

## **ABSTRACT**

KEMP, BRIANA, LATRECE. Searching for Sisterhood: An Examination of the Lived Mentorship Experiences of Black Doctoral Women in Counselor Education at PWIs. (Under the direction of Dr. Stanley Baker and Dr. Rolanda Mitchell)

Literature supports the value of mentorship in pursuing higher educational degrees, more specifically, research advocates for the intentional implementation of mentorship for diverse groups in higher education. The value of mentorship is particularly impactful for Black women pursuing their doctoral degree. This hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative study explores the mentorship experiences of Black women pursuing their doctorate in counselor education at predominantly white institutions. The purpose of this study was to better understand the mentorship experiences of Black doctoral women in counselor education at PWIs and to gain insight into aspects of mentorship that have been most beneficial to this population during their doctoral process. This research aims to add to the gaps in literature that have not specifically explored the unique experiences of Black doctoral women, specifically in counselor education at PWIs. Through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, this study analyzed the stories and experiences of eight Black doctoral women in counselor education at PWIs who had completed at least one year of their program.

Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality were used as theoretical frameworks to guide and inform this study. Purposive and snowball sampling were utilized to recruit the eight Black doctoral women who participated in this study. The data analysis process consisted of following the hermeneutic circle between the main researcher and two peer debriefers. From the data analysis process, the research team identified four major themes (Expectation vs Reality, Defining Mentorship, Forming Lasting Bonds, and Beneficial Outcomes) and five subthemes

(Expectation vs Reality, Defining Mentorship, Forming Lasting Bonds, and Beneficial Outcomes). Findings from this study provide implications for practice, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

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Searching for Sisterhood: An Examination of the Lived Mentorship Experiences of Black  
Doctoral Women in Counselor Education at PWIs

by  
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## DEDICATION

First and foremost, I want to dedicate this dissertation to God. The motivation and endurance it took to complete this dissertation was instilled in me through him, and I would be remiss if I did not mention how impactful my spirituality has been throughout this process. I also want to dedicate this dissertation to all the Black women in my life--my mom, sisters, nieces, friends, aunts, and mentors. I am grateful for the eight Black women who decided to give their time and support to this dissertation. I thank you for sharing your stories and trusting me to execute them appropriately. I dedicate this to all the Black women who have or are pursuing their PhD; I see you and I thank you for your strength and dedication...keep going! And finally, I dedicate this to myself. I faced imposter syndrome a plethora of times during my entire doctoral journey, feeling incompetent and unworthy. There were many sleepless nights, waves of anxiety, and a lot of doubt. I questioned my abilities and often felt defeated. When I reflect on the journey, I find gratitude in the entire process. To be here, at the finish line, I give myself so much love and admiration. I did it!

## BIOGRAPHY

Briana (BK) Kemp identifies as a Black cisgender woman currently in her doctoral journey in counselor education at North Carolina State University. She received her bachelor's degree in psychology and master's in clinical mental health counseling from Columbus State University in Columbus, GA. She has clinical experience working in inpatient facilities such as mental health hospitals and has worked with a variety of populations ranging from adolescents to geriatrics. BK first became attracted to the field of mental health during her AP Psychology class in her sophomore year of high school. Since her higher education journey, she has found a love for being an educator in the field of mental health and pouring into future clinicians. She currently works as a graduate assistant in NC State University's Counselor Education program, as well as an adjunct professor at New York University.

BK was born and raised in Atlanta, GA. She is the second oldest of four children and is currently an aunt of four. BK currently resides in Raleigh, NC, where she moved to pursue her PhD at North Carolina State University. She enjoys working as an adjunct faculty and loves to travel and visit loved ones in her spare time. Current obsessions include: Money Heist, Cowboy Carter, funnel cakes, pistachio ice cream, sunsets at the beach, and naps!

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### **bell hooks, 1989:**

*“Often it is assumed that Black males are better able to succeed at graduate school than Black females. While many White scholars may be aware of a Black male intellectual tradition, they rarely know about Black female intellectuals. Black intellectual traditions, like those of White people, have been male-dominated “(p. 60).*

In 1862, Mary Jane Patterson became the first Black woman to receive a college degree. In 1921, over 100 years ago, Georgiana R. Simpson, Mosell Alexander, Eva B. Dykes, and Sadie Tanner, became the first Black women to pursue and receive their Ph.D. in the United States (Howard-Baptiste & Harris, 2014). In the 1954 ruling of *Brown vs Board of Education*, Black students were granted the opportunity to attend predominantly White educational systems, including higher education systems. However, this ruling did not follow with the immediate extinction of racism and prejudice in educational systems (Ellis, 2001). Though Black students were now able to enroll in these predominantly White schools, their experiences were challenged with discrimination, injustices, and trauma. In lieu of these detrimental experiences for Black students, the *Brown vs Board of Education* ruling opened the space and opportunity for better educational resources for Black students which opened the door for higher educational opportunities (Rasheem et al., 2017).

The rates at which Black women are pursuing higher education degrees are constantly increasing in comparison to their Black male counterparts (Vakalahi et al., 2014). However, Black women have lower retention rates, as well as slower graduate rates in comparison to White women and other minority women (Vakalahi et al., 2014). Some contributing factors of Black graduate women lagging behind their counterparts or completely not finishing their studies are familial factors such as marriage, children, or taking on the role of caretakers for loved ones (Vakalahi et al., 2014). Other factors include the status of employment and or finances (Gardner,

2013). There is a dearth of literature that examines the lived experiences of Black doctoral women, and the literature that does examine these lived experiences highlights similar themes of invisibility, tokenism, poor mentorship, racism, sexism, and lack of access to resources (Cook & Williams, 2015). Researchers have found that the Black women in higher education often struggle with a sense of belonging, finding that the opportunity for community kinship is scarce in predominantly White spaces (Cook & Williams, 2015).

Navigating racial and gendered biases while pursuing higher education degrees is a barrier for Black women, as they face sexism and racism, along with discrimination based on other intersecting identities such as age, level of experiences, and/or socioeconomic status (Cook & Williams, 2015). At the intersection of race and gender, Black graduate women often face racial and gendered microaggressions perpetuated by faculty and students, resulting in hostile environments and feelings of alienation or otherness (Cook & Williams, 2015).

The experiences of Black graduate women are unique and separate from the experiences of Black men and White women. Collins (2002) asserts that women of the African Diaspora can be defined or categorized in two ways: as individuals who have unique lived experiences, and as a subgroup within a marginalized population. This worldview of Black women also brings forth the long-standing negative stereotypes placed upon Black women that persist today. Historically, Black women have felt the need to overcompensate and work twice as hard to dismantle negative stereotypes; specifically, Black graduate women feel the need to legitimize their intelligence, competence, and worth (Bertrand-Jones et al., 2013). These factors negatively impact the experiences of Black graduate women and intrude upon a seamless graduate experience.

### Statement of the Problem

Not only are Black graduate women facing racial and gendered oppression but there are also systemic nuances of which many Black women are unaware. Unwritten rules that are substantial for academic success and preparation for post-doctoral job opportunities are often not openly discussed and are sometimes missed by Black doctoral women (Gardner, 2013). Many Black doctoral women also identify as first-generation and tend to lack intimate mentorship, role models, or guidance on navigating the doctoral process (Gardner, 2013). Embarking on an unknown territory with little support or advice can be overwhelming and anxiety-filled. Often, Black doctoral women suffer in silence, and in collaboration with negative campus experiences, have reported distrust in faculty members, feeling isolated, frustrated, and unsupported (Shavers & Moore, 2017).

Black women face many barriers while navigating their doctoral process, often resulting in psychological and emotional stress. Thus, it is vital for them to have adequate support and coping techniques throughout their doctoral process. Patton (2009) stated “support systems are necessary in helping Black women overcome the dual-edge burdens of race and gender, particularly when they attempt to find mentors within the “old boy” network” (p. 511). Findings also indicate that mentorship is an essential aspect of the educational process, specifically when pursuing a doctoral degree. A healthy and reciprocal mentorship can be a source for mitigating some of the challenges Black doctoral women face (Cartwright et al., 2021).

Mentoring appears to be a substantial strategy to influence both retention and graduation rates of students of color (Rasheem et al., 2018). Because Black doctoral women have unique experiences and encounter a series of challenges, mentorship is crucial for navigating these barriers in predominantly White spaces. Mentorship can also be a supportive relationship for

Black women in higher education to share their experiences of racial-gendered oppression, fatigue, frustration, and feelings of being an “outsider” in multiple spaces. Mentors have been a guide towards decoding the unwritten rules of academia that many Black women are not aware of and have provided tools and resources for the student’s professional trajectory (Rasheem et al., 2018). Since research shows that mentorship for Black doctoral women can be a crucial element, more examination is needed on its vital role in the successful completion of a doctoral program.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

As discussed, researchers have discovered that Black doctoral women often face issues of invisibility, tokenism, poor mentorship or support, and academic exclusion (Colclough, 2023; hooks, 1989; Jones et al., 2013), especially when compared to Black men and White women. Despite the alarming findings, the research on the experiences of Black women in doctoral programs is inadequate, especially regarding mentorship (Rasheem et al., 2018). There are also gaps in the literature regarding the discussion of racial gender identity, professional identity and development, and group work toward building collectivity amongst Black doctoral women. This is a crucial limitation of previous research, requiring more focus on the experiences of Black doctoral women. Recognizing that the experiences of Black doctoral women are unique and separate from their peers exposes the need for more culturally sensitive mentoring relationships for this group. Research advocates for healthy mentorships for Black doctoral women and emphasizes the benefit of mitigating some of the negative experiences Black women in higher education face (Jones et al., 2013).

Black women pursuing doctoral degrees often rely various coping mechanisms when navigating predominantly White spaces, such as creating a community with those of shared

experiences, spirituality, advising/mentorship, code-switching, and racial-gendered identity centrality (Grayson, 2022; Lewis et al., 2017; Rasheem et al., 2018; Rogers et al., 2019; Shavers & Moore, 2017). Much research is heavily focused on the microaggressions and oppression Black women face within their doctoral programs but has failed to explore positive impacts such as healthy mentorship. While research has shown Black doctoral women expressing positive mentorship as a positive barrier in their doctoral experience (Rasheem et al., 2018; Patton, 2009), mentorship themes have not been explored in detail.

With the research that supports mentorship being positively correlated with academic and professional success (Rasheem et al., 2018), in collaboration with research that supports more positive doctoral experiences for Black women with healthy mentorship (Rasheem et al., 2018; Patton, 2009) these personal experiences are not only worth exploring, but it is also imperative. Rasheem et al., (2018) stated, “Mentoring Black women in academia is an old issue requiring new solutions” (p. 5). Recommendations from research have included changes on an institutional level and within the program, yet researchers have not deeply explored the aspects of healthy mentorship encounters for this group (Rasheem et al., 2018; Rogers et al., 2019; Shavers & Moore, 2017).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Patricia Collins (1990a) asserts that Black women need agency over their voices, experiences, and power, despite being consistently left out of spaces that center their voices or vocalize their experiences and identities. This study explored the stories of Black women in an effort to better understand their experiences and learn the aspects of mentorship that have been most beneficial in the pursuit of their doctoral degree in counselor education. The historic

marginalization of Black women makes this type of research imperative to fill gaps in the literature.

This study explored Black doctoral women's mentoring experiences in counselor education programs at PWIs. As stated earlier, research supports the positive outcomes of healthy mentorships, specifically for students of color. With the presence of racial-gendered microaggressions and systemic oppression at PWIs, insight into mentorship experiences can support future Black women pursuing their doctoral degree in counselor education.

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative study explored the experiences of eight Black women who have earned or are pursuing a doctorate in counselor education and their encounters with mentorship. Recruitment emails were distributed to all doctoral-level, counselor education programs housed at PWIs in the United States, to identify potential participants. The requirements for the doctoral identity will range from at least one year in the doctoral process to up to five years post-doctorate. This study employed hermeneutic phenomenology, which explores the world and human experiences as they are lived (Heidegger, 1962). The following research questions, grounded in Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality, guide the study:

1. What are the lived experiences of Black doctoral women with mentorship in counselor education programs at PWIs?
2. What factors and aspects of mentorship have been most beneficial for Black doctoral women in counselor education programs at PWIs?

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are relevant to this study and are operationalized below.

**Black doctoral woman:** Those identifying as both Black and a woman who are currently in the doctoral process (at least one year completed) or up to five years post-doctoral.

**Predominantly white institution (PWI):** Higher education institutions that are historically White, with 50% or more White student enrollment.

**Mentorship:** A reciprocal relationship that nurtures and inspires the mentor and mentee (Crawford & Smith, 2005; Thomas et al., 2007).

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

For the purpose of this study, Black Feminist Thought by Patricia Collins (Collins, 1990a) and Intersectionality by Kimberle' Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989) were utilized as the theoretical frameworks. Both theories reflect the experiences Black women face while living in a White male-dominated society, inform the study, and speak to the various experiences of Black women pursuing a doctoral degree. Interpretive phenomenologists address the notion that it is impossible to avoid incorporating theoretical assumptions into qualitative research, but it is also undesirable to avoid theory (Vagle, 2018). Both theories provide a framework for exploring the unique experiences of Black women, and each theory was used as the foundation for formulating the research questions and interview questions.

Black Feminist Thought (BFT) is a critical social theory created by Black Feminist Patricia Collins in the early 1990s (Collins, 1990a). It was created out of the need to highlight the unique experiences of Black women, while also serving as an emerging paradigm to empower Black women (Collins, 1990a). Collins understood the imperativeness of centering the voices of Black women and sharing their stories. BFT contextualizes the racism and sexism that Black

women experience in a White male-dominated society while providing Black women with a framework to internalize their experiences as pathways to igniting their strengths and resistance.

In 1989, Kimberle Crenshaw shed light on the importance of viewing the experiences of Black women from a lens that recognizes the multiple identities of Black women and the multiple acts of oppression Black women face. In the realm of law, Crenshaw, a critical race legal scholar, witnessed the exclusion of Black women from policies, rights, and protection (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1989) advocated for a theory that examined the experiences of Black women as being separate from those of Black men and White women. Crenshaw (1989) emphasized the reality of Black women being “multiply burdened” and that the intersection of multiple identities tied to a marginalized group would result in multiple acts of oppression. This theory provides a framework to examine the experiences of Black women through an intersectional lens and highlights the impacts of interlocking oppression, which further sets Black women in spaces of high psychological stress.

Together, these two theories serve as frameworks to better understand the experiences of Black doctoral women, with an emphasis on their unique experiences at the intersection of race and gender. Both frameworks will be used as tools in the creation of the methodology, interview questions, and data analysis. Each framework provides insightful tools for examining the lived experiences of Black doctoral women in predominantly white spaces. These theories will be covered in depth in chapter two.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study will be divided into five chapters. The first chapter details the purpose and relevance of this study; outlining the key terms, significance of the study, and research questions. Chapter two will provide an in-depth literature review related to the experiences of Black women

pursuing doctoral degrees in predominantly white spaces, racial and gendered biases, mentorship, as well as the chosen theoretical frameworks, Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality. Chapter three will outline the research methodology, data collection and data analysis steps utilized in this study. The fourth chapter will present an overview of qualitative data results, while the final chapter will interpret the findings of the study, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter will provide an overview of the literature pertinent to the study. It will discuss historical and current experiences Black women have faced in pursuing doctoral degrees. This chapter will introduce and operationalize mentorship, as well as provide a historical overview of the theoretical frameworks, Black Feminist Thought, and Intersectionality. Other concepts that will be discussed include racial-gendered microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, and cross-racial mentorship. The literature reviewed covers themes that align with this study and also highlights gaps in the literature.

### **Black Women in Higher Education**

Black students often face race-related stress at PWIs, which impacts their psychological well-being; however, studies have shown that Black women experience greater difficulties regarding psychological stress in comparison to Black men (Shahid et al., 2018). Black women in higher education face the fatigue of constantly facing racism, sexism, discrimination, and systemic oppression at PWIs (Ragland et al., 2021). Researchers have been examining the negative impacts of race-related stress on people of color in higher education settings for decades, but unfortunately, the issues of systemic racism and oppression have continued to persist (Chancellor, 2019; Golden, 2020; Jones, 2020). The acts of microaggressive behavior and oppression persist throughout the experiences of doctoral students and even in colleges and universities that focus on social justice progression and mental well-being such as counseling and clinical programs (Ragland et al., 2021). As more literature continues to highlight the experiences of Black women in university settings (Shahid et al., 2018; Ragland et al., 2021), recommendations should include implications for creating more equitable institutional systems, safer environments, and better support systems for Black graduate women.

## **Race and Gender-Related Experiences**

When Kimberle' Crenshaw (1989) urged legal scholars to view the experiences of Black women as unique and separate from those of White women and Black men, she was providing a framework for the experiences of Black women to be viewed through the scopes of both race and gender. Ultimately Intersectionality theory emphasized the experiences Black women face of both racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 1989).

The cumulative acts of racism and oppression toward people of color result in an overwhelming amount of fatigue (Chancellor, 2019). Racial battle fatigue (RBF) was coined by race theorist William Smith and is defined as the “Cumulative result of a natural race-related stress response to distressing mental and emotional conditions. These conditions emerged from constantly facing racially dismissive, demeaning, insensitive and/or hostile racial environments, and individuals” (Smith et al., 2007, p. 6). Racial battle fatigue can have mental, emotional, and physical impacts. Victims have displayed anxiety, lowered self-esteem, headaches, indigestion issues, insomnia, and isolation (Smith et al., 2007). Experiencing racial battle fatigue while attempting to further education and pursue careers can result in distrust of these systems and not feeling worthy to be in these spaces (Walkington, 2017).

When viewing the experiences of Black women as they relate to RBF, research has provided evidence that Black women often encounter racism, discrimination, and isolation when pursuing higher educational opportunities (Jones, 2020). In a study examining Black college women's unique experiences due to sexism and racism, Shahid et al. (2018) found that campus racial tension was a significant predictor for stress in Black women. Black women hold a double minority status and often battle feelings of being inadequate researchers, scholars, or educators when at PWIs (Walkington, 2017). While some literature primarily focuses on the experiences of

Black college women (Jones, 2020; Shahid et al., 2018; Walkington, 2017) there is a need for more research that deeply examines the impacts of intersectionality and racial gender discrimination Black women face in multiple realms of higher education across various programs.

As stated earlier, Black doctoral women are doubly burdened at the intersection of race and sex, describing their experiences of discrimination as racial-gendered encounters (Crenshaw, 1989). These encounters can often show up in the format of microaggressions or microinvalidations. There is an extensive amount of research that documents the microaggressive acts of racism, discrimination, and oppression Black students face at PWIs, which persist today (Jones, 2020; Mills, 2019; Pittman, 2012). These microaggressive acts can be but are not limited to, rude stares, exclusion from opportunities, derogatory comments, avoidance, and displaying racist content in academic settings (Morales, 2014). Microaggressions can be perpetrated by faculty members and peers and are deeply rooted in ignorance and a lack of awareness. Because microaggressions are historically known as subtle or accidental, they leave space for victims to feel confused in responding, allowing the events to be glossed over (Morales, 2014).

Black women are facing high rates of racism, sexism, and discrimination in academic spaces, which ultimately make it difficult for Black women to flourish (Jones, 2020). Black women also face conflict in responding to racial-gendered microaggressions due to fear of being labeled as the “Angry Black Woman” or “Strong Black Woman” (Ragland et al., 2021). The literature demonstrates that Black women in higher education often respond to these aggressions by adapting to the culture (code-switching), finding community in other Black women, disengagement, and overcompensating to disassemble these stereotypes (Grayson, 2022; Lewis et al., 2017; Rogers et al., 2019).

Crenshaw (1989) initially provided the framework for the experiences of Black women to be viewed at the intersection of race and gender, however, the theory expands to look at all identities of an individual such as race, gender, spirituality, class, marital status, and parental status (Carastathis, 2014). When a marginalized individual holds multiple marginalized identities such as Queer Single Black Mother, their experiences may result in multiple acts of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Carastathis, 2014).

Ohara and Cook (2018) examined racially diverse doctoral students who had encountered social class microaggression in their program based on identifying as lower socioeconomic status. Results found that participants felt unsafe, invalidated, and confused when encountering microaggressions related to social class from faculty and peers. Rogers et al. (2019) explored the experiences of three Black doctoral student mothers and found that the participants experienced issues in their program at the intersection of race, gender, and parental status such as lack of opportunities, racial-gendered encounters, and lack of understanding of their parental status.

The research emphasizes the negative encounters Black women may face in pursuing higher education degrees and highlights the need for more support for Black women during this process. The unfortunate acts of racism, sexism, and discrimination do not stop at the university level. Black women deserve to have their voices acknowledged and heard, and this is even more imperative for those navigating doctoral programs at PWIs (Golden, 2020).

### **Black Students in Counselor Education**

While there is a trend of Black students pursuing counselor education degrees and faculty positions, retention rates are still an issue for the population (Glover, 2023). When investigating factors related to Black students falling behind in counselor education programs, or not

completing the program to its full term, researchers found concerns related to mental health stability, self-doubt, depression, and stress (Henfield et al., 2013). Black faculty members are often expected to be mentors for Black students and meet scholarly expectations required of all faculty members (Grant & Ghee, 2015; Shillingford et al., 2013). The following literature excerpts will provide examples of the experiences Black students in counselor education programs face at the intersection of race and other marginalized identities.

In a study that explored the experiences of Black students in a counselor education program, the researchers found themes of feelings of isolation, peer disconnection, and faculty misunderstandings and disrespect (Henfield et al., 2013). Black students expressing negative experiences related to isolation and disconnection could be helped through more positive mentorship experiences, however, the underrepresentation of Black faculty members in counselor education programs can result in faculty member misunderstandings when Black students are assigned to cross-cultural mentorship relationships (Grant & Ghee, 2015; Shillingford et al., 2013). While the Henfield et al., (2013) study, unfortunately, is consistent with the literature related to the negative experiences Black students face in higher education, the researchers provide recommendations related to stronger and more satisfying mentorship relationships that are culturally sensitive such as: proactive recruitment and retention of African-American faculty, openly talk about common challenges associated with being a racial minority at a PWI, and faculty members become more cognizant of how a history of oppression may influence students' perception of their behavior and non-behavior (Henfield et al., 2013).

Elliot et al. (2021) explored protective factors for Black doctoral students enrolled in counseling psychology programs. They found that Black students in these spaces may engage in behaviors such as utilizing support systems outside of the program, self-care techniques,

monitoring their engagement in race-related conversations, and engaging with supportive cohort members and advisors/mentors (Elliot et al., 2021). While not specific to counselor education, this research represents a sister profession that addresses both the experiences Black doctoral students may face and their possible coping mechanisms in counseling doctoral programs.

In a recent research study that explored the lived experiences of Black students in counselor education programs, Glover (2023) found four themes: representation is meaningful and matters, White faculty were not providing safe spaces, disingenuous and performative recruitment was occurring, and Black students have specific needs. The study consisted of 12 participants who identified as Black and were enrolled in counselor education programs at PWIs. The findings highlight a need for safer spaces where Black students feel connected to faculty members, the curriculum, and feel that their diverse needs are being met (Glover, 2023). Recommendations also included hiring more Black faculty members, creating safe spaces to discuss racial trauma and injustices, and utilizing diverse and inclusive frameworks and pedagogies (Glover, 2023). This research indicates that Black students are currently having negative experiences in counselor education programs, and enhancements in these programs are imperative for Black students to feel safe, validated, and have their specific needs met.

Although the main tenets of many counselor education programs emphasize multiculturalism and social justice, some Black students have reported that their curricula were not properly aligned with these tenets (Glover, 2023; Haizlip, 2012). The persistent disconnect these Black students are experiencing due to being a marginalized group in counselor education programs significantly impacts their psychological well-being and their academic success (Glover, 2023). Haskins et al. (2013) explored the experiences of Black students in counseling programs and found themes of isolation, tokenism, lack of inclusion of Black counselor

perspective, and access to support. These themes ultimately spoke to the yearning of Black students to feel more supported, heard, and valued in their program. This literature adds to the extant literature that emphasizes the lack of positive experiences Black graduate students have with mentors and advisors during their graduate program from an access-to-support perspective.

### **Black Doctoral Women in Counselor Education**

Pursuing a doctoral degree in counseling often comes with the expectation that many programs will emphasize aspects of diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism in their curriculum (Scheel et al., 2018). While counseling programs may highlight these social justice variables in their program curriculum, the experiences of the BIPOC students suggest that reality does not always meet expectations. Feelings of isolation and marginalization can come from faculty members who repeatedly invalidate or take for granted their experiences and perspectives. (Henfield et al., 2013). Ultimately, and unfortunately, the negative experiences of Black doctoral women in counselor education programs may not be different from those across other disciplines at PWIs. Although counselor education programs aim to be more diverse and culturally sensitive (CACREP, 2016), the climate of these programs may still mirror society's White, heteronormative, patriarchal systems (Thacker & Minton, 2021). While there is evidence of these experiences in the literature, there are few studies that specifically explore the experiences of Black students, and specifically Black women, pursuing doctoral degrees in counselor education (Brown & Grothaus, 2019; Williams, 2022).

Williams (2022) explored the lived experiences of Black women in counselor education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study consisted of nine participants who identified as Black women enrolled in or recently graduated from CACREP-accredited counselor education

programs. The researcher identified four themes from the results: academic success factors, supportive networks and coping, academic challenges, and personal challenges (Williams, 2022). Academic and supportive networks spoke to the positive outcomes that stemmed from having supportive family, friends, and faculty members during their doctoral process. These themes are supported by research that notes the positive influence support systems have on the academic success of Black women, often when they feel safe, heard, and validated (Haizlip, 2012; Haskins et al., 2016). Academic and personal challenges addressed the issues Black women faced resulting from the pandemic and at the intersection of race and sex. These challenges included technology issues and course interruption, discrimination, racism, oppression, mental health challenges, and lack of culturally appropriate resources and support. The experiences of the Black women in this study highlight the challenges that come with pursuing a doctoral degree while being a Black woman during a pandemic. Implications from this study add to the literature that advocates for more culturally competent faculty members, resources, and spaces for Black women to flourish while pursuing doctoral degrees (Williams, 2022).

When using an intersectionality lens, it is important to note the experiences Black women in counselor education may face at the intersection of other identities; all of which contribute to their worldview, perceptions, and experiences. Haskins et al. (2016) explored the lived experiences and intersecting identities of eight African-American counselor educators who were mothers. Six themes were identified: race, professional strain, work-life balance, support, internalized success, and mothering pedagogy. Findings from the study revealed that the participants experienced inequities and feelings of invisibility as a marginalized group (Haskins et al., 2016). At the intersection of race, gender, and motherhood, the participants were susceptible to *racialized marginalization* which left them feeling isolated, unsupported, and

excluded. Some of the self-care strategies included leaning on the support they received from family, friends, and other Black mothers in counselor education. The findings add to the literature that focuses on the unique experiences Black women face due to their intersecting identities, and the implications align with the literature advocating for more support within institutions and the inclusion of more diverse and inclusive curricula (Haskins et al., 2016).

Wilson (2021) explored the factors that led to the success of Black women who completed their counselor education program. The study consisted of 10 African-American women who graduated from a CACREP-accredited counselor education and supervision program at a PWI. The researcher found themes that related to the success of the participant's doctoral journey. The themes were: support from dissertation chair, representation of African American women with PhDs in the field, and access and opportunities (Wilson, 2022). While the Black women in this study still shared experiences related to discrimination at the intersection of race and gender, they were able to utilize coping and protective factors to proceed forward in the completion of their program (Wilson, 2022). Findings from this study are consistent with the literature that emphasizes the need for Black women to feel supported, represented, and valued in their doctoral program (Shahid et al., 2018; Jones, 2020; Walkington, 2017).

### **Mentorship**

Mentorship is defined as a relationship in which skilled professionals who have expertise in a certain field of work, guide, train, teach, and provide counsel to those who are less skilled and interested in the same field of work (Daniel, 2009; Johnson, 2002). When looking at some of the structures that define higher education practices, techniques that students are familiar with are advising, supervision, and mentorship. Specifically, for students of color, mentorship has been a leading strategy in influencing retention and graduation rates (Rasheem et al., 2018).

When researching literature that focuses on the value and relevance of mentorship for doctoral students, readers may come across mentoring and advising being utilized interchangeably. Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) defined advising as, “academic guidance, mentoring, and supervision of students” (p. 127). Mertz (2004) distinguished the relationship between mentoring and advising based on the intent and level of involvement. Her hierarchy model ranks mentoring first, followed by advising, and then role modeling (Mertz, 2004). A mentor is viewed as having a more in-depth relationship with the mentee in comparison to advisors, providing psychosocial support, career advice and opportunities, and being a role model (Kram & Isabella, 1985).

Benefits of mentoring include: (a) a strengthening of communication skills, (b) critical thinking, (c) profession-specific skills, (d) a greater understanding of professional identity, and (e) an increased satisfaction with one’s chosen degree and career path (Holland et al., 2012; Taylor & Neimeyer, 2009; Vespia, 2006). When mentorship intends to provide a space for safety and openness, it can positively impact the level of confidence and empowerment mentees exude (Boswell et al., 2015; Louis et al., 2014; Mousavi et al., 2018). A student's academic, personal, and career success is positively tied to a healthy and reciprocal mentoring relationship (Lynch, 2000). With the copious amount of research supporting the notion that strong and healthy mentorship can be a motivating force in the trajectory of a student’s academic and career success, students must be provided spaces in which healthy mentorship can flourish.

### **Mentorship in Higher Education**

When students pursue a graduate degree, the need for healthy mentorship intensifies, as they have a more clearly defined view of their career path (Montgomery et al., 2014). It is often

at this phase that students are expanding their knowledge and skills to achieve mastery in their identified area of study. Students may begin embarking on opportunities for professional development such as conferences, leadership events, research conventions, and other events to enhance their professional development. It is at this stage that students need guidance and support from mentors in identifying these opportunities, as well as grants and travel funds to assist in attending these events (Montgomery et al., 2014). Hansman (2013) suggested that many errors young professionals make in navigating the profession could be mitigated had they experienced satisfying mentoring relationships to guide and navigate the process. As mentioned earlier, students at the graduate level are transitioning into a more defined career path, and the guidance of mentorship during this career transition is imperative. Positive mentorship experiences can result in building mentees' self-esteem and competence in research, scholarly writing, and leadership (Montgomery et al., 2014).

Hall and Livia (2022) examined some of the experiences graduate students faced due to the absence of mentorship. The sample consisted of 54 participants representing multiple disciplines; 19 at the master's level, 34 at the PhD level, and one graduate student not enrolled in a specific program. The major theme identified from the data analysis was “falling through the cracks”, with sub-themes of missing mentorship, students' difficulties accessing mentorship, university structures undermining mentoring, and damage to mentees (Hall & Livia, 2022). Lack of mentorship occurred when mentors were unavailable, uncommitted to participants' progress, and/or unwilling to understand how personal issues affected students' academic engagement (Hall & Livia, 2022). Participants expressed feeling confused, having low self-esteem and confidence, feeling isolated, experiencing anxiety, and having overall feelings of poor well-being and insufficient productivity due to the lack of positive mentorship experiences. The findings

from this study align with related professional literature, indicating that the quality of mentorship relationships has a major impact on the progression and level of success of the students/mentees (Tompkins et al., 2016).

In addition to the challenge of emerging into the profession as a novice, minorities face the challenges of isolation, alienation, oppression, and discrimination while pursuing higher education degrees (Pittman, 2012; Rasheem et al., 2018). Particularly, Black students struggle with integrating their personal culture with the culture of their specific program, as well as academic isolation (Butler et al., 2013; Rasheem et al., 2018).

Butler et al. (2013) explored the role of mentoring for young African American males in higher education and proposed an evidence-based approach to mentorship based on multiculturalism and strengths. The approach included (a) placing or reframing perceived deficits within a multicultural context; (b) identifying resources and assets; and (c) incorporating those attributes into specifically designed interventions, strategies, and programs (Butler et al., 2013). This approach, which aimed to increase retention rates, could be applied in mentoring other students of color to enhance their overall graduate experience, particularly Black women at the graduate level.

In exploring the role of mentorship for the advancement of Black women in higher education, Colclough (2023) found various themes of mentorship that were beneficial. The study consisted of six participants who identified as Black women in higher education and had experiences with mentorship. The findings revealed the aspects of mentorship that were most helpful in the progression of their careers: access to mentorship, organic connections, increase in networking and exposure, sponsorship, and career guidance. While the participants shared their positive experiences of mentorship, they also discussed challenges related to being a Black

woman in higher education such as: microaggression, isolation, imposter syndrome, and feelings of inadequacy. These negative experiences align with previous research related to Black women in higher education, despite their positive experiences with mentorship (Colclough, 2023).

### **Mentorship in Counselor Education**

In the field of counselor education, researchers, educators, and supervisors recognize the value of healthy mentorship and its impact on student progression (Stark et al., 2019). In the field of counseling, Black et al. (2004) defined mentorship as a “nurturing, complex, long-term, developmental process in which a more skilled and experienced person serves as a role model, teacher, sponsor, and coach who encourages, counsels, befriends a less skilled person to promote the latter’s professional and/or personal development” (p. 46). The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016) requires counselor educators to emphasize the role of mentorship in the field of counselor education via discussion of its imperativeness and providing a guideline on some of the assets of mentoring. Specifically for counselor educators, mentors guide mentees toward professional identity in research and teaching pedagogy, as well as providing tools for successful scholarship, publication, and employment (Boswell et al., 2015). While mentorship can be cultivated informally or formally, students appear to have more satisfying mentoring relationships when the mentor and mentee have shared identities and interests such as race, gender, and research expertise (Cook & Williams, 2015).

As students embark on increasing their practicum and internship skills, they are paired with supervisors. The supervisor’s role is to enhance supervisee skills as educators, practitioners, researchers, supervisors, and leaders, and advocates (CACREP, 2016). Supervisors can also have

a great influence on molding their supervisee's professional identity (Bjornestad et al., 2014). While not all mentors are supervisors, and not all supervisors take on the role of mentors, this formal relationship may transition into a satisfying mentorship relationship for many student mentees.

Boswell et al. (2015) conducted an exploratory mentoring study with 30 master's, doctoral, and junior faculty participants in counseling programs. As they shared their experiences, the researchers identified several themes and subthemes. Participants identified positive outcomes from their mentorship relationships such as: "Being able to learn through modeling," "Gaining subsequent experience as a mentor," "Learning about life balance through positive and negative examples," and "Having a positive view of being challenged." When identifying traits of a mentor that were mostly sought out, Boswell et al. (2015) found the participants were more attracted to mentors who were: "Approachable," had an "individual approach to the mentoring relationship" and were "encouraging". Needs the participants identified were: "Having multiple mentors", having mentors who could "provide specific answers", and having mentors who were aware of the "politics in counseling". The findings from this study align with the research that emphasizes the significance of mentorship and its positive impact when the relationship is healthy and satisfying (Boswell et al., 2015). This research adds to the literature that examines the role of mentorship in counseling programs and the needs of counseling professionals in training.

### **Cross-Cultural Mentorship**

Relationships defined as cross-racial or cross-cultural occur when the mentor differs racially, ethnically, or culturally from the student (Daniels et al., 1999). Unfortunately, diverse

faculty members are scarce in counselor education programs, particularly Black women, leading Black doctoral women to often be paired with faculty from different cultural backgrounds for mentorship, supervision, or advising (Elliott et al., 2021; Patterson-Stephens et al., 2017). Since the reality is that many Black doctoral women may have mentors and supervisors who do not share their identity, faculty in these roles must understand multicultural competencies in working with diverse students. While there is a dearth of research specifically related to mentorship, which identifies gaps in the literature, the following literature can be utilized as seminal work to explore these cross-cultural experiences.

Brown and Grothaus (2019) examined 10 Black doctoral counseling students and their experiences of cross-racial trust with White counselor educators and clinical supervisors. Findings from this study revealed three superordinate themes: reasons for trust, reasons for mistrust, and benefits of cross-racial mentoring. When expressing mistrust in working with White mentors, the majority of the participants expressed cultural mistrust. This entailed personal experiences of racism from White people, covert racism in their program, and questioning the genuineness of White people wanting to build relationships with Black people. On the opposite side of the spectrum, participants also expressed the benefits of cross-racial mentoring such as benefitting from networks of privilege and assisting in increasing the trust of other White people. This research provides insight into the tools needed to better the experiences Black students may face in cross-cultural mentorship relationships. Implications included diversifying faculty and staff and incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy into the curriculum of mentorship (Brown & Grothaus, 2019).

Cartwright et al. (2021) explored the mentoring experiences of Black doctoral women in counselor education programs and found that this group often felt safer speaking with other

Black women as their mentors, and preferred mentors who were willing to discuss race and culture. While they still endured negative experiences that left them feeling isolated, they ultimately found mentorship with other Black women mentors to be beneficial and empowering. Cartwright et al. (2021) provided implications that include diversifying faculty members to include more Black females; the cultivation of programs specifically for supporting Black women; and more training for mentors of all races to be competent in discussing racial, ethnic, and cultural issues. The study proposed in this paper differs from Cartwright et al., (2021), as it expands the participant pool to include Black doctoral women who have completed their program within the past five years.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Research supports the benefit of utilizing theoretical frameworks that represent the experiences of Black women such as Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality in building mentorship relationships with Black women mentees (Shavers & Moore, 2017; Rasheem et al., 2018; Bertrand-Jones et al., 2013). Recognizing these frameworks were created by Black women, intending to empower and liberate Black women from their racist and sexist experiences in a White male-dominated society (Collins 20002; Crenshaw, 1991), it is fitting to employ these frameworks in building satisfying relationships with Black doctoral women.

### **Black Feminist Thought**

#### ***Origins***

Black Feminist Thought (BFT) is a critical social theory created by Black Feminist Patricia Collins in the early 1990s (Collins, 2002). It was created out of the need to highlight the unique experiences of Black women, while also serving as an emerging paradigm to empower

Black women (Collins, 1990a). Collins understood the importance of centering the voices of Black women and sharing their stories. Collins was one of the many trailblazers in advocating for the experiences of Black women to be separate from those of Black men and White women, as Black women have a more unique experience that encompasses intersecting oppression based on intersecting identities (Collins, 2002).

BFT contextualizes the racism and sexism that Black women experience in a White male-dominated society while providing Black women with a framework to internalize their experiences as pathways to igniting their strengths and resistance. It should be noted that the development of BFT was initially created with the consideration of Black women's experiences within the United States context (Collins, 1990a). Collins emphasizes that, while the experiences of Black women are both unique and distinctive to each individual, there is space for a community for Black women to find connectedness in sharing their similar experiences with other Black women (Collins, 2002). Collins continuously pays tribute to other Black feminist intellectuals in her writings as she notes their significant contribution to the birth of a paradigm for empowering Black women that demonstrates the value of centering the voices of Black women and their worldviews.

### ***Key Constructs and Definitions***

When identifying the key constructs of Black Feminist Thought, Collins (1990a) highlighted several themes that provide tools for Black women to achieve self-actualization, empowerment, and resistance. The three main themes of BFT are: (a) Black Feminist Thought is exclusively guided by the voices and experiences of Black women; (b) the intersecting identities of class, race, religion, and gender impact oppression towards Black women; (c) the importance

of redefining the culture of Black women (Collins, 1990a). Collins (1990a) recognizes Black women as having agency over their voices, experiences, and power. She believes Black women have constantly been left out of spaces to center their voices or vocalize their experiences and identities.

Under the theme of centering Black women's voices, self-definition and self-valuation aim towards giving Black women the power over their own experiences, and spaces to amplify their voices. Black women often are placed into boxes filled with negative stereotypes and preconceived threats such as the *Angry Black Woman*, and notions of societal constructs of resiliency for Black women such as the *Strong Black Woman* (Collins, 1990a). These erroneous stereotypes were formulated with the goal of controlling Black women and keeping them inferior (Collins, 1990a). Self-definition encourages Black women to both challenge and confront these labels, while self-evaluation emphasizes the context of redefining the images of Black women in a realistic, empowering, and positive light. (Collins, 1990b).

Collins (1990a) defines the experiences of Black women when seen as *othered* or invisible when navigating in a White male-dominated society. The othered status was viewed as being different or deviating from the status quo in comparison to White men (Collins, 1986). This othered status, followed by the dehumanization and objectification of Black women, provided another step towards keeping dominant groups superior (Collins, 1986). Because Black women have been denied access to spaces to change these narratives, Collins (1990a) created this framework to center the voices of Black women and promoted the imperativeness of Black women to use their platforms for these similar values. When dissecting the theme of intersecting oppression, Collins (1990a) contextualizes the intersecting identities of Black women such as race, class, gender, and religion. Each of the identities has a specific role in formulating the

worldview and experiences of Black women. The interlocking of the identities is what connects the shared experiences of Black women, while also recognizing the unique and distinct experiences each Black woman encounters. There is the acknowledgment of the shared, yet different experiences of Black women, while also reinforcing the notion that Black women are not a monolith.

Collins (1990a) also makes it clear that the experiences of Black women are separate from those of Black men and White women as she reinforces the reality of Black women being doubly oppressed at the intersection of race and gender (Collins, 2002). The long-standing history and reinforcement of the negative labels placed upon Black women have led to internalized racism and sexism, which is often difficult to expunge (Collins, 1990a).

Collins recognized the value of knowledge and redefining the culture of Black women in order to empower Black women to resist these long-standing and false perceptions. The preconceived ideas of Black women were created by outside influences and used as tactics to continue to control the behavior of Black women (Collins, 1990b). Collins also highlights the many contributions Black women have made towards the rich history of the United States, as well as the many Black women trailblazers who were often left out of the retelling of our history (Collins, 1990a). Collins (1990b) believes Black women scholars must provide the knowledge and facts about the experiences of Black women to cultivate a paradigm that informs other Black women of their history and progressive culture.

## **Intersectionality**

### ***Origins***

Kimberle' Crenshaw (1989) shed light on the importance of viewing the experiences of Black women from a lens that recognizes the multiple identities of Black women and the multiple acts of oppression Black women face. In the realm of law, Crenshaw is a critical race legal scholar who witnessed the exclusion of Black women from policies, rights, and protection. Policies regarding racism and sexism, were not constructed with the consideration of Black women (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1989) advocated for complete reconstruction of antiracist and feminist theory discourse, as they do not hold space for the unique experiences of Black women at the intersection of racism and sexism. Crenshaw used her expertise in law to provide legal cases that she believed had discriminated against Black women on the accounts of racism and sexism.

Crenshaw (1989) emphasized the centrality of the experiences of White women in cases of gender discrimination and their privilege of not having to claim their whiteness as an added barrier to discrimination. She advocated for a theory that examined the experiences of Black women as being separate from those of Black men and White women. Crenshaw (1989) emphasized the reality of Black women being *multiply burdened* and that the intersection of multiple identities tied to a marginalized group would result in multiple acts of oppression. This theory provides a framework for examining the experiences of Black women through an intersectional lens and highlights the impact of interlocking oppression, which further sets Black women in spaces of high psychological stress. Crenshaw (1989) uses her platform to bring

awareness to these social injustices and to advocate for inclusive systems and representations of Black women.

### ***Key Constructs and Definitions***

In her efforts to build upon the notion that the experiences of Black women cannot be examined solely through the lens of race or gender, Crenshaw (1991) provides a deeper scope of these issues to address the structural, political, and representational acts of violence towards women of color. Here, Crenshaw also expands the term intersectionality to be inclusive of other marginalized women of color. She recognizes other intersecting identities such as class, age, and sexuality, and encourages an expansion of intersection to include these salient identities.

Crenshaw (1991) reinforced a focus on race and gender as originating from the dismantling perceptions of viewing race and gender separately and continues to explore intersectionality through various avenues, recognizing the interlocking oppression that stems from disadvantages across multiple identities.

Crenshaw (1991) initially provided the intersectionality framework to give voices to the experiences of Black women that are separate from White women and Black men. This structural intersectionality construct breaks down the variety of experiences that occur within marginalized groups by specifically examining the various experiences of women of color based on other identities such as geographical location. Here, we see Crenshaw contextualize the varying experiences of women of color within other groups of women of color. She factors in the identities of location, marriage status, and socioeconomic status (SES) while continuing to utilize her expertise as a legal scholar to provide supportive legal cases and policies that further explain the injustices towards women of color.

Structurally, Crenshaw (1991) presents the multitude of barriers against the protection of women of color, specifically those of immigrant status and lower socioeconomic status. Systemically, there is a lack of resources, access to resources, and knowledge of resources. The culture shock and language barriers prevent immigrant women from pursuing resources and supportive services (Crenshaw, 1991). Cases of abuse of undocumented women are often not reported due to their status, leaving these cases unavailable for research studies and statistical reports. Seeking support seems very unlikely due to structural barriers (Crenshaw, 1991). Furthermore, interventions and resources are in short supply due to the lack of culturally sensitive resources and funding for support systems for lower SES women of color. These issues indicate that women of color suffer from multiple disadvantages, and the system is also not set up for meaningful intervention and support, leaving women of color left to attend to these issues independently (Crenshaw, 1991).

### ***Political Intersectionality***

Crenshaw (1991) discusses the insidious cycle of antiracist and feminist discourse in minimizing the voices and experiences of women of color who are victims of violence. Statistically, Black women are more likely to be victims of assault in comparison to White women (Ujima, 2018). Yet, these statistics have not appeared to have led to any form of justice or support for Black women. Black women who are victims of assault are often less likely to report their cases, less likely to have their trials end in convictions, and less likely to receive and seek supportive services or treatment (Crenshaw, 1991; Ujima, 2018). Crenshaw (1991) informs readers that women of color are far more likely to be victims of violence than White women due to these multiple barriers of race and gender.

Crenshaw (1991) shared her thoughts on notions in the Black culture to protect our Black men even when the lives of Black women are at risk. I appreciate this section the most, as often the research and literature illuminating the experiences of Black women is very sparse in presenting accounts of aggression towards Black women from Black men. It feels taboo to converse about issues of Black-on-Black crime when the goal is ultimately to bring the experiences of people of color to the forefront for equity and social justice change.

### ***Representational Intersectionality***

Crenshaw (1991) identifies the cultural construction of women of color as another barrier for the empowerment of women of color. How women of color are portrayed in the media is often poorly constructed. Black women are often portrayed in a light that does not define our entire being, let alone our positive and intellectual attributes, which is disempowering (Collins, 1990a). Historically, Black women have been objectified and dehumanized, and not much has changed about the way in which Black women are portrayed in the media. Black women have been the objects of obscene and misogynist rap culture, which is another case of the oppression that occurs within marginalized groups (Crenshaw, 1991).

Crenshaw (1991) believes patriarchy is a critical issue within the African American community and is damaging for both Black women and men. Black women have had too little opportunity to speak out in cases of misogyny and sexism. The misrepresentation of Black women and the devaluing of our bodies is damaging to our self-esteem and disempowering. Crenshaw (1991) advocates for Black cultural unity in the struggle for social justice change especially in the sexism and the intersection of race domains.

### **Usefulness of BFT and Intersectionality in Higher Education**

The foundations of BFT and Intersectionality have been utilized heavily in research on working with Black women clients. The findings support interventions and frameworks (provide examples) tied to BFT that will be beneficial in working with Black women in a variety of settings. There is literature that emphasizes utilizing BFT and Intersectionality as frameworks for enhancing the experiences of Black women in educational settings; specifically for school and college counselors in working with Black women (Bertrand-Jones et al., 2013; Rasheem et al., 2018; Shavers & Moore, 2017). Porter et al., (2020) found that with a deeper understanding and utilization of the key constructs of BFT student affairs and higher education practitioners, administrators, and faculty can better understand and assist Black women in these settings and provide better experiences.

There continues to be an underrepresentation of Black women in higher education (i.e., faculty and staff members) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). BFT recognizes the *othered* status Black women are often placed in while in White male-dominated spaces, and utilizing this framework can allow Black women to recognize the shared experiences of other Black women and can be a guide towards empowering Black women in these spaces.

### **Usefulness of BFT and Intersectionality in Counselor Education**

BFT creates a space for the stories of Black women to be centered in a world where Black women are underrepresented, silenced, and oppressed. This paradigm recognizes the invisibility of Black women as a marginalized group, and advocates for these experiences to be brought to the forefront. The key constructs of BFT align with the goals of multicultural competencies in counselor education regarding an emphasis and recognition of intersectionality,

the historical context of injustices towards marginalized people, and a map towards dismantling these unjust systems (Ratts et al., 2016).

Historically, the counseling profession has moved towards incorporating multiculturalism into professional work, and over the last decade, diversity, equity, and inclusion have been emphasized in the foundations of the educator, supervisor, advocate, and researcher roles (Ratts et al., 2016). It is no longer an option for a counselor to be cognizant of and utilize the concepts of multiculturalism and diversity in working with clients, students, and supervisees (Ratts et al., 2016). Counselor educators are challenged to adequately address cultural issues and allow students to have agency over their experiences. This aligns with the constructs of BFT and Intersectionality which include allowing Black women to be the authors of their experiences, empowering voices that are often silenced, addressing cultural and historical context, addressing multiple identities of a person and how that impacts their worldviews, and providing a paradigm for empowerment and liberation.

### **Usefulness of BFT and Intersectionality in Mentoring Black Doctoral Women**

When considering the techniques and tools to utilize in building satisfying mentorship relationships with Black doctoral women, mentors are encouraged to consider diverse and multicultural concepts (Bertrand-Jones et al., 2013). Black women have had to face negative stereotypes such as the Angry Black Woman, the Strong Black woman, the Mammy (the timid and meek caretaker), and the Jezebel (promiscuous and seductive) historically; all of which they were challenged to actively dismantle by overextending themselves to prove their seat at the table (Corbin et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2013).

Mentors must be willing to diversify their techniques and embody cultural sensitivity when mentoring Black women. Bertrand-Jones (2013) proposed that mentors and advisors should specifically incorporate key constructs of BFT and Intersectionality when working with Black women students. Both theories highlight the experiences of women at the intersection of race, gender, class, and other salient identities pertinent to their experiences (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). Bertrand-Jones (2013) provides a BFT model for advisors and mentors when advising Black doctoral women. It highlights the encounters Black doctoral women may face from adversaries in pursuing a doctoral degree and utilizes a theoretical advising and mentoring framework that empowers Black doctoral women to achieve academic success (Bertrand-Jones, 2013).

### **Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature regarding the experiences of Black women in doctoral programs and highlight the major gaps in the literature regarding the mentorship experiences of Black doctoral women in counselor education programs. The literature reviewed the negative experiences Black doctoral women may face at the intersection of race, gender, class, and other salient identities while attending PWIs. Historically, Black women have faced discrimination and oppression while pursuing higher education degrees (Ragland et al., 2021; Shahid et al., 2018; Walkington, 2017). While there is research highlighting the coping mechanisms Black women in higher education utilize to overcome racial-gendered microaggressions, the research exploring the role of mentorship for Black doctoral women is limited. Therefore, it is important to explore the experiences Black doctoral women have with mentorship, specifically in counselor education programs. Lastly, this chapter highlighted the theoretical frameworks of BFT and Intersectionality and discussed how:

each theory encompasses the unique experiences of Black women, how each theory can be used as a framework for exploring the intersecting identities of Black doctoral women, and how these intersecting identities impact their experiences.

### **Chapter 3: METHOD**

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the mentorship experiences of Black women who have earned or are in the process of earning a PhD in counselor education at a PWI. Chapter three will describe the methods employed in collecting and analyzing qualitative data. Specifically, this chapter will include an overview of the methodology used to conduct the study, including the research design, participant selection, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

#### **Rationale for Qualitative Methodology**

In conducting qualitative research, researchers observe and study things or people in naturalistic settings with the goal of better understanding a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Further, Creswell and Poth (2016) emphasize the need to study a group or population whose voices are often silenced using qualitative approaches. There is a paucity of literature that specifically explores the lived experiences of Black doctoral women and their mentorship encounters. There is even less research that specifically explores these experiences in counselor education programs at PWIs. An examination of Black doctoral women's experiences with mentorship will provide space for a voice that is not yet amplified in the literature and is well-suited for a phenomenological qualitative research design.

#### **Research Design**

This study employed a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to investigate the encounters of mentorship the participants experienced. Edmund Husserl, often referred to as the father of phenomenology research, gave light to the philosophy of phenomenology as a

framework for finding the true meaning of experiences through a deep exploration of realities (Moran, 2013). Phenomenology can be defined as the study of a phenomenon as people experience it (von Eckartsberg, 1998). Furthermore, phenomenological research aims to identify what all participants have in common while experiencing a certain phenomenon and develop rich descriptions based on these experiences (van Manen, 1990). For the purposes of this study, the shared phenomenon is the mentorship experiences of Black doctoral women in counselor education at predominantly white institutions.

Martin Heidegger developed a branch of phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, based on the works of Husserl (Langdrige, 2007). The works of hermeneutic phenomenology were later enriched by scholars such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ademeo Giorgi, Hans George Gadamer, Poul Ricour, and Max van Manen (Langdrige, 2007). From Heidegger's perspective, it was irrational for researchers to detach themselves or remain neutral while investigating the experiences of others (Langdrige, 2007). In comparison to transcendental phenomenology, an approach in which researchers bracket, hermeneutic theorists suggest that it is not possible to bracket personal experiences regarding a specific phenomenon (Langdrige, 2007). Vagle (2018) suggests moving from bracketing towards bridling (Dahlberg, 2006) in which the researcher becomes more aware of their judgments and more certain they do not interfere with the phenomenon being explored.

Hermeneutic research utilizes reflexivity as a means of mitigating biases during the data analysis in which researchers reflect upon how their values, beliefs, and identities may impact the data (Langdrige, 2007). Vagle (2018) encourages researchers to engage in post-reflexivity, which is a form of reflexivity that speaks to the researcher's positionality constantly evolving. Specifically, researchers are asked to "be reflexive about how they are coming to see the world

the way they see it” (Vagle, 2018, p.15) Employing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach for the execution of this study is the best fit, as the researcher closely identifies with the phenomenon of the study and would experience some difficulty executing this study with a completely blank slate, bracketing off personal experiences.

A data analysis procedure used in hermeneutic phenomenology is the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle is a method of data analysis in which the researchers move back and forth between components of the data or experiences. The researcher breaks down the data into smaller parts and compares each part to the whole experience or concept. This form of analysis and interpretation process provides a deeper exploration and expansion of new meanings (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). The goal of the hermeneutic circle is to better understand the experiences or data in its entirety (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Furthermore, the hermeneutic circle is an ongoing and circular process between parts of the data as the essence and understanding of the experiences become more complete (Gadamer, 1988; Schleiermacher, 1998).

### **Positionality**

Some of my most salient identities include being a Black doctoral woman. Pursuing my doctoral degree has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my life, as it will ultimately grant me future opportunities in the profession of counselor education. As a Black doctoral woman, I have had my own experiences of racial-gendered oppression within my program. Being in communication with other Black women in my program, there seems to be a consensus that racism, sexism, and oppression within the program still impact Black people, specifically Black women. Knowing these experiences were valid and true, I felt it was important to hold space for Black doctoral women to share their experiences of being doctoral students at PWIs.

It has been an honor to be the first person in my family to not only pursue higher education but to also pursue a doctoral degree. I take being a student very seriously and have been a student most of my life. I have always felt that as a Black woman, growing up in a lower socioeconomic status, that education would be my pathway towards a better and more successful life. Being a first-generation student has been both a pride and a tribulation. It has not been as seamless as it has for many of my White counterparts. I come from a supportive family; however, the guidance and financial support piece was not a fortune I had. Embarking on unfamiliar territory and not seeing many people who looked like me was both overwhelming and alienating. I remember feeling isolated and helpless. As I have attended PWIs throughout my higher education degree, that feeling of isolation, unfortunately increased as I furthered my degree. As a Black woman in these spaces, it was my mission to find safe spaces where I could connect with other Black women on similar paths.

Personally, one of the biggest additives towards a positive doctoral process has been my mentor relationship with an alum from the same program. She also identifies as a Black woman, we have similar research interests, and her current role aligns with my future aspirations as a professional. Her knowledge and experiences, having been through the same program, have been tremendously influential for me while I am navigating through the doctoral process. I have also found solitude and guidance from other Black women faculty in the program. I have felt safe, supported, and motivated in working with these Black women professionals, whether in the setting as an assistant, student, or mentee. I am grateful for the mentors I have found during this doctoral experience who have provided me with resources and tools for different opportunities to help advance me in the professional academy. These personal experiences have inspired me to research the mentorship experiences of Black doctoral women throughout their doctoral process.

As a Black woman in the field of counselor education, I hope to add to the gaps in the literature and provide implications for bettering these experiences.

## **Data Collection**

### **Population**

The population consisted of Black women who have experienced the phenomenon of participating in a doctoral-level, counselor education program at a PWI. Participants had to: (1) self-identify as a Black woman and (2a) be currently enrolled in a doctoral level counselor education program at a PWI, having completed at least one year of the program, *or* (2b) be a graduate of a counselor education doctoral program within the past five years.

### **Sampling Procedures**

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I began participant recruitment. For phenomenological research, Creswell and Poth's (2018) text suggests sizes varying from 3-4 individuals to 10 to 15 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. To align with the goals of this study, the recruitment strategy involved identifying 5-10 potential participants who met the inclusion criteria. I employed both purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is defined as “intentionally selecting individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2012, p. 206). To facilitate purposive sampling, recruitment materials (email, flier, etc.) were shared within academic and professional networks that were aligned with the identified population (i.e., Black doctoral women). For example,

recruitment emails were shared on counselor education listservs and in social media groups that cater to academic and counseling professionals.

Recipients of the recruitment materials were encouraged to share the request for participation with others who meet the criteria. This method, referred to as snowball sampling, was beneficial as current participants were able to inform other potential participants who fit the criteria for the study experiences (Creswell, 2012). The screening survey and demographics questionnaire were beneficial in making sure candidates were eligible and met the requirements to participate in the study, which increased the possibility that the participants gathered were a good fit for the research study. After the participant recruitment and an initial screening of responses, there were a total of eight participants who were eligible and ultimately participated in the study.

### **Screening Survey**

To ensure that participants met the criteria, the first instrument utilized was the screening survey. This document consisted of six questions designed to determine eligibility based on inclusion criteria (see Appendix A). Individuals who did not meet the criteria, based on their responses, were notified that they had not met the criteria, and did not proceed further in the study.

### **Demographic Questionnaire**

After completing the screening survey, participants who met the criteria then completed the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B), which allowed them to share their gender, race/ethnicity, age, pronouns, and geographic region. The purpose of the demographic questionnaire was to gain background information about the participants for the purpose of

descriptive analysis and to provide contact information. This contact information was used to communicate with participants, schedule interviews, and collect personal statements for document analysis.

### **Interview Questions**

In-depth interviews are useful in helping to understand the personal feelings, opinions, and experiences of others (Frechtling et al., 1997). The following research questions guided the interview questions in this study:

1. What are the lived experiences of Black doctoral women with mentorship in counselor education programs at PWIs?
2. What factors and aspects of mentorship have been most beneficial for Black doctoral women in counselor education programs at PWI's?

To collect data that informs the research questions, I developed semi-structured interview questions grounded in the theoretical framework. Semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and consisted of open-ended questions found in the table below:

**Table 1.** Interview Questions*Summary of Interview Questions and Foundations of the Questions*

Interview Question	Research Question	Literature Component	Theory
Tell me about your journey into counselor education and this specific program.	What are the lived experiences of Black doctoral women with mentorship in counselor education programs at PWI's?	Gardner and Holley (2011) found that Black women are commonly first-generation doctoral students with the challenge of navigating the intersection of race and gender, in addition to academic-related issues (Patton, 2009)	BFT gives a voice to Black women who share similar experiences at the intersection of race and gender. (Collins, 2000).
How would you describe or define mentorship? (consider its purpose, benefits, and/ or value)	What are the lived experiences of Black doctoral women with mentorship in counselor education programs at PWI's?	Utilizing strong objectivity (Harding, 1993) and allowing Black women in doctoral programs the opportunity and space to self-define what shapes their mentorship experiences.	BFT places Black women at the center of their own experiences, allowing them to give meaning and knowledge to their encounters (Collins, 2000).
Can you tell me about the experience you had with mentorship prior to starting your program?	What are the lived experiences of Black doctoral women with mentorship in counselor education programs at PWI's?  What factors and aspects of mentorship have been most beneficial for Black doctoral women in counselor education programs at PWI's?	Patton (2009) stated 'support systems are necessary in helping Black women overcome the dual-edge burdens of race and gender, particularly when they attempt to find mentors within the "old boy" network' (p. 511)	BFT emphasizes the unique experience of Black women, which warrants the examination of those stories/experiences (Collins, 2000).

Table 1. (continued)

<p>Can you tell me about your expectations around receiving mentorship coming into a PWI program (what formed those expectations?)</p>	<p>What are the lived experiences of Black doctoral women with mentorship in counselor education programs at PWI's?</p>	<p>There are a multitude of barriers that African American female students face as they navigate university campuses (Bonner &amp; Thomas, 2001). There is a lack of systems in place to assist and support African American women as they journey through the Academy (Patton &amp; Harper, 2003).</p>	<p>BFT addresses the history of oppression for Black women; said history can inform expectations that Black women have upon entering a PWI (Collins, 2000).</p>
<p>Can you tell me about your experiences receiving mentorship during your program?</p>	<p>What are the lived experiences of Black doctoral women with mentorship in counselor education programs at PWI's?</p> <p>What factors and aspects of mentorship have been most beneficial for Black doctoral women in counselor education programs at PWI's?</p>	<p>Unfortunately, there is a disproportionate underrepresentation of Black faculty in counselor education, it is likely that some Black graduate students will be paired with White mentors (Brooks &amp; Steen, 2010; Haizlip, 2012). Scholars (Johnson-Bailey &amp; Cervero, 2004) note that cultural mistrust may hinder the forming of these beneficial interracial relationships.</p>	<p>BFT gives a voice to Black women who share similar experiences at the intersection of race and gender. (Collins, 2000).</p> <p>Intersectionality places the experiences of Black women separate from those of Black men and White women. Recognizing their experiences are unique (Crenshaw, 1989).</p>

Table 1. (continued)

<p>In general, how have mentorship relationships been formed/generated for you? (e.g., describe the mechanisms for assigning mentors? How did you initiate mentorship on your own? Were you connected with someone through informal means, such as a friend of a friend?)</p>	<p>What are the lived experiences of Black doctoral women with mentorship in counselor education programs at PWI's?</p> <p>What factors and aspects of mentorship have been most beneficial for Black doctoral women in counselor education programs at PWI's?</p>	<p>Doctoral mentoring relationships can be a formal systematic pairing, or organically based on mutual interests. Mentorship initiated and driven by the student has been most successful (Yang, 2011).</p>	<p>BFT emphasizes that a shared group experience exists among Black women and that the expression of such experiences are unique and different according to each woman (Collins, 2000).</p> <p>Intersectionality emphasizes that varying acts of oppression and/or privilege exists based on multiple identities (race, gender, age, class, marital status)</p>
<p>Can you tell me about any benefits you've received from the mentorship experience during your program?</p>	<p>What are the lived experiences of Black doctoral women with mentorship in counselor education programs at PWI's?</p> <p>What factors and aspects of mentorship have been most beneficial for Black doctoral women in counselor education programs at PWI's?</p>	<p>Mentors are instrumental in expanding the networks of Black women in the academy, in terms of research interests and employment, and influential in connecting them to an often-inaccessible academic pipeline (Gardner, 2013; Thomas et al., 2007).</p>	<p>Intersectionality and BFT emphasize that Black women are doubly burdened at the intersection of race and gender (Collins, 1986). Intersectionality also brings light to the other identities of being a woman that may lead to other barriers, such as marital status or parenthood (Crenshaw, 1989). BFT gives Black women a framework to resist oppression and empower themselves.</p>

Table 1. (continued)

<p>Can you talk about any unproductive and/or absent mentorship experiences you had in your program?</p>	<p>What are the lived experiences of Black doctoral women with mentorship in counselor education programs at PWI's?</p> <p>What factors and aspects of mentorship have been most beneficial for Black doctoral women in counselor education programs at PWI's?</p>	<p>Because socialization into academic culture is essential for establishing a research agenda and identifying a career path, doctoral students without a mentoring relationship are at a disadvantage (Felder, 2010; Johnson, 2001).</p> <p>A mentor's inability to encourage the student's scholarship may reinforce a feeling of intellectual illegitimacy or imposter syndrome and negatively affect a student's confidence in their research abilities (Holland, 1993; Jones, 2006; Knight, 2012).</p>	<p>BFT recognizes the "outsider" status Black women may feel in unwelcoming and predominantly White spaces, leading to feelings of alienation and unsatisfactory relationships (Collins, 1986).</p>
<p>What recommendations do you have for improving mentorship experiences for Black doctoral women in Counselor Education at PWIs?</p>	<p>What factors and aspects of mentorship have been most beneficial for Black doctoral women in counselor education programs at PWI's?</p>	<p>Holmes, Land, and Hinton-Hudson (2007) offered specific mentoring strategies derived directly from the unique perspectives of Black women graduate students and faculty. Higginbotham (1995) suggested a transformation of the college curriculum by incorporating the voices of women of color.</p>	<p>BFT places Black women at the center of their own experiences, allowing them to give meaning and knowledge to their encounters (Collins, 2000).</p>

After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed by the researcher and forwarded via secure email to each participant for review. This process, known as member-checking, allows participants to ensure they were regarded correctly and supports the fidelity of the research. Participants had a two-week window to respond with feedback and/or questions. After reviewing participant feedback and integrating that into the data, the interviews were ready for data analysis.

### **Collection of Participant Personal Statements**

Patton (2015) emphasizes the power of triangulation, the examination of two or more resources, to increase the validity and credibility of findings. In addition to the semi-structured interview, data was collected from the personal statements participants used for admission into their doctoral program. Because some of the inquiries of this study are related to expectations or goals for mentorship during the doctoral experience, I was interested in examining some of these themes in their personal statements. Excerpts from official documents can provide relevant quotes and statements to add credibility and authenticity to the overall phenomenon and study (Cohen et al., 2011). When requesting documents, I restated the purpose of the study, with an emphasis on the goal of obtaining these specific documents. I was sure to highlight the sacredness of these types of documents, and let participants know to send pieces or portions they felt most comfortable sharing. Participants who (a) agreed to submit their personal statement and (b) had access to the document, were directed to send their statement to me via email at least one week before or after individual scheduled interviews. Participants were asked to upload PDF versions of their documents, eliminating any editing privileges, into a secure drive. Participants who were unable to unwilling to share their personal statements were still able to participate in

the semi-structured interview, as I did not want the document analysis to exclude individuals interested in sharing their story via interview.

### **Field Notes**

Ongoing field notes were taken throughout the data collection and analysis process. Field notes are essential in hermeneutic phenomenological research and can aid in identifying biases and assumptions (Cohen et al., 2011). Field notes may include “the observer’s personal and subjective responses to and interpretations of social action encountered” also known as the observer comments (Saldana, 2016, p. 45). They may also consist of reflections, new thoughts that may arise, and feelings and emotions that may surface from spending time with the data.

I created field notes after interviews while analyzing the personal statements from participants, as well as throughout the data analysis process. My field notes consisted of brain dumping in which I jotted down everything that came to mind while sitting with the data. I considered my research questions, interview questions, and the overall purpose of the study. At times, thoughts or emotions would come up for me after taking a day or two away from the data; these impressions were also included in my field notes. In addition to cataloging my feelings in the moment, field notes allowed me to expand upon those thoughts when revisiting the data. All field notes were saved and stored in a secure Google drive to which I only access.

### **Data Analysis**

Recordings from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed from Zoom recordings and uploaded to the Atlas.ti software, along with the four personal statements submitted for analysis and coding. Unlike transcendental phenomenology which includes researchers bracketing off their prior experiences, Heidegger (1962) suggests that researchers do not attempt

to explore phenomena from a neutral or detached stance. Instead, researchers are encouraged to engage in a reflexivity process (Langdrige, 2007). Vagle (2018) asserts that reflexivity is an ongoing process, in which the researcher consistently examines how their positionality, perspectives, backgrounds, and insights influence all aspects of a study. Reflexivity occurred as I remained conscious and aware of my own experiences, how my experiences can be biased, and how my experiences can be an additive means of analyzing the data. While analyzing the field notes, I also engaged in reflexivity tools to reflect on personal biases that may impact the interpretation process, which ultimately adds transparency and credibility to the study. Reviewing the data and revisiting thoughts and reflections can contribute to the emergence of new ideas that may not have been discovered or thought of before, which can be groundbreaking for the overall study (Ramsook, 2018).

To build credibility, I utilized peer debriefers as another means of mitigating biases and capturing the accuracy of these experiences. Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that “the debriefer must be in every sense the inquirer’s peer, someone who knows a great deal about both the substantive area of the inquiry and the methodological issues’ (p. 308). Peer debriefers were recruited via an email that detailed the goals of the study, their specific roles, and incentives. After recruitment, I identified two peer debriefers who had knowledge of qualitative research, the field of counselor education, and the purposes of the study. Debriefers’ roles included: reviewing transcripts, reviewing personal statements, and assisting with the formulation of codes and themes.

Each member of the research team had access to the Atlas.ti software which included the eight transcribed interviews and four personal statements, allowing them to fully engage in the

coding process. Each researcher began coding the collected data independently. Resonating statements and phrases were analyzed and compared against the research questions and goals.

Saturation is the phenomenon during data collection and analysis when the data begins to repeat itself or become redundant (Kerr, Nixon, & Wild, 2010). In completing interviews, I believed saturation had been met and the data analysis could commence. During the process of team meetings for data analysis, we discussed saturation and agreed from reading the transcripts that experiences from each participant began to become similar and stories sounded familiar. The team also came to a consensus that saturation had been met, and there was no need for additional interviews.

Once codes were created by each individual research member, the team met to discuss potential themes that appeared to capture the true essence of these experiences. During team meetings, researchers engaged in reflexive thinking, asked questions to mitigate biases, and discussed various categories for the codes. In following the steps of the hermeneutic circle, we continued to compare participant statements to the phenomenon being studied and compared these same statements to research questions, this process was ongoing and included reviewing field notes as well. Each researcher provided thick descriptions that spoke to defining their codes.

From this, codes began to be categorized into themes. We did this by discussing which codes had similar meanings and could be compiled into one theme. After themes were constructed, we reviewed which themes truly defined the phenomena being studied and each of the participant's experiences. As a research team, we discussed which themes needed to be collapsed into one theme, and which themes needed to be branched into subsections. During this process, subthemes begin to emerge. Ultimately, the goal was to capture both individual and

shared experiences to display major themes that provided a more in-depth understanding of the participant's experiences and their influences.

### **Confidentiality and Trustworthiness**

Both validity and reliability are two important factors that should be considered when facilitating effective qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Tracy (2019) provides indicators of quality research which can include reliability and validity strategies, trustworthiness, sincerity, self-reflexivity, and credibility. First, participants were required to sign an informed consent prior to their engagement in this research study. Next, to ensure confidentiality, participants were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy throughout their engagement in this research study. Participants were also informed of the purpose of this study as well as the process by which their information will be secured for safety.

To enhance trustworthiness, member checking also occurred, which allowed the participants to review their transcripts and address any discrepancies. Participants were sent their transcripts and given instructions on how to make notes in the documents if any changes needed to be made. Transcripts were sent via email before the data analysis process, and participants were given a two-week timeframe for member checking to be completed. Once the member checking window closed, the data analysis began.

### **Credibility and Confirmability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility can be established through reflexivity, triangulation, and peer debriefing. Creswell and Miller (2000) highlight the role of research reflexivity, member checking, and peer debriefing as strong components for providing evidence

of validity and credibility. In defining confirmability, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state: "Confirmability . . . involves the use of written field notes, memos, a field diary, process and personal notes, and a reflexive journal" (p. 513). As previously noted, I utilized the following data collection methods: interviews, and document analysis.

The purpose of this triangulation method is to search for shared truths through various sources of data to strengthen the results of the research study. I engaged in reflexivity and peer debriefing to mitigate biases and accurately represent the experiences of participants. I identified two qualified and skilled peer debriefers to assist with the data analysis process. The peer debriefers were selected based on their experience conducting qualitative research and their familiarity with Atlas. ti software. The debriefers contributed by asking confrontational or challenging questions during the data analysis to enrich the findings and check my biases and blind spots. Berends and Johnston (2005) believe that having multiple perspectives during the data analysis process can be beneficial in disputing coding disagreements and refining the coding systems.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide details about the methods used to execute this study. The rationale for employing hermeneutic phenomenological research and the motivating force to conduct a qualitative study was presented. Details for the research design, participant selection, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis were provided. The process in which theory and literature informed interview questions were provided and the procedures for conducting document analysis and field notes were presented. Finally, tools for increasing validity and reliability were highlighted. The next chapter will present the findings of this study.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to better understand the lived mentorship experiences of Black doctoral women in counselor education at PWIs, and the aspects of these mentor relationships that were most beneficial. Both purposeful and snowball sampling were used to recruit eight participants who met the requirements for this study. Participants were required to participate in 30–45-minute semi-structured interviews and there was an optional submission of their personal statement that was used for admission into their doctoral program. All interviews were conducted via Zoom and participants were asked to submit personal statements via email in pdf format.

Each of the eight participants provided their unique experiences with mentorship while pursuing their doctoral degree. While only four participants submitted their optional submission of their personal statements for admission into their doctoral program, overarching themes were submerged from these documents that correlated with experiences from the semi-structured interviews. Each of the participants had completed at least three years of their program, however, there was variation in their progress toward dissertation completion. Below is a table highlighting demographics and a visual overview of each participant.

**Table 2.** Participants Demographics

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Year in Doctoral Program</b>	<b>Self-Identified Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Self-Identified Gender</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Socioeconomic Status</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Submitted Personal Statement</b>
Jade	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	African-American	Female	Employed	31-40	Low-class	Engaged	No
Jamie	4 <sup>th</sup> year	African-American	Female	Employed	51-60	Middle-class	Divorced	No
Jessica	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	African-American	Female	Employed	31-40	Middle-class	Single	Yes
Tasha	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	African-American	Female	Employed	41-50	Middle-class	Single	No
Jay	4 <sup>th</sup> year, dissertation defended	African-American	Female	Employed	31-40	Middle-class	Single	Yes
Mary	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	African-American	Female	Employed	41-50	Middle-class	Single	No
Mina	6 <sup>th</sup> year, ABD	African-American	Female	Employed	41-50	Working-class	Single	Yes
Ashley	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	African-American	Female	Student	31-40	Low-class	Single	Yes

## Overview of Participants

### Jade

Jade is a 3<sup>rd</sup> year doctoral student in a counselor education program at a PWI. Her undergraduate and master's degrees were both from an HBCU, and some of her expectations coming into a doctoral program stemmed from those experiences. She has had a plethora of mentorship experiences prior to starting her doctoral program and defined them as both positive and encouraging. During her work as a clinician and as a master's student, she received encouragement from her mentor, a Black woman, who encouraged her to pursue her doctoral degree. Jade stated,

I reached out to her because she also went to this specific university. And so, I hit her up and was like, hey would just love to like, chat and catch up. And we hadn't talked in years. And I sent her an email. And she responded like within seconds, and was just like, it's so crazy that you're emailing me. I was just thinking about you. So again, like me, believing it signs...so she and I connected, and then I was like, well, let me just see when the interest meeting is and when they'll be talking about the program and like answering questions.

### Jamie

Jamie is a 4<sup>th</sup> year doctoral student in a counselor education program at a PWI. Her background and current field of work is school counseling. While she did not have many expectations of mentorship coming into a doctoral program, she became interested in pursuing her doctorate after talking to a close friend who spoke highly of Jamie's current program. She stated,

My goal with entering a doctoral program was to get a position at a district level where I could be in charge of, like the professional development of school counselors for our district. And then what led me to my specific university was a counselor, who's the friend that I had who was in the program. And she just talked about how she was enjoying this specific program, specifically how she was able to manage it, because logistically it was something I wanted to do. But I couldn't figure out how I could do it and maintain my job, and so, just seeing her do it, and hearing how she was able to do it kind of led me to apply to this program.

### **Jessica**

Jessica is a 3<sup>rd</sup> year doctoral student in counselor education at a PWI. Her background and current field of work is school counseling. Coming from a school counseling background, some of her goals in pursuing her doctorate surrounded conducting more research as she was more removed from research during her work as a school counselor. With this goal, she did have some expectations around advisor-mentor/ student relationships to assist in obtaining these goals. Jessica shared not initially wanting to go into counselor education but being encouraged by her mentor from her master's program to pursue her doctorate. She stated,

It was actually one of my master's professors who encouraged me to apply and get it done, and then kind of figure it out later, because I wasn't sure what I would do with the degree. And I had shared that with them, and their response was, 'Well, go ahead and get it now while you're young, and then, if and when you decide to exit school counseling, you already have this degree.' And you know, you can kind of move forward, and so I applied.

**Tasha**

Tasha is a 3<sup>rd</sup> year doctoral student in counselor education at a PWI. Her background work was in teaching, and she navigated into pursuing her master's in counseling. Tasha shared having positive mentorship experiences and connections in the field of counseling and education that really motivated her to pursue her doctorate. Specifically, she had developed a close relationship with a mentor from her internship, and a colleague turned friend who soon inspired her to pursue her PhD in counselor education. She stated,

I talked to a close friend of mine who went through the program that I'm currently in. And she was talking about her wonderful experiences, and I know one of my fears was taking the GRE and when she called me, she said, guess what they're waving the GRE. What are you gonna do now? And so, I was like, I have no excuse, I can't get a yes, if I don't put my name out there. So, I did the application, did the interview, and got selected, and I'm here now, in year 3.

**Jay**

Jay is a 4<sup>th</sup> year doctoral student in counselor education at a PWI, who recently defended her dissertation! Her background was in teaching, and she navigated into counseling where she received her master's in counseling. It was during this time that she began to consider pursuing her PhD after being approached by one of the professors in her master's program. She stated,

I remember my professor said to me after class, Jay, you need to get your PhD. And I was like Oh, I was like, you know, I can't even read, and I have no idea what's happened, what are you talking about? I had never considered it like my brain didn't even go, 'Yes, I'm going into a counseling program, which means the people teaching me are counselor educators', like I didn't even put that together, and my professor was telling me that I

needed to get a PhD. I didn't realize it at the moment. But the Professor, I was telling you who was like you need to get your PhD, they were a mentor to me.

### **Mary**

Mary is a 3<sup>rd</sup> year doctoral student in counselor education at a PWI. Mary's experience is in school counseling. When deciding to pursue her doctorate, she communicated with her doctoral students and graduates which helped develop her expectations for her current program. Mary shared having low expectations from faculty and staff and expected to find more relationships with her cohort. When reflecting on her experiences with mentors prior to starting her program, she shared positive experiences with her site supervisors. She stated,

I've had a couple of mentors, but it was, I guess, more so, they were my site supervisors.

When I'm thinking about the individuals who are, you know, instrumental in my professional growth, those individuals were my site supervisors. So, it was the regular check-ins, the honest and open feedback, only, you know, to help me grow professionally in my role as a counselor.

### **Mina**

Mina is a 6<sup>th</sup> year doctoral student in counselor education at a PWI. She received her master's in counseling psychology and wanted to pursue her PhD after receiving some insight from her master's program mentor. She shared having many positive experiences with mentorship before starting her doctoral program, but the most instrumental in her journey was the mentor who inspired her to pursue her PhD. She stated,

My faculty advisor, she kind of was one of the people who encouraged me to go in the direction that I wanted to go. So, I think that she wonderful, I mean she was the truth-teller, which I appreciate someone who told me the truth. She's also someone who was

willing to share the things that I needed to know whether or not it was politically correct to say it or to do it. I felt really taken care of like she was looking out for me, you know, and she would share information about things that I wouldn't otherwise know, or things that I wouldn't have thought about. She challenged me and we also talked about our identities as black women and what things looked like for us in this field.

### **Ashely (3<sup>rd</sup> year doc student)**

Ashley is in her 3<sup>rd</sup> year in counselor education at a PWI. She is pursuing her doctorate at her alma mater where she received both her bachelor's and master's. What drew her to the program was the advertised multicultural social justice aspect. She was interested in learning more about these competencies and how to execute them as a clinician. Regarding mentorship, she had very little experience receiving mentorship prior to starting her program and therefore had low expectations of mentorship during her doctoral program. She did, however, have experience being a mentor to others. Ashley stated,

What led me to my CES [Counselor Education & Supervision] program. I'm not sure I feel like this is everybody's CES program. But it definitely has, like a multi-cultural social justice aspect. And I feel like we're still in the process of learning how to do that like, what does that look like in real time, you know, like we've been learning about it. We've been reading about it. But then, actually, what does it look like, you know?

### **Themes and Subthemes**

After data analysis of eight interviews and four personal statements, the researcher and peer debriefers identified themes and subthemes. These themes were created by analyzing the data, referring back to research goals and questions, and ensuring themes embodied the true essence of

these experiences. The themes and subthemes are displayed in the table below. Following the themes will be verbatim statements from the participants to support each theme.

**Table 3.** Themes and Subthemes

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subtheme</b>
Research Question 1: Expectation vs Reality	<i>Origin of Expectations</i>
Research Question 1: Defining Mentorship	<i>Taken Under Their Wings</i> <i>Sisterhood</i> <i>Wrap-around Services</i>
Research Question 2: Forming Lasting Bonds	<i>How the Mentorship Relationship was Formed</i>
Research Question 2: Beneficial Outcomes	--

## Research Question 1 Findings

When exploring Black doctoral women's lived experiences with mentorship in counselor education programs at PWIs, many participants discussed discrepancies between their envisioned mentorship experience and their actual experiences. Further, they discussed the impact of the mentoring relationships on their personal and professional experiences. After coding responses, the following themes emerged: **Expectation vs Reality and Forming Lasting Bonds**. From each theme related to research question one, at least one subtheme emerged; *Origin of Expectations* was a subtheme of **Expectation vs Reality**, while *How the Mentorship Relationship was Formed* was a subtheme of **Forming Lasting Bonds**.

### Expectation vs Reality

While reflecting on their early experiences as doctoral students, participants shared similar sentiments regarding their expectations of their doctoral program, as well as their relationships with faculty and staff. Based on interview statements, many of the participants did eventually have their expectations met in some capacity. Several of the participants shared that their expectations began to be met during the 3rd year of the program, a reality that differed from their expectations prior to starting the program. Other participants also shared having to search for their needs to be met outside of their program, which was not a reality they were prepared for coming into their program. Ultimately, there was a combination of expectations not being met in some capacity, and eventually being met after some trial and error.

Multiple participants shared having high expectations for mentorship prior to starting their doctoral program. For example, Mina stated,

Yeah, I thought that there would be this wrap-around care. I don't know why. I don't know why. But I really did in my head, I was like, Okay, we're at this level. So, they're the, they've got a structure where people are gonna come in. And they're gonna I mean, really wraparound care. That is what comes to mind. I also thought that I would have a person, so I thought that my advisor was going to be my mentor.

Additionally, another participant, Jade, expressed what specifically attracted her to her current doctoral program and shared how she expected the execution of mentorship to flow:

Another thing that attracted me to the program, I looked at our faculty and their CVs, their background, and like the type of research that they were doing and like wanted to be connected to someone that had similar ideas or like similar values. I wanted to be able to collaborate and like work with somebody. But again, I wanted to be an understudy. I wanted to be able to learn from somebody, be mentored, do research together, do work together, help me, kind of get clear on my ideas, and like what I wanted to do.

When reflecting on the expectations of mentorship amongst both faculty and other doctoral students, another participant, Jamie, expressed hoping for more connections with peers and doctoral students who were already in the program. Jamie stated,

I think I would have expected or would have liked to see just automatic connections to people who were in the program. Like, you know, some semesters ahead of me in the program just to kind of guide and be available to answer questions when my academic

advisor might not be available or because of other responsibilities that they have, and with them being more my peer colleagues, it would make those conversations easier, and I would feel more comfortable approaching it.

Seven of the eight participants shared experiencing a different reality as they embarked on their doctoral journey. Some participants reported feeling lost and confused when it came to certain expectations of their program, and others reported not feeling confident in reaching out to faculty and staff for assistance. Tasha expressed some of the unwritten rules she encountered during her doctoral journey, and how she learned more from peers than faculty. She stated,

Some things I did not know, and I learned them from my peers. You know, I review the handbook and do all this stuff. But it was just some like the unwritten stuff, the unwritten rules or things I feel that will help propel you forward, or doesn't really give you an advantage, but like to kind of help you prepare for whatever you decide to do, I don't feel I learned that my first year and I honestly probably wouldn't know that my second year if I hadn't had that particular experience doing an internship with this professor who I view more as a mentor more than anybody because I was like. Hmm! These are things I wish I had known more.

Additionally, another participant, Ashley, reflected on an experience in which she hoped for more support from staff. She expressed the expectations she had surrounding her conference presentation and shared experiencing a reality different from her expectations. She stated,

I got picked to present at a conference. I've never done anything like this before. And I was really wanting, I probably could have opened my mouth more, and asked the professors for more help. But I would have just thought like, 'Wow, this is my first time

presenting, let's reach out to her and make sure things are okay'. But I didn't get that. And I really, really wanted my professors to, you know, like rally under me. And you know, like they came to my presentation, but I just really wanted them to help me.

Ultimately, there was a consensus that their first few years were a learning process in which they had to seek assistance and advice, whereas, in their later years of the program, they were more confident and competent in knowing what it takes to complete a doctoral program and prepare for the profession. Tasha shared gratitude for the connections she has formed thus far, but also expressed wishing for more connections to have occurred in her earlier years of the program. She stated,

One thing I do wish, because we do have several black females who were in the Counselor education program. But I don't really feel like I got to know those who were not a part of this specific Ph. Ph.D. program. Well learn more about them, and I wish I had known earlier to ask more.

Some were doing like maybe the online or the virtual and they were guest speakers at a class that I'm taking and I was like, oh, some of their experiences and things that they have done, I wish I could have connected with them sooner because there were some similarities in their work, experiences, and different things I want to do and just kind of talk to them about their career trajectory, and how things had worked. I wish that had been more my first year instead of my 3rd.

Mary, shared a similar sentiment, stating that much of her mentorship experiences came later in her program.

I didn't receive a lot of mentorship in this program until my last year in the program, which is this year. I'm working closely with a professor. But before this, I mean outside of meeting with my advisor, to look at schedules, and you know things of that nature. But to have someone like providing feedback and wanting to meet regularly and check in I would say that happened my last year. This is my third year in the program.

Finally, when reflecting on these experiences, Jessica also shared the reality of mentorship experiences being outside of her program or initiated by her within her program. She had certain expectations of what advising and mentorship would look like and took it upon herself to make that a reality. Jessica stated,

I would say that aside from this, this last year, the majority of the mentorship I've received has been outside of the program from individuals, not in the program. It has been something that I've had to initiate even in terms of academic advising meetings. I think there were two times within two years that my advisor initiated like, 'Hey, let's set up a time to check in and talk, and again it was kind of more academic-heavy, where are you at with your coursework? What's coming up for you?' type thing, which, again, is helpful but in the doctoral world it's not just take the classes and graduate. It's, you need to take the classes, but when you get to a certain point, you also need to think about assembling your committee, and, you know, start doing your negotiated exam proposal.

### ***Origin of Expectations***

After compiling the experiences of expectations vs reality, a subtheme emerged, labeled ***Origin of Expectations***. Each participant shared what their expectations for mentorship were

prior to starting their doctoral program, whether they were high or low. Also, each participant expressed that these origins of mentorship expectations stemmed from individuals in the field of counseling, whether it be a mentor, colleague, or close friend. Overall, in both groups (those having low expectations, and those having high expectations), participants formed their expectations from (a) their own experience in their master's program, (b) communication with doctoral students, and/or (c) communication with other professionals in the field of counseling. Mary expressed having low expectations for mentorship from advisors regardless of whether the program is a PWI or not after consulting with other doctoral students. She stated,

Coming into a doc program or just looking, and you know, doing research and talking with individuals about their experience. To be quite honest, my expectation for mentorship was very low. Just because what I've heard from others that I had questioned, you know just interviewed like, hey, how's your process been? How involved was your advisor? Did you receive mentorship? It was very low. But everyone that I did speak with, everyone's common kind of response was, they found community within their cohort, and other doctoral students, but not necessarily their advisor or other faculty member in the program. And this was true for any college, whether it was an HBCU or PWI program.

When reflecting on her expectations as well as their origins, Jessica expressed some of her expectations stemmed from her goals for research and were formed through observing other doctoral students. She stated,

And when I came in I was starting to think about what is it that I want to do with this degree? And if I want to go into a higher ed profession where I know that research is part of it, I would like to get some experience. I don't know if it was from my master's program, or just observing doctoral students with professors, I thought your advisor slash mentor is gonna give you all these opportunities to join them in research, or, you know, be on their research team and you know, you have the option to join or not.

Finally, Jamie expressed not having set expectations for mentorship and shared that these low expectations stemmed from her speaking to a close friend who had already been through the program. She stated,

I didn't necessarily come in with an expectation that a mentor program was already established, like, I don't know that I came in with that pre-preconceived notion. But then, like I said, I had applied to the program, knowing someone who was in the cohort ahead of me, so I had relied on a lot of the things she shared from experiences, the good and the bad, and I knew that she would be a resource.

### **Forming Lasting Bonds**

Seven out of eight participants reported having positive mentorship experiences whether in their program, outside of their program, or later in their program. When reflecting on these positive bonds, participants spoke about how many of these relationships were formed and the long-lasting influence these relationships had on their doctoral experiences. Some of these bonds were formed before starting their doctoral program, while others were formed during their doctoral experience. These relationships began to evolve from professional relationships into

more personal relationships, and all of them have remained intact and have been instrumental during their doctoral journey.

Focusing on the positive experiences of mentorship and its long-lasting influence, Tasha shared the trajectory of a mentorship experience that positively impacted her in the best way possible. She stated,

My former mentor, we've developed a relationship, a great working relationship over doing my internship, and so and she was pretty much known, but we're totally opposite but had similar work ethics. She was absolutely 100 an advocate for students and the profession and other counselors, and so she was very passionate about that. And like I said, over the years, I've changed jobs while still being a counselor, or location and she did as well. But we just kinda checked in, I think, when I started being a counselor more regularly, just informally, like we would meet out for lunch or dinner or something every now and then, and just, you know, chat about each other's lives, but also about being a counselor, and we just kinda maintained that.

Additionally, Jamie, spoke about how mentorships extend beyond the professional trajectory and can evolve into a more intimate relationship. As she reflected on how she advocates for mentorship, she stated,

I think there's some value with mentorships like, I tell my new school counselors, when we give them a mentor for 3 years, we say, this mentor started out with you, this person mentoring you and guiding you. But what I tell them is, after the mentor process is over. I hope you've made this person your colleague. This is a person who you would just reach

out to. You know, you form a relationship together, a long, lasting relationship. When it's all over.

When reflecting on her experiences of mentorship that expanded beyond just a professional relationship, Mina expressed what it was like to have a personal relationship with her mentor. She stated,

What I usually imagine is us laughing about something, don't even know what we're laughing about. But in my head I see us sitting around laughing and so having a relationship where, yes, we do work together. Yes, I'm learning, and all of that. But there's also space to have fun and to make jokes and kind of laugh at one another and laugh about things. You know that has been very important. Just remembering that we can have fun doing all of this stuff. And you know, feeling comfortable enough to laugh for real, you know. Also, kind of lets me know they're a real..they're a real mentor.

### ***How the Mentorship Relationship was Formed***

The subtheme of ***How the Mentorship Relationship was Formed*** emerged as participants began to express how many of their mentorship relationships during their doctoral journey were formed. Many participants shared whether they had to initiate these relationships or whether they happened more organically. In reflecting on how mentorship relationships were formed, Jay, expressed having a more organic experience, as her program was more intentional in creating spaces for mentorship to occur and flourish. She stated,

Some of the connections were formed organically, and others were set up through organizations, but the culture of the program was very intentional in cultivating

mentorship relationships. We did have a professor encourage us in our intro class of our semester to spend time with each of the professors and every professor in the department came to our intro class and introduced themselves and talked about their research interests and gave us what we could sit down. We had a conversation with them, and then I personally did a one-on-one conversation with each of the faculty members to see who I may want to do research with or who may I want to be like my dissertation chair. So, we had the opportunity to interact with all the faculty members, even though it was virtual that first year, so we could get that feel.

Additionally, another participant, Jade, expressed initiating a meeting with her advisor as a vetting process to see who a good fit for her would be based on research interests and accolades. She stated,

So, one of the reasons for coming into the program, looking at the faculty, there was one faculty member in particular whose work I was heavily interested in. And so, I really wanted them to be my advisor. I think I ended up setting up a meeting with them. I'm trying to remember. I don't remember if I ended up meeting with them before advisors were selected. Maybe I did. I think I might have reached out. That's very part of my personality to reach out to random people that I think I could learn from. But I think we had a meeting, and it was such a transformative meeting like we were connecting. I think we both cried during that meeting. Our interests were so aligned, it felt really good, and I think that was also one of the things that made me feel like, Wow, like this is where I'm supposed to be. I'm supposed to be doing this work.

In reflecting on how a mentor relationship was formed prior to starting her program, but remained during her doctoral journey, Jessica reflected on her mentorship experience in her master's program. She expressed feeling as if this relationship had progressed more organically, which removed a lot of initiative on her end. She stated,

In terms of mentors outside of the program, one is my master's professor who had encouraged me to apply and this individual would reach out periodically, and I really enjoyed, loved the fact that they were, you know, constantly kind of pushing me to grow and to do so prior to going back to school, it was, 'You're doing such great work now you need to get your PhD'. And so then, when I was like, 'Hey, I got into this school.' It was like, 'that's awesome, now you need to get publications. But it wasn't just a like, go do this thing it was, here's some information, here's help. And so, when they said, 'You know, now you're gonna get publications', a few months later they reached out and were like, 'Hey, I'm working on this book. Do you wanna join me?' And I'm like, 'Yes, yes.' So, I appreciate things like that. Where again I'm not taking the initiative.

Research question #1 aimed to gain a better understanding of the overall mentorship experiences of Black doctoral women in counselor education at PWIs. Two themes and two subthemes emerged in capturing these stories. Each of these themes and subthemes was supported by thick descriptions from participant statements. From here I will transition into the themes and subthemes relevant to research question #2.

## Research Question 2 Findings

When exploring what factors and aspects of mentorship have been most beneficial for Black doctoral women in counselor education programs at PWIs, two themes, **Defining Mentorship** and **Beneficial Outcomes** emerged. Additionally, there were three subthemes pulled from Defining Mentorship: *Taken Under Their Wings, Sisterhood, and Wrap-around Services*.

### *Defining Mentorship*

One of the first interview questions asked participants to define what mentorship meant to them. While each of the Black women participants had their own unique definitions, there were similarities across the board regarding the qualities of a mentor, aspects of mentorship in the realm of counselor education, and mentorship in general. When defining what mentorship is, participants used similar terms such as: *pouring into, taking a mentee under their wing, and wrap-around services*. Several participants expressed that effective mentorship did not feel “forced” and did not require the student to continuously initiate meetings. Other participants expressed effective mentorship as having someone who “*positively confronts*” and “*challenges you in the best way possible*.” In defining mentorship, Jessica shared how mentorship should be nurturing for mentees, she stated,

I think of it kind of as nurturing in the sense of there's a lot that goes into getting a doctoral degree in anything. And not everything is intuitive, and so a mentor really provides that hand-holding through, not just the academics cause, I think part of it is advising, but not the entire relationship.

Additionally, Jay expressed mentorship as being intentional, organic, and warm. She stated,

So, it's a very like directed and intentional relationship. Here's a person I can call on about this area, and they are willing to share their knowledge, guidance, wisdom, things like that. The relationship is something that is just almost like a natural flow of how things go. And there is warmth. They're gonna care for me warmth. I trust this person, and they're gonna give me good information-warmth.

From these descriptions came the subthemes: *Taken Under Their Wings, Sisterhood, and Wrap-around Services*. These subthemes appeared to be prominent throughout the data. All participants expressed an understanding that mentorship should involve the mentor taking the mentee under their wings and guiding the mentee towards their goals. Every single participant shared having women as their mentors and expressed some feeling of sisterhood that formed from these connections. Lastly, reflecting on the holistic approach that many of the participants expressed in defining mentorship, we landed on the subtheme of wrap-around services.

All participants believed that a mentor should be willing and intentional in their mentorship practices. They each viewed effective mentorship as intentional actions around providing support and guidance. When reflecting on the value of mentorship and expressing how she defines mentorship, Mary expressed the subtheme *Taken Under Their Wings*:

Mentorship is very valuable. Mentorship to me is someone who has taken me under their wing to help prepare me to get to maybe where they are, my mentor, or to where I wanna be, whatever my professional goals are, and then helping me get there so providing me with that very crucial and critical feedback. That will only help me and my professional

development. Mentorship is regular check-ins. And yeah, just open and honest conversations and feedback.

When reflecting on the role of mentorship specifically in counselor education, Ashley expressed mentorship as a mentor showing a mentee the ropes for progressing in the profession. She specifically used terms such as “covering” and “take under their wings”. She stated,

I like to think of mentorship as like a covering, you know, like but some term I've been hearing so often like. And when I think of like covering, I'm like, okay, somebody that's going to provide you with insight...be able to provide you and show you the ropes. Make sure that you're able to make certain connections. Make sure that you're networking with the correct people. Expose you to different programs or different faculty or other clinicians in a field. So especially when I think of CES in particular, and what that mentorship looks like, it's being able to partner with somebody and they're able to take another person or individual underneath their wings and kind of show them the ropes of whatever their expertise is in.

And finally, another participant, Jamie, defined mentorship as an expert guiding someone interested in a certain field of work or study. She expressed novice professionals often feel some anxiety going into a new field and the role of mentors to assist in mitigating some of that anxiety. Jamie stated,

I would describe mentorship as being able to provide guidance and support to those who are new to whatever it is you're mentoring about. So, like for example, for doctoral students, then it would be like just trying to provide them some guided insight, based on

your knowledge or expertise. The purpose would be to kind of help reduce some anxiety that people who are new to whatever area you're mentoring about, but really trying to relieve some of that anxiety that they might have, based on whatever their goal is, because it will be something new to them. I think the values as they relate to mentorship are, you wanna try to be consistent and supportive, non-judgmental, open, and available to that person.

Seven of the eight participants expressed mentorship as being multidimensional and containing various aspects of guidance. These participants wanted a more holistic approach to mentorship that advanced passed academic conversations. Mina, spoke to the multidimensional aspects of mentorship and the subtheme *Wrap-round Services* as she reflected on how a more holistic approach has been beneficial for her. She stated,

I think mentorship for me is providing support to a junior colleague or someone with less experience in some way. In the various dimensions of the work that we do. So, you know it's not necessarily related to work. It's various dimensions, but they're all connected. They're interconnected. So, you know, my work life balance is also something that is part of the mentorship role, and what I do at work is also part of that, setting boundaries. And you know the politics of academia, those things. And they're all interrelated because they take up so much space in my world.

Continuing to express a more holistic approach, Tasha expressed mentorship as going beyond those academic questions and extending into guidance towards preparing an individual for the profession of counseling. She stated,

I feel like a mentor is able to speak to the right now and to the future. They ask, what do you want to do after this? That's the question. If I just wanna go back to school counseling, they could be like, Okay, well, you may wanna consider a district level position with the knowledge and skills you're gonna gain from this, or, hey, I wanna go into higher Ed, okay, you may wanna consider attending conferences and submitting proposals, or hey, I really wanna go into research...whatever it may be, they're really helping with what you want to happen beyond the doctoral program.

In considering how all participants expressed their mentorship experience during their doctoral program with Black women mentors, the subtheme of *Sisterhood* emerged. Participants used definitions such as “warmth” and “embracing energy” to describe mentorship that felt like a sisterhood and went beyond the professional jargon. Jade shared how mentorship could be both professional and personal. She expressed the notion of “pouring into” from a mentor to the mentee and described the bond as a sisterhood. She stated,

When I think about mentorship, I think about somebody who naturally and willingly pours into the development of their mentees like it doesn't feel forced. It feels like it's someone that sees something in you before you see it in yourself. So yeah, like that pouring into. And whether that's like, you know, academically, professionally, or just like life. And I think you know, being a black woman, and that natural sense of, At least I would describe it as a natural sense of sisterhood. And I don't know if I feel that way because of some of my life experiences and being a part of sisterhood organizations, if that's why I have that outlook. But that's been my experience. And so, I look at mentorship kind of like a big sister, little sister situation.

Additionally, Jamie defined mentorship in thinking of her struggles as a Black woman in higher education and expressed wanting guidance from other Black women. She stated,

We shouldn't have to struggle on our own to be successful or to figure it out. I'm used to being the only black person in an honors class, the only black in an AP class, and all my life I've had to figure it out to get to this point, But I shouldn't in this profession. You know this, and you should try to do something to help make it a little bit easier right? So, it just would be good to have a mentor, somebody to kind of check in on you, reach out to you, that kind of thing. And even better if they could relate to you being a Black woman in higher education.

### ***Beneficial Outcomes***

Each of the participants reported positive and beneficial outcomes from their mentorship experiences, specifically the mentor relationships that mirrored their initial expectations, and aligned with their definitions of mentorship. Many of the outcomes were beneficial in expanding their knowledge and experiences, making professional connections, and providing opportunities to assist in advancing through their doctoral program and the profession. All of the participants were first-generation students and expressed the benefit of having a mentor who helped decode some of the unwritten rules of navigating a doctoral program. Some participants shared outcomes not directly related to the field and had experiences of aid from their mentors in more personal areas of life such as financial opportunities or being accommodating to their personal needs. When reflecting on how mentorship during her doctoral journey has allowed her to make connections and network with other professionals, Jamie expressed how a mentorship

relationship aided in providing opportunities for her to connect with other professionals for certain events such as teaching, webinars, or workshops. She stated,

One of my mentors, that was formed outside of the university, in my professional role. This is a person who I've invited to come speak to my school counselors in the district. So, she's gonna do a professional development workshop in a few weeks. And so, it just kind of helps you form connections. We partnered with writing a journal article that was published. And so, I wanna do some teaching but I don't wanna be a professor, but I'm gonna want to teach some classes here and there, and I'm gonna reach out to her to see if I can if she can help me make some connections so like networking kind of things, and that's been beneficial. And I think the same thing with the professor who's at my university, who's helping me with my dissertation.

Another participant, Jay, shared a specific experience in which the mentor in her program aided in providing a service to meet her personal needs. When she needed assistance finding a space to see clients virtually, her mentor provided her with their office space to conduct her sessions. She stated,

I had tangible needs. So, for example, we had to co-teach classes, and again, I was living in 2 different states, and I also was running a practice. So, there was a day where I finished teaching, but I still needed to see 2 clients, but because of traffic, there was no way for me to get to my home in the area and see clients. In previous semesters, I'm thinking of a very specific event, but in previous semesters I would reserve one of the counseling labs, and I would see clients virtually in one of the counseling labs. This

particular semester., all the counseling labs were reserved for a class on this day, like every single room that could be reserved was taken, and I needed to see 2 people every week. And the teacher, the professor that I was co-teaching with said, 'Oh, you can just use my office'. So, after class, we would go upstairs, they would do whatever they need to do. I would set up, and they trusted me enough to be in their office and see clients and leave, he is a mentor. He was like, I see you have a need, I know you need to see clients, and here's what I can offer you.

Continuing to reflect on beneficial outcomes, Mina expressed how her mentorship relationships provided opportunities to expand her professional experience. She shared how mentors were instrumental in advocating for her and advancing her skill set. She stated,

I have received scholarship nominations and award nominations. Asking somebody at the last minute, can they just write this recommendation for me, and they were on it later that day. You know, people putting in a good word for me. I mean, it's fascinating the things that people will do like they will do work for you, you know. They will write something for you. They'll put you on a research project. They will say, 'You know what, why don't you lead this writing or this manuscript writing, this manuscript submission? Why don't you do that? Because you're an early career academician. And so, you need this more than I do. So why don't you do that?' You know those are some of my experiences. So, I've gotten very concrete benefits from the mentorship, from the mentors that I've received like tangible benefits.

## Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presented the findings from this study after completing hermeneutic data analysis. The researcher and peer debriefers identified four major themes and five subthemes after analyzing data collected from the semi-structured interviews and personal statements. The themes and subthemes addressed the two research questions that guided this study. Each of the four themes (Expectation vs Reality, Defining Mentorship, Forming Lasting Bonds, and Beneficial Outcomes) and five subthemes (Origin of Expectations, Taken Under Their Wings, Sisterhood, Wrap-around Services, and How the Mentorship Relationship was Formed) were defined and supported by reports from the participants.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This phenomenological study explored the lived mentorship experiences of Black doctoral women in counselor education programs at PWIs. This study's goal was to better understand these experiences and highlight which aspects of mentorship were most beneficial for this population. Both BFT and Intersectionality, paradigms created for and by Black women, were used as the theoretical frameworks for this study. The two frameworks guided the way data was collected and allowed for results to highlight the similarities as well as differences in each of the participants' unique experiences. Both frameworks also advocate for more space to be created for the complex and unique experiences of Black women to be emphasized, validated, and respected (Collins, 20002; Crenshaw 1989).

This chapter will provide an analysis of each of the four themes and five subthemes identified from this study:

**Table 3.** Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
Research Question 1: Expectation vs Reality	<i>Origin of Expectations</i>
Research Question 1: Defining Mentorship	<i>Taken Under Their Wings</i> <i>Sisterhood</i> <i>Wrap-around Services</i>
Research Question 2: Forming Lasting Bonds	<i>How the Mentorship Relationship was Formed</i>
Research Question 2: Beneficial Outcomes	--

This chapter will also discuss the findings as they coincide with the research questions, the literature review, and the two theoretical frameworks, BFT and Intersectionality. Finally, this chapter will provide a breakdown of the implications, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. The discussion will of these findings are reported below.

## **Summary of Findings**

### **Research Question 1:**

What are the lived experiences of Black doctoral women with mentorship in counselor education programs at PWIs?

This question was asked to gain a deeper understanding of the overall mentorship experiences of Black women pursuing their doctoral degree in counselor education at a PWI. This encompasses both positive and negative experiences, how these relationships were formed, and gauging any expectations the participants may have had for mentorship prior to starting their program.

### **Expectation vs Reality**

During the interviews, each participant discussed their expectations of mentorship prior to entering their doctoral program. Upon analyzing the data, one of the major themes that emerged was the difference between those expectations and reality. This theme was captured after hearing many of the participants express the positive expectations they had for mentorship in their program before starting, versus the actual reality they experienced with mentorship throughout their program. While there was one participant who had very low expectations, the

other seven participants reported more optimistic expectations for their mentorship experiences before starting their doctoral program.

Some of these high expectations included an expectation that faculty would “take them under their wings”, provide them with the support needed to successfully complete their doctoral degree and prepare them for the profession. While all the participants had completed their master’s and six of the eight participants had positive mentorship experiences during that degree, many of the participants expected a more elevated level of faculty support while pursuing their doctoral degree. With research and publication being some of the main tenets of obtaining a doctoral degree, participants reported expecting more guidance, support, and motivation from faculty to engage in these scholarly activities. Recognizing that faculty had completed their doctoral degree and had experience in the field, there was an expectation that they would use that knowledge to be more holistic in their approach versus focusing solely on academics.

Unfortunately, when entering their doctoral program, several of the participants shared a different experience than what they had expected. This expectation was related to what their relationship would be with their advisor, other faculty, and even other doctoral students, particularly those students who were further along in the program. Many of the participants reported feeling lost and not fully aware of what was expected of them as a student and novice professional. When it came to forming relationships and getting needs met, some participants expressed having to explicitly ask for what they needed from faculty, while other participants expressed feeling more comfortable asking other peers. While one participant expressed that the nature of her program was very intentional in creating mentorship relationships, other participants expressed having to search for these relationships in order to get their needs met; some of these needs were met by relationships outside of their program.

Literature speaks to the notion that many Black doctoral women are first-generation students who are not fully aware of all the unwritten rules in higher education spaces (Gardner, 2013); many of the participants expressed this same sentiment. It is difficult to ask for help when you are not sure what assistance you need, which is why some of the participants spoke about leaning on other doctoral students who were further along in the program for guidance. Some of the wants and needs surrounded their own particular goals, whether wanting to do research, present at conferences, teach, or obtain publications. Either way, there was some expectation from their program to get these goals met.

After what felt like trial and error their first few years, many of the participants shared having a different experience with mentorship and support during the latter years of their program. Several of the participants reported getting knowledge from other doctoral students and outside sources that propelled them to be sure their needs were getting met within their program. These efforts included asking for research and/or teaching opportunities, forming deeper connections with faculty, submitting proposals for conferences, and becoming involved in counselor education organizations. Many of the participants expressed coming into their program with these expectations, and not getting these expectations met until their 3rd or 4th year. While appreciative of these opportunities as they propelled them in the profession, almost all participants expressed wishing these opportunities were more readily available in the first few years of their program.

### ***Origin of Expectations***

After exploring many of participants' expectations for mentorship before starting their program, the research team found a subtheme, ***Origin of Expectations***. Several participants, including those with low and high hopes, expressed having formed their expectations for

mentorship based on past experiences and peers pursuing their doctorate in counselor education. Many of the participants had high expectations based on their interactions with other doctoral students or mentors who urged them to pursue their doctoral degree. Others shared having high expectations based on the simple notion that the more advanced the program, the more intentional mentorship would be in place. For those who had low expectations, they expressed these notions stemmed from their conversations with other doctoral students or their experiences in their master's program.

For the majority of participants, their expectations of mentorship were influenced by mentorship and mentors, either intentionally or unintentionally. Some participants expressed feeling inspired by a close friend, colleague, or identified mentor in the field of counseling to pursue their doctoral degree. While they may not have labeled it as such at the moment, it was later defined as a mentor-mentee relationship. For the participants who had low expectations of mentorship, their influence still stemmed from some form of guidance and support from those established in the field, whether it was other doctoral students or professionals in the field of counseling with a doctoral degree. I believe this subtheme, origin of expectations, speaks to the value and influence of supportive relationships, as many of the participants expressed their origin of expectations stemming from some sort of trusted and valued individual with experience in the field of counseling. Research supports this notion that mentorship is instrumental in the trajectory of academic and professional success for mentees (Boswell et al., 2015).

### **Forming Lasting Bonds**

Many participants shared being motivated to pursue their doctoral degree by a close relationship which they now view as mentorship. In building these bonds, it did not always initially appear as a mentor-mentee dynamic; however, after growing deeper in these

relationships, several participants expressed their gratitude for these relationships that propelled them into the field of counseling and the pursuit of their doctoral degree. Six of the eight participants reported still being connected with these mentors throughout their doctoral experience and that various opportunities have stemmed from these relationships.

Under this theme, there were many stories of participants expressing the evolution of their mentorship relationships from one that was mostly professional and has now transformed into a more personal relationship. What participants appreciated from these relationships was the ability to be more transparent about their needs and wants, as well as feeling safe to vent about their doctoral experience. These experiences also added to their professional repertoire. Participants expressed how refreshing it was to engage in mentorship that was not 100% academic-focused. Regardless of how the mentorship was formed, almost all participants expressed appreciating a more holistic and multidimensional framework to mentorship. Research advocates for mentors to engage in mentorship that is unique to each mentee, understanding they each have a different set of needs (Butler et al., 2013).

While these relationships were formed through a specific experience, participants shared still being closely connected to some of their mentors. Ultimately, the bonds that were formed and most beneficial to their doctoral experiences were lasting bonds that positively impacted their academic success. These positive mentorship experiences align with the literature that supports satisfying mentorship experiences being correlated to building mentee's competence, self-esteem, and leadership skills (Baranik et al., 2010; Louis et al., 2014; Mousavi et al., 2018).

### *How the Mentorship Relationship was Formed*

From the theme **Forming Lasting Bonds**, participants begin to speak on how their mentorship relationships were formulated. Some participants had formed these relationships before starting their program, while other mentorship relationships were formulated throughout their doctoral journey. Outside of the one participant whose program was more intentional in advocating for mentorship opportunities to be readily available to students, the remainder of the participants had to initiate their mentorship relationship during their doctoral journey in some form. Relationships were initiated through actions such as reaching out to faculty with similar interests and signing up for professional development experiences outside of the program. Each participant expressed the benefits that stemmed from these relationships, however, there was some conversation around wishing they had these bonds formulated earlier in their program, not always wanting to initiate these relationships, and wishing their assigned advisor had taken on more of a mentor role. These findings align with those from the Boswell et al., 2015 study, specifically the finding of Black doctoral women yearning for mentors who display a more approachable energy. Some participants spoke to the idea of initiating a mentorship relationship either aligning or deviating from their personality type. Those who identified as more introverted yearned for the mentor to take more initiative. All participants spoke of being understanding of the faculty's busy schedules and why mentorship may not be at the forefront, however, they all still had needs and wants. Ultimately, there was a consensus that participants wanted the relationships to be organic, ever-evolving, and involve more intentionality from the mentor.

**Research Question 2:**

What factors and aspects of mentorship have been most beneficial for Black doctoral women in counselor education programs at PWIs?

This question was asked to gain a deeper understanding of how beneficial mentorship relationships have been for Black doctoral women in counselor education programs at PWIs. It was important to gauge which aspects of these relationships were most conducive to their academic success and how the participants defined these mentorship experiences, more specifically, what parameters were used to express the essence of these healthy mentorship experiences.

***Defining Mentorship***

When asked to define what mentorship meant to each of the participants, everyone gave their own unique definition, however, there were some similarities in their definitions, as well as a strong correlation with what their expectations of mentorship would be like during their doctoral program. How each participant defined mentorship also was a factor in their scouting process for initiating those mentorship experiences. As previously mentioned, many of the participants shared definitions that aligned with how they expected faculty and staff to interact with them during their doctoral process, including wrap-around services, initiating opportunities for research and publications, assistance for conference proposals, insight on the process of developing professional relationships, as well as tools for marketing yourself as a professional. There was a group consensus that mentorship involved an “expert” in the field assisting, guiding, and supporting a burgeoning professional, so that they may be prepared for the field.

When reflecting on the mental and physical burnout that came with being a Black woman in a doctoral program at a PWI, several of the participants appreciated mentors who were honest about the stress and sense of overwhelm that came with being a Black woman in academia, but also providing support, resources, and validation for their experiences. Because many of the participants expressed mentorship relationships with other women, specifically Black women mentors, we landed on the subtheme of *Sisterhood*. For example, many of the participants shared the safety and warmth that came from conversations with their mentors that surrounded regular “check-ins”, and questions such as “How are you doing?” “What do you need from me to feel supported during this time” and again, simply validating their experiences.

There was some variation in defining the depth of these relationships. A few participants expressed mentorship as relating to a specific field of work, and not going beyond that. The majority of participants felt that a true mentorship relationship was multidimensional and entailed a more holistic approach to the field of work. From these descriptions came the subtheme *Wrap-around around Services*. This notion spoke to the mentor meeting all the needs of the mentee: work, academic wise, lifestyle, socially, and mentally. Specifically, in the realm of counseling and mental health, there is a lot of conversation surrounding self-care and burnout. With this topic, many of the participants expressed wanting a mentor who also checked in about their mental health and their overall being. All the participants expressed having personal needs that they believed a mentor to be of assistance in helping those needs get met.

Another aspect of mentorship expressed by the participants that aligned with the wrap-around services was the notion that mentors should not merely check in about academics. All participants defined a mentor as someone who fully prepared them for the profession of counselor education. This included conversations about building their professional vitae, as well

as activities that bolstered their marketability for the profession after graduation. These opportunities could include conducting research, producing publications, being a part of professional organizations, or presenting at conferences. Participants believed that a mentor should guide the mentee towards experiential learning to enhance their skills while also building their resume. Each participant agreed that any professional that merely discussed academics and classes, did not encompass the true essence of a mentor that would prepare you for the profession. These findings aligned with the findings from the Brown and Grothaus (2019) study, which continued to define satisfying mentorship as a mentor who went above and beyond for their mentees, as well as providing resources, being knowledgeable about the counseling profession, and offering appropriate challenges to build skills set.

Lastly, a heavily discussed definition of mentorship included the mentor being a covering, thus the theme *Taken Under Their Wings*. This included intentional efforts to guide, support, and advocate for the mentee. Because they sought mentorship from those with expertise in the field, they believed effective mentorship would involve using said expertise to provide insight, tools, and resources that would prepare them for the field of counselor education. Another aspect of this subtheme involved the mentor helping mitigate some of the anxiety that comes with being a new professional in the field. Hall and Livia (2022) explored themes related to the experiences of graduate students due to the absence of mentorship and found feelings of anxiety, isolation, and confusion. Recognizing that many of the participants were technically novice professionals, they each expressed wanting to work under someone who helped them achieve their goals with confidence and competence. Findings from the Hall and Livia (2022) study along with the findings from this current research study continue to highlight the need to

implement healthy mentorship relationships for bettering the academic and professional outcomes for students.

### ***Beneficial Outcomes***

Participants shared a variety of beneficial outcomes that came from positive mentorship relationship experiences. It is important to mention that when sharing these benefits, participants were clear that these outcomes derived from the mentorship relationships they deemed to be successful and that met their definition of mentorship. Thus, the following experiences stemmed from those defined mentorship relationships that were most beneficial toward their academic success.

All of the participants expressed an extensive number of benefits from the mentorship experienced throughout their doctoral journey. These mentorship relationships also encompassed mentors both inside and outside of their doctoral program. One of the most discussed benefits was access to experiential learning opportunities that enhanced their counselor education skills. Examples of these opportunities included a mentor asking the mentee to join them in research, informing the mentee about upcoming conferences and awards for financial support, sharing job opportunities, teaching opportunities, and professional organization opportunities. When reflecting on the shared identity of being a first-generation student, each of the participants discussed the benefit of access to opportunities from their mentors because many of the participants were not aware of these opportunities or who to ask for help for some of these opportunities. They each shared the sentiment of this benefit standing out because they were given access to opportunities that they may have never existed or were an option due to coming into higher education as a first-generation college student and being unaware of some of those unwritten rules.

All participants shared that a mentor was an advocate for the mentee. This advocacy could present as speaking on behalf of the mentee for opportunities and supporting the mentee during a difficult situation that may have occurred within the program. Several of the participants shared an experience in which there was an incident involving another staff, and the participants felt ill-equipped to advocate for themselves during the encounter. In these instances, the participants expressed being able to confide in their mentor about the situation and feeling a deep joy knowing that they were advocated for by their mentor. Additionally, some participants shared that their mentor would speak to their accolades and talents to advocate for the mentee to obtain a professional opportunity. Participants shared appreciation for mentors who recognized their abilities and advocated for them for specific opportunities to enhance their skill set.

Another benefit that was a product of these mentorship relationships was having personal needs met. This benefit encompassed having specific and unique needs that were met throughout their mentorship relationships. Recognizing each participant had a variety of roles they were taking on throughout their doctoral program such as their current profession (private practice, school counselor, teacher, etc.) or even more personal roles (being a parent, being a part-time student, etc.); each participant expressed having a supportive mentor that recognized their needs and tailored mentorship appropriately. For instance, one participant shared that her mentor provided space for her to conduct therapy sessions after class when she was unable to locate a private space for her to complete her work as a clinician. Another participant shared having their mentor provide insight on financial opportunities to support their tuition or other financial needs throughout the program. Whether the participants expressed professional or personal needs, their mentors exuded support and resources to assist their mentees in getting their needs met, which relieved some of the anxiety surrounding pursuing a doctoral degree.

Lastly, several of the participants expressed making connections as a specific benefit that came from their mentorship relationships. These connections were mentioned as forming a connection with their mentor as being the biggest benefit throughout their doctoral program, or networking experiences because of their mentor. Some participants shared being able to contact their mentor for certain projects such as being a guest speaker or lecturer for a course or asking their mentor to write a recommendation letter for them for professional opportunities. Others expressed being connected to other professionals through their mentor, for example being informed about professional organizations or groups, even being specifically connected to another professional through their mentor. One participant shared how her mentor connected her with another Black woman counselor who had similar interests, and how grateful she was for that connection. Another participant reflected on an experience in which her well-known mentor spoke highly of her in professional spaces and connected her to other counselor educators in the area. Making connections and networking is a huge component of the counselor education field, and getting in the door of these connections can be daunting at times. Each of the participants expressed their gratitude for their mentorship relationship to open that avenue towards building more professional connections.

## **Implications**

### **Theoretical Implications**

BFT and Intersectionality were used as the theoretical frameworks for guiding this research study. Both theories informed the research questions, interview questions, and aspects of the methodology. Each theory was beneficial in interpreting the findings from this study and gaining a better understanding of the mentorship experiences of Black doctoral women in

counselor education at PWIs. Tenets for BFT such as Black women being agents of their own stories and tenets for Intersectionality such as Black women's experiences being uniquely different from Black men and White women, have been woven throughout the methods used for this study and the shared experiences from the participants.

Both theoretical frameworks could be incorporated as a guide in mentorship relationships with Black women mentees. The tenets of these frameworks have been useful in empowering Black women as well as liberating them while existing in white-male-dominated spaces. Black doctoral women are often existing in white-dominated spaces, seeking validation and comfort while navigating their doctoral journey. If mentors, of any identity, could be more intentional in utilizing frameworks for and by Black women when working with Black women, it could not only assist in better understanding their experiences but also provide spaces for elevating their voices and tools for empowering Black doctoral women.

It was important to provide a space for Black women to share their experiences, recognizing that this group is not often granted spaces to center their voices (Patterson-Stephens et al., 2017). It was also important to give insight into these experiences for a unique group of people at the intersection of race and gender, recognizing these lived experiences may be different from their peers of other identities (Crenshaw, 1989). In conducting this research study, it was my duty to both center their voices and validate their experiences.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings of this study provide implications for counselor educators and particularly counselor education programs housed within PWIs. Findings from this study reiterate what is discussed in the literature regarding the many Black women whom are pursuing higher

educational degrees and also identify as first-generation students that may be unaware of the “unwritten rules” of academia (Gardner, 2013). Participants expressed simply not knowing all the expectations of them as doctoral students and not being informed of all the resources that were available to them. Counselor education programs and faculty can be more intentional in speaking to the expectations of students beyond academics, such as the knowledge and experiences needed to prepare them for the profession of counselor education. It cannot be assumed that all students are aware of the expectations and resources that are available. Faculty must acknowledge that students need to be explicitly informed about opportunities, specifically opportunities that cater to their identities such as grants and scholarships for Black doctoral women. Circulating more conversations about building professional portfolios and access to resources can be beneficial in providing more tools and opportunities, thus bettering the experiences of Black doctoral women in counselor education.

Many of the participants expressed mentorship as a feeling of sisterhood. Almost all of the participants shared having positive mentorship experiences with other women, specifically Black women mentors. These experiences speak to the need for more representation of Black women in counselor education. Some of these experiences came from mentors not specifically in their program, which speaks to the need for more intentional mentorship practices at the programmatic level, and advocates for more staff being skilled in providing these positive experiences for Black doctoral women.

While not a direct research question or hypothesis, many of the participants volunteered that their mentors were Black women and reported finding safety and security in being able to connect and relate to someone with shared identities. BFT speaks to collectivism and the value of shared stories amongst Black women, highlighting the empowerment and liberation that comes

from the power of multiple voices and shared experiences amongst Black women (Collins, 2000). Recognizing that each of the participants exists in predominantly white spaces, finding a community of shared identities is not always as feasible, thus each participant expressed a deep joy in being able to connect with Black female professionals and finding mentorship in these relations. Counselor education programs often speak to multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion; however, their staff is not always representative of those principles. A direct implication of this issue would be for counselor education programs to be more intentional in hiring diverse faculty, specifically Black women, who are aware of the needs of diverse students, and are equipped to meet their needs and improve their overall experiences.

That said, all the tasks of providing quality mentorship to Black doctoral women should not be solely placed on Black, female faculty members. Non-Black higher education professionals should be adequately prepared to mentor Black doctoral women. Having competencies around BFT and Intersectionality can be an important tool for understanding the unique experiences of Black women in doctoral programs, as well as how best to provide mentorship and holistic support. Black doctoral women in predominantly white spaces yearn for community, support, and validation. Mentorship is a huge component in helping students successfully navigate the doctoral experience.

Lastly, each of the participants expressed beneficial outcomes from their mentorship experiences; however, an undercurrent was the steps participants had to take to form these relationships. Many participants expressed wishing they had these positive experiences earlier in their program, as well as programmatic mechanisms for facilitating these connections. Counselor education programs can be more intentional in creating spaces for mentorship to occur that do not rely upon the self-motivation of the doctoral student, particularly Black women who feel

marginalized in a predominantly white space. An example of such a mechanism could be a system for pairing new students with doctoral student colleagues who are further along in the program, as well as a faculty mentor based on shared interests, identities, and or professional backgrounds. Programs can also create structured opportunities that allow students to get to know all faculty, not just the individuals who teach their assigned courses. This can open the door for mentorship opportunities that align with the student's personal needs and professional goals.

While most programs assign students an advisor, each participant shared either changing their advisor later in their program or not deeming their advisor as a mentor. While programs can be more intentional in creating systems specifically for mentorship, there can be more conversation around defining the roles of advisors to better meet the needs of their students, specifically their students with diverse identities. Each participant provided their definition of mentorship, and several shared their journey to being paired with a mentor who aligned with their definitions, specifically sharing they would have appreciated the relationship being formed earlier in their program. Allowing students more autonomy in choosing their mentors as well as creating systems that are intentional in building mentorship relationships can go a long way towards improving the experiences and outcomes of Black women in counselor education.

### **Limitations**

In conducting research, there are always limitations to a study. While some limitations can be out of the researcher's control, there is still space to discuss these limitations and provide insight for future research to possibly fill in the gaps and expand on the topic. One of the limitations of this study was not requiring all participants to submit their personal statements for admission into their doctoral program. After deciding upon the source of my document analysis,

I realized all participants may not have access to their personal statements, and I did not want this to limit my participant pool. Thus, I made it an optional source of data collection. I believe not having a required document that is consistent for all participants could have limited some of the participants' experiences who were not able to engage in the optional form of data collection. Another limitation was time constraints. Initially, when constructing this study, I wanted to conduct both single interviews and focus groups. Using BFT as one of my theoretical frameworks, it felt both healing and cathartic to create unity and collectivism among my participants by asking them to participate in focus groups or sister circles. Because of time constraints, I ended up removing that methodology and sticking to single interviews, hoping to use sister circles for future research.

And finally, the last limitation is the requirements for my participant pool. While I was specifically interested in the mentorship experiences of Black doctoral women in counselor education at PWIs, this domain excluded other Black doctoral women across disciplines at different institutions. I do believe findings from this study could be applicable to all higher education programs, however, they are specifically generalizable to Black doctoral women in counselor education programs at PWIs. Also, my requirements for participants to have completed at least one year of their program or be up to five years post-doctoral was limiting to other Black doctoral women who were currently in their first year or had past five years post receiving their doctoral degree.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study aimed to gain a better understanding of the lived mentorship experiences of Black doctoral women in counselor education at PWIs, however, there are ways in which this study could be replicated for future research. This study could be replicated with a larger sample

pool and an expanded timeframe in which participants must have been in their program or have graduated. Expanding the population to include participants from any type of university and across disciplines can allow for more diversity in the experiences shared. The goal being to gain an understanding of aspects of mentorship that have been most beneficial to Black doctoral women, it would behoove researchers to examine mentorship experiences across disciplines and universities for a broader storytelling experience.

As briefly mentioned in the limitation section, I recommend utilizing sister circles as a data collection source, along with 1:1 interviews, and a consistent document analysis; possibly a journaling activity. Findings from this study as well as the literature speak to Black doctoral women searching for belonging, specifically in predominantly white spaces. Creating spaces for collectivism could allow for other stories to be shared as well as healing and unity amongst the participants. Because many of the participants shared building connections and networking as a beneficial outcome of mentorship, sister circles could also be a space for building community amongst those with shared identities and experiences.

Another recommendation for future research would be to consider adding a few interview questions about cross-racial mentorship relationships. Many of the participants expressed that their most beneficial mentorship relationships were with other Black women mentors. It would be interesting to research how much the identity of the mentor in comparison to the identities of the participants has any impact on the mentorship relationship. Results from this recommendation could add to the literature that advocates for more representation of Black women in the field of counseling and providing more curriculum around interventions to prepare non-Black staff in working with and bettering the experiences of Black doctoral women.

Continuing to speak to identities, I would also recommend expanding this research to be more intentional in including the intersecting identities of Black doctoral women, specifically considering those of the LGBTQIA+ community and the disabled community. These stories can be informative, as Black women are not a monolith; instead, there is a vast array of Black identities, experiences and within-group differences. Results can speak to the varying experiences Black doctoral women have with mentorships based on intersecting identities and provide space for another marginalized group to share their stories that are often silenced. It can add to the literature that advocates for catering interventions to each individual person, recognizing these groups are not a monolith. Using the framework of intersectionality could still be applicable to inform interview questions and data procedures to be inclusive of these groups.

### **Conclusion**

This hermeneutic phenomenological study explored the lived mentorship experiences of Black doctoral women in counselor education at PWIs. The study not only explored their mentorship experiences but also aspects of these experiences that were most beneficial to their overall doctoral experience. In sharing their experiences, several participants expressed the highs and lows of their journey towards creating healthy mentorship relationships. While there were some hiccups along the way, each participant expressed the benefits of their mentorship relationship and aspects of the relationship that were most conducive to their academic success. Findings from this study suggest implications for programs to be more intentional in creating mentorship systems for their diverse students, and to bring more diversity and representation of Black women into faculty roles.

Ultimately, findings from this study align with the literature that emphasizes the value of mentorship, specifically for Black women in higher education. The deep gratitude and

appreciation each of the participants expressed in reflecting on their mentorship relationships speaks to the need for mentorship to be weaved throughout institutional programs and for the responsibility to not be solely placed on students to seek these relationships. Black doctoral women are a unique group, and their experiences are valid and need to be heard. I hope that this study will add to the literature that advocates for intentional and healthy mentorship throughout higher education, specifically for diverse students and to better the experiences for Black doctoral women.

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**APPENDICES**

## Appendix A: Screening Survey

**Thank you for considering participating in this research study exploring the mentoring experiences of Black doctoral women in counselor education. To see if you qualify to participate in this research study, I ask that you complete a screening survey. Those who don't pass this survey or don't sign the consent form will have their screening survey discarded and not used for research purposes.**

1. Are you 21 years of age or older? Yes/No [If no, disqualify]
2. Do you identify as Black/African-American? Yes/No [If no, disqualify]
3. Do you identify as a woman? Yes/No [If no, disqualify]
4. Have you either (A) completed at least one year of a PhD program in Counselor Education at a PWI ***OR*** (B) Graduated in the past five years from a PhD program in Counselor Education at a PWI? Yes/No [If no, disqualify]
5. Do you live in the United States of America? Yes/No [If no, disqualify]
6. Would you be willing to have a recorded, personal, 45-minute interview on Zoom for research purposes? Yes/No [If no, disqualify]

**Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire**

1. Please indicate your gender identity:
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Transgender Female
  - d. Transgender Male
  - e. Non-binary
  - f. Other:
  
2. Please indicate your identified race/ethnicity:
  - a. Asian or Pacific Islander
  - b. Black or African-American
  - c. Hispanic or Latino(a)
  - d. Multi-Racial or Bi-Racial
  - e. Native American or Alaskan Native
  - f. White or Caucasian
  - g. Other:
  
3. Please indicate your age range:
  - a. 21-30
  - b. 31-40
  - c. 41-50
  - d. 51-60
  - e. 61 or older
  
4. Please indicate preferred pronouns:
  - a. She/Her/Hers
  - b. He/Him/His
  - c. They/Them
  - d. Other:
  
5. Please indicate where your Counselor Education program was/is geographically situated  
(i.e., city, state):
  
6. Where are you in the doctoral process (i.e. 1st year, 2nd year, graduate) If graduated,  
please identify how many years postgraduate:
  
7. Please indicate your employment status:

- a. Employed
- b. Unemployed
- c. Student
- d. Disabled
- e. Other:

8. Please indicate your marital status

- a. Single
- b. Married
- c. Separated
- d. Divorced
- e. Other:

9. Please indicate socioeconomic status

- a. Low-class
- b. Working-class
- c. Middle-class
- d. Affluent/Wealthy

### Appendix C: Interview Questions Protocol Form

Title of study: Searching for Sisterhood: An Examination of the Lived Mentorship Experiences of Black Doctoral Women in Counselor Education

Researcher: Hi and thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview! I want to briefly reiterate the purpose of this study. This study aims to explore the mentoring experiences of Black doctoral women in counselor education. I am interested in exploring the mentoring experiences and aspects of mentorship that have been most beneficial for Black doctoral women in counselor education. Before we begin the interview, I ask that you have read and signed the Informed Consent Form. The findings from this study will be used to fulfill the requirements for my doctoral degree. Interviews should be no longer than 45 minutes. Participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time and for any reason. Friendly reminder that a second source of data collection for this study will be the optional submission of your personal statement used for admission into your counselor ed program, you have the option to send this via email after this interview. Do you have any questions about that? Lastly, this research will include member checking, in which participants will receive a copy of their transcribed interview for accuracy. Be on the lookout for an email with instructions regarding this after your interview. Any questions about this? You may now give yourself a pseudonym for confidentiality purposes, and feel free to decide if you want to be solely audio recorded or video recorded. Reminder that participation incentives are for full participation in this study and will be sent out after data collection has been completed. Thank you again for your time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Can you tell me about your journey into counselor education and your specific program?
2. How would you describe or define mentorship? (consider its purpose, benefits, and/ or value)
3. Can you tell me about the experience you had with mentorship prior to starting the program?

4. Can you tell me about your expectations around receiving mentorship coming into a counselor education program at PWI (what formed those expectations?)
5. Can you tell me about your experiences receiving mentorship during your program?
6. In general, how have mentorship relationships been formed/generated for you? (e.g., describe the mechanisms for assigning mentors? How did you initiate mentorship on your own? Were you connected with someone through informal means, such as a friend of a friend?)
7. Can you tell me about any benefits you've received from the mentorship experience during your program?
8. Can you talk about any unproductive and/or absent mentorship experiences you had in your program.
9. What recommendations do you have for improving mentorship experiences for Black doctoral women in Counselor Education at PWIs?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share that we may not have covered?

Thank you for your time! Another reminder to lookout for an email regarding member checking and the optional submission of your personal statement for admission into your counselor ed program. Let me know if you have any questions!

### **Appendix D: Member Checking Email**

Hello,

I hope this email finds you well!

I am contacting you to request that you review your interview transcript and the themes identified using your interview transcript. This process is referred to as “member checking” and will involve the following steps:

1. I will share your interview transcript and a document of themes identified in your interview transcript in the Google Drive via my private North Carolina State University Google Drive folder.
2. You are asked to gain access to the document(s) using your personal computer and a secure network. You, the peer debriefers and I will be the only ones to be able to access this private folder. I suggest completing this activity in a private location, on a private internet connection, and accessing this folder using a web browser that is in private/incognito mode.
3. You will read through the document(s) in the private folder and comment in the document if you agree, disagree, and/or would like to clarify or change the content in each document and how you would like to do so.

4. You will email me to inform me that you have completed reading through your document(s) and commenting on them.

I am requesting that you do this within two weeks of this email. ***Please do not provide information or feedback in the email you send regarding your completion of the task.***

5. Once the verification process by you is completed, I will remove your access to the private NC State University Google Drive folder with your document(s) in it.

I expect that the member-checking activities will take about one hour of your time.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you!

Sincerely,

(BK) Briana Kemp

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