

**“We Have to Feel Like We Belong”: A Narrative Inquiry on the Recruitment Experiences
of African American Men within Master’s-Level Counseling Programs**

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Dedication

This dissertation is for Manson and Bristow, the patriarchs of my family line who demonstrated the importance of family, gentleness, masculinity, and leadership in my earlier years. It is for Mom, Dad, Rajvi, and Alisha, who loved me well as I wrestled with the softness and strength of the child I was and the man I am becoming.

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Abstract

Counselor educators who work at predominantly White institutions recognize the need to develop recruitment and retention strategies for African American men. Yet, there is a lack of research regarding the experiences and processes through which African American men choose a counselor training program. The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore the narratives of recruitment from African American men who enter CACREP-accredited, master's-level counselor training programs. This study addressed two research questions: *What are the recruitment experiences of African American men enrolled in predominantly White, master's-level, CACREP-accredited counseling programs?* and *What influences an African American man's decisions to enroll in predominantly White, master's-level, CACREP-accredited programs?* Narrative inquiry (Squire, 2013) was used to analyze goal statements, semi-structured interviews, and reflective letters with four African American men within the first 30 months of their master's counseling program. Four major themes were constructed: *relationships communicate importance, collaboration fosters motion, messages influence direction, and recruitment requires belonging*. The findings highlighted the importance of building relationships with African American communities to diminish the gendered and racialized myths surrounding mental health care and counseling careers. Recommendations for future research and implications for counselor educators, mental health counselors, and school counselors were provided.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Background of the Study	2
Diversity in Higher Education	2
Recruitment in Higher Education	4
Counselor Education	7
Statement of the Problem.....	9
Purpose of the Study	10
Research Questions.....	10
Significance of the Study	11
Definition of Terms	11
Organization of the Study	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	14
Perna’s College Choice Model	16
College Choice Model and Graduate Education.....	21
Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Feminism	21
African American Men	23
Population Statistics.....	24
The Social Narrative of African Americans	25
Masculinity and Gender Identity Development.....	26
Racial and Ethnic Identity Development	28
Cross’ Racial Identity Development model.....	30
Jackson’s Black Identity Development model.....	32
Johnson and Quaye’s Queered Model for Black Racial Identity Development	34
Summarizing Racial Identity Development.....	36
Whiting’s Black Male Scholar Identity Model	36
African American Male Development Section Summary	38
African American Men and Higher Education	39
Definitions of Diversity	39
Population Statistics.....	41
African American Males at Predominantly White Institutions.....	42

	xiii
Recruitment and Diversity Recruitment	45
Political Actions Influencing Diversity Recruitment.....	47
African American Males and Higher Education Summary	49
Counselor Education.....	49
Admission and Recruitment in Counselor Education.....	50
Chapter Summary	54
Chapter 3: Methodology	55
Research Questions.....	56
Theoretical Framework.....	56
Socioculturally-Centered Narratives.....	59
Methodology.....	61
Sampling	61
Participants.....	63
Procedures.....	64
Recruitment Procedures	64
Data Collection	65
Data Sources	67
Hoping to get in: The goal statements	67
Remembering the journey: The interviews.....	67
Inspiring who's next: The future applicant letters	68
Trustworthiness.....	68
Peer Debriefing	69
Member Checking.....	69
Triangulation of Data.....	70
Reflexive Journaling	71
Data Analysis.....	72
Subjectivity	76
Interrogating My Subjective Experience	78
The Bracketing Interview	79
The Letter to a Future Applicant.....	81

	xiv
Processing the Interview	82
Chapter Summary	83
Chapter 4: Findings.....	84
Hear Their Voices: The Four New Students.....	84
Overview of Major Themes.....	86
Relationships Communicate Importance	88
The Power of Familiarity and Relationships	88
The Pathway and Process of Career Choice	92
Collaboration Fosters Motion	111
Guidance	111
Collaborative Care	114
Barriers and Hardships.....	116
Messages Influence Direction.....	120
The Impact of Messages and Expectations.....	121
Messages about belonging in education	121
Messages of belonging in mental healthcare	125
Myths of mental health, masculinity, and community.....	126
Dispelling myths	130
Faith and calling.....	134
Recruitment Requires Belonging.....	137
The Power of Familiarity and Relationships	137
Validation and Encouragement.....	138
An Intriguing Reflection to Note.....	141
Chapter Summary	141
Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications	143
Discussion.....	144
Recruitment and College Choice Process	144
Relationships Communicate Importance	145
The power of familiarity and relationships.....	146
The pathway and process of career choice	146

	xv
Collaboration Fosters Motion	147
Barriers and hardships	147
Guidance.	149
Collaborate care	149
Messages Influence Direction.....	151
The importance of messages and expectations	151
Recruitment Requires Belonging.....	153
Validation and encouragement	154
Relationships.....	155
Conclusion of Themes	155
Strengths and Developmental Improvements.....	156
Implications	157
Counselor Educators	159
Mental Health Counselors.....	161
School Counselors	162
Directions for Further Research.....	163
Conclusion	165
Return to Sender: A Letter from African American Male Applicants	166
References.....	167
Appendices.....	206
Appendix A: Review of Narrative Inquiry Studies in Education Literature	207
Appendix B: Recruitment Letters.....	209
Appendix C: Informed Consent.....	211
Appendix D: Screening and Demographic Survey.....	215
Appendix E: Interview Guide.....	217
Vita.....	219

Chapter 1:

Introduction

The demographics of the United States population will continue to increase in racial, ethnic, and national origin diversity over the next 50 years, creating a displacement of a white majority by 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2014). As a result, mental health counselors may also experience an increase in clientele from racially diverse communities. With shifts in the United States' racial demographic and changes in the training and ethical practices of counselors, concerns arise related to the stagnating racial and gender diversification of entering professional counselors (Bartoli, Bentley-Edwards, Garcia, Michael, & Ervin, 2018; Constantine, 2002; Harley, Jolivet, McCormick, & Tice, 2002).

The counseling profession has begun to respond to the United States' changing demographics. Teaching standards required social and cultural diversity training as a core content area of counselor training, as a facet of faculty demographics, and a focus on student recruitment and retention (CACREP, 2016). The American Counseling Association (ACA; 2005; 2014) oriented its *Code of Ethics* towards cultural sensitivity in counseling, supervision, and training practices. Although cultural awareness and cultural competence were embedded into accreditation and training requirements (CACREP, 2016), further information was needed to better anticipate programmatic engagement with racial and ethnic minorities during the recruitment and admissions process. This study sought to explore the experiences of recruitment for one underrepresented demographic in master's-level counselor training programs: African American men.

I began this chapter by framing the overall background of the study. I discussed diversity within the institution of higher education, specifically as it related to African Americans and African American men. I explored national admissions and recruitment strategies and provided information about undergraduate and graduate student recruitment of African American students. Then, I discussed diversity recruitment within counselor education programs, focusing on the need for strategic intentionality in recruiting African American men. I explored the gap in specific recruitment strategies for African American men within master's-level counselor training programs. I provided a definition of terms along with the relevant research questions. Finally, I presented the study's limitations and delimitations and delineated how I organized the study.

Background of the Study

Administrators and faculty needed to know the importance of diversity and recruitment in higher education and counselor education. This brief exposition situated the significance and importance of building a theory of recruitment and college choice for prospective African American male counselors. I began by exploring the construct of diversity from a narrative of Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in higher education. In understanding the term diversity, we gained a broader understanding of how it related to the racial and political narrative of the African American matriculation into graduate level programs and, specifically, counselor education.

Diversity in Higher Education

Diversity has been a major research focus of higher education literature for many decades. Van Vught (2009) defined diversity as the existence of differing identities within a space, system, or point in time. Birnbaum (1983) further differentiated diversity between higher

education institutions into seven categories, including institution size, institutional values, and degree programs. The Civil Rights Era and Affirmative Action initiatives ushered in a need for higher education institutions to recognize differences among their student populations. However, college administrators have struggled to systematically assess diversity (Huisman, Meek, & Wood, 2007). Thus, we must find new ways to effectively evaluate diversity within an ever-evolving national system. For this study, I investigated diversity through the lenses of race, gender identity, and ethnic origin within the theoretical framework of Critical Race Feminism.

As race became an influential and central lens for investigation, the concept of racial diversity rose as a key component of this study. The *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision coupled with the Civil Rights movement provided access for African Americans and other racial minorities to attend PWIs (Allen, 1992). Diversity initiatives, such as Affirmative Action, also helped to shape the national consciousness of racial inequity in higher education (Stulberg & Chen, 2013). The increase of racial diversity influenced the exploration of issues to racial diversity in higher education. In some instances, institutions noted the need to justify the importance of racial diversity within their student body (Bowen & Bok, 1998). Studies regarding student retention (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2006), campus climate (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), and experiences of racial tension on college campus (Cabrera, 2014; Pieterse, Carter, Evans, & Walter, 2010) continued to develop and inform what racial diversity means, particularly for racial minorities in PWIs.

As previously noted, the integration of African Americans created unique transgressions and conflicts in higher education throughout the latter half of the 20th century. However, similar limitations and issues have persisted into the modern era. Although enrollment rates for African Americans men into higher education institutions have increased within the past decade, this

population consistently experienced higher attrition at undergraduate and graduate levels when compared to their White male peers (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Furthermore, African Americans were more than three times less likely to enroll in undergraduate education when compared to their White peers (NCES, 2014). Experiences of racial microaggressions, lack of mentorship and support, and gaps in financial and cultural support were often attributed to attrition of African Americans (Brown, 2009; Chen, 2008; Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008). Given these concerns, it was important to consider ways in which PWIs integrated this information into their admissions and recruitment strategies and throughout the educational process for African American men. Furthermore, it was important to evaluate how these institutions developed recruitment strategies and how the stories of African American men informed strategic development.

Recruitment in Higher Education

Recruitment in higher education involved specific strategies for different levels of matriculation, roles, and responsibilities within institutions. Recruitment strategies based on both cognitive (e.g., standardized test results) and non-cognitive (e.g., letters of recommendations, personal statements) variables influenced admission decisions and strategies for engaging with prospective students (Breland et al., 2002; Thomas, Kuncel, & Crede, 2004). Studies regarding the positive correlation of standardized test scores to graduate student success (Kuncel & Hezlett, 2007) informed strategies for collegiate recruitment and admissions departments of both prospective undergraduate and graduate students (Kuncel, Wee, Serafin, & Hezlett, 2010; Schmitt et al, 2009; Sinha, Oswald, Imus, & Schmitt, 2011). Yet, for many studies, the samples remained mostly White and female or unreported unless researchers denoted the intentional

desire to recruit an underrepresented community. Finding strategies specifically focused on African American male identities created new challenges for engaging the college choice process and enhancing recruitment. Thus, a focus upon African American recruitment strategies helped to highlight the uniqueness of African American men who chose to pursue graduate education in counselor training programs.

Perna (2004) mentioned the importance of expanding recruitment beyond economic and financial need when recruiting graduate students from a broad array of sex, gender, and racial/ethnic groups. Some studies engaged in dialogue surrounding race and cultural narrative as a key factor for PWI's challenges for recruiting a racially diverse study body (Harper & Patton, 2007; Lett & Wright, 2003). Few scholars have utilized college choice processes as a variable for influencing racial diversity upon college campuses. Hence, understanding the process of college choice through the lens of racial minorities who choose to attend undergraduate and graduate programs grounded the process of recruitment through a more culturally responsive framework. Thus, this study explored recruitment and college choice through Perna's (2006) College Choice Process model.

College choice processes reoriented the narrative of college recruitment toward a more empowered position of the prospective student. Perna (2000) shifted the dialogue of college choice from the econometric model (Manski & Wise, 1983; Schwartz, 1985), centering economic costs and benefits as a rationale for college choice and recruitment, toward one that engages economics, personal finances, social and cultural capital, and environmental factors of development. Thus, a review of Perna's (2006) College Choice Process model helped to understand factors contributing to African American recruitment.

Perna's (2006) College Choice Process model integrated the importance of human capital and sociological experiences in the overall process of students choosing a college or university. The model proposed that college choice begins with some level of econometric influence (i.e., financial aid, academic ability, academic preparation). Econometrics led to interpreting costs and benefits of college. However, 4 layers of the person's experience (e.g., the habitus; the school and community context; the higher education context; and the social, economic, and policy context) connect to the econometric and cost/benefit analysis to influence college choice. The closest layer, the habitus layer, involves both racial and gender identities of the student choosing college. This layer defined the ways in which prospective students view themselves in relation to other students, their prospective institution, and the cultural fit and feel as individual holdings these social identities at their schools. Therefore, recognizing the impact of choice, stories, and relationships helped me to understand the unique experience of recruitment for African Americans, specifically African American men, into higher education programs at PWIs.

In the wake of racial integration and Affirmative Action in higher education, specific focus has been placed upon African American recruitment strategy and policy. The recruitment of African American men was complex and involved access to resources and awareness of administration's willingness to engage potential applicants (Squire et al., 2018). Restructuring culturally biased policies and perceptions of the "ideal" student have helped to reframe recruitment of racial and gender minorities within graduate and undergraduate programs (Posselt, Reyes, Slay, Kamimura, & Porter, 2017; Sinha, Oswald, Imus, & Schmitt, 2011). Thus, a focus upon cultural responsiveness, camaraderie, collegiality, and cultural humility played a role in recruiting African American men in higher educational institutions on graduate and

undergraduate levels. For the purposes of this study, we turned towards exploring the recruitment of African American men within master's-level Counselor Education programs.

Counselor Education

Counselor education arose from the merger of school (then guidance) counselors, community mental health practitioners, and college student personnel associations during the mid-20th century. The differentiation of professional counseling from allied helping professions (i.e., social work, counseling psychology) led to the development of what is now known as the American Counseling Association in 1952 (ACA, 2018a). Individuals who sought professional counseling licensure attended programs which utilized the accreditation standards of the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) or the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). Functioning within the order of the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES), the counseling profession distinguished itself through the lenses of wellness, development, and strengths-based approaches. Diversity, equity and inclusion were core values of the ACA Strategic Plan (ACA, 2018b).

As multiculturalism entered as the fourth wave of counseling, the mission and vision of many professional counseling organizations have aligned accordingly (ACA, 1995, 2014; ACES 2016; CACREP, 2009, 2016; Pedersen, 2001). Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, and McCullough (2015) developed the ACA-endorsed Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies to help frame culturally responsive counseling practice and supervision. CACREP has continued to adjust accreditation standards, requiring programs and faculty to consider cultural differences at admission while developing and assessing cultural responsiveness throughout the counseling program (CACREP, 2016). Organizations, such as the National Board

of Certified Counselors (NBCC) and the divisions of the American Counseling Association have developed programs and fellowships which bolster inclusion and diversity among emerging student and professional leaders within the counseling field. These commitments to training and practice within the counseling profession have also mimicked the desire to influence diversity within the counseling classroom.

However, a brief reflection about the statistics and experiences of men and racial and ethnic minorities within counselor education highlighted challenges inherent in recruitment, retention, and graduation of African American men. African Americans constitute roughly 18% of master's students in accredited programs, and African American men comprise only 2.5% of all students enrolled in master's-level CACREP-accredited programs (CACREP, 2017). African American students within CACREP-accredited programs reported experiences of microaggressions, cultural barriers, and resistance from more privileged peers (Henfield, Owens, & Witherspoon, 2011; Pieterse, Lee, & Fetzner, 2016; Watt et al, 2009). These experiences, while deleterious to their overall professional development, were not aberrations to the lived experience of African American men within American society. With expectations of misconceptions, oppressive environments, and racial conflict factoring into the college choice process, further exploration needed to occur regarding the recruitment of African American men into master's-level counseling programs.

Few studies discussed the issues of recruitment for racially diverse prospective students in counselor education. Rogers and Molina (2006) highlighted several strategies to increase racial minority participation in graduate level psychology programs. Holcomb-McCoy and Bradley (2003) observed the dearth of retention strategies for recruiting racial and ethnic minority faculty members within CACREP-accredited programs. Brooks and Steen (2010)

furthered the dialogue to discuss recruitment and retention strategies of African American men into faculty level positions. Yet, intentional strategy for matriculating African American men at the master's-level continued to be lacking within the counselor education literature. Thus, while PWIs have used diversity recruitment strategies to help increase racial and gender diversity, no literature within counselor education centered the racialized and gendered narrative of African American men as they choose and are recruited to master's-level counseling programs.

Statement of the Problem

CACREP (2016) *Standards* and ACA (2014) *Code of Ethics* both noted the importance of infusing cultural diversity and inclusion throughout the master's-level counselor training experience. Ratts et al. (2016) also outlined competencies which frame culturally competent counseling. However, the infusion of competencies and language regarding counselor training still avoided a glaring gap within the counseling field: those who receive training and provide clinical interventions identify as more racially homogenous (CACREP, 2017).

Shin, Smith, Goodrich, and LaRosa (2011) observed that many master's counseling programs do not acquire information regarding program demographics to inform recruitment strategies or program implementation. Furthermore, these programs rarely acquired or utilized data about people of color regarding their experiences of being recruited to their counseling programs. As African American men entered into these programs, the concern remained for whether the programs themselves were prepared to develop and accommodate the needs of the underrepresented student population.

The field of Counselor Education has begun to shift towards social justice and advocacy. There is an increased need in understanding the barriers to access and equity within the field. Finding new ways to diversify the ethnic and racial demographics of the practitioners within the

field was a small step towards increasing access and equity for a significantly minoritized group within the mental healthcare field. Although recruitment strategies may be implemented, the strategies often centered White, male-dominated narratives rather than the voices and stories of those being sought after during the recruitment period.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the narratives of recruitment from African American men who chose to enter CACREP-accredited master's-level counseling programs. This narrative inquiry focused on recruitment, definitions of diversity, and college choice processes for African American males. The findings of this study informed counselor educators and the counseling field of the counternarrative within the recruitment experiences of African American men. These findings expounded upon the challenges of choosing and entering a counselor education program, from the voices of the men whom they seek to recruit. This work disrupted the White-dominant policies which informed recruitment practices while it uplifted the narratives of African American men who are being recruited into these programs. This dissertation illuminated the counternarratives of recruitment from African American men that promote commitment and inclusion in an effort to decentralize dominant White policies surrounding counselor education admission practices.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the recruitment experiences of African American men enrolled in predominantly White, master's-level, CACREP-accredited counseling programs?
2. What influences an African American man's decisions to enroll in predominantly White, master's-level, CACREP-accredited counseling programs?

Significance of the Study

Understanding the narratives of African American males within Counselor education better promoted the field's commitment to decentralizing policies and procedures which benefitted a dominant White narrative. While theories of recruitment and retention have centralized data-driven strategies, they lacked the individual voices of those being recruited. Furthermore, there was a gap in recruitment literature within the field of counselor education. Accordingly, there was even less attention to the recruitment experiences of African American men within the field. Thus, this study helped to broaden our understanding of recruitment within counselor education and to generate a clearer access point for potential African American men to explore careers in counseling. Uplifting the voices of people of color and integrating them into our work as counselor educators, assisted counselor educators in developing culturally responsive recruitment strategies. This study was one of the first to engage the voices and stories of people of color as it relates to recruitment within counselor education.

Definition of Terms

I utilized the following definitions within this study:

1. **African American:** all individuals born within the US who are of African descent, whose ancestors were involuntarily brought to the US, and who identify with African American culture and ethnicity (Ogbu & Simon, 1988; US Census Bureau, 2018). African American can also refer to ethnicity and ethnic origin (Phinney, 1990). However, the term African American will distinctly respond to race. Occasionally, *Black* and *African American* will be used interchangeably, noting that Black is a more expansive term to refer to both American and non-American individuals of African descent or dark skin tone. When referring to research study outcomes, I will use these terms as they are used within the literature.

2. **CACREP:** represents the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. This organization has served as the primary accreditation organization for counselor education training programs (CACREP, 2016).
3. **Counselor Education:** the practice of educating, supervising, and training individuals for careers in clinical mental health, school, career, or rehabilitation counseling (CACREP, 2016)
4. **Diversity:** the variance of race and culture within the classroom and university setting. (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996)
5. **Man:** the identification with either a biological designation of maleness through physical sex or the self-identification of male through gender identity (APA, 2020)
6. **Master's-level counseling programs:** CACREP-accredited, counselor education programs from which students acquire a master's degree in clinical mental health, school, career, college, or rehabilitation counseling. Also, an entry-level degree program within the counseling profession (CACREP, 2016)
7. **Predominantly White Institutions:** colleges and universities whose racial and ethnic student demographic primarily serves White or Caucasian students (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1999)
8. **Race:** a socially constructed identifier for groups of people who share common physical, cultural, and historical characteristics. The social construction of race, then, provides different perceptions, stereotypes, and expectations to be placed upon individuals based on one's prior engagement with and social distance from members of a race (Helms, 1990; 2007; Johnson & Quaye, 2017)

9. Recruitment: the active and intentional practice of seeking potential students to a higher education institution or to a particular academic program (Carlson, 2003)

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 begins with a review of the population being investigated: African American males. This section will include information about cultural narratives, racial and gender identity development, and the development of the Black male scholar seen in higher education and graduate programs. I will investigate higher education and counselor education, providing specific attention to diversity recruitment, studies of African American male experiences at Predominantly White Counselor Education Programs. Chapter 3 provides an overview of narrative inquiry as a methodology and the framework utilized within this investigation. This chapter concludes with an explanation of the data collection and analysis procedures along with my subjectivity statement which uplifts my positionality to the inquiry. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study after data analysis was complete, exploring the major themes and the subthemes embedded within each thematic construction. Chapter 5 discusses the findings in greater detail, the implications for counselor educators, mental health counselors, and school counselors, and recommendations for further research. I end this document with a reference list and appendices for the study.

Chapter 2:

Literature Review

African American males are among the most marginalized and oppressed cultural groups in the United States (Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007; Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000). Commonplace experiences of racial harassment and racial discrimination influence African American childhood development (Sanders-Phillips, 2009) and increase the emotional and psychological stress of African Americans (Carter & Forsyth, 2010; Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, & Kelly, 2006; Williams, Chapman, Wong, & Turkheimer, 2012). African American males are increasingly at-risk for experiencing depression (Ward & Mengesha, 2013), abusing alcohol and other substances (SAMHSA, 2010; Seth, Murray, Braxton, & DiClemente, 2013), and attempting or completing suicide (CDC, 2010; Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2013). Though these issues are not unique to African American males, the intersection of masculine identity and gender role expectations create further complexity in processing difficult psychological experiences (Harper & Nichols, 2008; Matthews, Hammond, Nuru-Jeter, Cole-Lewis, & Melvin, 2013; Wade, 1996). As such, African American males must manage their actions as they struggle against confirming racist stereotypes (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007).

African American males continue to wrestle with direct and vicarious trauma along with questions about their worth in American society. Aymer (2016) and Brunson and Miller (2006) highlighted the increased exposure of African American males to traumatic incidences of police brutality. Similarly, Arkles (2012) and Cordine (2009) noted the discriminatory interpretations of legislative policies and their effect on African American male identity. Additionally, African American males navigate US social and civil inequities that lead to mass incarceration and human right revocation (Task Force on Inequity and American Democracy, 2004). Recognizing

the shifting complexity of experience in this population, the counseling profession must respond. Counselor educators must train counselors who are both aware of the racialized experiences of this community. Furthermore, counselors and counselor educators must begin to empower African American males to develop the skills and knowledge needed to address the increasing concerns.

This task becomes even more challenging as counselor training programs are confronted with the need to increase racial diversity in the counseling field. The Council on the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016) has mandated that programs develop recruitment strategies designed to encourage, support, and retain students and faculty members of color within counselor training programs. To accomplish this task, counselor education faculty members and administrators must recognize the White-centered policies and procedures of recruitment and admission which may challenge and discourage the application of African Americans. Furthermore, greater understanding of the zeitgeist of underrepresented communities, namely African American males, and their challenges within their higher education institution may guide practices of recruitment and retention.

The racial discrimination, public trauma, social injustice, and marginalization that exist within predominantly White institutions (PWIs) serve as a barrier for optimal growth in higher education recruitment and retention. Additionally, media in the US regularly highlights the current tragedies and successes of African American males. These observations partnered with concerns for bias and prejudice play a role in the fit and feel of counseling programs for this population as they seek to resolve the conflicts and mental health concerns within their community. As such, counselor educators must be vigilant in their efforts to understand the narrative of African American males within higher education in order to deconstruct

predominant and historical barriers that deter this population from entering the counseling profession.

This chapter provides an overview of African American men, centralizing their experiences of development, and their interactions with society and scholarship. The overarching theme is the centrality of the African American male narrative and its influence upon recruitment for master's-level CACREP-accredited counselor training programs. I use Perna's College Choice model to contextualize the construct of Diversity in Higher Education as it relates to African American males. I review recruitment and college choice models within higher education, taking a specific focus upon diversity recruitment and retention within psychology, social work, and master's-level counseling programs. Lastly, I explore the development of diversity and multiculturalism within counselor education and the research surrounding African American and male recruitment and training experiences.

Perna's College Choice Model

Student decisions to apply for a college or institution rest upon a multitude of factors including, but not limited to, proximity to home, financial resources, and academic prestige (Kane, 1999; Paulsen, 1990; Perna, 2006). Manski and Wise (1983) developed a model of college choice, known as the econometric model, which situated students' decisions for higher learning within the framework of a cost/benefit analysis. However, this model of economic interest lacked the sensitivity of cultural nuance, environmental risks, and systemic barriers which also influence prospective students' decision to pursue postsecondary options. Perna (2000; 2006) sought to develop an empowered perspective of recruitment and college choice which centers the decision-making process within the multisystemic world of applicants. This model is now known as Perna's College Choice Model (see Figure 1).

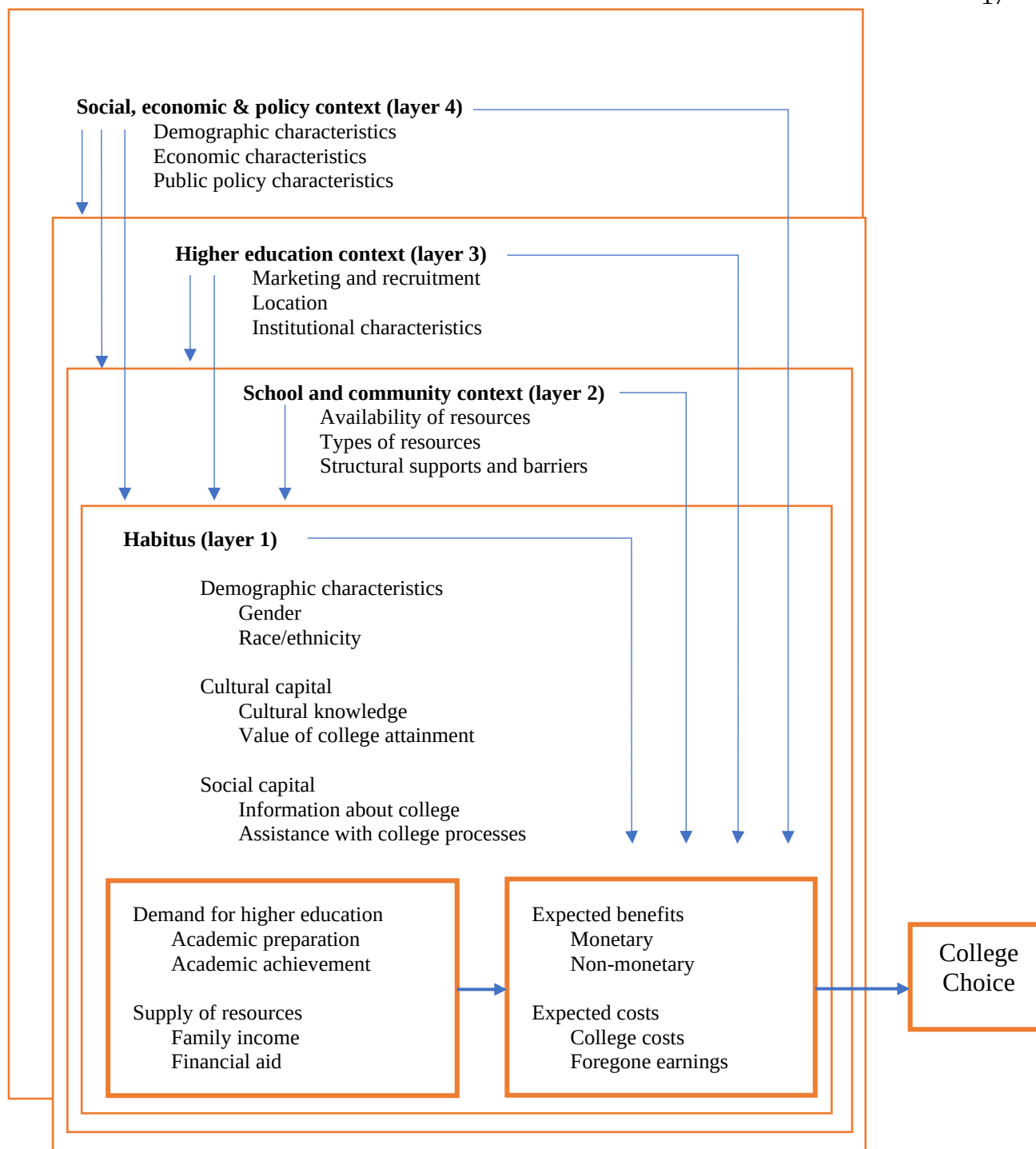


Figure 1. Perna's College Choice Model (Perna, 2000; 2006)

Perna (2006) integrated the econometric model of Manski and Wise (1983) with the sociological foundation of Hossler, Braxton and Coppersmith (1989) and Paulsen (1990). Within this model, neither rational economic interests nor sociological approaches alone hold precedent over students' decision for choosing a postsecondary educational option. Rather, there are four layers which interact with one another to influence students' decisions. Thus, I explained the four layers (the *habitus*, the school and community context, the higher education context, and the social, economic, and policy context), and their interactions to influence the prospective student's college choice decision.

The *habitus*, the student's value system which affects their worldview, shaped the outcome of their educational decisions (Paulsen, 1990; Perna, 2006)). The social identities of the student (i.e., race, gender, sexual orientation), their cultural capital (i.e., value of college degree), and social capital regarding college planning (college knowledge, college choice processes) all factored into the development of one's worldview surrounding college and college choice. These factors resonated with the ways in which the student views themselves and developed their narrative of what college is for and for whom college exists. Therefore, the school and community context surrounded the individual and personal experience of the *habitus* layer.

The *school and community context* highlighted the resources surrounding individuals as they pertain to college choice (Perna, 2006). School counselor access, college preparation programs, and college and career fairs all functioned to influence students' awareness of and ability to choose appropriate postsecondary education options. However, students who hold marginalized identities, such as students from low-wealth communities or African American students, may have observed structural supports or barriers inherent within the school and community context. A lack of exemplars in career paths, school administration, and classroom

settings may have hindered African American students from understanding their journey toward a particular role within the school or community. Here, the interaction of social identity (nested within the habitus) and the school or community structure (through postsecondary planning experiences) could either promote or discourage students' awareness of their "fit" within a particular college setting. The development of these messages, over time, functioned as a factor of students' relationship to the higher education context, the next layer of the college choice model.

The *higher education context* engaged the role of the postsecondary institution within the college choice process for potential students (Perna, 2006). Methods to influence college choice were filtered through passive techniques (i.e., marketing and websites) and active actions (i.e., recruitment strategies) which helped prospective students to envision their participation at the institution. Other factors, such as the location of the institution and the characteristics of the institution defined the potential for prospective students to feel comfortable or safe at the institution. Admission requirements and the culture and community of the higher education institution also situated the decisions of the prospective student as they seek to better understand the fit of the university for their educational development (Perna, Steele, Woda, & Hibbert, 2005). The construction of these institutions and the systemic interaction of fit and feel for certain cultural groups demonstrated the complexity of the outermost layer, the social, economic, and policy context.

The *social, economic, and policy context* situated individuals' narrative of college choice within temporal and sociological contexts (Perna, 2006). Larger political and systemic factors (i.e., racial inequity in higher education, unemployment and job market economy, federal education grant funding) played a role in access to higher education and systemic narratives

surrounding the potential outcomes of college choice. Public policy may have affected individual or community access to higher education through financial aid funding or resource support for college planning. Economic factors, such as job availability, shifted the value of education over the timeliness of pursuing a degree. Lastly, social factors of cultural climate and the zeitgeist of the support or inhibition of a cultural group within a higher educational space may have factored into how individuals decided the value of choosing a college education.

These four layers demonstrated the complexity inherent in college choice. However, several intermediate outcomes (Perna, 2006) supported or hindered individuals' ability to pursue particular postsecondary opportunities. Factors such as college savings funds and academic preparation experiences supplemented one's ability to decide where and if college remained an option for educational advancement and career development. Perna's college choice model, then, encouraged prospective students and institutions to understand and develop a layered, systemic approach to understanding the college choice and recruitment process. Furthermore, leveraging this information helped higher education institutions better understand the complex choice process of prospective students from underrepresented communities.

Several researchers have utilized the college choice model to illuminate the influence of race, political power, and privilege in the undergraduate college choice process. Perna's research has influenced others to observe theories of undergraduate attrition (Attewell, Heil, & Reisel, 2011), various cultural influences on college choice (Núñez, Sparks, & Hernandez, 2011; Perna & Titus, 2004; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008) and the challenges to diversifying study abroad programming (Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2011). Though this information mostly centered the experience of prospective undergraduate students, Perna's college choice model has also been applied to prospective graduate student recruitment and college choice.

College Choice Model and Graduate Education

Although recruitment literature utilizing Perna's model often centered undergraduate education, one study integrated the framework into graduate education. English and Umbach (2016) utilized the model to explore factors for deciding to pursue a graduate education and the influence of college/university's features upon the college choice process using a sample of roughly 10,000 student records. Researchers used hierarchical linear modeling to analyze records focused on the first two layers of Perna's College choice model. English and Umbach (2016) discovered the importance of human capital theory to matching the impact of academic achievement to one's aspiration and enrollment into graduate programs. Through this model, African American undergraduates were much more likely to pursue and enroll in graduate school in comparison to their White peers.

However, this quantitative mechanism was limited in gathering data about the actual habitus layer aside from reported demographic information. Thus, little remained known about the intersection of social identity factors, higher education contextual factors, undergraduate school and community factors, systemic barriers, and public policy interact to affect one's decision to pursue a graduate education. Therefore, this study contributed to the literature as it specifically pertained to counselor education. To better situate this study toward the racialized and gendered concerns of African American men in counselor education, I explored related literature through a Critical Race and Critical Race Feminist lens.

Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Feminism

Critical Race Theory (CRT) helped to interpret social inequity through the lens of race, its history, and the interaction of race and society. CRT is a sociological theory which visualizes social inequity in the United States within five tenets: (a) race is a central factor of inequity with

the US, (b) counternarratives are important to addressing dominant ideals, (c) social justice and liberalism is critiqued, (d) experiential knowledge of people of color is important and should be highlighted within literature, and (e) Whiteness is embedded as property within research literature (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Hiraldo, 2020; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). The focus on counternarratives and their ability to explore a racialized perspective on the dominant story provided researchers a pathway to deconstruct former knowledge about a construct, strategy, or idea. The CRT framework helped to better illuminate the tension between race and education within institutions of higher education in the US.

CRT's roots lie within the framework of Black Feminism or Womanism, espousing the importance of centralizing the Black and feminine experience to better understand power, privilege, and politics within varying systems (Collins, 2000). Black Feminism furthers the idea of social construction affecting the performance and experience of gender and its intersection with the experience of race for Black and African American people. This idea of the performative for a social identity has shaped the development of social norms within the various institutions in which African Americans exist (Butler, 1988; Warren, 2001). Thus, this investigation will utilize a critical theoretical framework which centralizes the intersection of the African American male identity in a postgraduate educational setting.

This critical approach, then, evolved into more modern interpretations at the intersection of race, gender, and their respective performatives within the context of higher education. Critical Race Feminism (CRF) furthered this dialogue towards the intersection of race, gender, power and privilege, leaving room for exploration of the intersections and their impact upon experience (Sulé, 2011). The feminism intersection highlighted the inequity within gendered

experiences; it discussed how gender performance has evolved to benefit male-identified individuals and oppress female-identified persons in society (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011). While CRF discussed the oppression inherent within racially minoritized women's experiences, the tension of both gender and race affected men and others who do not identify as women (Gilmore, 2003; Montoya, 2003). It was through this CRF lens that we began to understand racial identity, gender identity, and diversity as components of education and educational outcomes for higher education institutions.

I have outlined the critical theoretical framework through which I understood the college choice process. Reflecting upon Perna's conceptualization of college choice and the complex and intersectional sociology within Critical Race Feminist frameworks, I reviewed the literature surrounding the identified population of this study: African American men.

African American Men

Within this section, I reviewed the construction and understanding of the African American man. I discussed population statistics relevant to African Americans and the brief history surrounding the social narrative of "African American" as race within the United States. I explored masculinity and the construction of gender and gender identity development. Then, I presented the evolution of racial identity development, specifically focusing on models of Black and African American racial identity development. I briefly introduced Whiting's (2009) Black Male Scholar Identity model and its impact to conceptualizing African American men who choose to enter graduate school. I then concluded the section before exploring the literature regarding African American men in higher education.

Population Statistics

The designation of African American can be found in most records and narratives following the Emancipation Proclamation and the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (Emancipation Proclamation, 1863). The ethnonym has evolved over time as the United States has struggled to define the culture and identity of freed citizens of African descent. Terms such as Afro-American, Negro and Black have all been used to formally categorize American citizens of African descent with varying stereotypes attached to the labels (Hecht & Ribeau, 1987). However, the progressive development of citizen record and U.S Census has created a need to understand and standardize the concept of race and ethnicity within the US.

The U.S Census Bureau (2018) utilized the definition of Black or African American as those who have origins to the Black racial groups of Africa. The U.S. Census Bureau (2017) estimated that individuals who identified as African Americans alone account for 13.4% of the American population. The Office of Management and Budget (2016) formalized this definition of African American for federal collection and maintenance of racial demographics. Thus, African Americans were designated as the “principal minority race” having held the largest racial group population behind White Americans. Though viewed as the “principal minority race,” Ogbu and Simons (1998) categorized African Americans as an involuntary minority within the US through their ancestors’ involuntary migration to the Americas via the transatlantic slave trade. Ogbu and Simons’ categorization highlighted further complexity in defining and understanding the racial identification of African American individuals within the United States, specifically through the US Census Bureau.

Issues surrounding the definition and classification of African American within the US Census created barriers to effectively quantify the prevalence of African Americans within the

United States (Anderson & Fienberg, 2000). Thus, these data do not account for the individuals who identify specifically as Black or African American; they also quantify individuals who identify as Afro-Latinx, Caribbean Blacks, and biracial/multiracial individuals. The ethnic heritage of the individual may have played a role in the ways the individual experiences their space and role in American history.

For the purposes of this study, African Americans were defined as all individuals born within the US who are of African descent, whose ancestors were involuntarily brought to the US, and who identify with African American culture and ethnicity. This definition aligned with Ogbu and Simon's (1998) categorization of the African American as an involuntary minority. Defining African American identity helped to solidify the combination of African heritage, cultural traditions, and intergenerational social inequity that permeates the cultural narrative of modern-day African Americans.

The Social Narrative of African Americans

Though the United States government had struggled to define African Americans as a racial group, certain characteristics have emerged as unique to the African American identity. Eyerman (2001) explored the impact of slavery upon the collective consciousness of African American people. The impact of involuntary migration and continual practices of dehumanization created a sense of cultural trauma that persists within African American communities. This cultural trauma, named intergenerational trauma, affected the physiological and psychological outcomes of families and their offspring despite having never experienced the original stressor (Bombay, Matheson, Anisman, 2009; Gump, 2010). Intergenerational trauma existed at the genesis of African American identity and demonstrated both the pain and resilience that is characteristic within African American people.

It was the confluence of historical injustice and continual resilience that helped to define the social narrative of African Americans and the challenges African American males experience as they ventured towards post-secondary education and career development. Furthermore, understanding one's existence as an African American man in the US provided insight to the unique challenges to and opportunities for identity development, health outcomes, and educational attainment. To better understand these challenges, it was important to reflect upon the concept of masculinity and the mechanisms through which African American men develop a male identity.

Masculinity and Gender Identity Development

Gender roles and gender identity are formed through socially constructed mechanisms (Weber, 1998; 2001). Social Constructionism (or constructivism) is a paradigmatic framework through which individuals develop knowledge and identity through interconnections and interactions between individuals and environment (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Gergen (1985, 1991, 1994) noted that social constructionism functions through three main assumptions: (a) our experience of the world alone does not provide objective truth about our reality, (b) language and definitions within the world are developed and constructed through an amalgam of social interactions between people and culture throughout time, and (c) the maintenance and relevance of language, knowledge, and terms for understanding over time does not depend on how true or valid they are, but upon the circumstances through which social systems sustain the term (e.g., continuous utilization of a word or phrase in popular or news media).

Knowledge, then, is fluid and rapidly changing as societies interact to construct a framework for understanding an identity or construct (Marurana, 1978, 1998). This fluid construction of knowledge helped to understand the complex processes through which people

develop, experience, and express gender identity and masculinity within their social and cultural context. Thus, when understanding the development of gender identity and masculinity within African American men, it was imperative to discern the sociological network through which the individual has constructed meaning to their male identity.

The social construction of gender forms through the performative response of biological sex markers and social expectations of individuals as they interact with others and society (Lorber, 1994). Everyone behaves in ways that may connect to a gendered experience. Individuals, then, learn the role of gender through interactions with peers, family, and society. The compilation of these behaviors and the information from these behaviors forms a knowledge base for gender identity development.

Weber (1998) framed the development of gender through six themes: (a) the awareness of context interacting with gender identity formation, (b) the social interaction of personal values and culture constructing gender roles, (c) the power dynamics between different identities of gender forming an understanding of the function of one's identity, (d) the filtering of identity through internal and individual micro level and through social and macrosystemic levels, (e) the expression of gender in conjunction with other social identities such as race, class, and sexuality, and (f) the development of gender as a result of the connection from what you know and what you do to address social injustice. Using Weber's lens, we constructed and defined masculinity as a gendered response to male gender identity and social expectations.

Masculinity functions as a set of norms through which the dominant culture can identify men and male expectations (Brannon, 1976; Thompson, Pleck, & Ferrera, 1992). Masculinity has been associated with muscular body types, aggressive behavior, a drive toward power and toughness, and greater risky behaviors (McCreary, Saucier, & Courtenay, 2005). Masculinity

often promoted an apprehension for seeking help (Berger, Levant, McMillan, Kelleher, & Sellers, 2005; Galdas, Cheater, & Marshall, 2005; Wimer & Levant, 2011). Addis and Mahalik (2003) determined that masculinity and gender role socialization reinforced the importance of toughness over help-seeking behavior, determining that men seek help because of specific contextual events rather than an intrinsic drive. These dominant themes of masculinity, however, have been criticized for alignment with a hegemonic view of masculinity that overlooks the complexities of cultural contexts, social hierarchy, and intersectional identities that facilitate a different experiencing of masculinity (Connell, 2014; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

The social construction of masculinity, then, reminded us to acknowledge how gender identity development responded to the social identities an individual may hold. Therefore, understanding racial and ethnic identity as a factor of one's gender identity helped to identify the conflicts and supports experienced in African American men as they develop their social and emotional frameworks. Weber (1998) postulated that gender identity development intersects with other social identity markers. Thus, understanding racial and ethnic identity development mechanisms provided credence to its intersection with gender identity development.

Racial and Ethnic Identity Development

Race exists beyond biology and genetics; rather, it is the categorical moniker used to identify groups of individuals based on phenotypical, social, and historical commonalities (Laster, 2014). Race has shifted toward social categories, acknowledging that racial groups often differentiate based on their perception of social distance between one another (Quintana, 1998). This social distancing can create tensions regarding interracial socialization and integration (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Ethnicity, or ethnic identity, involves a complex combination of beliefs, culture, actions, and information that connects an individual to others who share a

cultural heritage (Phinney, 1990; Garcia, 1982). Ethnicity shapes one's self-esteem (Phinney, 1992) and affects one's perspective during intercultural interaction, communication, and discrimination (Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006; Mossakowski, 2003; Wiseman, Hammer, & Nishida, 1989). Defining race and ethnicity, therefore, helped strengthen our understanding of the ways in which one's identity may affect one's lived experience, one's development, and, perhaps, one's career path.

Despite being used interchangeably in many research studies, Helms and Talleyrand (1997) emphasized the importance of separating the constructs of race and ethnicity. Delineation of the differences between racial identity and ethnic identity helps to better understand and measure the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities (Helms, 2007). This concept of race, in comparison to ethnicity, was further solidified through various court cases arguing the importance of ethnicity to discriminatory policies. In the case of *St. Francis College v. Al-Khazraji* (1987), the plaintiff expanded the definition of prejudice and discrimination toward minorities, engaging further dialogue around Middle Eastern and Arab ethnicities. This case set the precedent for understanding the legal and structural differences that exist with the American definition of race versus ethnicity.

Definitions of race have created issues with demographic measurement and identification of racial groups (Hirshman, Alba, & Farley, 2000) and, thus, create challenges for understanding and tracing racial minorities through time. In better understanding the definitive and sociological differences between race and ethnicity, we understood the ways in which individuals may develop each identity through different mechanism. For the purposes of this study, I took an in-depth look at racial identity development, specifically African American identity development as it connected to the sociopolitical experiences of my population's interaction with educational

spaces and professional identity. Thus, I explored Cross' (1971, 1991) Racial Identity Development Model, Jackson's Black Identity Development Model (1975, 2008, 2012), and Johnson and Quaye's (2017) Queered Model for Black Racial Identity Development to help frame the development of African American males. Later, we explore Whiting's (2009) Black Male Scholar Identity Model to help frame the development of African American Males seeking to pursue higher education and, specifically, master's-level counseling programs.

Cross' Racial Identity Development model. Based on Thomas' (1970, 1971) model for negromachy, Cross (1971) believed that Black mental health was tied to acceptance of their Black identity. Cross understood that African Americans experienced tension in becoming aware of their Black and American identities. This tension developed a diminished sense of self-worth and independence from White American social norms. Thus, African Americans saw themselves as an epithet of themselves rather than as a unique group of individuals apart from a White normed society. The work of Thomas and Cross highlighted a disruption of Black people affirming the uniqueness in their Black identity and internalizing a new perspective surrounding one's racial identity. Therefore, Cross (1971) constructed a five-stage model to help structure the process of developing African American identity.

In his first stage, pre-encounter, individuals struggle to remove their personhood from the enculturated White viewpoint in which they have been immersed. There is an acknowledgement of being othered in one's Blackness but feeling incapable of success outside of one's social context. Next, during Encounter, individuals experience a critical encounter which heightens their racial awareness and reframes their current perspective of being Black in society. Individuals encounter a critical event (i.e., racist language used to describe the person, racial profiling triggers feelings of unsafety in a normally safe space) which triggers thoughts about

what it means to be Black within this experience. Their Black identity is no longer just a label, but a barrier to access and equity in society.

In Immersion-Emersion, individuals transition from former ideology about racial identity toward a new affirmation of Black identity and Black attitudes. Cross (1978) noted that immersion-emersion functioned as a transitional stage in which the individual may commit more energy towards demonstrating Black pride and engaging in critical dialogues surrounding race. Internalization integrated the former and updated perspectives for the sake of developing security within one's racial identity. Lastly, some individuals may experience internalization, yet remain committed to social activism and change. Cross (1971, 1978) delineated Immersion-Commitment as the last phase within the Nigrescence model to help codify the experience of identity security and community activism.

In 1991, Cross updated his Nigrescence model to reflect a separation of individual identity and group identity. A distinction of racial group orientation (RGO) and personal identity (PI) traits better defined the factors which aligned with a person's self-esteem and mental health. In his revision, Cross (1991) decreased the number of developmental stages from five to four: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization. Each stage describes individuals' experience of racial salience and valence to the African American community. As individuals move from Pre-Encounter to Internalization, they reassess their RGO while committing to actions that engage their emerging desire to connect to the Black community.

The updated Cross (1991) model provided more space for Black individuals to feel safe identifying as solely Pro-Black (Categorized as the Black Nationalist), as an intersectional Black being (the Biculturalist), and as an individual supporting the development and salience of many cultures (the Multiculturalist). The updated model led to an expansion of the various identities

within the stages of the Nigrescence model (Cross & Vandiver, 2001) and the development of assessment tools such as the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS; Vandiver et al, 2000; Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002).

Cross' model demonstrated a foundational understanding of racial consciousness and identity development. Several researchers have also validated Cross' model through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of the CRIS (Worrell, Vandiver, Cross, & Fhagen-Smith, 2004; Worrell & Watson, 2008) and various studies with different demographics of African Americans (Gardner-Kitt & Worrell, 2007; Whittaker & Neville, 2009; Worrell, 2008; Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). However, the linear nature of Cross's (1971; 1991) model focused specifically upon the linear process of individuals and negated the effects of society and intersectional identities upon the process of one's development. To further understand the intersection of gender and race upon African American Male experiences of mental health care and mental health career choices, this study observed African American identity development through Jackson's (1975; 2008) Black Identity Development model

Jackson's Black Identity Development model. Jackson's Black Identity Development (BID; 1976, 2001, 2012) model provided an alternative perspective to Cross' Nigrescence Model. For Jackson (2012), culture functioned as a five-elemental construct through which individuals make meaning about race and ethnic group identity. Thus, rather than events of racism being the primary conduit for racial identity development, Jackson's (2012) BID promoted the influence of racist events and Black culture apart from racism. Jackson (1976) aligned racial identity development with Erikson's (1950; 1991) psychosocial stages of development. However, further observation of the differences in racialized experiences between White and Black children encouraged Jackson to revisit the overall developmental process.

Jackson's (2012) most recent iteration of the BID model also mentioned five stages of racial identity development: Before the age of three, the Black individual is seen as *naïve* and, thus, develops socialization skills and beliefs from their closest caregivers without full acknowledgement of a racial hierarchy or tension. The Black individual enters a stage of *acceptance* between early childhood and early adolescence in which mostly negative messages regarding Black identity in the United States have been internalized. The person may struggle to see Black as good, but, mostly view White as normal, dominant, and good. At this stage, an individual is likely to demonstrate a racial group orientation away from other Black individuals and towards White individuals. In acknowledging the tension of identifying as Black and experiencing racism from White individuals in society, the Black individual exits *acceptance* and starts their stage of *resistance*. There is a hard shift against the promulgation of White cultural norms and an externalization of anger and frustration regarding the internalized messages and systemic barriers Black individuals experience. Fourth, as anger begins to subside, the Black individual enters *redefinition*, seeking out other Black individuals who also hope to process their frustrations and experiences of racism and oppression. In *redefinition*, the Black individual develops an understanding of the source of internalization and restructures their perceptions of Black identity and culture as a more integrative aspect of their daily living. Finally, as this integration of Black culture coincides with the person's daily living, the Black individual moves towards *Internalization*, providing space to both exist as Black with a diminished need to explain their personal or racial identity. *Internalization* provides room for the Black individual to explore the intersectionality within themselves as they recognize how Black identity pairs with other identities being held.

Jackson's (2012) BID model is a modern slant to Cross's (1991) recent expansion of the nigrescence model. While no formal assessment tool has been developed and validated using this structure, several researchers have integrated Jackson's work in their empirical studies.

Hernandez and Murray-Johnson (2015) cite Jackson's BID model in conjunction with Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) structure of intersectionality and post-colonialism to build an autoethnographic exploration of the construction of Blackness for Afro-Caribbean immigrants in the United States. Thomas (2016) utilized Jackson's model to conceptualize Blackness in an investigation of the media's impact of Black youth identity development. Hays (2018) integrated Jackson's model to understand the intersectional experiences of student leaders of color at Predominantly White Christian Institutions. Each of these qualitative studies leveraged Jackson's model and its openness to connect racial identity development to the other experiences and identities an individual may explore as they encounter a phenomenon.

Although Jackson's (2012) BID model provided a connection between racial identity, experiences of racism, and independent experiences with Black culture within the model, there existed a continued linearity within the model much like Cross's. Intersectionality, thus, does not become a relevant part of racial identity development until stability within one's racial identity is obtained. Therefore, I explored Johnson and Quaye's (2017) Queered Model for Black Racial Identity Development as a means of disrupting the implied binary and linearity of racial identity while rupturing the concept of development as separate from the intersectional experiences of one's development.

Johnson and Quaye's Queered Model for Black Racial Identity Development. Cross (1971; 1991) and Jackson (1976; 2012) provided structured, linear pathways through which individuals develop their racial identity and the concept of race within society. However,

Johnson and Quaye (2017) argued that the perception of racial identity development occurring in linearity falsely portrays the fullness of human development through social interaction. The Queered Model for Black Racial Identity Development engages the concept of intersectionality as a facet of racial identity development. Crenshaw (1991) proposed that individuals identify through the amalgamation of various social identities that cannot be separated or disentangled. Thus, identity is presented at the intersections, hence the term “intersectionality.” Johnson and Quaye (2017) engaged the concept of Queer theory (Sullivan, 2003), a post-structural ideology which fractures binaries (e.g., male vs. female) to develop a more expansive definition for social identities and definitions of function through a combination of critical race theory (Delgado, 2012), queer theory, and the Queered model for multiple dimensions of identity (Q-MMDI; Jones, Abes, & Kasch, 2013).

Queered racial identity development, thus, functions as a result of multiple interactions of identity through four processes: racial performativity, racial socialization, passing, desire, and becoming. Johnson and Quaye (2017) asserted that the interaction of social experiences continuously shaped one’s construction of the performance, socialization, and embodiment of their racial identity. Racial identity, then, became deconstructed into the fluid concepts of performatives/social identities, oppression, processes of becoming and being, and the desire to and contexts which shape the individual’s experience of racial construction. This framework allowed for greater attention to the complex role of intergroup (i.e., racism) and intragroup (i.e., colorism) oppression upon the development of racial identity development. Thus, there was space for African American men to filter their experiences of race through interactions of masculinity/male gender identity development and individuals within their racial group as they seek to pursue educational opportunities within master’s-level counseling programs.

Summarizing Racial Identity Development

Conceptualizing racial identity development painted a better picture of the factors which contribute to the full picture of human development and cultural identity embedded within the framework of this study. Understanding multiple lenses of Black and African American racial identity development clarified the perspective through which I sought to understand the voice of African American men as they discussed their experiences of being recruited into master's-level counseling programs.

Cross (1971; 1991), Jackson (1976; 2012), and Johnson and Quaye (2017) all proposed unique variations for understanding the construction of African American identity. Cross's seminal work laid the foundation for other theorists to view the growth and development of African American identity as nested within a web of ideas and interactions within one's social and psychological network. Recognizing the importance of intersectionality and fluidity within the educational development of African American male experience, I utilized the model which mimics such a process of development. Johnson and Quaye's (2017) Queered Model served as the framework for racial identity development as we explored Whiting's (2009) Black Male Scholar Identity model. Whiting's model integrated our understanding of Black and African American racial identity with the emergence of gifted characteristics often seen in students who enter graduate level programs.

Whiting's Black Male Scholar Identity Model

Several studies of Black males in educational settings reported the prevalence of educational deficits, learning disabilities, and behavioral issues within elementary and secondary education (Davis, 2003; Harry & Anderson, 1994; Jackson & Moore, 2006). However, few studies have mentioned the experiences and development of Black males who demonstrated

signs of giftedness. Thus, identifying giftedness within African American male students helped educators and counselors to promote and support academic success throughout the students' educational journey. Whiting's Scholar Identity Model for Black Males (2009) helped us to better understand the complex and unique issues of identifying and supporting Black male academic achievement.

Whiting (2006) posited that the underrepresentation of Black men in gifted and talented programs rested upon their lack of structure and support within educational spaces. These experiences of poor fit within the learning environment reinforced the narrative of not belonging for African American men in school (Ogbu, 2003; Whiting, 2004). Though African American men encounter numerous barriers to develop their racial and gender identities (e.g., managing racial oppression, demonstrating power and masculinity; Tatum, 2005), further barriers exist to identify African American men as gifted within the educational system (e.g., social expectations of Black masculinity, educator focus on deficits, negative peer pressure, Whiteness associated with academic success; Whiting, 2009). In recognition of these unique challenges, Whiting (2009) designed a scholar identity model for Black males.

Whiting (2009) noted nine characteristics of a scholar identity in Black males: self-efficacy, future orientation, willing to make sacrifices, internal locus of control, self-awareness, a need for achievement over a need for affiliation, academic self-confidence, racial identity, and masculinity. These characteristics integrate broad factors of scholar identity with the dynamic factors inherent in African American male identity. Whiting (2009) suggested that attention to the intersection of race, gender, and academic ability helped educators to better identify these gifted men while helping administrators, advisors, and counselors to better support and retain African American males in gifted programs. These gifted and supported scholars are the

backbone of students who apply for and persist within postgraduate programs (Gross, 2006; Leung, Conoley, & Scheel, 1994). Utilizing Whiting's theory as a framework for understanding African American male scholars in higher education, we began to develop strategies to observe and support the recruitment of African American men into graduate programs such as master's-level counseling programs.

African American Male Development Section Summary

This section defined gender, gender roles and masculinity (Brannon, 1976; Lorber, 1994; Weber, 1998; 2001). These frameworks helped to solidify the additional complexities of development at the intersections of race and gender. I discussed help-seeking norms and expectations both broadly for men and more intentionally for African American men. Then, I adapted frameworks for understanding racial identity development through linear stages (Cross, 1971; Jackson, 1976) and fluid processes (Johnson & Quaye, 2017) to further demonstrate how social experiences affected the African American male's construction of self-worth and self-esteem throughout their development. Lastly, Whiting's (2009) Gifted Black Male Scholar Identity Model integrated our understanding of masculinity and racial identity development to better understand the challenges of pursuing higher education and, furthermore, educational fields that do not support either gender or racial norms within the scholar. Recognizing the performative tasks of identity development over time, I explored the prevalence of African American men in higher education, the challenges faced in attaining a post-secondary degree, and the recruitment strategies and theories which helped to develop a greater influx of African American men into post-secondary and graduate-level programs.

African American Men and Higher Education

To better understand African American men within higher education, further exploration regarding the term “diversity” in higher education and the definition of diversity recruitment was required. These definitions helped to solidify the literary underpinnings of African American male recruitment strategies and population identification within research-intensive, predominantly White institutions.

Definitions of Diversity

The term diversity has taken many forms and faces, speaking to external and visual efforts of diversity (i.e., numbers of racially and ethnically different individuals within a particular institution/organization) or upon the variation of hegemony through the level of homogeneity within a space or group. Cortes (1991) negotiated that diversity could be explored through the shifting racial and ethnic demographics of the United States, pointing the readers to the natural orientation towards diversification. Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, and Terenzini (1996) framed diversity in higher education through the representation of different cultures, races, and values within an institution. For the purposes of this study, diversity was defined through the variance of race and culture within the classroom and university setting.

As diversity has been explored in higher education settings, arguments arose regarding the impact of increasing diversity within higher education spaces. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) further explored this inquiry through the development of a theory surrounding the impact of diversity upon higher education learning outcomes. Within their study, they gathered longitudinal data from both local samples at the University of Michigan from 1990 and again in 1994 and national student samples within the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). A combination of data from surveying and self-assessments compared variables relating

to student identity factors (i.e., gender identity, racial and ethnic identity, parents' educational level), institutional diversity, and diversity experiences to student learning outcomes and democracy outcomes (i.e., student engagement with civic processes that encourage a more heterogeneous and racially diverse society).

Gurin et al (2002) utilized multiple regressions to determine influence of experiencing more diverse environments on educational and interpersonal development of the participants. The resulting regressions showed that there was a positive relationship between learning outcomes and democracy outcomes. When controlled for African American students, specifically, diverse classroom populations significantly impacted their learning outcomes and contributed to their ability to view a diverse democracy as plausible.

Gurin et al's (2002) study substantiated that diversity in higher education, seen through the lens of racial/ethnic identity, socioeconomic status, gender, and other factors, bolsters the academic and intrapersonal growth of all students. Furthermore, this study challenged its readers to understand how diversity discussions within a homogeneous classroom provided a limited, if not marginal, change within students. Thus, further attention to diversity recruitment demonstrated an academic program's concerted effort to strengthen the learning outcomes of their students.

As the focus of this study sought to understand racial and gender diversity within master's-level counseling programs, I discussed population statistics in post-secondary educational institutions, population statistics in counseling programs, national and institutional diversity recruitment strategies, and diversity recruitment efforts within the field of counseling.

Population Statistics

The National Center for Education Statistics (2017) estimated that, for Fall 2014, just over 9.6 million applications were received for admission into all Title IV higher education institutions who do not provide open enrollment. Just over half (56%) of applicants received admission into those institutions with only 16% of the original applicants enrolled as either full-time or part time students in these institutions. Although no data were reported regarding the racial breakdown of individual applicants, it is important to note that women accounted for 55%, 57%, and 69% of all enrollees at 4-year, 2-year, and less than 2-year institutions during fall 2014. This trend demonstrated that males, on average, entered post-secondary education at a lower rate than their female and non-binary counterparts.

The National Center for Educational Statistics did report racial demographics for students enrolled in Title IV institutions during the 2013-2014 school year. In 2017, the institute reported that of the more than 27.8 million undergraduate and graduate enrollees into higher education institutions, 43.1% identified themselves as males. Of the 27.8 million enrollees, only 14.2% of all enrollees identified as African American in comparison with 52.2% of enrollees identifying as White. Breaking it down between undergraduate and graduate students, post-secondary institutions reported having more women than men (59.8% to 40.2% respectively) enroll in graduate programs. Likewise, 12.0% of graduate enrollees identified as African American in comparison with 53.0% of White enrollees.

Although these numbers closely mimic national population statistics in the United States, it is important to be mindful of the lack of intersectional data of African American male enrollment within these institutions. Furthermore, this dataset combines data of students both enrolled in minority-serving institutions (i.e., Hispanic-serving Institutions (HSIs) and

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)) and PWIs. To further understand the educational disparities which exist for African American men in higher education, this study focused upon the population of African American men seeking an education at PWIs.

African American Males at Predominantly White Institutions

African Americans most regularly pursue a degree at either a Historically Black College/University or at a PWi, yet the educational experiences are distinctly different in each setting (Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hilliard, 2015; Negga, Applewhite, & Livingston, 2007). African American males experience a sense of institutional support, a great amount of racial community, and stronger non-cognitive factors (e.g., a sense of personal academic responsibility, academic focus, time management skills, and academic passion) at HBCUs compared to PWIs (Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008). Furthermore, the strength of support networks and the impact upon African American community development continues to influence the recruitment of African American students to graduate programs at HBCUs (Palmer, 2012). Yet, African Americans at PWIs tend to have a greater development of racial identity, but experience higher rates of racial tension, minimalization of acts of discrimination, and impaired wellness (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010). Recognizing these differences, we further explored the challenges African American men face at PWIs when pursuing postsecondary education.

Harper and Quaye (2007) insisted that a connection exists between academic success, persistence, and engagement with racial identity development for African American men in higher education. This connection is further reinforced as Men of Color continue to highlight that stereotypes about their race and gender exposed the salience of their racial identity and played a role in their social and professional engagement (Gardenhire-Crooks, Collado, Martin, Castro, Brock, & Orr, 2010). These African American male students recognized the impact of their race

within their interactions with others, highlighting the critical incidences which promote racial identity development.

These critical incidences (i.e., racial microaggressions, feelings of isolation and tokenism, concerns for garnishing financial aid) persist and expediate racial identity development as African American men consider pursuing graduate level education (Johnson, Kuykendall, & Winkle-Wagner, 2009; Morelon-Quainoo et al, 2009; Strayhorn, 2009). The simple factor of understanding one's racialized experience within the context of the academic environment added additional stress to one's ability to develop as a scholar within Whiting's (2009) scholar identity model. Accordingly, examining experiences of racial discrimination helped to contextualize an accelerated development of racial identity for men of color at predominantly White institutions.

Racial discrimination remains rife within predominantly White institutions whose structures and administrations remain culturally centered upon White, male dominant narratives (Allen, 1992, Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey, 2002; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). African American students noted that racism distracts them from academic tasks and depreciates their academic motivation (Allen & Solórzano, 2001). Most recently, policy development and enactment for racial equity following civil rights and the 2008 presidential election continue to benefit dominant populations, thereby minimizing racial discriminations within higher education systems (Paguyo & Moses, 2011; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004). These discriminatory acts and racist policies diminished safety for African American men at PWIs. Thus, it was important to explore the experience of impaired wellness as they receive an education at predominantly White institutions.

The continued experience of discrimination provides a significant challenge to the physical and mental wellness of African American men at PWIs. These men can experience

“racial battle fatigue” from a confluence of racism, racial microaggressions, and persistent vigilance with the expectations of marginalization (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Smith et al. (2007) uncovered that African American men experienced consistent marginalization, hypervigilance, and “anti-Black male stereotyping” (p. 561) leading to a diminished sense of safety and belongingness on college campuses. This psychological stress becomes an additional responsibility for the student’s success that could, otherwise, be mitigated through active preparation and adaptation from the recruiting institution. While examining the impairment of wellness, we must be mindful of the confluence of gender and race provides a unique challenge for community, collegiality, and self-efficacy for African American men at PWIs.

The intersection of gender and race distinguish a unique set of performatives and becoming processes for African American male students at PWIs. The continuous struggle with racial battle fatigue and discrimination from White male counterparts reminds African American men of their lack of belonging on PWIs and reinforces the emasculating narrative of an academic African American male (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). The messages and anti-Black male stereotyping associated with African American male work ethic further influence the development of unique and adaptive coping skills to mitigate the stress of racial and gendered expectations within and outside of the African American community (Pierce, 1995; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007).

PWIs, graduate programs, and, in this study, counseling programs, hold a responsibility to acknowledge and respond to the deleterious experience of racism and misandry that lay prominent for African American men entering higher education. Hearing the stories of African American men within these spaces helped to inform best practices for deconstructing racist policies and systems. One method of deconstructing the racist barriers to graduate level

education stands within recruitment strategies. Therefore, a review of recruitment strategies may help predominantly White institutions to encourage African American men to pursue an education with the promise of overcoming the socialized racial and gender stereotypes of their demographic.

Recruitment and Diversity Recruitment

The process of recruitment involves organizational actions and decisions which may affect the willingness of certain individuals to attend and participate in the organization's programs and events (Carlson, 2003). Recruitment strategies help higher education institutions appear more attractive to desirable students, faculty, and staff. Dumas-Hines, Cochran, and Williams (2001) highlighted four strategic mechanisms through which most higher education institutions engage in recruitment: outreach programs, pipeline programs and strategies, marketing, and financial incentives. Dumas-Hines et al. (2001) denoted that a combination of these techniques had been utilized to attract racial and ethnic minorities to PWIs. Thus, diversity recruitment in higher education involves intentional strategies to increase the population of underrepresented groups within college campuses (Gurin, 1999; Lee, 1991). I explored the latter three mechanisms further to frame the recruitment of African American men into higher education, graduate level programs and, specifically, counselor education master's programs.

Pipeline programs engage a collaboration between secondary education systems, communities, and higher education institutions to lessen the barriers underrepresented students experience in acquiring a postsecondary degree (Myers & Wilkins, 1995). Federal grants and initiatives from the 1950s have established programs, such as TRIO and Upward Bound to help mitigate barriers to college access. TRIO programs and Upward Bound both function as pipeline programs to support underrepresented and disadvantaged high school students through financial

aid workshops, campus visits, and academic support services (McElroy & Armesto, 1998). Although these programs are not always oriented toward recruiting students to a particular institution, colleges and universities host and receive federal funding to conduct TRIO and Upward Bound Programs. Furthermore, specific programs, such as The Posse Foundation, and Prep for Prep, identify at-risk, but promising high school students of color and support their efforts for entering and succeeding in postsecondary education (Harper & Griffin, 2010). These programs, through community collaboration, mentorship, and academic support, build and affirm African American men and women to go to prestigious PWIs if they so choose. However, the marketing of prestige and importance upon these institutions, develop student interest and help underrepresented communities envision their future at the college or university.

Colleges and universities have established the importance of marketing and recruitment for an ever-expanding local and global community (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). Marketing, then, demonstrates the freedom of applicants to discern which academic space will provide the most valuable, prestigious, and beneficial learning experience, pending that the prospective student becomes informed of these contributing choice factors (Baldwin & James, 2000). Recognizing the global expansion of student “consumers,” college and universities must utilize a mixture of traditional (i.e., mailers, college fairs) and innovative marketing techniques (i.e., the use of social media) to help develop student interest in a college or university (Constantinides & Zinck Stagno, 2011).

Similarly, leveraging the social capital of alumni networks and alumni affinity functions as a marketing strategy for prospective students to both undergraduate and graduate programs (Gallo, 2012). Yet, with significantly lower alumni of color, African American applicants are less likely to develop relationships with alumni from the same racial background. The positive

and negative experiences of alumni of color, especially African American alumni, affect the marketing and perception of safety and support future applicants may observe during their college choice process (Burley, Butner, Causey-Bush, & Bush, 2007). PWIs also experience fewer opportunities for social engagement with communities of color and receive less financial support specific to communities of color. Thus, Black and Brown applicants continue to encounter systematic barriers for information gathering, historical narratives, and financial support within the recruitment structure of PWIs.

Historically, financial aid has been a major factor for all students seeking a postsecondary education at any level (Manski & Wise, 1983). Quarterman (2008) observed that planned, intentional, and accessible financial aid for diverse student populations further facilitated interest in the PWi. The econometric concept, however, remains limited as it overlooks the context of community, social identity, and policy in the recruitment and college choice process. Perna (2004; 2006) deconstructed financial incentive as a standalone factor of recruitment, noting that college choice, particularly in communities of color, involved the aforementioned factors along with family and cultural factors. Therefore, through Perna's College Choice Process Model, PWIs can begin to identify the multisystemic factors which need to be addressed when recruiting underrepresented prospective students.

Political Actions Influencing Diversity Recruitment

Dialogue surrounding the recruitment of diverse populations in higher education institutions has persisted for several decades. Various legislative action in the 1960s, such as John F. Kennedy's Executive Order 10925 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided the framework through which institutions of higher learning developed initiatives. An example of the effect of these legislative acts is Affirmative Action (Cooper, 2005).

Affirmative Action describes John F. Kennedy's executive order and Lyndon B. Johnson's legislative action to incentivize and demand systematic recruitment and retention of underrepresented cultural groups (i.e., race, religion, nationality, sex/gender) (Executive Order No. 10,925, 1961; Kantor & Lowe, 1995; Paguyo & Moses, 2011). Affirmative Action developed over decades of American legislation to become the national policy it is today. Swain (2001) traced the history of Affirmative Action nested within the 1935 labor law prior to President Kennedy's 1961 Executive order which formalized non-discriminatory policies within labor and education. Cooper (2005) noted that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 promoted dialogue surrounding affirmative action through the establishment of Title VI policies. Title VI declared that government and public institutions were required to create equal opportunities for racial, ethnic and gender minorities, pushing higher education institutions to develop new strategies and spaces for equalizing admission opportunities, while criminalizing discriminatory practices towards racial, ethnic, and gender minorities. Though federal policy and legal actions have restructured the impetus for diversity recruitment, new racist policies and systematic barriers continue to halt African American applicants from attaining postsecondary and postgraduate degrees at PWIs.

Most institutions delineated success in Affirmative Action efforts through a numerical increase in underrepresented groups rather than a comprehensive effort for inclusion (Cooper, 2005). Boxill (1995) framed the concept of comprehensive inclusion through four key factors: (a) retention of distinct cultural factors within each race, (b) an accepted commonality of the idea of justice between racial groups, (c) maintenance of connection to one's racial and ethnic group to promulgate distinct cultural qualities, and (d) rejection of a cultural hierarchical system through the affirmation and appreciation of cultural differences. King (2001) further extended

Boxill's work, noting that institutions which pursued comprehensive efforts for inclusion of diverse, underrepresented groups often found higher rates of recruitment and retention of those students and communities over time. Thus, continued acknowledgement of intentional, culturally responsive recruitment strategy, especially at the graduate level, uplifts the narrative that a college or university values the voice and experience of students from various racial backgrounds.

African American Males and Higher Education Summary

Within this section, I have noted the experiences of African American males as they pursue postsecondary education. Through defining diversity and the population statistics of African American men within PWIs, I have demonstrated a concern for both recruiting, retaining, and graduating African American males at the undergraduate and graduate level. An exploration of racial identity development, intersectional racialized and gendered experiences, historical and political action for and against diversity recruitment and retention, and impairments to wellness highlighted the imperative nature of intentional strategies and preparation for programs which seek to increase African American male students. Knowing more about programmatic preparation in recruitment, I, then, discussed Counselor Education programs specifically and the literature surrounding diversity, African American men within the field, and diversity recruitment efforts within the field.

Counselor Education

The counseling profession evolved through the combination of teacher education, professional career guidance, and community mental health programs in the 1950s (ACA, 2018a). The ACA defines professional counseling as “a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and

career goals” (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, p. 368). The practice of counseling requires master’s-level training through specialized training programs, known as counselor education programs. The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) is the primary accrediting body for counselor education programs. CACREP identifies counselor education as the avenue through which individuals develop and enhance counseling skills, self-awareness experiences, advocacy tools for the betterment the community (CACREP, 2016). These entry-level graduate programs address a diverse number of specialty areas with a vast number of communities and people groups. For this study, instead of reviewing the practice of counselor education, I recognized the important mechanisms through which students are recruited and admitted into CACREP-accredited counselor education master’s programs.

Admission and Recruitment in Counselor Education

Few studies have examined the admission standards and recruitment strategies of counselor education programs. CACREP (2017) acknowledged a glaring gap in counseling programs utilizing intentional strategies to recruit and retain a diverse student population, thereby affecting the diversity of clinicians within the counseling field. CACREP (2016) noted that each accredited program must utilize the following standards when considering an applicant: “(1) relevance of career goals, (2) aptitude for graduate-level study, (3) potential success in forming effective counseling relationships, and (4) respect for cultural differences.” (p. 7). CACREP (2016) also encourage the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty members and students within CACREP-accredited programs. These requirements provided structure for the potential for cultural development and inclusion during training. However, the definitions for

how a program measures these criteria during admission and recruitment are left to the discretion of the program.

Graduate level aptitude has been measured through traditional standardized tests like the SAT, ACT, or GRE. These tests, however, have demonstrated differential validity, or differing levels of construct validity for various cultural subgroups (Bridgeman, McCamley-Jenkins, & Ervin, 2000; Mattern, Patterson, Shaw, Kobrin, & Barbuti, 2008; Ramist, Lewis, McCamley-Jenkins, 1994). The GRE, specifically, has been shown to promote racial bias in its gatekeeping of graduate level programs (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2010). Yet, counselor education faculty continue to utilize this assessment and undergraduate GPA as measures of success when recruiting and admitting potential candidates for their counseling programs. Swank and Smith-Adcock (2014) conducted a quantitative study of admissions as gatekeeping for CACREP-accredited counselor training programs. After surveying 79 accredited counselor training programs, Swank and Adcock discovered that GPA, Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores, and recommendation letters were the most frequently utilized admission procedures. Higher GPAs were often required for doctoral-level programs in comparison to master's-level programs. Yet, GRE and GPA scores were determined cutoffs for student opportunities to receive invitations for interviews. Recognition of the cultural biases of these admissions techniques emphasized the implicit barrier African Americans may face in their admission to counseling programs.

Hatchett, Lawrence, and Coaston (2017) explored the academic aspects of these criteria to help understand the connection between how master's-level counseling students are traditionally admitted and their successful completion of a program. The study followed 146 counseling students in both school and clinical mental health counseling programs. A large

portion of participants identified as female (82.2%) and White (92.1%). Hatchett et al. (2017) discovered that GRE scores and undergraduate GPA were significant predictors of final graduate GPAs and student scores on the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination, an assessment often used to measure knowledge with CACREP's eight core content areas (CPCE, 2015). Further analysis observed that students with "less developed" verbal and writing scores on the GRE may struggle to accomplish the communication and writing tasks within counselor education programs, leading to potential attrition (p. 78).

Knowing the racial biases of language inherent in standardized tests, there is a small implication that communities that do not develop these language skills function at a deficit in accomplishing the requirements of counselor education programs. Thus, an implicit bias may exist when encountering African American men who do not align with the traditional language skills tested within the GRE. While this study aligns with one of the admissions criteria for CACREP-accredited counselor education programs, there is a noted lack of attention to non-academic factors for admission and the differences in attrition between the racial and gender demographics acquired within this study. This study further demonstrated the importance of awareness when exploring recruitment with culturally and racially diverse student communities. The integration of creativity within admissions and recruitment processes may further the culturally responsive methods of recruitment for ethnically and racially diverse community in Counselor Education, especially for gifted African American men (Kaufman, 2010; Luria, O'Brien, & Kaufman, 2016)

Later, within this same section of the standards, CACREP calls for "continuous and systematic efforts to recruit, employ, and retain a diverse faculty to create and support an inclusive learning community" (2016, p. 7). Bradley and Holcomb-McCoy (2004) recommended

highlighting racial and cultural diversity within the university, reviewing the structure of mentorship amongst Counselor education faculty, and decreasing alienation for African American faculty as key factors for recruiting African American counselor educators. Baggerly, Tan, Pichotta, and Warner (2017) reported that the counselor education field has responded to this call for diversification with noted increases in female, racially diverse, and Latinx faculty members over the past 50 years. Baggerly et al. (2017) attributed this increase in diversity to the emergence of the fourth force of counseling, multiculturalism, and the systematic process of support and intentionality to recruit Black faculty members. Brooks and Steen (2010) emphasized that African American male counselor educators requested the prioritization of African American male counselor educators, more assertive recruitment, and faster hiring processes as beneficial for recruiting this population. Yet, in all of these studies, there was a lack of specificity for how to recruit these African American men at the early stages of their entrance into the field. Thus, an examination of student recruitment strategies in counselor education helped to refine the process of recruitment for African American men into master's-level counseling programs.

When looking for recruitment strategies for African Americans and African American males in Counseling programs, the literature continues to thin. Shin (2008) viewed the revision of recruitment as a form of advocacy for social justice within counselor education. Recruitment of students of color, then, required an infusion of social justice values throughout the training process to help draw a diverse pool of applicants. Rogers and Molina (2006) noted that strong financial aid, personal contact with prospective students, and building relationships with applicants of color and students and faculty of color influenced diverse student recruitment. A dissertation study from Branch (2018) unveiled that African American male counselors and

counselor educators resolved that recruitment of Black men was paramount to the reduction of barriers for African American men entering counseling as clients. Branch (2018) provided four recruitment strategies for African American males: “(a) Meet them (Black Men) where they are, (b) create a program to recruit students of color, (c) provide advocacy and support for African American men, (d) improve efforts of mentorship.” (p. 97). Though these strategies directly contribute to the literature regarding African American male recruitment into counseling programs, there remained a gap for understanding this process from the perspective of the men currently in master’s-level programs. Therefore, the narratives shared within this study uplifted the voices of African American men and, thus, guided intentional efforts for culturally responsive recruitment practices of an oft-underrepresented population.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature regarding African American males and their experiences in higher education and, specifically, within counselor education. Centering this chapter within a Critical Race Feminist lens, I have begun to highlight our knowledge about African American culture, African American male identity development, and the process of becoming a Black male scholar. Situating the narrative within these frameworks helps to better understand the African American male experiences with higher education and, most specifically, the recruitment experience within both undergraduate and graduate levels of study.

Chapter Three provided a methodological framework for understanding the narrative of African American male recruitment from the experiences of African American men who have chosen to enter master’s-level counseling programs.

Chapter 3:

Methodology

Individuals who chose to explore research in Higher Education discovered a number of recruitment and retention strategies designed to encourage underrepresented students to attend PWIs. Researchers have documented the experiences of African Americans and African American men at PWIs as they matriculate and persist through their undergraduate and graduate education (Allen, 1992; Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Harper, 2015; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Though there were studies about the institutions and the African American men within these programs, little was known about the experiences of African American men who choose to enter master's-level counselor education training programs. Thus, the purpose of this study was to use narrative inquiry to inform counselor education recruitment strategies through the co-construction of stories from African American men who have been recruited to master's-level counselor education programs.

In this chapter, I presented an overview of qualitative methodology and Narrative Inquiry nested within my theoretical framework of Perna's College Choice model. I provided a rationale for a Critical Race Feminist lens for this study and its importance to constructing a narrative of African American male recruitment within the White male dominated narrative of higher education and counselor education. Then, I contextualized Narrative Inquiry within counselor education literature and diversity recruitment in higher education. I focused upon the methods of data collection, the participants within the study, the historical context of this research and cultural embeddedness of the selected population. Next, I explored thematic analysis within Narrative Inquiry and co-constructed products. I ended this chapter with an exposition of my subjectivity to this topic and the methods to support the trustworthiness and rigor of this study.

Research Questions

Narrative inquiry and narrative analysis extracted the contextual details of an event or experience – the how, why and what – and moves the audience to understand a larger picture of the narrative topic or intention (Riessman, 2008). This narrative perspective, then, required research questions oriented toward the rich description nested in the participant's experience. For this study, I explored the following research questions:

1. What are the recruitment experiences of African American men enrolled in predominantly White, master's-level, CACREP-accredited counseling programs?
2. What influences an African American man's decisions to enroll in predominantly White, master's-level, CACREP-accredited counseling programs?

Theoretical Framework

To answer the aforementioned questions, I conducted a qualitative research study. Qualitative research is a research tradition which centers its data collection and methods upon answering the "why" of human experience through observation, document reviews, interviews, and reflexive experience (Creswell, 2013; Given, 2016). Understanding one's qualitative research methodology provides the researcher a structure and guidelines through which they may understand human phenomena. Qualitative researchers seek to gather data through an expansive number of methods and techniques which substantiate the paradigm, or scientific belief systems, of the researcher's inquiry (Hays & Wood, 2011). Kline (2008) noted that there must be congruence between a researcher's study design, their research tradition, the paradigmatic framework, and the purpose of the study. This research study, then, was nested within the constructivist paradigm which substantiates the co-constructive process of presenting narratives from the voices of my participants.

Constructivism is an epistemological paradigm which views knowledge and truth as a result of continuous overlay of data, experience, and stories (Gergen & Davis, 1985).

Constructivism posits that reality does not have one objective truth, but, instead, exists within the connection of multiple, subjective realities from various perspectives. Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) highlighted constructivism's ability to understand the phenomenon of a narrative experience through the engagement of multiple realities existing in a social network. Berger and Luckmann (1966) specifically centered social constructivism as an epistemological approach which assumes knowledge is constructed through collaboration of social interactions and shared experiences between different entities. Narrative Inquiry, then, served as a methodological approach that functions through a social constructivist paradigm.

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research methodology which seeks to build knowledge and understanding from the stories of people as they have encountered an event or experienced a phenomenon (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Nestled within the social constructivist paradigm (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011), narrative inquirers gather stories of the various storytellers to construct the reality of an experience. Narrating stories functions as a core mechanism for connecting the self to the others around us (Plummer, 1995). Narrative also provided the storyteller with a mechanism to develop their identities through explanation of their world through their viewpoint (Watson, 2006). The essence of the story as the basic unit of knowledge lent itself to truth being a subjective construction of realities. Therefore, narrative formed a shared system of power between individuals who experience a phenomenon and their audiences, giving voice to the "truth" within the narrators oft-overlooked narrative (Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2013). These stories began their construction through understanding

the tensions which exists within the boundaries of time (temporality), actors (people), plot (action), tentativeness (certainty), and space (context) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Polkinghorne (1995) explored two forms of cognition surrounding narrative inquiry and analysis. The paradigmatic cognition centralized the story through an idea or category which best explains the action and plot within the narrative. This framework facilitated the “discovery of concepts” (p. 10) which, through thematic analysis, helped to build a network for understanding the relationship between common concepts of experience. Narrative cognition shifted from observing the commonalities in narrative experiences towards the unique elements of narratives embedded within each story (Polkinghorne, 2005). The attention to context and time became heightened in the overall process of analysis and interpretation, allowing for the stories to describe the product rather than allowing the product to describe the stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus, narrative inquiry viewed the actions and experiences as an outpouring of meaning laden within the contexts and temporality of a story (Hoshmand, 2005).

Like other forms of qualitative work (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003), narrative inquiry served as both a means through which an experience is structured and the framework by which we present a perspective of experience (Kramp, 2004). Through stories, a reconstructed understanding of the experience took place and questioned seeking to know the “what” behind the phenomenon are answered. Squire (2013) noted that narratives can be framed as either experience-centered, focusing on a narrative’s sequence, its human elements, its retelling ability, and its display of transformation; or socioculturally-centered, expanding the narrative to include systemic barriers and instances of cultural interactionism that shape the reader’s and storyteller’s encounter with the narrative itself (Davis & Risman, 2015). In either case, narrative has a powerful quality to

capture the experience of what it means to be human and how we humans encounter, view, and experience the world in which we live (Robert & Shenhav, 2014).

For the purpose of this study, I constructed a socio-culturally centered narrative. The voices of the participants developed a critical story which centralized the racialized and gendered experience of African American maleness during the recruitment experience. This narrative, though personal, peered into the layered experience of privilege, race, and oppression inherent in higher education and dominant recruitment strategies. Thus, I explored the socio-cultural narrative, centralizing critical theories which may highlight the system through which participants experience recruitment at a PWI.

Socioculturally-Centered Narratives

Squire (2013) noted the engagement and interpretation of the narrative hinges upon the researcher's centering of either the experience within the narrative or the sociocultural context in which the researcher situates the narrative. Experience-centered narratives construct the sequential and meaningful representation of the personal story. Expansion of context through follow-up interviews or contextual documents (i.e., reflective writing samples) envelop the development of a personal experience (Andrews, 2003; Squire, 2013). These narratives provided richness and depth of an event or a process as a reconstruction of what or how the narrators experience the event. However, the experience-centered narrative limited a more expansive review of the cultural and systemic factors which contextualize a narrative knowing. Socioculturally-centered narratives sought to engage in the missing link, furthering the dialogue towards understanding the layered context of internal and social identity and the interactions one may experience through enacting those identities with others.

Socioculturally-centered narratives, then, constructed stories which highlight the social and cultural genre or lens through which a narrator lives and experiences the events and their plots. (Squire, 2013). Socioculturally centered narratives engaged the told story and the elements of environment, the social history, the embedded power structures, and the interactions of communities which all take actions upon the storyteller and the setting in which the story is situated (Plummer, 1995; Squire, 2013). The researcher co-constructed and engaged the varying identities at play in the narrator's story and reconstructs the essence and meaning of the story through the cultural resonance of the story in context. In short, narratives within this approach demonstrated the fluidity and constant interactions one's social character and identity may have upon the meaning of the story.

These interactions happened continuously for traditionally minoritized groups within professional settings, causing the stories to deepen in description through a greater understanding of the impact of culture upon the shape and form of one's narrative. I recognized the marginalized experience of African American identity, partnered with the minority status of African American men in counselor education, provided a unique framework for understanding the complexity of their recruitment experiences. Thus, a socioculturally-centered approach was taken to amplify the layers of cultural and environmental context laden within the narrative of African American male recruitment into Counselor education.

Next, I explored the methodology which framed this narrative inquiry. Later in this chapter, I explored the process of sampling, data collection, and data analysis through the lens of narrative inquiry to ensure this dissertation study followed a narrative methodological framework.

Methodology

I used Narrative methods and procedures to help uplift the stories of African American men as they reflected upon being recruited into master's-level counseling programs. I used socioculturally-centered Narrative inquiry to investigate the aforementioned questions and to recognize the systemic and layered barriers and interactions African American men encounter when entering the counseling profession. Here, I described the sampling criteria, recruitment procedures, and participants of the study. I then discussed data collection and data analysis methods for this study. To help supplement the methodological choices within this study, *Appendix A* listed the various narrative studies within counselor education and allied fields which helped me to design this narrative methodology.

Sampling

Sampling is the process of identifying sources that can provide data for research analysis (Merriam, 2009). Researchers outline their sampling techniques to understand from whom data will be acquired and for what reason. LeCompte, Preissle, and Tesch (1993) noted that sampling creates boundaries that define which individuals are to be observed and understood specifically within a larger population. Qualitative researchers design their research in ways that best represent the epistemological and methodological frameworks of their research study (Kline, 2008). Thus, this study utilized sampling methods that remain congruent to narrative methodology.

Narrative methodology highlighted the co-constructive process of obtaining field texts (data) through active participation within the field itself (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, Riessman, 2008). The potential for narrators to share about their experience of a phenomena are often present, yet narrative inquirers must develop a structure for connecting to the potential

storyteller. Thus, narrative sampling involves providing the structure and balance for characters and co-constructors to engage and narrate the events and experiences within a particular phenomenon (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Utilizing intentional sampling techniques which gather the voices of the intended characters helps the inquirer to co-construct the critical voice that may be lacking within the literature. Therefore, I outlined the sampling techniques that fit within the narrative and constructivist framework of this work.

This study uplifted the voices of African American men as they reflected upon their story of being recruited to their master's-level counseling programs. Thus, purposeful criterion sampling and snowball sampling were best suited for gathering participants for this study (Creswell, 2013; LeCompte, Patton, 2015; Preissle, & Tesch, 1993). Purposeful criterion sampling involves acquiring a sample that most conclusively fits the identities and experiences sought within the research study (Merriam, 2009). Purposeful criterion sampling helped to gather the narrative of the specific community of students who can share stories of the phenomenon of recruitment from the lens of the marginalized community. Likewise, snowball sampling helped to highlight the network and community embedded within the culture of African American culture. Snowball (or chain) sampling involves the utilization of participants or interested persons to advertise the study to other potential participants who fit the criteria (Patton, 2015). I engaged with counseling students and counselor educators of color who knew other African American men to help strengthen potential participants' willingness to engage in the process of this study.

For the purposes of this study, I set inclusion criteria based on race (African American), gender (man/male), educational status (30 months from matriculation), program accreditation status (CACREP-Accredited), and institution-type (PWI). These inclusion criteria highlighted

the population of interest and the unique confluence of race and gender as they reflect upon choosing and being recruited to their program of choice. Though participants may have disclosed their institutions, these data were not reported within this study. Alternatively, I reported the geographic region of the institution for the students to help connote the potential cultural differences surrounding the institution as it relates to the African American narrative.

Smaller sample sizes are appropriate for narrative inquiries (Fraser, 2004; Riessman, 2003) and can range between two to ten participants to reach sufficient saturation (Boyd, 2001). Due to the paucity of African American males in counselor education and higher education (CACREP, 2016; Hughes & Kleist, 2005), I expected a smaller sample size between two and six participants. I will describe the participants and their characteristics below.

Participants

Four males participated in this dissertation study. Participant data was aggregated and de-identified to support the confidentiality of the participants. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality throughout this study. Each participant identified as a current counseling student within a CACREP-accredited program in various regions of the United States. Their geographic regions are described in reference to the American Counseling Association's regional designations. One participant was in the Southern region, two were within the North Atlantic region, and one was within the North Central region.

I also gathered information regarding each participant's hometown and undergraduate institutions to better understand their interactions with predominantly White institutions and communities. At the time of the interviews, three of the participants were full-time students within their program and one was a part-time student. Participants ages ranged from 27 to 43 years old, with a mean age of 34 years. Two participants were enrolled in clinical mental health

counseling programs, one in a school counseling program, and one in a family counseling program. All four participants were currently enrolled in a PWI and had been enrolled in PWIs prior to beginning their graduate studies.

Procedures

The procedures of the study outlined the process and design of the research study. Within this section, I discussed recruitment procedures, data collection procedures, and the description of the data sources through which I reconstructed stories of African American male recruitment in counselor education.

Recruitment Procedures

I received approval from the University of Tennessee's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to secure ethical and legal support for this study. This approval demonstrated a level of rigor and ethical trustworthiness within this study. I outlined the procedures of the study and the ethical mechanisms I utilized throughout the duration of this research study. Once IRB approval was obtained, I began recruiting participants

I provided a call for participants through three pathways. First, I sent a recruitment email (Appendix B) through CESNET, COUNSGRADS, and the AMCD counseling listserv. The email encouraged faculty and supervisors to share the study with potential participants who may fit the criteria. I engaged in snowball sampling by asking participants or interested counselor educators to forward my request for participation to other individuals who fit the criteria of this study (Heckathorn & Cameron, 2017). I also gained approval to utilize social media platforms (e.g., Facebook Groups, Twitter) to send my study to potential candidates and to others who may know potential candidates.

The recruitment email provided a link to the informed consent form within QuestionPro. Those who consented to participate received a brief screening survey (see Appendix D). After participants completed and submitted the screening survey, I assessed the information for fitness to the current study and followed up with qualified submissions. Eight applicants expressed interest in participating in this study. However, only five of the eight applicants met the criteria for the study. I implemented purposive selection techniques to ensure all potential applicants met the criteria for the study (Patton, 2015). After reaching out to qualifying applicants, four participants completed all consent forms and scheduled their interview. The four qualifying participants provided consent via QuestionPro and scheduled their interview time for the 90-120 minute interview. Participants who did not qualify for the study during the screening survey were notified within QuestionPro and thanked for their willingness to participate.

Data Collection

Qualitative data collection involves a diversity of strategies and techniques to obtain data in the form of experiences, stories, observations, and documents from participants (Flick, 2014). Like sampling methods, data collection methods which connect to the methodological approach and purpose of the research study strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings and link approach to product (Kline, 2008). Thus, I utilized data collection methods which aligned with narrative methodology.

Narrative inquirers share in the process of acquiring stories and co-constructing the narrative product for larger audiences to experience and understand a phenomenon (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Stories, then, become the unit of analysis and were collected through interviews, documents, and Narrative acquisition can occur through the exchange of story via interviews, through document review, through observation, and through other “field texts” which

tell the story of an experience (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013; Riessman, 2008). Thus, narrative inquirers seek to engage in interviews and ask participants for other documents that enliven the context, temporality, plot, and action within the story of their experience. I acquired documents and stories which help to enrich the description of the experiences of recruitment from African American men in counselor training programs.

The construction and development of the narrative is a central element of narrative inquiry. I collected data to explore the various layers of Perna's (2006) College Choice model while allowing data to exist both within and outside of the conceptual framework of this study. To contextualize the recruitment experience, I gathered admissions requirements and timeline for each participants' program to help situate the temporality of recruitment and admission into the program. Specifically, I requested participants' personal statements for application into the program as a facet of their self-identification and exploration at the time of their application. I performed individual interviews to acquire participants' stories of recruitment. Lastly, each participant crafted a letter to future applicants to help draw the realistic experience and aspirational hopes for new trainees with similar demographic histories. These documents served as field texts to help orient my understanding of the recruitment narrative and the self-narrative from the application time period (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

Recruitment and data collection continued until participant data began to reach saturation. Saturation in qualitative research denotes the phenomenon at which newly collected data begins to repeat or return similar statements or conclusions as previously collected data sources (Flick, 2014; Mason, 2010). To ensure saturation was accomplished prior to the completion of recruitment, I and my co-researcher began to develop codes and themes from the first three participants, noting the similarities and differences between the cases. I then recruited one final

participant and compared his story and data sources to the others. Discerning the many repetitive themes within this fourth story, I concluded that the data set had reached saturation.

Data Sources

I gathered three specific data sources from the participants: The goal statements from their time of application to their program, the interview and its accompanying transcripts, and the letter to future applicants. Below I described each data source and the information gleaned from that data source.

Hoping to get in: The goal statements. Two participants were able to submit goal statements recovered from their original admissions packet. The other two participants noted their disappointment in being unable to recover their documents and had a desire to “rewrite the documents” in hopes of fulfilling the requirements of the study. Their willingness to revisit this action spoke to the importance the participants attributed to their stories and the veracity of the project. These goal statements highlighted the time snapshot of participants from their viewpoint during their admissions and recruitment period.

Remembering the journey: The interviews. Following the submission of their consent forms and goal statements (if available), I scheduled a 120-minute interview with each participant utilizing a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix E). These interviews were held online via Zoom teleconferencing and were audio recorded for later transcription. I recorded field notes during and following each interview to help process my observations and experiences with each participant. Participants were given the option to not utilize the video aspect of the software. Participants were able to stop the interview at any point during the allotted 120 minutes. All four interviews lasted to the maximum 120 minutes. All audio recordings were

transcribed verbatim using Rev.com and stored on a password protected computer. Transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and decoded of identifiable information to ensure confidentiality.

Interviews provided room for the participants to explore and understand the gravity of their entrance and admittance into the counseling profession. Their reflections demonstrated four different journeys that connected in their relational gravity and the embedded narratives through which they navigated their personal career choices. As these men began to finish sharing their stories, I reflected their hopes for future clinical leadership and development in the field. I do this through the presentation of their letters to future applicants.

Inspiring who's next: The future applicant letters. All four participants developed the final artifact, the future applicant letters, at the end of their interview. Future applicant letters represented their reflection upon the experiences of joining their program and the information they hoped to impart to other African American male applicants about entering their program. The participants wrote each letter in first-person narrative within the context of their acceptance into the chosen program. These documents served as a present artifact to uplift their reflections about being African American and Male within their programs.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers have challenged the trustworthiness and rigor of research and inquiry since its inception (Donmoyer, 1996; Smith & Hodkinson, 2008). Tracy (2010) noted that quality qualitative studies must clearly the methods of rigor and trustworthiness to help substantiate the outcome of data analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided twelve techniques to support their four criteria for trustworthiness (e.g., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) within qualitative studies. However, Loh (2013) instructed narrative studies to highlight a selection of criteria to help strengthen the trustworthiness and rigor of their study.

Thus, I engaged in peer debriefing, member checking, triangulation, and reflexive journaling as methods of trustworthiness within this study.

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing engages those who share the experiences of the research topic but hold an external perspective to the researcher or participants within the study (Morrow, 2005). Peer debriefers serve as co-researchers who further establish internal consistency with interpretations and the analysis of narratives as they are reviewed within the analytical process (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, Morrow, 2005). Peer debriefing and validation strengthens the coherence, utility, and verisimilitude of the results through the lens of their own sense of living within the narrative themselves (Loh, 2013, Riessman, 1993).

I partnered with two peer debriefers throughout this dissertation process. The first, the interviewing peer debriefer, identified with a different racial and gender identity from me. This person completed the initial interview protocol with me and processed the findings of my personal experience undergoing the interview. The second peer debriefer, the co-researcher, held different a gender identity with me, but shared a racial identity. This person helped me to review and analyze the narratives given within this study. I shared the first three participants' data sources with the co-researcher, collaborating to develop codes and themes embedded within the stories of three of the four participants. After completing my own round of coding and analysis on the fourth participant, the co-researcher and I began to co-construct the various themes bubbling up across each narrative.

Member Checking

In most qualitative studies, member checking allows the participants to provide context, input, and interpretation to the data gathered and analyzed within a study (Creswell, 2009).

Oftentimes, member checking involves a review of the interview transcript, follow-up interviews, or a review of the data analysis. Within narrative analysis, member checking functions as a co-constructive practice which helps shape the interpretation of the story. Thus, gathering information from member checking helps to contextualize the story and increases the verisimilitude of the constructed narrative product (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Member-checking occurred following the final thematic processing of the narrative interviews, goal statements, and future applicant letters of each participant.

Each participant was offered opportunities for member-checking interviews. I provided each participant with the interview transcript and initial themes from our conversation to confirm or correct the messages embedded within the narratives shared within their documents.

Transcripts from each of the four interviews were acquired and coded during the analysis phase. Participants were given two weeks to respond and set up a member checking interview to confirm or expand upon the transcript, initial codes, and initial themes defined within their narrative. Within the email, I denoted that each participant needed to take no further action if they were comfortable with the findings of their narrative. None of the participants responded within the 14-day period. Thus, their initial codes and themes were brought into the final analysis.

Triangulation of Data

Data triangulation supports the internal consistency of the research material through intentional return and focus on the data sample and the varying ways data represent an event (Mishler, 1990). I assessed the narrative information within the interviews, the letters to future applicants, and the reflective admissions documents to help understand the context of the student's application within the timeframe of the story being elicited within the interview.

After member-checking with initial codes and themes from each data source, I began to investigate the characters, events, and plotlines mentioned within both the interviews and the goal statements. Similarities between stories and characters helped strengthen the identities and impact of particular characters or narratives to the themes evolving within each story. The statements the participants made to the future applicants were used as triangulation data to help better understand the context in which they described their institution and the experiences leading up to their matriculation to the program.

Lastly, the demographic data and the three documents helped me to better understand the temporality and context in which each narrative was nested. A brief review of the program's description, the institutional values, and the communities in which they were nested helped me, again, to better understand the context of the information the participants reported within their narratives.

Reflexive Journaling

As I co-constructed these narratives with my participants, I acknowledged the importance of questioning how my experiences and perspectives shape and form my interactions with these stories. Reflecting upon my thoughts and their derivation throughout the analytical process helped to strengthen the rigor of the study (Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017; Tracy, 2010) while supporting the melding of my own story within the story of the participants (Beuthin, 2014). Throughout the data collection and data analysis process, I engaged in reflexive journaling taking meticulous notes and memos of the thoughts and interactions I made with the data, peers who helped me construct themes, and participants who choose to share their stories with me throughout this process. This process helped to refine the narrative which led to the thematic outcomes of our interpretation of the data (Morrow, 2005).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves the methodical process of understanding and interpreting raw data to make meaning of the phenomenon under inquiry (Flick, 2014; Holliday, 2007). Qualitative data analysis can be both time-consuming and quick, detailed and comprehensive. Several qualitative data analysis methods require an outlined plan for engaging with the data (Flick, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). However, narrative data analysis requires a confluence of planned analysis and full immersion into the constructive process of narrative and storytelling.

Polkinghorne (1995) noted that narrative analysis does not reduce the narrator's story to simple themes but maintains the uniqueness and totality of the narrative, enlivening the integration of drama, action, and impact of words and messages upon experience. Thus, the analysis of narrative inquiry involves the transformation of field texts into re-presented research texts which narrate the collective experiences from the voices of those who have experienced a shared phenomenon (Hoshmund, 2005). The product does not become a generalized response to stories, rather, stories inform the experiences and supplement an idea of how one interacts with future and similar stories over time. Thus, this study produced a thematic analysis which uplifted the experience of African American men as they are recruited to and choose to participate in counseling programs in predominantly white spaces.

Riessman (2008) denoted four broad types of narrative analysis: thematic, structural, dialogic/performance, and interactional. Thematic analysis seeks to draw meaning from what is said within the narrative exchange. Though linearity is not the central facet of utilizing thematic analysis, Mishler (1995) explored use of thematic analysis to create a set of ideas derived from the confluence of what was said in the exchange and the restructured meaning-making from the

told narrative. Rather than being in isolated engagement with the information during analysis, narrative and its interactive characteristics between the “teller” and the “told” allow a co-constructive process that naturally evolves in human communication (Fisher, 1984). These themes arose with an acknowledgement that I, too, experienced the retelling of my participants’ stories through my own systemic and cultural frame and understanding of the narrative they chose to share with me for this study. Thus, I elaborated upon my own subjectivity to this topic at a later section in this chapter.

I used *Dedoose*, an online qualitative data management software, to help organize codes and provide accessible structure to understanding the narrative within each participant’s story. I began coding material using three phases of data analysis to help solidify the reconstruction and re-presentation of the narratives as a unified collective (Saldaña, 2016). This analytical process adapted Pastiopoulos and Buchanan’s (2011) analysis method. First, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber’s (1998) holistic-content and content-categorical narrative approaches provided an overarching method for analyzing the individual transcripts.

The co-researcher and I read through all data sources thrice to gather a sense of voice and patterns within the narrative and the interaction of narrator and audience. Although I read all four sets of data, my co-researcher only read three sets and helped to confirm the resulting codes and themes evolved within my analysis of the fourth participant. The first reading was an overall review of the participant’s data with no coding. Both me and the co-researcher read the goal statements first, if available, then the interview transcript, and, finally, the letter to future applicants. This practiced helped to familiarize us to the participant and to immerse us into the essence of the story told through the lens of the narrator.

In the second phase, we engaged in in vivo coding. This study followed Charmaz's (2014) suggestion for in vivo coding techniques:

- 1) Terms everyone 'knows' that flag condensed but significant meanings; 2) A participant's innovative term that captures meanings or experience; 3) Insider shorthand terms reflecting a particular group's perspective; 4) Statements that crystallize participants' actions or concerns. (p. 134)

In vivo codes invest in the pure messages of the experience through the words and vision of the participant. Thus, the co-researcher and I read through the goal statements and developed codes that utilized the words of the participant. This practice was repeated for each data source. After completing this in vivo coding process, the co-researcher and I met to discuss similarities and differences in in vivo codes to gain a better understanding of how we understood the participant and the participant's narrative. I shared field notes taken from the interviews to help my co-researcher to better understand the perspective and context in which I understood the participant's narrative during the interviews. The co-researcher and I drafted new field notes from the meetings and used them to develop axial codes. These codes were utilized within the third reading and coding of the documents.

Prior to a third readthrough of the data, we developed axial codes. Axial codes maintain the meaning behind the original in vivo codes, while gathering the essence of experience and interaction with the data during analysis (Saldaña, 2016). The co-researcher and I began to develop the axial codes after reflecting the meaning behind choosing particular in vivo codes. Common themes between in vivo codes led to the development of common codes and definitions which operationalized our understanding of experiences and statements within the narratives. Each data source had its own set of definitions and codes. From there, the co-researcher and I

read through the goal statements, the transcripts, and the letters one more time, coding with the newly defined axial codes. We collaborated to come to consensus on the final codes through online and in-person discussion meetings for each of the three participants' data sets. From there, we developed initial categories which related to the codes between and throughout each case. These categories were specific to the data sources without directly connecting or analyzing the thematic nature of the narrative between participants.

Once each transcript had undergone this analytical process, I returned to each participant via email to offer a member-checking interview. The email revealed the categories along with the transcript of the participant to ensure no meaning was lost in the transcription and translation of the narrative experience. Participants were encouraged to review their applicant letters and goal statements as they reviewed the categories from their specific narrative. Hearing no response from the participants, the co-researcher and I moved forward in developing the key themes across the participants.

Prior to our last meeting, I used the axial codes to understand the narrative of the fourth and final participant. I recognized that no new information or codes were present within this narrative. I explored the data with my co-researcher and discussed any incongruences that may have existed in the analytical process. Noting no incongruences or inconsistencies, we began to imagine across all four cases which codes and categories were most prevalent within the four participants' narrative. As all data was compiled in *Dedoose*, the major categories of each data source were compared to one another and held in conversation before discerning the similar messages and narratives as they related to the participants' stories. I extracted the quantity of codes from *Dedoose*, noting when and how often a code or theme was noted within the narrative of a data source. We then utilized this data to further understand the narrative across

the participants and across the data sources. We reviewed transcripts, field notes, meeting notes, goal statements, letters, and subjectivity statements to grasp the essence of narrative between all the participants involved. The codes were then overlain with Perna's (2006) College Choice model as the guiding framework to observe the impact of race, gender, community, and story in the overall journey of the participant's recruitment into counseling programs at PWIs.

Subjectivity

Addressing one's subjectivity to the topic and focus of a qualitative study helps to substantiate the potential biases which alter one's understanding and interpretation of the data (Preissle, 2008). Below is a descriptive narrative subjectivity statement to describe my interactions with the constructs of recruitment, African American identity, and male gender identity as it relates to this study:

It is a fascinating experience, growing up within the body of an African American man. I embody the very characteristics of the expected participants in this study and, yet, I rummage through my own personal narrative to discover the challenges and concerns I feel with developing and engaging in this narrative. I recognize my own hesitance in feeling like an adequate researcher, that my owning of the identities does not alone qualify me to do this work. That even hosting the educational aptitude of an emerging PhD'd scholar adds a deleterious hit to my ability to exist and be as African American male as the social identities have been constructed over time within me. But this work is, indeed, a deconstructive and reconstructive process into who I am and what it means to break the norm of how one might interpret the identity of "African American Man."

I was raised within a predominantly Black environment within the rural southeastern region of the United States. Being the youngest son of two boys in a household with a present

Black father and an engaged Black mother, I was surrounded with examples and opportunities to explore what it meant to be African American and to develop a sense of pride in that identity. My parents, being older than most other children's within my age bracket, used story to help illustrate for me what it meant to exist in this world as an African American. Though I never knew my grandmothers (both had died prior to my birth), I soaked in the oral narratives passed down through my grandfathers. Either through song or through story, I learned about my history and heritage through the words of the patriarchs of my family. Even as they passed away, I was imbued with high respect for the power of maintaining one's history through storytelling and communal sharing. These experiences draw me toward integrating narrative techniques into this dissertation study.

However, these positive experiences with developing my identity as male and African American countered the interactions I had with near-peer African American males of my own generation. I often experienced ridicule and grief from other African American males throughout my elementary and secondary school years due to my strong academic performance, my sensitive resistance to aggression, and my preference for art and music over sports and games. I was an outlier in my community and held much contempt against the other boys who treated me poorly. I became cautious of relating to other African American males for fear of not fitting the mold or understanding the correct performatives for the contexts in which we lived. While I have sought to heal these messages over time, these resistances to relationship may cloud my interpretation of story and experience from the perspective of the participants in this study.

It has been nearly 7 years since I entered into a counseling program. My journey to this profession enacts stories surrounding my religious affiliations and service, my academic support networks, and the people of color and marginalization who encouraged me to pursue

postgraduate degrees. The network and system engendered a confidence within me to not only aspire to pursue a graduate degree in counseling, but to attempt acquiring the terminal PhD in Counselor Education. My own experiences of recruitment involve intentional conversations with the faculty of the University of Tennessee both prior to acceptance and enrollment into my master's program and my doctoral program. Their willingness to support not only myself, but the fullness of my identities allowed me to feel safe and capable of doing the work within this field. Thus, these experiences color my expectations for how other African American men may understand their experiences of recruitment.

Interrogating My Subjective Experience

Bracketing in qualitative research involves the intentional process through which the researcher or primary investigators increase their awareness of biases, assumptions, and other “blind spots” which affect the outcome of a research project (Tufford & Newman, 2010). To substantiate the trustworthiness of this study, I found it important to undergo the interview protocol and to reflect upon the experience. Several years ago, I could have qualified as a participant for this study. I realized that my identities and experience influence the ways in which I understand African American men who choose to enter CACREP-accredited, master's-level counselor training programs. Thus, the interview and the corresponding reflection helped to clarify the interaction of participant and researcher narratives throughout this project.

Prior to interacting with any participants, I underwent the interview protocol with an individual who did not share the same racial or gender identity as myself. She self-identified as a cisgender, White woman. During this process, she explored both my racialized and gendered experience through qualitative demographic questions. The interviewer utilized the initial draft of the interview questions and prompts to help extract my recruitment and program choice

stories. The interviewer also prompted me to write a letter to future applicants in accordance to my own expectation for participants to do the same process. Lastly, we discussed the experience and processed the interviewer's observations. The following statements are findings from the bracketing experience.

The Bracketing Interview

In much of my dialogue, I shared my own awareness of other people's perception of my career decisions, noting family messages as the strongest voice in my career choice journey. I openly discussed my relationship with my parents and their experiences with careers and education. My decision-making process around career choice and major centered upon what seemed valuable to my community, noting instances in which members of my church and older relatives addressed me as "Doctor," "Professor," and "Pastor." These messages reinforced my own valuation of these career paths and my hesitance in pursuing a degree in "less prestigious career paths."

It felt easy for me to disclose my status as a first-generation college student in reflection, yet I remained aware that I did not have the words to define that generational status during my undergraduate experience. My words gave me an overview of the ways in which I discussed the value of education in the whole story of the African American male experience. Education was a way out of my hometown and an escape from the expected pathway of "being a statistic" as an African American male. I explored the statistic stereotype; I held a belief that many African American males did not complete a postsecondary degree, felt incapable of leaving one's hometown, and would be either arrested or murdered before the age of 30. Talks about stereotyping led to discussions about masculinity, Blackness, and the intersection of feeling "Black Enough."

I found myself disclosing what it meant to be “Black Enough” at home, with my peers, and in school. Although education was highly valued in my home, I acknowledged my hesitation to feel affirmed as a Black male academic. I disclosed that being academic did not fit the Black masculine ideal I had grown to develop through messages from media and other Black people. Throughout my academic journey, I noted wrestling with being “Black enough” for others and discerning if I fit the expectations for others. The concern for not being Black enough often pulled me away from predominantly Black spaces and toward White-dominant spaces when pursuing educational opportunities (e.g., attending a PWI for both undergraduate and graduate education). This challenge of discerning my identity highlighted my sensitivity to understanding the racial and gendered narrative of my participants as they explored their program choice journey.

My awareness of the tension between race, gender, and education filtered into my experiences of entering my graduate program. I became aware of my otherness as the only Black male in conjunction with the dearth of males in general in the program. I reflected on being the only person of color and finding solace in observing a faculty member who both shared my racial and gender identity within my program. I also highlighted my experiences working in a predominantly Black space for my assistantship. The confluence of White-dominant education and Black-oriented program development led me to develop my racial identity and to further orient myself back towards people of color and the importance of being “openly Black” towards the end of my master’s program. Thus, a focus on racial identity development became an aspect of my overall journey and an area of interest in my future conversations with my participants.

In discussing my program choice process, I mentioned the various programs in which I had applied. I noted three programs which all resided in PWIs of varying size. These interviews

were marked with mention of my level of comfort with “familiar” colleagues, namely other White students such as those whom I had interacted with throughout my secondary and postsecondary experiences. These highlights further engaged my awareness of the transition of my racial group orientation and its impact upon choosing counselor training programs.

When asked about my recommendations for enhancing the number of African American males within the counseling field, I pushed away from discussing financial support as the only facet of recruitment. I noted that financial support was important in my own process of attendance, but that I had been influenced to attend my particular program because of the connections I had made with individuals both within the institution I chose to attend and those at institutions I had declined. My resistance to center finances as a mechanism for recruitment drew upon my presupposition of “money as recruitment tool” within the grand narrative of program recruitment. Thus, my response focused on one’s connections to faculty members and acknowledgement of one’s otherness while providing options to explore the otherness with advisors or supervisors.

The Letter to a Future Applicant

After discussing recommendations for programs to recruit African American men, I completed a letter to a future applicant to the program I attended. Within the letter, I highlighted the need for Black males within the program and the counseling field. The need narrative emphasized both colleagues and clients who may be impacted by the applicant’s attendance. My letter encouraged the uniqueness of the individual’s perspective as a man of color and the special quality through which the program challenged me to explore my racial and gender identity, both intentionally and unintentionally.

I offered both encouragement and support to the applicant, noting various organizations and spaces where the applicant could find community while in the program. I also provided an avenue to personally connect to me and to others. I highlighted community to be a significant piece of my persistence away from family, friends, and familiar spaces. I noted my understanding of my existence as a Black counselor in the Black community. I emphasized that you may be misunderstood by colleagues and clients. I encouraged the applicant to understand the connection between the inane survival and persistence of African Americans through history and his deep capacity for healing within and outside the African American community. The letter ended with a call not for the applicant to enroll and also ensure that his impact to the field was acknowledged and encouraged.

Processing the Interview

As I finished the letter and read the letter to my interviewer, we discussed the experience of completing the interview and its impact upon my understanding of being African American and the impending participants of African American men. The protocol raised my consciousness regarding my own preconceptions about being an African American male counseling student and the ability to remember and fully explore that identity. The resulting conversation emphasized a need to more intentionally discuss race, gender, and masculinity within the participant interview. The interview also led to a deeper emphasis on writing, reading, and reflecting upon the letter to future applicants during the overall interview process. As I recounted the interview, I recognized the gravity of the stories I would receive and the voices this study would highlight within the counseling field.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with a brief review of qualitative research, narrative methodology and, specifically, the socioculturally centered referent through which I engaged in these narratives. I have outlined the specific narrative methodology used for this study, including sampling methods, data collection, and data analysis procedures. After taking a moment to review the methods for ensuring trustworthiness, I have outlined my subjectivity to the research at hand. In Chapter 4, I presented the findings of this narrative inquiry.

Chapter 4:

Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand the narratives of recruitment from African American men who choose to enter CACREP-accredited master's-level counseling programs. I used socioculturally-centered Narrative inquiry as my methodology to analyze the stories of four African American men who were enrolled in master's-level counselor training programs at the time of interview. Four major themes appeared from the narratives and the documents provided: *Relationships communicate importance, messages influence direction, collaboration fosters motion, and recruitment requires belonging* In Chapter 4, I focused upon the findings and themes evolved from the stories of the four African American males who participated in this study. Then, I introduced the participants and recount their stories of recruitment and program choice stories provided to me during data collection.

Each voice forms a unique and individual story situated within Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) bounded framework of temporality, people, action, certainty, and context. I used this framework to narrate the stories of each storyteller. Goal statements, interview transcripts, and their letters to future applicants vivify their stories and draw out the four themes embedded within each story. I concluded this chapter with the mutual findings embedded across all cases leading to a discussion of these themes and their implications for practice within Chapter 5.

Hear Their Voices: The Four New Students

In describing the stories of the participants of the study, it is important to understand the context of the interviews and the backgrounds of the participants who shared their stories. This section will provide a brief overview of each participant individually. These profiles will help to better situate the contexts in which they discuss discovering counseling, the recruitment and

program decision-making process, and their recommendations for recruiting other African American males to counseling. This section provides a brief description of each participant.

Bernard signed onto our chat at his new apartment in the middle of the day. The place was full of motion and action as he and his wife had just relocated to a new part of town. Bernard was in his Mid-twenties and nearing the end of his first year as a full-time student in his master's program. He spoke openly about the developmental tension in feeling accepted as a Black male in both predominantly White and Black spaces. Recently married to a White woman, he and his wife were coming together to create a new space and life together. Bernard spoke openly about his spiritual path to the counseling field and serendipitous connection to his current program of study.

Arriving home from work, Terrance connected to our chat with much energy and enthusiasm about the discussion topic. A man in his 40s, Terrance worked full time and attended his counseling program part-time. Terrance, who was in the midst of his second year of his counseling program, noted his shift of mindset after moving away from a predominantly African American community within his new state. He was adjusting to recognizing the impact he will make despite his past and the academic push in his current student life. Terrance spoke of the importance of connection and relationships in his journey towards applying to his counseling program.

Henry checked in as he took a break from completing an assignment for one of his classes. Henry was in his 30s and attended his program full-time. Counseling was a second career for him but provided a level of fulfillment missing in his previous position. Henry's openness to service through his former university and current fraternity influenced his interactions with Black and Brown youth and young adults. These interactions led Henry into

conversations about the dearth of African American male counselors with another counselor during a community service event. He mentioned the power of continuing his education as a first-generation college student and the privilege he experiences in doing so.

Aaron connected to the conversation voicing his gratitude and readiness to discuss his recruitment experiences. Aaron was finishing the second year of his program as a full-time student and was prepared to reflect upon the events which led to his matriculation into counseling. Aaron noted his pro-Black stance to mental healthcare, emphasizing his desire to pursue leadership and further education within the counseling field. His drive was to fill representational gaps. He observed the impact of a single conversation which began his pursuit of a counseling degree.

The following section provides a description of the major themes to help frame the narratives throughout the study. I will then explore the categories from each document and how those statements inform the overarching theme.

Overview of Major Themes

The participants' narratives developed the following four major themes: *Relationships communicate importance, collaboration fosters motion, messages influence direction, recruitment requires belonging*. These themes highlight four elements of participants' stories and the counternarrative they offered in reflection of their own journeys toward becoming counseling students. Table 4.1 contains an overview of the major themes, the corresponding categories, and their connection to the overall research questions. In the following section, I will introduce each theme and the categories which correspond with the theme. I will further construct the theme through the stories and statements of each participant as they reflect upon their experiences of choosing their current counselor training programs.

Table 4.1: Major Themes and Categories

Research Question	Theme	Categories
What are the recruitment experiences of African American men enrolled in predominantly White, master's-level, CACREP-accredited counseling programs?	Relationships communicate importance	• The power of familiarity and relationships • The pathway and process of career choice
	Collaboration fosters motion	• Guidance • Collaborative care • Barriers and hardships
What influences an African American man's decisions to enroll in predominantly White, master's-level, CACREP-accredited counseling programs?	Messages influence direction	• The importance of messages and expectations • Guidance
	Recruitment requires belonging	• The power of familiarity and relationships • Validation and encouragement

Relationships Communicate Importance

The first theme highlights the ongoing conversation of the participants, various characters embedded within their stories, and various levels of action that occurred between them to connote the importance of their career path and career choices. The participants encountered many significant persons, either momentarily or over long periods of time, who offered information about the importance of education, the importance of mental health, or even the importance of understanding their own identities. These relationships, whether personal or professional, helped participants to determine what ideas and values had become important to them over time. Friends, family, near-peers, teachers, and community role models all helped to shape participants' understanding of their personal identities as they related to their professional desires. Two categories from the interviews contextualize this theme: *The power of familiarity and relationships, the pathway and process of career choice.*

The Power of Familiarity and Relationships

Familiarity and relationships threaded the pathway toward participants' matriculation into the counseling field. Location, community, and institutional connection became components of each participant's decision-making process. Bernard mentioned that, although program offerings and prior connections were important aspects of his program choice process, he equally valued finding a program within his geographic location. He stated, "Yeah, it was pretty practical. I had to stay in [current location] because we really weren't planning on moving..." He had created parameters around where he could study counseling. His wife had begun to establish her professional career; Bernard also knew the difficulty of moving for education and wanted to work against the difficult transition. But he said, "Being a [city] native, I knew about it." Although he may not have known about the counseling program, his relationship to the area

influenced his decision to apply. Proximity-wise, he also admitted, “it also helped, too, that we lived two blocks south of the campus.”

Bernard highlighted several relationships throughout his interview that strengthened his desire to become a counselor. Within his narrative, he emphasized the impact of the church staff who refined his career path through denying his application become a staff member. Their encouragement to develop his evangelical skills refined his interpersonal skills while making him aware of his desire to help people find meaning and purpose. Bernard also noted the significance of his relationship with his counselor. Their denial of his entrance into full-time work at the church also influenced his shift towards entering counseling and, concurrently, desiring to become a counselor.

Bernard’s relationship with his wife supported his understanding of what it means to be a counselor. He noted, “My wife and I are talking about it because she’s central to me sort of coming to...becoming a counselor.” He noted throughout how observing her profession promoted his desire to enter the counseling field. He stated:

My wife is a therapist, by the way, too. She has her undergrad in philosophy and social work... She also has her LCSW, so she has all of that counseling experience, too, and so when we’re dating and conversing, I’m getting that knowledge from her.

His goals became coalesced with hers in providing culturally responsive and supportive counseling for underserved communities. Bernard was surrounded by examples of mental health care practitioners and the ways in which they uplift others to discover themselves and their purpose.

Aaron’s connection to his high school instructor helped him feel more comfortable talking about the field of psychology. However, after feeling frustrated with his enrollment in

two different online psychology programs, Aaron began to believe the counseling field was not for him. “Before I made the decision to go to [current institution], I was like, ‘man, listen, this is not working out. I’m about to do real estate...something completely else.’” Yet, his draw into his current program was the relationship he established with a friend who also was a student at his current institution. He said:

I had a friend who, um...and I missed...being in the classroom too, that was another thing. I missed like, actually, you know interacting with my professors and interacting with other students...and so, um, I had a friend who was at [current institution] and she kinda convinced [me] and said, “Hey, try it out,” you know?....And, um, you know, fell in love with it from there.

Aaron mentioned that he only applied to one counseling program, his current institution. He trusted the word and experience of his friend. Despite a challenging interview, he felt certain that this institution was the right fit for his graduate education.

Terrance’s draw into his specific program was, also, the encouragement of a recent grad. As noted above, Terrance’s relationship with the graduate was short-lived (they only met at the cookout); however, the impact of the interaction helped Terrance feel more comfortable about pursuing a counseling career. Yet, his greatest draw into the institution was their willingness to answer his questions and to remain present with him as he began to understand the application and interview process. He called in and connected with one of the Black female staff members. He noted:

I was calling them every day...it got to the point that I started knowing people by their first name. So, I build rapport with her, you know, and she knew I was Black too...I didn’t get any special treatment or anything, but I asked her all the questions I wanted to

ask. She told me who to go to for what, who to go to for this. You see what I'm saying?...And I didn't feel like I was bothering anybody. You know, I felt like she wanted to answer those questions

Terrance felt safe to explore what it meant for him to apply and participate in the program. Their patience to stay in phone conversations with him for long periods of time helped him to believe in the support he would obtain from being a student at the institution. The support of the institution combined with the support of peers and family enticed Terrance to apply and matriculate into his current program.

Henry had three relational connections into the counseling field. First, his relationship with the school counselor during his service experiences encouraged Henry to consider what it meant to become a school counselor in his area. Her words of support and encouragement provided Henry with the insight and awareness that he was a major asset and influencer to other African American male students within the school system. Henry then felt comfortable to explore a counseling program at his undergraduate alma mater.

Henry's connection to his former PWI demonstrated a shift in his relationship to the higher educational institution. Although he still acknowledged the potential to be othered as a Black male (as seen in his interview process), Henry acknowledged the positive influence he could have. "I was the only African American they had, uh, in there," he said. "And so I was kind of sitting back and listening to the...the questions and whatnot that they were asking, um in the interview process." Having been at the institution previously, he was less surprised as the racial and gender disparity that existed within the counseling program.

Henry also established rapport with a faculty member within the counseling department. When considering the career shift, he knew it would be important for him to talk with a current faculty member. He said:

...so, I looked into [school counseling]. I kind of read up on it a little bit. And then I took the opportunity to go back to my alma mater and talk to one of the professors who was in the school counseling department....I had a conversation with her and, you know, we literally just talked like you and I are right now. And she was the one who was like, "You have to be in this program"....We talked a little bit about my background, about my story and everything. And she became excited about the idea of me possibly, uh, entering into, uh, the school counseling arena. After that it was just like, "Alright, I'm going to go ahead and take a leap."

Establishing a relationship with a faculty member helped Henry see himself within the classroom and within the overall program. He felt convinced that he belonged within the counseling department and that he had affirmation from an ally within the department.

In this section, the participants all noted the ways in which their familiarity with the institution or the semblance of familiarity helped them to better understand the culture and community of their programs. Their relationships with faculty, staff, alumni, peers, and family provided information which the participants could use to navigate the career decision-making process. These relationships, then, were a key component to communicate the importance of career as they voiced their process of becoming a counseling student.

The Pathway and Process of Career Choice

Every interview began with an invitation to share one's story about the early pursuit of a degree in counseling. At a point in their interviews, all participants spoke of childhood

experiences which played a role in their careered lives. Bernard felt certain that he would pursue college following high school, knowing that whatever career path he chose would require postsecondary education. He stated:

I got my degree because that's what has been instilled in me since, I think...since maybe kindergarten...I didn't really internalize what going to college meant until middle school and high school, but all I know was I have to get As and Bs in elementary school and I definitely have to get As and Bs in high school, and you're going to go to college and you're going to get a degree [and] a scholarship to pay for it. Like, that was the story that was told to me.

He was not a first-generation college student and noted his return to his father's state of residence for his undergraduate degree. Bernard mentioned how his desire to be an artist was quickly shifted from adult messages regarding its value as a career. He said, "I started drawing in second grade, told adults in my life that I wanted to be an artist. One adult said, 'Be an architect. They make more money.'" From there, Bernard decided to shift from art to architecture up until his first semester of undergraduate experiences. This early message of seeking a financially stable career remained a consistent influence throughout the narration of his career choice process.

Henry, too, noted the impact of finances and career stability as a factor of his early career decision-making. Having experienced the financial hardships of being in a single-family household, he said, "...I wanted to make money because I wanted to do stuff like take care of my mom and make sure she was okay because I knew what it was like to have nothing." His career choices were limited to what he observed from other adults and what he knew would provide financial stability for his family system. Henry observed his mother taking night courses and

struggling to manage her family and her finances. He later stated, "...it's kind of unorthodox.... I got my degree in accounting...kind of following in the footsteps of, of my uncle and everything." Henry's uncle guided Henry to pursue his first degree at an institution at which he would receive his undergraduate and graduate education. Yet, Henry was not shy to highlight the disconnection between the accounting field and what his "heart desired."

Terrance had fewer exemplars of academic prowess. He wrestled with his identity as an academic and struggled to see himself as someone capable of acquiring a college degree.

Terrance said:

I never had any type of dreams or aspirations as far as like going to college...like I was a smart kid and I'm not like tooting my own horn. I got, like, awards and everything that say like I was a pretty intelligent kid...but...I didn't take school seriously...so I mean, I barely graduated high school.

Terrance grew up in a community with few people leaving the community for school or a career. There were even fewer African American male role models demonstrating what it meant to hold a career. He said he never saw "real professional Black people" and "wears-like-suits every-day-to-work type of people" in his community. He noted living with his grandma but having few layers of accountability from males within the community or within his own family system. When thinking about careers after high school, his friend's desire to join the military influenced his process of career decision-making. He stated:

I graduated from high school and me and a friend of mine, you know, we trying to figure out what we're going to do with our lives or whatever. So where do we go? We go to the armed forces recruiting center or whatever.

This experience turned negative, in which his recruiter attempted to divide him and his friend based on Terrance's high aptitude score on the ASVAB. The interaction lead to their enrollment in community college, Terrance's first interaction with Black academics, and, eventually, Terrance's completion of an undergraduate degree in sociology.

Aaron, in his focused recount, outlined the influence of a psychology high school teacher in his career choice process. He stated:

You know, I kind of got started in the psychology field in high school. We had like an elective course that I took in high school and just became interested in the...field of psychology. Um, I think from that point, I was kind of leaning more towards industrial psychology, working more with businesses.

The interaction with this teacher provided Aaron a clearer pathway for finding counseling and psychology as his career path. Although Aaron's teacher provided him support in understanding the field, his peer groups created division in his future outlook. He said:

I guess I sort of always had kind of two separate groups of friends....I'll say three separate groups. My friends that went to this college prep program...who...all had high aspirations for themselves...and I had friends who, you know, who I grew up with in, you know, the street environment, and who were, you know, selling drugs and going in and out of jail...umm, and then in the ...middle of that was my family who wanted high aspirations from me, but didn't really understand how I would obtain it, how achievable it was.

This statement framed his full understanding of his social and academic self in high school.

Aaron faced many challenges feeling "stuck in-between two worlds." He stated, "I had one side that kind of pressured me to be realistic...whatever that was. And then I had people who saw the

potential in me and wanted me to be the best I could be.” Aaron wrestled with the expectations of others who believed his academic challenges meant he was doomed to selling drugs or in need of the discipline of the military. His mother even attempted to sign him up for the Army to prevent Aaron from being influenced into delinquency. However, Aaron was determined to graduate and pursue undergraduate study. After a hard conversation with his brother about his friend group, Aaron said:

He saw what they were doing and thought that I would would be leaning towards [selling drugs], not understanding that my mind was like, I’m gonna...get to college no matter what. Um, so that was always my mindset, even though I didn’t believe that 100%, but I knew I was gonna at least try.

Similar to Terrance, Aaron felt uncertain of his ability to finish high school. He saw few adults graduate from high school but felt encouraged in his interactions with his psychology teacher. He was, however, quick to note that the inspiration came from someone outside of his race. This realization further impacted his current and future career aspirations. He said, “I need to play my role, um, because even like going back to my mentor in high school, he was...an Italian White male, you know what I mean? I...really never had any African American educators.” His recognition of a racial and gendered gap in academia inspired his desire to engage and pursue psychology, recognizing the lack of African American influence within the overarching field.

Terrance’s interaction with African American peers, professors, and, later, graduate students inspired his orientation toward the counseling field. He moved, got married, and started a new job prior to completing his degree at a community college. Before leaving, however, he recounted the lack of advising support:

Man, I was so close to graduation...I had so many freaking credits, man. I should have definitely had a degree...but for whatever reason, you know, I wasn't getting no proper, you know, advisor or whatever it might be. So I would just [be] taking classes 'cause, you know, school was kind of fun. Like I like learning...Next thing I know, they like, "Hey, you are about to start running out of money." I'm like, "Wait, running out of money? What do you mean?"

He noted similar situations with his Black male peers at the institution. However, his relationships with Black professors helped encourage him to see his value and place within education. He stated:

...met two Black professors early on...one woman, Dr. Kyle who she encouraged me....She was encouraging me and my homeboy....she's a person who I credit to...inspire me to...really do more with myself. And...Dr. Hightower, who he actually ended up dying by suicide....But just seeing a Black man in a position where he was, you know, it was something so foreign to me.

These leaders encouraged him to continue his education while demonstrating the opportunity for him to complete his degree even after moving.

When Terrence recognized the need for completing his bachelor's degree, he was astounded of his accumulation of credits and the lack of information he received about graduation or career development. He stated:

It was a lot of things that made me have to go back to school. Like, I started working for the state...and then the thing about the state...is you can't even apply for certain jobs unless you have a bachelor's degree...They don't care if the bachelor's degree is in

fanning flies, you need it....So I just went back to school, got that degree, and as soon as I got that degree, my employment status got better.

Being uninformed about credit hours and the impact of degree completion graduating with a bachelor's degree, Terrance found career stability after navigating a chaotic path towards attaining his degree. However, he, like the other participants, found dissatisfaction in the work despite the stability.

Bernard eventually graduated with a liberal arts degree, having tried several majors in business, physical education, and music following his entrance as an architect. He mentioned that his heart for ministry drove him to an internship at his church, where he met his wife and other mentors. These individuals helped Bernard to better understand his passion for people and his predisposition for serving others, yet, ironically, pushed him towards personal development prior to furthering his pursuit of full-time ministry. He said:

And so, I found that...I was under the expectation I was going to, like, get full-time work at the church, but they decided to change things up because they just needed more...or, I needed more development according to them. Which is something that I agreed with too. And they also wanted to change up their search for a full-time pastor like someone who's, like, trained not only maybe with a degree, but also with some experience.

This barrier inspired Bernard to engage in counseling, which heightened his awareness of his interest in the field. He reformed his understanding of anxiety management, yet developed a refined belief involving his financial and masculine role and responsibility to his family. He stated:

I felt like I was doing my duty as a husband while I was still working at the church part-time, but at the same time, I knew I was neglecting some things too....I guess the idea

that I had was, “Alright, I’m just going to compartmentalize my responsibilities. All my energy is going to be focused. All my intellectual and physical energy is going to be reserved for work, or maybe just my intellectual energy...and I’m going to try to save my emotional energy for my marriage when I come home.” And so I said, “what kind of job...is out there where I don’t have to use that much emotional energy? Ah, technology!”

Bernard hoped to bifurcate his intellectual energy with his emotional energy in hopes of understanding his purpose for career path. Despite his passion for people, helping, and development, his belief regarding his family role and responsibility shifted his career purpose.

However, soon into his work, a growing dissatisfaction evolved. Bernard noticed an inability to separate his work as an IT specialist which his drive for understanding and engaging the anxious experiences of his clients:

During that time, yeah, I got what I wanted. We were making the money that we needed, and, yeah, it was an intellectual job for sure. I had to spend a whole bunch of intellectual energy there because I had to learn a lot of stuff, but now I also noticed that I’m still spending the emotional energy that I’m trying to reserve...I’m still spending it at that job....It’s like people in general, they need psychoeducation. People need psychoeducation.

Like a lightbulb firing off, Bernard recognized through conversations with his wife (who is a licensed clinical social worker), his counselor, and other helping professionals, that much of his interactions with clients and customers resulted in the same psychic strategy. Bernard began to discern that his skills were oriented toward an innate desire to offer guidance and support. Thus, Bernard started to wonder if he could still provide for his wife and family while also pursuing a

career that better fit his skills and predispositions. His wonderings and conversations led him towards choosing counseling.

Henry had been successful in his accounting position, yet leadership changes in his workplace set a precedent for a career change. Over the years, he had developed a strong relationship with the CFO of his company. This connection did not transfer that connection to the CFO's replacement. In reflecting on the change, Henry noted, "...as a result, um, basically...I knew that this wasn't going to be a position that I, you know, even though I did...I...enjoyed it because of who I was working for not necessarily the work that I did." Henry found the job "gratifying. But at the same time it wasn't fulfilling." It was around this time that he joined a fraternity and became more involved in service with middle school students. He reflected:

I just found a passion in talking to the kids, um, especially those in middle school and high school. Really kind of being able to impact and see the changes in a day...spending a full day with them, it was like, you know, they started off where, you know, they had these attitudes and everything. And they didn't want to do it. But by the end of the day it was just like they were engaged. They were like, "wow."

He realized that his passion was supporting these young men in their academic and personal development. He stated:

And so for me, it, um, in 2017 when I knew it wasn't going to work I was like, "You know what, I do not want to go back to corporate work. I- I don't find it, um, pleasing. I don't find it fulfilling. And I want to do something different."

During one service event, a school counselor noticed Henry's prowess for working with African American males and his passion for developing their sense of self. "Her and I had a

conversation,” he stated, “and she, she just said to me, she was just like, ‘you should be doing this.’ And I’m like, ‘What and why?’” As he reflected on their conversation, Henry said:

She kind of explained to me a little bit because she was actually going on maternity leave. Uh, she was like eight months and she was going on maternity leave and she was just like, “We need more men like you guys,” ...talking about my brothers....So when I knew that I was going to part ways with my job, I was like, “You know what, let me just look into school counseling.”

Cautious about the shift from mathematics to emotions, Henry engaged with the idea of applying to a counseling program. His first attempt was to gather information to return to the educational space he knew best, his alma mater.

Aaron knew that his academic path led to psychology in some way. Yet, practically, he found it difficult to find other African Americans immersed within the field. Aaron knew his prowess for writing and research would benefit him as he sought employment but was unprepared for how both majors would lack racial diversity. He stated:

So what I noticed right away was that, you know, first of all, all the...African American students were either in communications or they were in business...so in my psychology courses, I was usually the only Black student in my psychology courses...as well as my English courses....It was...it was culture shock. It was a lot of culture shock because from [my hometown high school], we had kids from all over....It was very diverse in my high school...

For the first time, Aaron reported experiencing microaggressions and racial tension within his academic spaces. Although he did not disclose the specific actions that helped him persist in his undergraduate study, he was able to continue and complete a double major at his institution.

Despite having begun his academic journey focused on industrial and organizational psychology, he chose to enter into a technical writing job for an insurance company. Finding incongruence with the tasks of that position, he began working with children with autism. In explaining the two careered experiences, he stated:

‘Cause part of...the job with the insurance company was like, I just need something after I graduate. Anything that comes after I graduate, I’m gonna take. And at the time, I thought that, okay, this could be part of me building that, you know, resume for my writing career or whatever it was. But before I even did that, I was working at a juvenile residential facility.

He reflected that his experiences in the residential facility discouraged his desire to do direct care with individuals in intense settings. Yet, his writing work did not fit his ultimate career goals. He returned to school online for industrial psychology and moved to a new state, hoping the change would provide new careered inspiration.

After beginning to work with adults with substance abuse concerns, Aaron switched to counseling psychology. But with the online format and lack of support, he began to question whether he should remain in school. He noted:

I probably was on and off with the counseling at [online institution] for maybe two years. But before I...made the decision to go to [current institution] I was like, “Man, listen, this is not working out. I’m about to do real estate...something completely else.”

The balance of expenses, workload, and a lack of motivation for online education promoted his belief that “the work as kinda meaningless...there were no real interactions...” and “it was just hard to...see a future in it...jobs was scarce in that field.”

In lieu of being enticed away from education once again, Aaron interacted with one of his friends, a female former coworker from his early days in his new location. Her reflections about her experiences within her counseling program inspired Aaron to apply to his current program. He realized that he missed “being in the classroom” and “interacting with [his] professors and interacting with other students.” Again, in concern that he was not a good fit for his particular program, Aaron gave himself an ultimatum in applying. He noted, “I’ll try to apply to [current institution]. If they do accept me, I’m gonna go full steam and do it. If they don’t, then I’m going [to] switch gears and try a different career.” This risk eventually yielded to his eventual invitation to interview for the counseling program.

Terrance wrestled with his own concerns for fit and matriculation possibility when discerning his desire to become a counselor. He recognized that his passion for people in his work at the state came with specific training that, he believed was not transferrable to other fields. Again, the fragility associated with his position pushed him to discover what was so important in his career. He stated:

Everybody told me the state was a guarantee. As soon as I got to the state, they started laying people off. So I just barely missed...the cutoff....So I was able to not be laid off, but it ain’t no guarantees in none of that stuff, man....It kind of scared me. I was like, “Yo man, I’m just out here with kind of like no skills, no real expertise.”

Like Henry, negative interactions with his supervisor heightened Terrance’s anxiety about the fragility of the position. He noted his belief of education being a pathway for escape. At first, social work looked like the correct pathway for advocating for his former Medicaid clients and for the elderly. However, when he explored a social work master’s, he noted, “...I saw how many hours you needed to do to complete that program...and it kind of scared me because I’m

like, “Well, I gotta work and stuff, man. Like, how am I going to do something like that?”

Terrance became discouraged, thinking that he was trapped in his profession despite feeling called into a more direct helping profession where he was his own boss.

Luckily, an interaction with his partner’s cousin gave him new insight to his possibilities of becoming a helper. He reflected:

My girl at the time...her cousin, he had just got finished getting his master’s from [Terrance’s current institution]. We was at a cookout like on the 4th of July and I...was impressed....Even as...a grown man, bro, like, because...education has always been in a sense the way out for me.

He overflowed with excitement, emphasizing that he saw himself as the guy’s groupie as he asked about the pathway to acquiring a degree in educational leadership and counseling. In conversation, the guy encouraged Terrance to apply for the master’s counseling program at his current institution rather than a social work program elsewhere. Having no experience with the counseling profession, this interaction promoted his awareness of a field that best fit his professional desires.

Bernard applied to his program through the surreptitious nature of its location, its affordability, and its alignment with his future career goals. He was unaware of the importance of accreditation, but, he knew that the program must fit with his best learning style. In reflecting on program search, he noted:

Yeah, it was pretty practical. I had to stay in [town] because we really weren’t planning on moving, and, um, between internet classes or online classes and in-person classes, I felt like this is a kind of field where I would benefit more, and even as I compare my hybrid classes to my just lecture classes or my discussion-based classes, I benefit more

from my discussion-based classes. So, I'm staying in [town] and going to a school in person, those are the two big things. Affordability as well, because after my undergrad experience, it's like: you got thousands of schools offering the same thing. Why pay \$100,000 as opposed to \$24,000.

His online searches for affordable programs led to his current institution. Better yet, the program was nearby, which felt like "providence, serendipity, fate, God opening a door" to him. Furthermore, discovering that there was a streamlined admissions process that did not require GRE scores further confirmed his excitement in applying to the program. He submitted an application and knew his only remaining barrier was the interview.

Bernard's interview consisted of on-site group and individual components. He recounted writing an essay related to a counseling term and answering questions with other applicants. What he found significant was how different he was in comparison to the other applicants. He stated:

I was the only, um, African American heterosexual male in the interview. I was the only African American male in general, actually (laughs) in the interview. I think...I think there were two or three men altogether and that's myself included.

He recounted the distinction in his sexuality after mentioning his wife and other males mentioning male partners. But the lack of racial and gender diversity stood out to Bernard. He recounted other women and other religious identities being mentioned and the institutions insistence upon having a diverse learning community, but not being apparent during his interview. Despite the lack of diversity, he felt drawn to the faculty and peers in the program.

Once Henry made the decision to return to school, he determined that his former undergraduate institution provided all the necessities for his graduate education. He stated, "The

only program I applied to was [current institution]. I did my research, found that they were CACREP-certified. I had a relationship there being an alumni there already.” Henry held a lot of trust in the institution and knew enough from his experiences as a choir director and a student to support his return to the institution. However, as a parent and a person in close proximity to family and other supports, he knew his options were limited. Henry also stated:

...but it’s close enough to, to where I live that I knew I could make the commute. Uh, with my children it was just like, okay, I’ll figure out how to, um, kind of work around those types of things that I have to work around to make sure that, um, I have the, the time that I’m supposed to have with my kids and be able to, um, pursue this degree at the same time.

In returning to school, Henry’s priorities shifted. His decision to get a counseling degree had ramifications for his children’s wellbeing and his own ability to balance workload. He encouraged himself, saying, “[current institution] is going to be it. I’m going to make it. I’m going to get in there...I’m not accepting no for an answer.”

Henry mentioned meeting with a former professor to help assuage some of his worries within the application and interview process. From there, he applied and received word of the on-site interview session. Although he knew there would be other steps to receiving admission, Henry noted his excitement and caution in demonstrating his abilities before other students. He stated:

In the interview process, what I loved about the interview process and made me the most nervous about the interview process was, number one, you’re being interviewed by more than one person. Probably about, uh, three to five people at a time. What was crazy about it was there were at least, I believe, three faculty and two students that were

there....current students...I guess in their process it gives you, um, some diversity in, in the way that you respond and how you respond and, and what not only the faculty thinks as far as whether or not you're a good fit, but if the students who've been in the program and stuff feel that you're a good fit as well...

Henry was quick to rationalize the presence of the other students in the midst of his program interview. Although the individual portion of the interview gave him insight about the interview protocol, he highlighted his experience as an African American male amongst other applicants of different backgrounds. As he discussed a conversation about admission with his current professor, Henry said:

The one think I remember....after I got accepted [his professor] [said] it to me...people...become like crabs in a barrel at times because when...when a question is asked and one person's answer sounds like it's right, other people try to piggy back off of what it is that they say....But I was the opposite of, you know because their answers sound nice. But for me, you know, 'cause a lot of what they talked about was diversity. Um, for me, it was a completely different mindset, a completely different avenue, um, of thinking....And they were younger than me as well. Um, but you're taking these types of things and you're answering as best as possible based on what it is that you know.

It was clear to Henry that in emerging into his program, he would have additional work to explain and explore what his specific lived experience brings to the counseling profession.

Like the others, Aaron only applied to his current institution, trusting that the recommendation from his friend would provide the unique experience he needed for success. He believed that the physical interactions of student and faculty would prove to be the panacea to his academic issues with online education. He recounted having positive experiences during the

application phase. He said, “They were really helpful with everything, let me know what I needed when I needed it.” Yet, to his shock, the interview process was much less smooth. He stated:

So we did like an interview, and since...my grades at my previous institution weren't that good, I had to do like two interviews. The first was sort of, um, like, I don't know. I still have talked about-spoke to [the faculty] yet about it, but I wasn't...I just wondered if they did this on purpose. I felt sort of attacked, you know what I mean? They were kind of like, questioning, you know, my character, how serious I was about this, and you know, um...I obviously...I was prepared to explain why I did so poorly in my previous institution. I was prepared to explain that, but I wasn't quite prepared to try to, you know, defend my character.

Aaron noted that the persons questioning him in the first interview were “two older white men” and that he was “explaining [himself] to people who wouldn't understand [him] anyway.” Aaron mentioned, as the interviewer noticed the teeming anger Aaron was feeling, that the interviewer said, “Hey, like you're gonna be accepted, we just....want to see who you are.” Aaron continued to carry those questions of the intentionality of their methods into his second interview with more faculty members. He reported that it was slightly better but remained cautious of everyone's perception of his personality and worthiness for entry.

In all his decisions, Aaron still noted his yearning for opportunities to attend a predominantly Black counseling program if one were available or existed. As he reflected on his group interview process, he stated:

I guess I could point out when I felt like, okay, I was the oddball in the room was the interview, um the classroom, uh, you know, while you're in the classroom and you know,

you have all these people who don't look like me, except for maybe one or two in a class of 20. So, you know that, that was...that was interesting, but as far as my decision to, um, again, it just goes back to there not being many predominantly black institutions who are CACREP...

Aaron acknowledged his understanding of the power of accreditation. He also uplifted that his career choice journey may have looked differently if there were available programs at HBCUs with the outcome and prestige of a PWI education.

Terrance's process of matriculation involved many phone calls to administrators at his current institution. He mentioned his level of nerves in returning to school. He ruled out social work at other institutions and stuck with counselor education at his current school. Terrance continuously questioned whether he was worthy of entrance into the program. During group interviews, Terrance surveyed the room to get a quick gauge on the applicant pool. He noted:

It was a little bit intimidating; you know what I'm saying? Because it was like everybody was like kind of dressed up. I was dressed up....It was intimidating because you was wondering...can I say something that's gonna make me get, like, the boot?....But, you know, at the same time though, like letting them know, "Hey man, this is who I am."

Like, I don't really know how to be faking too, you know?

Even after completing interviews, Terrance noted an unusual interaction between people of color within his department. He reflected:

We had like a big group interview and then they broke that big group interview down into like smaller groups. And whether it was big or small, I was still pretty much one of the only Black men in the room....And I'd be looking around. I see a couple little sisters and I'm like, alright. They always representing...And then I see a couple of cats or whatever.

I'm like, alright, I'm trying to give a little head and eyes or whatever see. And you know, that's the other thing...the responses that I get from other Black men...you bruh, it be sad.

Terrance started looking for other Black and African American males to help him feel more stable about his impending transition. Yet, he received more cold responses from the other Black persons in his department.

All in all, Terrance marveled at the juxtaposition of his anxiety then to his experience at the time of the interview. He mentioned, "And I've had nothing but a great experience man. Like I'm almost the face of the university now, man."

The participants encountered numerous characters prior to their application and interactions with their specific counseling programs. These relationships helped participants to develop core values within their various and intersecting identities, while also helping them to recognize what held importance within themselves and their communities. Aaron's narrative surrounding family support at the end of high school reinforced the importance of education to young Black men. Bernard's relationship to his ministry mentors and his wife reinforced the impact of his racial uniqueness to pastoral and clinical care to his community. Terrance's peers and his interactions with faculty uplifted the narrative that he was a student worthy of furthering his academic career in spite of his home and community upbringing. Henry's care and connection to leadership reinforced that, while pragmatic outcome for careers are necessary, fit and feel provided a deeper sense of worth and impact within his community. These relationships developed a framework for recognizing the impact of character interactions upon personal and professional identity development.

Collaboration Fosters Motion

Relationships helped the participants to explore personal and professional identity development through their engagement with similar and dissimilar others. Yet, the collaborative action between characters promoted motion toward their eventual matriculation into a counseling program. Participants spoke of various personal and systemic barriers that increased their hesitation to move forward in their academic or professional careers. Yet, collaborative action with others helped mitigate barriers between participants and their process towards degree attainment. Both in reflection about program choice process and in looking ahead to potential applicants, participants highlighted narratives and messages to reassure themselves and future others that they were not alone in becoming counselors. Their insecurities were uplifted as realities that soon provided an orientation to successful matriculation into the counseling program. The following categories from the future applicant letters and the goal statements helped to define this theme: *Guidance, collaborative care, barriers and hardships*.

Guidance

After I prompted participants to discuss what they would tell another African American male applicant to their program, many opined lessons or strategies which helped them persist within their program. Aaron lent his applicant a premonition about impending challenges, saying “Prepare yourself for the bad days...” while inviting the applicant to “...take time to consider what you are expecting out of this program.” His voice guided the applicant to reflect as a means of confirming one’s place within the program in the midst of challenges. Henry continued this trend of looking ahead as he stated, “My motto has always been: Your situation doesn’t determine your destination. Know that your destination is waiting for you on the other side with

all of us.” He believed that, in accordance with his own narrative journey into counseling, one’s present hardships does not represent the conclusion of one’s story.

Bernard and Terrance also encouraged applicants to consider the gravity of their admission to support their decision making. Terrance stated, “Now that we have that out of the way, I want to encourage you to take this task very seriously.” His tone invited the applicant to again use reflection as a means for understanding the importance of their acceptance into a counseling program. Bernard, too, promoted this intention of gravity as he wrote to the applicant

I don’t recommend [slowing down] as a spiritual technique or even a counseling technique. I recommend this because as you practice this skill, I believe that you can learn how to make your unique experience at [redacted] a meaningful one – an experience that is deeper than just a means to an end.

His call invited the applicant to observe the impact of reflection and exploration in his maintenance of his sense of self and belonging within the program.

These messages of guidance were not only focused on program persistence, but also personal and professional identity development. Aaron made a direct statement to help the applicant understand the changes he will encounter:

There will be peaks, valleys and many challenges throughout this journey. Make sure to cherish each moment, learn from losses and celebrate each win. Please take your time as you travel through this new chapter in life

Yet, he also encouraged the applicant to directly observe the power in his racial identity, stating, “Be unapologetically Black and strive for greatness. Prepare yourself for the bad days...” Aaron reminded the applicant to be true to himself in his process of becoming a counselor. Terrance, too called forth cultural guidance in the developmental process of the applicant. He

wrote, “Please remember, you have the power of your ancestors behind you.” He believed that the development of one’s identity as a counselor is a task best accomplished in communion with generations before today.

Bernard recognized the importance of highlighting the uniqueness of the applicant’s racial and gender identity as a facet of his guidance and reassurance for the applicant’s safety to grow. He stated,

You will be accepted for you. I am tempted to be cynical about my last statement because it is a cultural expectation (call it cliché maybe) for people in general to be accepted for who they are today, and so it can be hard to receive “genuine” acceptance. Nevertheless, let me stress that [redacted] will respect your identity.

He stressed the typicality of language, expecting the applicant to have heard the typical rant of diversity and inclusion without active or intentional response from the organization. Yet, Bernard’s experience as an African American male and the corresponding safety shaped his guidance and encouragement towards the applicant. He later returned to this point of inclusion through another guiding directive:

Seek opportunities to build a network that involve people who are like you AND who are not like you. It may be easier or more natural to do the latter because of [redacted]’s demographics, but you will be surprised by how often you will get the opportunity to involve people in your network who are similar to you.

Bernard found it meaningful to highlight the lack of isolation another African American male might feel in his experiences on campus. He demonstrated his confidence that the applicant could find another individual with similar experiences.

Aaron provided reflective guidance about racial and professional identity development in another form. He stated, “Think about who is relying on you and what tools you need to obtain to successfully help those individuals or that community that is relying on you.” Aaron invited the applicant to recognize his admission into the program was not an individualistic event, but a collective success for the greater African American community. He highlighted his frustration of isolative and culturally unresponsive mental healthcare towards people of color in his guiding inquiry, “What do you want to represent as a person of color in a profession dominated by White western influences and typically ignore the needs of people who look like us?” Aaron believed in the power of reflection to uplift the African American male; his questions reflected his pathway into his commitment to the counseling profession.

These men provided powerful narratives of guidance to their letter recipients. However, their statements also observed the impact of self-care and collaboration to the strength and development of applicants’ counselor identity.

Collaborative Care

The participants demonstrated a counternarrative to the hypermasculine, aggressive, and competitive image of African American men. All letters contained a section of collaborative care for future applicants. Aaron penned an auspicious note to his applicant, saying, “take good care of your overall well-being and continue to fight for each day for what you deserve.” To Aaron, self-care was a mechanism of resistance and reclamation. Henry, too, noted the power of self-care as resistance to the hardships within the field

While entering this field remember that self-care is imperative so find the things that you love and make sure you do them whenever you need to take a break from reality, Try to find others in the field that you can collaborate with so that you can help each other along

the way. Whenever you feel like you want to give up...Don't. Call on your counter parts in the field, or if you can't talk to them you can call me.

Henry promoted the idea of de-nesting oneself from the harsh reality of being African American and male within the Counseling field, having reflected upon his own challenges prior to scribing his letter. Again, he guided the applicant to take breaks and to continue to discover himself within the counselor development phase. Here, collaboration was a key component of his guidance. He shared the impact of simply finding "others in the field" to share in the challenges the applicant will face. Being someone who shares the applicant's identity, Henry narrated his willingness to join the applicant when he needed the break.

Bernard noted that growth within the counseling field is a collaborative process. He wrote, "If our paths cross one day, I hope we can get the privilege of helping each other grow as counselors." Bernard recognized that a piece of his growth and development was tied to his interaction with the applicant. Aaron and Henry respectively demonstrated their passion for these future applicants within the following two sentences. Aaron wrote, "You are not in this alone." To which Henry echoed, "If no one else, I am rooting for you." Terrance joined in the chorus, saying, "And you also have the support of brothers like me. You are not alone. And if you ever...have any questions or concerns, you can feel free...to reach out to me at any time."

The voices of the participants reached out to applicants, yielding an invitation to join the community and to partner with them as they grew and developed their own identities as African American Male counselors. Their statements pressed applicants to envision themselves in this community of African American Male counselors where their admission was an invitation, an encouragement, and a validation of their belongingness to the counseling field. While their collaborative statements encouraged the participants to enter into the counseling profession, the

participants' narrative also highlighted the barriers which slowed their movement toward becoming counselors.

Barriers and Hardships

Two of the four participants were able to gather their goal statements. Within this document, the participants specifically spoke to the barriers and hardships that decelerated their motion towards their counseling programs. Both participants voiced their thoughts about potential barriers to matriculating into their programs. Bernard spoke openly about his concern regarding the financial and occupational barriers to entering his program. Bernard wrote, "Working full time as a service technician is an apparent barrier to pursuing my graduate studies," and "Paying tuition from our income is a potential barrier for [partner] and me." Despite the barriers, Bernard openly discussed his commitment to the program and to counseling, observing that he would "work to decrease [his] working hours in order to devote enough time to [his] studies." Bernard even acknowledged his willingness to apply for financial aid to pursue this program to commit to "[making] counseling more comfortable and attainable for folks who find it uncomfortable and unattainable." Bernard demonstrated an ability to identify these barriers, highlight the challenges they presented, and articulate solutions which make these barriers a mild hindrance to his matriculation into his chosen program.

Henry, however, observed his barriers to entering the program through a more racialized and gendered lens. He declared that his barriers to the field were less about resources and more about visibility of other African American men in the field. His pursuit of a counseling degree and even personal counseling came through a lack of role models. Henry wrote, "Another reason why I would like to be admitted into the program is because there are not many minority counselors that I have seen especially in the school system." His disappointment in the lack of

African American counselors bled into his observation of the lack of African Americans within the field and his own discomfort of processing home experiences at school. In discussing his experiences with school counselors, he noted:

...but, to be honest, at times it was hard to talk to them because they really didn't understand the struggle or the life that I lived, so their ability to connect with me and be able to give me advice that I could truly take with me and apply with me didn't really sink in.

Henry hoped that this lack of representation provided an opportunity for his program to admit him, stating that the admission would allow him "to help change lives which [he] truly [felt] is needed in the times we are living in." Henry was willing to be direct when addressing the distrust and barriers he experienced towards counselors within his own community.

Henry and Bernard both shared the impact of counseling experiences as a part of their decision-making process to enter into counseling as a profession. Bernard shared the impact of personal counseling for his marriage and his pursuit of counseling. He wrote:

[Partner] has opened my eyes to the benefits of therapy by counseling me through my own personal anxieties and influencing me to proactively seek a counselor on a regular basis. I always heard other people talk about the benefits of receiving counseling, but I had never experienced it until I began seeing one on my own...I am inspired to help people work through social and emotional challenges the same way that [partner] and my counselor have helped me work through my own obstacles.

Bernard attributed his desire to engage his counseling aspirations because of the experiences he had with others within the field. He also mentioned the common, beneficial experience with the proximal characters in his worldview who have also engaged in counseling relationships.

Bernard's community has modeled positive outcomes and openness to his future career. Those positive messages encouraged him to pursue his own treatment and, subsequently, to discover his own desire to become a counselor.

Henry, however, acknowledged that he has counseling experiences, yet these experiences were often less than positive. He noted:

There were times during my middle and even high school years where I had to go to speak with my school counselor and it did help, but, to be honest, at times it was really hard to talk to them because they really didn't understand the struggle...

For Henry, these experiences exposed the gap between his everyday life and the perceived experiences of counselors with whom he did not identify demographically. Again, Henry allowed himself to use these less-than-positive interactions to inform how he believed his presence was needed within the field. His statements reinforced his desire and commitment to counseling and the impact his presence could make to people who share his racial and gender identity.

Both men shared about their hardships, their prior work experiences and the meaning derived from these stories embedded within their narrative. For Bernard, highlighting work experiences and counseling experiences provided him room to display his ability to reflect, his willingness to respond, and his openness to growth. He informed his program of the skills he acquired within various industries prior to his application to their program. Bernard attributed delegation skills to his managerial positions and confrontation skills to his leadership training. In reflecting on these experiences, he wrote, "All of this experience has taught me how to meet deadlines, adapt to change, use critical thinking to solve problems, become a leader, and interact with people with patience and good ethics."

Bernard opened up about the outcome of counseling towards his marital relationship. He spoke to the impact of being a husband to his understanding of what it means to maintain a strong marriage. His partner's willingness to push him towards counseling further solidified the power of the field and his desire to "...help people work through social and emotional challenges the same way [partner] and [his] counselor have helped [him] work through [his] own obstacles."

Henry integrated his stories of hardship into his understanding of whom he wished were available to him during difficult areas of his development. Henry spoke of being bullied during childhood and the impact of fatherlessness upon the economic structure of his home. He wrote:

My mother became a single mom when I turned two as my father decided to leave as a result of a drug problem he developed while he was serving in the armed forces. This left my mother with just a high school education to raise 4 children. We faced very difficult times during those years which included nights we went to be hungry, times where we didn't have heat and having to wear hand me downs because we couldn't afford clothing.

Henry highlighted the systemic impact of childhood disparities upon him and his siblings. Rather than telling the story for demonstration of need, Henry remained open about the positive ramifications of such experiences and the appropriate clinical skills they helped develop. He wrote, "it was during that time that I started to realize what mattered most which was helping others." He further noted,

...but it didn't stop me from succeeding because I had people who were in my corner who spoke to me about my circumstances and made sure that I continued to succeed so that I did not end up where I was.

Henry's statement exposed a key component to his and Bernard's resilience. These statements highlighted a catalyst to develop and integrate difficult, defining moments into decisions which

led to their application for a CACREP-accredited counseling program: Relationships. These relationships develop a sense of comfort and preparation for the participant to recognize the collaborative action of others within their career journey.

These relationships connote how individuals may understand the world around them and their place within that world. Yet, collaboration, the intentional action of engagement and support, enhanced participants' action towards becoming counselors. People in various relationships took time to help these men understand what counseling is, what their roles could be, and how to successfully engage their skills within the field and the classroom. Aaron's high school teacher highlighted his proclivity for psychology. His friend also encouraged him to not give up on his dream and to pursue a new route to accomplish his dream. Bernard's wife, counselor, and mentors asked difficult questions about his careered life, helping him navigate what job would maximize his joy and align with his calling. Henry's uncle guided him towards exploring the possibilities at a PWI. His willingness to lean into the racial disparities helped him to find community and, later, service opportunities that shifted his career identity. Terrance battled feelings of inadequacy and concern regarding his academic ability. However, discussions with faculty, staff, and military recruiters encouraged Terrance to explore his capabilities and to lean into the experiences and emotions he sought to develop. Collaboration became the medium through which the participants navigated the narratives they held about themselves from their lived experiences and interactions.

Messages Influence Direction

Participants received messages, either personally, culturally, or systemically, which shaped the direction of their academic and professional choice process. These messages guided participants to see different careers and characteristics as more valuable and desirable within

their racial and gender groups. The voices of the characters in their stories guided their understanding of their roles within their community. Their interactions with mental healthcare spaces provided implicit voicing surrounding whether they could see themselves as African American males being successful and belonging within their programs. These messages dictated the roles participants would serve within a community or profession if they chose to engage in a particular direction. For some participants, their passion to uplift and become the counternarratives influenced their direction towards the counseling profession. Two categories from the interviews and future applicant letters captured this theme: *The importance of messages and expectations, guidance*

The Impact of Messages and Expectations

In sharing stories about their pathways and process of choosing their counseling programs, participants uplifted the impact of messages and stories from family, friends and society. Each participant identified a statement or an experience which highlighted their understanding of counseling and the roles and responsibilities they felt to their communities and their identities. The participants noted various myths surrounding mental health or higher education which affected their path towards counseling. These messages, whether implicit or explicit, became major mechanisms through which they developed a sense of worth and meaning prior to choosing a counseling career. These messages were broken down into the following subthemes: messages about belonging in education; messages of belonging in mental healthcare; myths of mental health, masculinity, and community; dispelling myths; and faith and calling.

Messages about belonging in education. The participants shared stories connected to their awareness of their presence as an African American man in an educational setting. These

experiences involved both explicit and implicit statements which shaped the participant's sense of belonging within the academic environment.

Aaron was encouraged to use his innate skills of discernment and writing within the psychology field. When recounting an interaction with his high school psychology teacher, he stated:

...He would kind of throw little hints at me, here and there, be like, "Hey man, you may...you should really think about, you know, psychology. I think you'd be really good at, you know, dealing with people..." Like when I write papers, I guess the way

I...dissected people was kinda interesting to him, so he kind of threw it in my ear....

That simple encouragement led Aaron to take the psychology elective and, later, enter a psychology major at his alma mater. However, Aaron was not the most exceptional student, straddling between serious academic peers and unmotivated community friends. He noted that he felt "stuck in-between two worlds" of his peer group and "would do as much as [he] could to get by in high school" to a point where he almost did not graduate. Concerned and disappointed, his mother threatened military recruitment as an alternative to school. His brother, who struggled with substance abuse and dropped out of high school, even called and warned Aaron about the dangers of avoiding education. Aaron received those messages of the importance of education and said, "I'm gonna get to college no matter what. Um, so that was always in my mindset, even though I didn't believe that 100%, but I knew I was gonna at least try." His family involvement and teacher's declaration highlighted the importance of education despite the conflicting messages from his different peer groups. These messages of education persisted throughout his post-secondary academic career.

Bernard received information about which kinds of careers held more impact and purpose among adults within his community. He recounted a story from his childhood where he was told to avoid coming an artist. He remembered adult saying “Be an architect. They make more money.” Thus, his young mind gathered that his career had a purpose of being pragmatic (for personal finance) rather than just creative or artistic. These messages from childhood infiltrated his consciousness as he sought to tell his family and friends about his impending career shift from Information Technology (IT) to counseling. Bernard recounted:

...Dad is a big supporter of continuing education. I was a little hesitant to tell them because it’s like, “Here I go again, telling my dad that I’m not actually doing IT” or, “here I go again, telling my dad that I’m changing careers again...”

His hesitation echoed the voice of his younger self realizing that the career path he chose may not fit his family’s expectations for him. Yet, Bernard continued:

...but, yeah, he accepted it. He was cool. One piece of advice I do remember him saying was like, “yeah, you want to kind of beat in your career and your values and stuff when you’re 30,” So I guess I have like two-and-a-half years...

From there, he received affirmative messages from his mother, his best friend, and his wife that the former life in IT did not fit his values or his needs for emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Instead, his move toward counseling felt more congruent to the individual they knew him to be.

Henry believed that higher education in predominantly White spaces would provide him with very little community or connection to other African Americans. After an administrative error changed his undergraduate plans from a historically Black university to his eventual predominantly White alma mater, Henry recounted:

The transition occurred where, you know, I had to be in this university. So, you know, at first it was just like, “Eh, all right. Well, I guess I’m just going here to, you know, do the work and graduate and leave.”...It was just like... “I’ll connect to a couple people.” You know and, “Let me look for my Black crowd.”

He believed that this particular space was not built for him. His desire to attend an HBCU was fueled by his desire to be surrounded by African American culture and community. Having “always grown up around White people, Asian, everybody...” Henry wanted college to be a way to “stay connected” to his Black identity while acquiring an education. He believed that his undergraduate and current institution would host a few people of color with whom he could connect. He felt the initial disappointment in attendance and even resisted his uncle’s encouragement to apply to this school. Henry even noted that his persistence at the institution hinged on his connection with his African American roommate and the campus gospel choir.

Terrance spoke openly about his own disbelief in becoming a candidate for the program. Throughout his story, he noted community members and teachers pointing out his struggles with academic work. Those messages fostered his identity of being a bad student. As he reflected on the counseling program application process, he concurrently remembered of his academic struggles to matriculate and navigate undergraduate studies. Terrance said:

I was literally just checking a box so that I wouldn’t be able to say, you see, you didn’t even try. So I had to apply...Like if I wouldn’t have applied, then, you know, I’m wasting my potential or whatever, whatever...But I really wasn’t expecting them to say, “Hey, come on in.”

He had anticipated defeat even before application. His awareness of his academic differences drafted a narrative of who should be offered admittance into the counseling field. These feelings,

though tied to their academic narratives, began to bleed into participants' discussions of their sense of belonging as practitioners within the field.

Messages of belonging in mental healthcare. Messages of belonging in mental healthcare explored the stories and interactions the participants shared as they encountered mental healthcare practitioners and settings. These messages contextualized their impending experiences as counselors as they filtered the messages through racialized and gendered lenses.

Aaron discussed feelings of displacement for an African American man to practice or even discuss mental healthcare. Entering into his program, he reflected upon being the only African American male. Furthermore, he noted the uncommon texture that aligned with his community's understanding of what it meant to be a mental health counselor. Although it was difficult for him to matriculate without having models of African American male counselors, Aaron felt confident that he would begin to disrupt that rhythm.

Aaron experienced a similar encounter in his interactions with White students and staff at his PWI and in working at psychiatric hospitals and youth residential spaces. The distinct lack of African Americans and people of color on staff stood out to him. First, he noted, "When I worked in a juvenile residential center during my undergrad, all the kids there, of course were African American." This expectation of residential spaces being populated primarily by African Americans provided insight to the inequity of African American presence in residential and mental healthcare youth facilities. He then discussed his observations of the racial identities of the staff members:

...Not only were they not African American, but these were [regional] White folks who have traditional views...When I transitioned from that to...working at [alternative school]...the autistic kids and the special needs [students]...we had a few African

American students, um, a few people of color, but the majority by far was, um White women...It was me, and another African American male, but the rest were, uh White women...And now I'm currently working in an psych hospital...and...well none of the clinicians are African American. Um, and there's like a lot of like, Black psych nurses and med techs...but...as far as like the therapist, um, no. The...doctors, no. The psychiatrist, no.

Aaron's interactions with these mental health care settings reinstated the message that African Americans and people of color are disproportionately displaced as the individuals requiring these services and White individuals being the service providers. He clearly dictated his discomfort with the racial inequity in leadership and service provision in mental health.

Henry, too, mentioned the difficulty in finding representation and place for the African American male within counseling spaces. To him, the shift would require systemic change. He stated:

We have to start and we, we have to be able to change the system 'cause, you know, you want more people in this field. You want more people, more African American males, especially in this field? We have to feel like we belong. You know, and we have to feel like we're appreciated. Um...and compensation is a start, but also hearing us is a...we can't go around feeling as if our voice doesn't count...because sometimes it's administration that is the...roadblock...to making the schools great.

Myths of mental health, masculinity, and community. Myths of mental health, masculinity, and community centered the expectations and messages the participants received about mental healthcare, being male, and being a member of the African American community.

The title of myth refers to the incongruence of what they saw or heard and what they later discovered as they neared a career in mental healthcare.

Both Terrance and Aaron mentioned stories of encountering mental illness among community and family members but knew little of the healing process nor about the field of counseling. Terrance recounted his community's response to individuals experiencing mental health concerns:

I ain't even really know nothing about mental health back then. All I knew was there was people in my neighborhood that gave them labels. Like that's crazy Kenny....Like that was what it was I mean....And you ain't know if he was crazy or if he was drunk because he be drunk more often than anything else....So now, of course...I'm all educated. I'm like, "Yeah, he was [co-occurring]..." Like a whole bunch of people in my neighborhood that I just didn't know back then, you know?

Aaron, too, mentioned low awareness of mental healthcare concerns within his own family system:

You know, it's funny because I look back now...You know hindsight is kind of like the best teacher. You know...I kind of look back now and I see like, you know, I question like, well, dang, was my mom really an alcoholic back then? Because back then it was just like, she just drank a lot, she came home and she was drunk...It wasn't really, um, mental health...I thought that she was doing something detrimental to her health and her mental health....And for the rest of the family, and then you know, so really nothing was said to me about mental health. Nothing...I don't think I became aware of it until maybe during my undergrad, maybe.

The idea of mental healthcare felt foreign to Aaron when reflecting on his lived experience with family and community members. The idea of intervention never seemed like a possible solution to addressing the behaviors of those around him.

Bernard reflected on his experiences of anxiety, insecurity, and racial identity development during his childhood and adolescence. In doing so, he began to explore his experiences of counseling within the African American community:

...I think my counseling experience growing up was typical. I've never been to counseling because the African American community doesn't do that, anyway. Um, it's funny because I don't want to speak for the whole African American community because there's even subcultures in our own. So the subculture, the African American culture that I was a part of, counseling wasn't a thing. If you wanted to go to counseling, you talked to your family.

He began to discover his community's alternative to counseling but found challenges to receiving emotional support from male peers or family members. Bernard stated:

Um, to answer your question about if I was able to talk to men in my family, though, about problems, um, it wasn't stated explicitly, and, I think because I have [trouble] when it comes to confronting problems. I think I get that from my bio mom. So, if the men in my family, whether it be like, my uncle or either my stepdad or my bio dad or cousins my age...if their body language showed that they don't want to talk about something, or I've known from past conversations they won't understand where I'm coming from, I took that as a learning experience to say, "Yeah, don't talk to me about this stuff. Try to find somebody else to talk to."

Bernard developed an understanding that males, especially African American males, did not talk to one another about these challenging emotional spaces. Bernard was aware that he was already different enough from both his White and African American peers, noting that “in the White kids’ eyes, [he] wasn’t black enough, and in the Black kids’ eyes, [he] was Black on the outside, but they didn’t really know how...down [he] was with the African American set.” Wrestling with his development of racial and gender roles and performatives, he found it more comfortable talking with his mother and his wife about the emotional challenges of his teenage and early adult years. In time, he found comfort with his stepdad, but still found emotional vulnerability a challenge until after counseling and, furthermore, entering his current program.

As men, the participants discussed the role of their careers for family provision and image maintenance. Henry noted that his pathway into his original career came from his observation of his uncle’s prestige within the accounting field. He stated:

I spent a long time thinking that I wanted to be an accountant. You know, kind of following in the footsteps of, of my uncle and everything...it pushed me to kind of go and do exactly what makes me money and not necessarily what my heart desired.

He learned through observation how careers function. Watching his uncle do accounting gave Henry an understanding of the successful outcome of adult careered life. In similar fashion, Terrance observed how careered African American men in his community also had more stability and function within the community:

So, he worked at UPS, and he was the first man that I ever knew who got custody of his own kids. So, for me, that was kind of powerful because I’ve...I just never knew any man...and it’s so funny because now I’m a man, who, you know, I have custody of my daughter...it’s like...just having people like that, you know, you just never know...was

that an influence? Like, did that affect me? You know, making sure I was a good parent for my kid because my dad wasn't necessarily in my life....and then [there] was [other man]....And what [other man] did was he gave back. He gave his time, like, he was out with like....scout masters....and I'm like, "I wonder if that's why I'm a community volunteer...especially with...Black adolescent males."

Terrance developed a sense of purpose in his maleness and his Blackness through observing these other African American men in his community. He recounted those observations, both of careered presence and personal absence, as subtle messages about what maleness meant to him and his community.

Dispelling myths. The participants also left room to question the messages and myths surrounding what mental health careers meant to them and to those around them. In some ways, their entrance into the field was to help adjust people's perceptions of what it means to be an African American man within society and, then, within the counseling field.

Henry's reflection on his career journey and what was and was not told to him in career exploration led to his passion for supporting other African American men's exploration of the counseling field. He said:

You know, realizing a lot...of Black men don't understand what it is like or what it is to be a school counselor. You know, they're not informed as to what it is to be a school counselor or the true meaning....I mean...kind of getting that out there in and of itself...the understanding of why there's a need for...Black school counselors.

He wanted to uplift the dearth of African American men within the field and to reach out to interested persons to join him. Bernard, too, knew that visibility regarding African American mental health could further publicize how a counseling career functions

I think, if I'm speaking about African American men who are like me....I would say:

Helping us know the roadmap or the avenue to becoming a counselor, because the narrative I received is: you go to a four-year school, get out in four years, and get a job....If you can be more real with the narrative and say, "If you want to be a counselor, yeah, you might have to do six years of school, but here are some things that will help you with at least those four years before you go into...counseling. Oh, and those emotions that you're probably told to push away from the rappers and maybe even the male figures in your life or the gangsters or the athletes eating soup, here's why emotional health and emotional knowledge is important.

To Bernard, informing young African American men about counseling was, also, an effort to deconstruct the emotional incongruencies he experienced as an African American man in development.

Even Aaron chimed in to note that his community did not prepare him to know what it meant to be Black and male and counselor. He responded to a question about bolstering African American male recruitment in saying:

The knowledge...you know, realizing a lot, a lot of Black men don't understand what it is like or what it is to be a school counselor. You know, they're not informed as to what it is to be a school counselor or the true meaning. Um, so, I mean...getting that out there in and of itself, um, you know the understanding of why there's a need for the Black school counselors.

Aaron spoke from his own inability to connect with school counselors. He discussed later of his fractured interactions with staff members who he believed were supposed to function as school

counselors. He desired to rewrite the narrative of having an incompatible school counselor relationship.

Henry also found it important to share how what others believed were deficits to his development provided greater insight to client conceptualization and care during his interview. This insight, he believed, set him apart from other applicants during the interview. He stated:

...You know, one of the questions I'll never forget. ...umm, basically spoke about...single-parent households and...how we felt about single-parent households when it comes to the children and the time spent. And a lot of them felt like, you know, these kids they lacked the attention and time from their parents....And my perspective was completely different because I came from this area. And I'm like, you know, you have to understand that you have a mother who is trying to take care of her children. At the same time, one job doesn't always do. So they may be working two or three jobs at a time trying to provide, but, at the same time, they're up at 9:00, 9:30 at night trying to make sure their kids' homework is done, checking their homework and stuff....These are the things that you got to recognize that these small things that you don't think about are actually things that contribute to the way that these kids respond when they go to school.

His lived experience gave him a unique perspective on addressing the student's need from a multi-level approach. This action began to disrupt the deficit model of an African American man coming into his particular program.

Terrance also noted that the understanding of deficits was flawed. As he thought about recruitment and admissions processes, Terrance, highlighted his perspective on the broken admissions standards:

So, let's just say a White person who has grown up with...all the privilege of a two-parent household...going to a better school if not the best school...having enrichment activities, you know, going to camp, going to piano lessons....Like, so if a person has had all those things, then yes, I would want them to have a 3.75 or 4.0 GPA because your light's not turned out....And so if a person has a 3.0 or 2.75, but this person hasn't even been able to eat a proper diet....this person may not have the time and the focus on the actual academics, but they may have everything else.. And guess what? If this person had all of that other stuff over there, they may have a 5.0.

Terrance believed that the systemic, economic, and sociological barriers one encountered directly impacted their academic abilities. However, he found it meaningful to note that people with these barriers during development are as capable if not more capable when the barriers are removed.

Each participant, however, desired to uproot the African American male myth that mental health was not a priority for this demographic. Terrance reflected on a journal article he read recently:

I was reading just reading an article the other day saying how, like, scary it is right now to be a Black man because, you know, we supposed to be so strong and so this. And because of that, it's leading us to substance use, alcoholism, depression, higher suicide rates because we scared to look weak or what we believe would make us look weak....That's why I've been trying to be kinda like a poster child man lately. You know, letting people know, "man, hey, having emotions, it's okay," you know?

Terrance understood that the narrative around African American male mental health required modeling to help shift the story away from resilience and strength and toward vulnerability and acceptance.

Faith and calling. One message that remained within each story and throughout the narrative of several participants was the role of faith to their own story, the African American community, and their relationship to mental healthcare. For Terrance and Bernard, their understanding of faith and religion influenced their trajectory toward the counseling field. Terrance noted his predisposition for supporting disenfranchised individuals who were “taken advantage of or bullied.” He referred to this characteristic as having “that type of spirit.” In reflection, Terrance said:

Something I haven’t necessarily mentioned, but [I have] a strong connection to God, too... Like... I’m a believer. So that is, uh, of course affected the way that I do things and live my life too... I’ve definitely taken some of the spirituality classes and I’ve taken a deeper dive into all religions. Um, understanding how faith plays a role in not just my life, but in like everybody’s life whether they have it or the lack thereof... Especially like as, as being a future counselor, like it’s a, it’s a great asset to know how you can use it and when to use it and you know who it’s gonna work best for....

He continued emphasizing that his proclivity for understanding faith’s connection to his counseling journey comes from his belief of African Americans mostly having some kind of faith. He had developed an idea that “[Faith]’s in our DNA.”

For Bernard, knowing that his faith was a major mechanism for his journey towards counseling, he had to deconstruct what pastoral care meant to him and to others within his community. Feeling called into the counseling field, he wanted to ensure that he was not

overlooking God's call for ministry. At the beginning of his application process, he stated, "I've also thought about, 'does [doing ministry] mean I actually have to have the title of pastor?' And even as I continued trying to answer that question today, I said no...". He uplifted that ministry and mental healthcare can occur concurrently. His faith, however, is deeply ingrained with his understanding of the function of mental health. He believed that he and his wife "were called to just develop authentic relationships with people..." as a part of what "God [is] calling [them] to do as a couple." Although they were not directly providing pastoral care to clients, Bernard stated:

I feel like God is still calling me to a pastoral calling without the title....I don't want that to be taken as: with every person that I'm counseling, they're also going to get evangelized. No. What I am trying to say is: people, I think, are looking for meaning, and becoming a counselor will help me to guide people to their meaning, to find their meaning...

In Henry's work within the gospel choir, he recognized that he had a call for care and counsel after a critical incident with a choir member. He recounted, "we had rehearsal, like rehearsal was like so strong, um, in God that we didn't even get to finish rehearsal, so instead what we did was we just started to pray. We prayed for probably about 30 minutes..." One student was particularly perturbed. In dialoguing with the student, he discovered that she was suicidal and had made attempts to take her own life. In hearing the information, Henry noted his calm demeanor and willingness to remain present with the student. That moment influenced his decision to become a counselor. He stated:

...That really changed a lot, um, for me because to see someone who....and she talked about, you know, thinking about taking her own life. I mean so much that she did that

should have cost her her life, that I truly feel that God had a, God had His hand on her....and during that period of time that was just like, okay, these kids, these are the reasons why I do what I do. Because if I can save, if I can help one person then I feel like I have done what it is that my life is [meant for]....That's why it became a big role...It just catapulted me into wanting to make sure that I kept a relationship and that I knew about my students.

For Henry, his calling to care for his students melded into his continuing responsibility to serve each student as a counselor in the field.

Messages over time shaped participants' beliefs around who they are, how they function, and where they might succeed in their world. Henry's relationship with his father hampered his ability to develop as a child within his family system. However, his experience and vulnerability were the tools needed to connect and relate to other young Black men during his service in schools. Terrance observed careered men and knew they existed in contrast to those who wrestled with sufficient mental health issues. He ruminated with these messages in various careers hoping to offer supportive words and advice that echo what he hoped to hear from his program. Aaron's interactions with mental healthcare workers and clients prior to his matriculation demonstrated a systemic layer of brokenness within mental healthcare. Yet, his passion for developing a counternarrative about African Americans in psychology fueled his passion towards writing and leadership within the counseling field. Bernard heard many messages about career, education, gender roles, and race that shifted his values and vulnerability. Those same voices strengthened his recognition of his abilities and supported him to pursue counseling and clinical direction. The participants journeyed through the sayings and the scriptures, hoping to find a program and a career which they could call their own.

Recruitment Requires Belonging

Within every story that the participants told about program choice and intentional actions of recruitment, there was a rumbling conversation that was less about the direct action of an institution with the applicant. Instead, participants provided stories that uplifted their desire to belong within their program and within the counseling field. Participants noted that seeing themselves within the program, whether in its values or in the program's valuation of their worth, helped them to know that they belonged within the counseling world. Authentic, deep conversations with alumni, intentional recognition of skill aside from GPA or GRE scores, and appreciation of the whole person functioned as mechanisms to help participants see themselves and future others as members of a community to which they belonged; they were able to know they were meant for counseling rather than having to prove they were worthy of placement. The following categories helped to define this theme: *The power of familiarity and relationships, validation and encouragement*

The Power of Familiarity and Relationships

Although all four participants highlighted the impact and importance of relationships within their interviews, the two who submitted goal statements also offered brief insights to relationships helping them recognize their sense of belonging to the counseling profession. Both participants developed a narrative interest in the formative relationships which helped them understand their path towards becoming counselors. Bernard consistently mentioned his wife as a source of inspiration for applying to the counseling program. He connoted the impact of the degree to their future opportunities of practice together along with their present ability to infuse family systems knowledge into the successful interactions of their relationship. His goal statement infused information of support systems, from former supervisors, to his wife and in-

laws, to even the spiritual mentorship he has received to help inform his decision towards becoming a counselor.

Henry, too, mentioned the relationships within his family system, his fraternity, and his school choir as influential to his career decision making. Each relationship provided critical incidences which led to his awareness of counseling ability and prowess. Henry, too, acknowledged and affirmed the presence of relationship to increasing his self-awareness of mental healthcare and the impact he could make in the field as an African American male.

These goal statements developed a timestamped snapshot of these participants prior to their full acceptance and matriculation into their programs. Their interviews display the deeper explanations and recollections of their journey and the ways in which these critical incidences continued to impact their understanding of the recruitment and program choice process.

Validation and Encouragement

The participants grounded their letters to future applicants in a spirit of invitation, validation, and encouragement. Henry, Terrance, and Bernard all offered a word of congratulations to the applicants. Though Aaron did not directly use the word congratulations, he supported the applicant's decision to enter the field in saying, "Make sure you cherish each moment, learn from losses and celebrate each win. Please take your time as you travel through this new chapter in life. I promise it'll be a great story to share one day." The participants gathered that another African American male's entrance into the counseling world is a celebratory and memorable event. Moreover, Henry captured his excitement for a same race, same gender colleague in saying, "Your space in this field is imperative and my hope is that you become the greatest counselor that you can be." He stated his expectations of his colleagues' work and the outcome of his eventual matriculation into the counseling profession. There is no

room for questioning or second-guessing the worthiness of an African American male's entrance into the counseling field.

In some format, each participant highlighted how the counseling field was in need of another African American male's presence. Henry wrote, "Upon the completion of this field of study, you will become an agent of change, a direct line to those who are in need, and a role model to many who may not even know. Our field needs you." His statement, here, uplifted his vision of the role of the African American male counselor. He saw his work and his future colleague's entrance as an agentic manifestation of mental healthcare support and access within his community. Bernard echoed Henry at the start of his letter. He wrote

Forgive me if I sound redundant, you have probably heard this before...the field definitely needs you. As I think about it even more, you have probably heard about how the professional world needs you in general. With that being said, I just want to congratulate you for taking the first step in pursuing the profession.

His invitation promotes the weight of responsibility that comes with entering the counseling field with their ascribed identities. He celebrated the applicant's discovery of the field, much like his own process of celebration throughout his career journey and resurfaced the redundant nature of his own repetitive messaging about becoming a counselor of color.

Henry also highlighted the impact that this applicant will make to younger African Americans within their community. He wrote, "In your heart and mind be great and be the change that you want to see or maybe even the change that you needed when you were younger." Henry validated the experience of racial and gendered disparity within the counseling field. Aaron, too, encouraged his applicant to see the power in his application process, stating, "This will be one of the major decisions in your life."

Despite their invitations becoming a letter of celebration, Aaron, mentioned that “this journey will not be an easy one.” Terrance also tore into those challenges, stating, “Understand that to whom much is given, much is required. That means that because of this amazing opportunity, you will be required to work harder and dig deeper than you ever have.” Henry affirmed the incongruencies in the needs of the role, the uniqueness of racial, gender, and professional identity, and the compensation one receives following the receipt of a counseling degree. He stated

Your experiences and knowledge will go a long way especially in our communities.

Know that you may not be compensated as much as one would hope, but the compensation in the eyes of those lives you have changed because of your presence will be more than your heart can imagine.

His authenticity revealed his desire to inform the applicant of the potential continuity of financial challenges following graduation, but the emotional and systemic compensation one receives in pursuing this career.

The narration of their recruitment evoked a distinct counternarrative to the hegemonic higher education recruitment strategy: rather than being recruited, these men simply knew they belonged. Bernard spoke of the serendipity of his program’s proximity and their mission centering his unique clinical values. Aaron noted the structural importance of having an ally who could see the strength in being African American and male within the counseling world. He provided solid declarations to introduce himself and possible others like him into the counseling field. Terrance held in high regard the preciousness of time well-spent with program liaisons. Henry’s return to his alma mater, after resisting his original matriculation, spoke volumes to the transformation of the space for safety and security. Their stories and their letters uplift the unique

nature of what drew them into their programs: they believed that each program was prepared to receive them as African American men who were ready to become leaders in their clinical world.

An Intriguing Reflection to Note

In thinking about the information from the final artifact, I observed an intriguing phenomenon. Most fascinating about the letters to future applicants is that none of the men made a direct statement of recruitment for any of the applicants. Though many participants wrote narratives about the nature of the program, its inclusive environment, and the collaborative support of peers and faculty, no applicant used the word recruit within their narrative. Likewise, despite the context of the instruction being towards applicants and not accepted students, each participant visualized an individual who was accepted and encouraged to participate in their selected program. Their messages were one of invitation into the field in general with a clear message to all applicants: this field and our communities need you.

Chapter Summary

The four participants' stories coalesced into a snapshot of the four major themes. These themes capture their experience and provide their own message to the communities and programs from which they have come. I framed the four major themes as a letter of advocacy, a unified voice which speaks back to their programs and to the counseling field. The voices provided the following four themes: *Relationships communicate importance, collaboration fosters motion, messages influence direction, and recruitment requires belonging.*

In this chapter, I have expanded the findings of the narrative data which my participants shared with me. I have used a socioculturally-centered narrative methodology to analyze the two goal statements, four interview transcripts, and four letters to future applicants to help uplift the stories of African American men who sought admission to and enrolled in CACREP-accredited

master's-level counseling programs at PWIs. I have described the four major themes resulting from these artifacts. In Chapter 5, I discussed these findings, utilized the findings to answer the two research questions, and provided implications for how these findings impacted counselor education and graduate student recruitment literature.

Chapter 5:

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to understand the narratives of recruitment from African American men who chose to enter CACREP-accredited master's-level counseling programs. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the recruitment experiences of African American men enrolled in predominantly White, master's-level, CACREP-accredited counseling programs?
2. What influences an African American man's decisions to enroll in predominantly White, master's-level, CACREP-accredited counseling programs?

I utilized a socioculturally-centered narrative methodology to understand and analyze participants' data. In chapter four, I presented the four resulting themes from the analytical process: *Relationships communicate importance, messages influence direction, collaboration fosters motion, and recruitment requires belonging*. The themes constructed from the participants' stories highlighted African American males' systemic and interpersonal decision-making process for entering master's-level counselor training programs. The findings in Chapter 4 contribute to the recruitment literature for African American males; participants' stories and voices informed what was important for them in their program choice process.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the findings and connected their meaning to current higher education recruitment and counselor education literature. I provided an overview of the implications of these findings to the field of counselor education, leading this chapter towards further research opportunities from this study. Lastly, I conclude this chapter with a final retelling of the narrative from the voices of the participants.

Discussion

Recruitment as a construct across fields and within education is a well-researched topic (Carlson, 2003; Gallo, 2012; Harper & Griffin, 2010; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Myers & Wilkins, 1995). However, recruitment centered in counseling literature is limited. Furthermore, there is a dearth of literature surrounding culturally responsive recruitment strategies within counselor education. The findings of this study provide an opportunity to understand African American male experiences, to develop these strategies, to recognize the gaps that remain in the literature. Before discussion of the four major themes, I return to the concepts of recruitment and college choice through Perna's (2004; 2006) College Choice Process Model. Here, I discuss this study's findings and their relationship to current counselor education literature surrounding recruitment and recruitment experiences.

Recruitment and College Choice Process

Recruitment and college choice, while interrelated, were described as two different experiences from the participants. Many definitions of recruitment, specifically diversity recruitment, focused on the institutions' needs to be active and intentional in drawing students toward their program (Carlson, 2003; Elliott, & Healy, 2001; Frølich & Stensaker, 2010). This sensation of active and intentional action prepared participants to explore admissions requirements and to make connections to the institution. Participants highlighted their communication with alumni, administrators, and faculty members prior to their application. These interactions became significant factors to help participants begin to understand and visualize themselves within their eventual programs. However, no participant attributed those statements as a means to recruit them to their program. Instead, those statements strengthened their relationships to the people connected to their program of choice. Their stories create a

counternarrative to previous literature regarding diversity recruitment higher education (e.g., Dumas-Hines, Cochran, & Williams, 2001; Gurin, 1999; Lee, 1991).

The narrative of recruitment often begins from the lens of the recruiting institution. College choice, however, centers the experiences of participants in their interactions with and perceptions of the potential programs with whom they would apply. Perna (2004; 2006) acknowledged that college choice is an amalgamation of personal identity development, systemic and social interaction, and econometric benefits. Participants further enhanced this amalgamation as they explored their own stories of secondary and post-secondary education leading up to graduate study. Their responses emphasized the awareness of self-identification (Johnson and Quaye, 2017; Whiting, 2009), otherness/othering (de Beauvoir, 1989), and potential social and financial challenges when deliberating their decision to return to school. Participants explored the mechanisms through which they first discovered the field of counseling and their specific program. Their pathway for choosing an institution and its corresponding counseling program integrated the layers of narrative and interaction which influence an African American male's understanding of self and role in career and community. The first theme, *relationships communicate importance*, highlights the importance of the person-to-person interaction.

Relationships Communicate Importance

Participants constructed the theme of *relationships communicate importance* throughout each piece of their story development: within narratives of African American and male identity development, within their family and community roles, and within their relationship to a larger careered context. Their stories uplifted the power of familiarity and relationships and the relational pathway and process of career choice to connote how their interactions within systems

influenced their career and program choices. I further described how relationships impacted the participants' development and decisions.

The power of familiarity and relationships. Relationships and connection to space, time, and institution emerged as a major concept of this study. Participants constructed a reality which contrasts the familiar (i.e., African American, faith-oriented, academically prestigious) and unfamiliar (i.e., Predominantly White, mental health-focused) spaces for community and connection to others. Finding spaces or people that looked or felt familiar helped to facilitate the participants' willingness to learn what roles and identities were valued or important to the participants and their communities.

The findings strengthen three theoretical underpinnings within this study: the fluid, intersectional, and continuous process of racial identity development from Johnson and Quaye (2017); the social construction of gender's function, roles, and power from Weber (1998); and the differences of process and pathway for career and graduate school choice among African Americans from Perna (2000; 2004). Furthermore, this study highlighted the role of counselor training programs in building intentional relationships and critical visibility within surrounding African American communities. Counselors and counselor training programs can demystify mental wellness, build curiosity around mental health, and draw connection to African American males through active involvement in community events, schools, and cultural gathering spaces. These curiosities and encounters have a role in professional identity development and appear to encourage African American men to explore careers in counseling.

The pathway and process of career choice. Participants' narrations of their pathway and process of career choice infused the relevance of relationship to help explore how and why career choices were made. Participants highlighted observing other male family members or

mentors who helped refine their understanding of purpose and calling. These interactions, whether brief or longstanding, supplied the participants with information about how to proceed with their next career decision. This finding supports Whiting's (2009) Black Male Scholar Identity model, demonstrating the impact of role models who embody their developing racial identity or desired scholar identity upon self-esteem and academic self-efficacy. The findings further support the notion that conversations which validate an African American male's inclination towards academics and counseling can influence his decision to explore and apply to a counseling program (Branch, 2018; Brooks & Steen, 2010; Whiting, 2009)

Collaboration Fosters Motion

Participants emphasized that the action occurring within the relationships of their stories played a role in the progression of their career journeys. These progressive movements helped participants navigate the developed beliefs about being male, being African American, and being interested in pursuing a career in counseling. Whether their collaborations were successfully integrated or voiced as a desire from their reflection, participants recognized the strength of collaboration to becoming counseling students. Their reflections of personal barriers and hardships and statements of guidance, collaborative care constructed their narrative journey of becoming and being.

Barriers and hardships. I will begin with discussing the antithesis of motion within the participants' narrative: Their encounters of barriers and hardships along their journeys to choosing a counselor training program. These barriers varied across their lifetimes. For some participants, finances created an access barrier to education and opportunities. Their lack of interaction with other "professional" African Americans were juxtaposed with examples of Black men committing crimes or being absent within family systems. Deleterious role modeling

prevented participants from visualizing what careers were available to them during their childhood experiences. Mention of current jobs and careers prior to entering the program halted the participants from entering a counselor training program with little certainty of financial aid or community support from other African Americans.

At times, the dialogue surrounding the lack of African Americans in the counseling profession felt overwhelming as participants considered applying to counselor training programs. Their stories about finding security in “traditional jobs” (e.g., government positions, accounting) uplifts Witherspoon and Speight’s (2009) research about the importance of career self-efficacy and gender to African American males’ interest in and exploration of more non-traditional career paths. The barriers of racism, economic inequity, and gender expectations slowed the participants’ ability to explore career options while aspiring to fill roles in more traditional jobs. These messages connect to the environmental barriers that shape African American male identity and foster the emotional challenges an individual may face while also developing mentally and academically (Harper & Nichols, 2008; Matthews, Hammond, Nuru-Jeter, Cole-Lewis, & Melvin, 2013).

These same barriers and hardships which slowed early enthusiasm to education also spurred rapid movement towards entering the field as participants got older. The lack of role models became motivation to trailblaze, to fulfill the absent roles of African American male counselor which the participants sought out in their own life journeys. Their stories give rationale to CACREP’s (2016) call for increased diversification of the field. The participants’ encounter of barriers and their drive to overcome them emphasize the John Henryism endemic of African American men (Matthews, Hammond, Nuru-Jeter, Cole-Lewis, & Melvin, 2013).

However, their counternarratives debunk the myth of self-reliance between masculine characters through their expressions of guidance to their future colleagues.

Guidance. The participants' letters to future applicants imbued many notions of guidance and support for the potential learner. Their statements of wisdom from their own matriculation discernment process mirrored the gaps in their pathway towards career and program choice. The guidance they offered demonstrated an awareness of the need to give back to other males who may be entering into the same process. Their guidance confirms the importance of mentorship for persistence within Whiting's (2006) Black Male Scholar model. Additionally, it enhances our understanding of the role African American male support and collaboration have in terms of program choice and academic persistence. The participants' statements about authenticity in Black/African American identity also adds empirical support to Harper and Quaye's (2007) conceptual connection between engagement of racial identity development and academic success and persistence of African American men. More specifically, researchers noted higher levels of racial identity development but higher incidences of racial prejudice and impaired wellness for African American males who attended PWIs (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010). These participants were aware that their guidance can influence future applicants' conceptualization of successful matriculation; they reinforced that choosing a degree program is a decision best made in community.

Collaborate care. As participants wrote to future applicants, their missives promoted the communal and connected nature of care and success between African American males. Within their letters, the participants emphasized that, though the journey would be difficult, applicants would not need to navigate through the process alone. Though applicant and participant were assumedly disconnected, participants narrated their support for applicants and voiced their

willingness to listen when challenges arose. Again, the findings highlighted Johnson and Quaye's (2017) model related to the importance of laborious tasks (performing, being, and becoming multiple identities) and the expectations these men will face within counseling programs. The participants recognized the challenges of being both African American and male in spaces built for White males and even White women. They acknowledged the emotional tasks it required to be vulnerable in spaces that have previously felt exclusive and unsafe. Their words echoed the racial discrimination exposed in prior higher education literature (Allen, 1992; Paguyo & Moses, 2011; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

However, these men evoked the power of community to help protect and uplift the applicants before they arrive to the program. Their voices spoke to their willingness to support applicants upon their matriculation into the program with their ears, their resources, and their voices if and when they arrive. This exploration echoed Bradley and Holcomb-McCoy's (2004) conclusions about the impact of decreased alienation and increased mentorship for counselor education faculty members. The participants also strengthened Rogers and Molina's (2006) call for personal contact and relationship building with prospective students as well as Branch's (2018) four steps of recruitment Black men to the counseling and counselor education profession. The CRT framework, mentioned in Chapter 2, highlights the importance of experiential knowledge and emphasizes that stories and messages promote social justice and collaborative effort within the research literature (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995). Their message is clear: the presence of collaboration from other African American males promotes their success and persistence.

Messages Influence Direction

Participants reconstructed the messages learned in their interactions with other characters and societies within their stories. These messages helped construct their racial, gender, and career identities; they influenced the direction of the participants' relationships to academics, emotions, and social status. The participants perceived that these messages coursing throughout their lives influenced the direction of their college and career choice process. The importance of messages and expectations furthers our understanding of narrative and its connection to career self-efficacy and the guidance required to support African American male matriculation into counselor training programs.

The importance of messages and expectations. The participants highlighted lifelong messages around education, identity, group expectations, and mental healthcare within their narratives. Their stories emphasized how African American peers recognized the participants' uniqueness and their ability to excel in education. White peers often questioned their existence in predominantly White educational spaces. The participants found shifts from predominantly Black communities of education to predominantly White communities to be jarring and, at first, unsafe to express their differences of thought. Counseling faculty members and mental health professionals provided mixed messages about the participants' impact on the counseling profession; some supported the rarity and need of African American males within counselor training programs while others questioned the participants' belonging to mental healthcare workplaces and leadership roles.

These messages supported Rollins and Valdez's (2006) and Brown and Segrist's (2016) research, noting that perceived racism and internalized racism negatively influences African American males' career decision-making self-efficacy and career aspirations respectively. This

systemic level of discrimination engages with the social, economic, and policy context layer of Perna's (2006) College Choice model, observing how system-level discrimination impacts individuals' ability to discern what education space is both safe and willing to matriculate and support African American males. Negative messages around African American male inclusion in the field influenced the participants to question their belongingness and fit for the field. Furthermore, participants' voices strengthened Harper's (2007; 2009) research surrounding the positive impact of peer support for the promotion of African American male academic success in post-secondary and graduate education.

The participants emphasized the many myths surrounding mental health, masculinity, and community within their narratives. Their African American communities had developed culturally-specific ways to mitigate mental healthcare concerns (e.g., barbershop talks, dialogues with older women within the family system). Yet, participants emphasized their inability to emote or share their fears and concerns among other African American males nearby. Their communities saw substance use for the amelioration of hardship as normative but often inappropriate behavior for healing. The participants, then, believed in their role to dispel these myths of masculine gender expectations and mental healthcare conversations. Their entrance into the counseling field became a statement as they became interventionists and role models who sought to clarify the pathway to becoming mental healthcare providers and advocates for other African Americans around them.

The participants noted that the predisposition to engage mental health as their calling. For some participants, that tied back to their faith, a source of security and persistence in the midst of hopelessness. Thus, the participants noted the importance of finding a program that did not see their race, their backgrounds, or their "social deficits" as flaws. Instead, some participants

received messages of hope and support from alumni or program staff which directed them toward their chosen counselor training program.

These myths and messages surrounding African American mental health strategies further highlight the literature surrounding African American communities, intergenerational trauma, and help-seeking behaviors of African American men (Belgrave, & Brevard, 2015; Bombay, Matheson, Anisman, 2009; Gump, 2010; US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). The participants recognized that these messages had historical roots within the African American community, with narratives and expectations of masculinity supporting the propitiation of the race in the face of hardships and struggle. Although the men were able to voice their resilience in reflection of these messages, the impact of the messages upon their psychological health and their career choices emphasized the importance of deconstructing the narrative of mental health and cultural healing. Choosing counseling as a career, then, promotes participants' ability to influence the message and to become experts in experience, research, and practice with African American males. Most of all, their counternarratives reverberate the message they hope to return to the field: to recruit African American males in requires crafting a space in which they can belong.

Recruitment Requires Belonging

Participants grounded their core message within the idea of belonging and the narrative counseling programs voiced in demonstrating African American males' belonging to the profession and their communities simultaneously. The construct of belonging emphasizes the importance of emotional attachment and safety to a place, person, or community (Ignatief, 2001). Maslow (1968) defined belongingness as a basic human need to reach self-actualization and wholeness. Belongingness implies that one's identity within a community is valued while also

demonstrating that one's presence has worth and meaning to self and others. Ostrove, Stewart, and Curtin (2011) discovered that this concept of belongingness not only influences an individual's connection to a social group, but also shapes a graduate students' perception of their connection to their field of study, their academic program, and their self-concept as academics. This literature further substantiated the importance of demonstrating that an African American man does belong within a counseling program at a PWI.

Belonging was the nature of "fitting in" through the celebration and inclusion of their unique experiences and identities within the classroom and between interactions with faculty and staff. The participants discussed their drive to support future applicants by telling them that they belong. Their narratives explored the ways in which staff, faculty, and peers noted the importance of their role in demystifying mental healthcare within their communities. Furthermore, through collaboration and relationships, the participants were encouraged to know that they belonged and could create an influence if they desired to enter into this new learning environment. Recruitment, the intentional draw into the program, required each participant to experience the sensation of validation and quality relationships. These elements of belonging created major guidance in affirming their ability to thrive within the counseling profession and, accordingly, within their programs.

Validation and encouragement. The participants provided words of validation to each of the future applicants within their letters. The participants celebrated the accomplishments of applying and receiving admission into graduate programs. Their voices directly acknowledged the scarcity of African American males within the counseling profession and supported the applicant's fit and worth to the counseling field. The more participants returned to applicants' race or gender, their words echoed the expectations they held for themselves within their

communities. The participants offered titles like “agent for change” while becoming “the greatest counselor that you can be.” These notes vociferate the trust and hope applicants had for their fellow peers and the applicants who were courageous enough to participate within the field.

The context and temporality of this encouragement is important here. Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) connoted that narrative field texts require three elements: the movement between people and events through time, the acknowledgement of social conditions that ground one’s context, and the location in which events of a narrative occur. Although these letters speak to imaginary applicants, the practice of narrative letter-writing helps participants to process the emotions felt in their own phenomenon (DeCino, Waalkes, & Smith, 2018). Their voices of validation create a relational oscillation of character identity; while the men speak to whom they hope to welcome into the field, they are reaffirming who they are and the voices that molded their identities.

Relationships. The exploration of relationships both within the interviews and the goal statements reaffirmed the participants’ belonging to the counseling profession. Participants highlighted affirming words from partners, community leaders, and other counselors who believed in their desire to become counselors. These communal bonds confirm that while social distance exists between and within racial groups, building and validating one’s experiences helps to increase the opportunity for integration and cultural inclusion in higher education (Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew, & Hunt, 2015; King, 2017; Quintana, 1998; Smedley & Smedley, 2005).

Conclusion of Themes

The four themes and their connected subthemes provide a structure for better understanding the narrative formation process of African American males matriculating into master’s-level counseling programs at PWIs. While these structures relate to the various bodies

of research related to African American culture, counselor education, and higher education, we begin to understand a new line of story and structure for questioning the process of recruitment and program choice from within counselor education. In reflection, I will expound upon the strengths and limitations of this study.

Strengths and Developmental Improvements

Storytelling in qualitative research is a known avenue for understanding the experiences of Black and Brown families when seeking to understand topics of education, healthcare, and human development (Belgrave & Brevard, 2015; Palacios et al, 2015). African American communities have leveraged oral traditions of storytelling as a method for data collection and analysis both formally and informally for centuries (Banks-Wallace, 2002). The narrative methodology within this study engaged the cultural traditions of African American communities to invite new voices into the recruitment literature. Recruitment literature is sparse within the field of counselor education. This study begins to address CACREP's (2016) call for research upon recruitment and retention strategies for counselor training and educational programs.

Several studies regarding African American men in counselor education seek to understand the experiences of doctoral students and faculty members (Branch, 2018; Brooks & Steen, 2010). This study begins an exploration of African American men at the early stages of matriculation and enrollment. This study serves as a model for future qualitative studies that center underrepresented communities while remaining culturally proactive. It is an effort to utilize research as an avenue of advocacy and social justice within the counseling field (ACA, 2018; Nassar-McMillan, 2014)

The timing of participant recruitment, the barriers of access to the population, and the small available population size contributed to the number of participants in this study. I reached

saturation of data with four participants ($n = 4$). The utilization of an integrated analytical approach (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Pastiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011), the triangulation of multiple data sources from each participant, and the depth of content from each participant added rigor to the study's findings.

Socioculturally-constructed narrative studies emphasize the worthiness of a single voice in shaping and understanding the process and pathway of an experience. Thus, each participant within our sample enhances the counseling profession's awareness of African American male experience both within programs and within the process of recruitment. However, there is natural influence in the reconstruction of narrative aside from the original storytellers and the characters involved in the told events. The use of a Geesian (Gee, 1991) or structural analytical method for narrative analysis would help to maintain the original wording of the stories while reconstructing the plot within the temporality of the participant's timeline.

Despite presenting an opportunity for member-checking and feedback, no participant provided additional information or feedback following their initial interview session. While I assumed that their lack of response was an affirmation of the findings and their experience, there remains the possibility for feedback impacting the findings of this study. In future studies, researchers may benefit from designing a specific and accessible feedback loop for participants in order to encourage a response for initial codes and themes from the study.

Implications

These findings uplifted the voices of African American men as they recounted their journeys of choosing a counseling program at a PWI. The following section will explore implications for counselor educators, mental health counselors, and school counselors. Table 5.1 provided a brief summation of the implication of this study.

Table 5.1 Implications for Counselor Educators, Mental Health Counselors, and School

Counselors

Counselor Educators	Mental Health Counselors	School Counselors
Uplift and assess strategies within programs with consistent recruitment and retention of African American men	Become visible resources to African American communities	Recognize the racist narratives of career development and career awareness
Investigate and dismantle White-dominant ideologies as markers for admission	Engage strategies for social justice within ACA Strategic plan (ACA, 2018)	Develop programming that helps African American men explore communal resilience and support
Foster collegiality and support openness and visible allyship	Acknowledge and identify cultural strategies used within community for mental wellness	Make intentional efforts to expose oneself as a resource for career exploration

Counselor Educators

Counselor education, as a field, requires new and innovative techniques to recruit, retain, and increase its diverse student population. While CACREP (2016) calls for counselor training programs to develop intentional diversity recruitment and retention strategies, the literature has yet to bloom here. Counselor training programs in PWIs who observe consistent increases in African American male students should begin to assess what strategies and experiences on campus help African American men choose their program for attendance. The four themes from this study may serve as a framework to construct their investigation of the phenomenon.

The recognition of belonging's impact upon one's program choice promotes the importance of critical discussion regarding systemic barriers and cultural safety in counselor training programs. Diversity conversations must become less about increasing demographic numbers and more about discerning the impact of multiple worldviews and experiences for counselor development. Participants' reflections give light to the narrative journey in which they experienced belongingness and ostracization from communities and peers. Counselor educators can begin to investigate and dismantle admissions policies that center Western and White-dominant ideologies as markers for success in student matriculation. Faculty members must question the purpose and necessity of standardized test scores as cutoff markers for applicants (Kuncel & Hezlett, 2007; Sinha, Oswald, Imus, & Schmitt, 2011; Thomas, Kuncel, & Crede, 2004). Likewise, faculty and staff members can demonstrate openness and vulnerability with applicants by disclosing their strategies for inclusive learning environments. This action may help to diminish the implicit power dynamic between applicant and program members during the admissions process and invite African American men to feel safe to question and contribute to program diversity and growth.

The echo of relationships, community voice, and collaborative care within the participants' narratives highlights the importance of student experience to the recruitment process. Intentional near-peer relationship-building and faculty mentorship can help foster a culture of openness, visibility, and allyship for African American male students. These relationships can cultivate feedback structures for student empowerment and alumni feedback. Counselor educators must begin to integrate this information as they seek to develop more inclusive and culturally-proactive learning spaces. Branch (2018) suggested that African American men at all levels (doctoral, professional, and faculty) would be open to intentional establishment of mentoring relationships with counseling students. Furthermore, Santos and Reigadas (2005) determined that same ethnicity mentoring relationships tend to have greater outcomes for academic performance and career development. Counselor education programs could design advising and mentorship time which captures an opportunity to support underrepresented students feel seen and visible in their training experience.

While counselor educators and administrators develop the learning spaces for African American men to be trained as counselors, the population's exposure to counseling and mental health begins within the community layer of Perna's (2006) college choice model. Thus, the visible participation of mental health and school counselors within community events, schools, and cultural gatherings play a role in the recruitment of African American males into counselor training programs. Service-learning activities and courses within counselor education curricula may promote opportunities to connect to African American communities as well as other underrepresented communities. These activities help students to gain awareness and practical experiences with a diverse community while diminishing the distance between academic spaces and community organizations

Mental Health Counselors

Within their strategic plan, the American Counseling Association highlighted specific steps for counselors and counselor educators to become advocates of social justice and community leaders (ACA, 2018b). These strategies encourage mental health counselors to be visible within their communities, to utilize leadership roles to construct solutions for social justice, and to build structures for diversifying the counseling community. While these statements foster a commitment to inclusion of underrepresented individuals, the methods of exposure and demystifying the field remain unclear.

Mental health counselors can provide workshops and resources that clarify the cultural strategies African American communities leverage to maintain wellness. These workshops may also support African Americans to identify the need for professional support when the mental wellness of a community member diminishes. In our awareness of the cultural distrust of mental healthcare, mental health counselors must begin to explore collaborations with mental health facilitators in African American communities. Partnerships with religious leaders and community leaders about psychological first aid exposes African Americans to the power of mental health hygiene. We must begin to explore the ramifications of myths surrounding counseling within the African American community. Participation in health fairs and community events further facilitates opportunities for African American males to be exposed to the field of counseling and its differences from other healthcare providers.

While mental health counselors expose community members to the field of counseling, school counselors play a role in exposing African American males to counseling through personal engagement, social-emotional learning activities, and career development. I suggest a

few opportunities for school counselors to become more visible and better resourced facilitators of counseling and career development within their school systems

School Counselors

Schools are major venues for children and adolescents to gain messages about careers and the worth of work (Solberg, Howard, Blustein, & Close, 2002). However, most school curriculums uplift science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) majors as growing, well-paying career fields over social sciences (Turner, Joeng, Sims, Dade, & Reid, 2019). In the same continuous conversation, African Americans continue to mitigate internalized racist narratives regarding career development for high paying, White-dominated career fields both within STEM and social sciences (Brown & Segrist, 2016). These messages of who belongs in particular fields begins in school systems where children and adolescents learn the worth of work and the careers which feel most attainable to them and others within their communities.

School counselors, then, play a role in helping educators support and develop programs for restructuring the career development narrative. Developing culturally proactive career development programming can help African American males begin to explore careers that uplift the strategies of resilience and support within the African American community. Many participants noted their lack of understanding for what school counselors did and saw their role as primarily in remediation with African American male students. African American males, then, benefit from shifts within the school and community layer as career exploration resources become more visible and available. Exposure to the role of the school counselor as an ally in student support and career development within the school system helps African American male students to know and understand what the field of counseling is. Thus, school counselors become community collaborators and early interventionists in students' understanding of their career

journey. Washington (2010) suggested that school counselors must not ignore racism and should celebrate the strength and ability of African American communities to uplift African American male academics through collaboration with community leaders and school administrators. Intentional, concrete examples of career opportunities and academic performance growth over responses to behavioral disruptions may also help African American males develop a sense of belonging and allyship with school counselors (Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008).

These implications help us to understand how counseling professionals can utilize this information in their current practices and classrooms. However, further research must be done to better understand the findings of this study and its impact upon African American male recruitment in counseling. The following section will offer future directions for the study of African American male recruitment in counseling programs at PWIs.

Directions for Further Research

This study explored the pathway of college and program choice for African American men seeking careers in counseling. The themes surrounding collaboration and relationships explore the impact of communal relationships and their function to career development within the African American community. Yet, further research must be done to better understand the impact of the community to the exposure and development of one's comfort and connection to the counseling field. Participants noted peer support in helping them navigate towards their current programs and career choices. Exploration of the role of peer in career development would help counselor educators to better understand the themes of *relationships communicate importance* and *collaboration fosters motion*. Future researchers may benefit from interviewing both the participant of an underrepresented community and a peer or ally that can corroborate the information within their storyline. The conversation between the narratives mirrors the relational

aspect of understanding the impact of community within the college choice process. Researchers may also choose a particular career development framework (e.g., Social Cognitive Career Theory, Happenstance Theory, Career Construction Theory) as a lens for understanding a population's career choice pathway.

Recruitment begins with culturally proactive program development. *Recruitment requires belonging* explores the construct of belongingness as a factor of diversity recruitment. Further studies of belongingness and its impact on career development and career choice may help us to better understand the experiences and challenges persons of color in higher education and counselor education. Sharing narratives provides one avenue for understanding one's belonging. Further exploration of the development of African American career aspirations, specifically within the counseling field, may help us to understand how racial and gender expectations shape our knowledge of the pathway to counseling career choices (Brown & Segrist, 2016).

Messages influence direction reminds us that counseling trainees are developing their sense of being and becoming continuously. We are exposed to messages throughout our lives and engage in our performatives and responsibilities as we gather information about how we believe we should relate to others. Further integration of Johnson and Quaye's (2017) Queered Model for Black Racial Identity development may help heighten the intersectional experiences of African American men as they explore their career identities and their journey toward counseling.

Integrating the recommendations from Brooks and Steen (2010), Branch (2018) and this study also help to uplift the complex narratives of African American men within counseling. Yet, there is still a significant gap in our profession's understanding of the retention and development of African American male counseling students at the master's-level. This information becomes

more sparse as we explore the literature of becoming doctoral students for counselor education programs. Further exploration of retention and counselor/counselor educator identity development for African American men helps to deepen our understanding of the needs and resources for men of color and other underrepresented communities within our counseling profession. Utilizing the implications from this study and those of Brooks and Steen (2010) and Branch (2018) may provide a framework for understanding belongingness, identity development, or mattering within the specific perspective of counselor education at the master's-level.

Within this chapter, we explored the meaning within the narratives shared in this study. I expanded upon the four themes constructed with the four participants and my co-researcher. I explored what these meanings mean for counselor educators, mental health counselors, and school counselors, respectively, while furthering the dialogue of future research opportunities. I now conclude this chapter and explore the potential voices soon to come from this study.

Conclusion

In many ways, the act of recruitment strategies helps hold the counseling field accountable to its call for inclusion and diversity. The power and energy to develop said strategies, however, requires a willingness to engage and deconstruct systems of White supremacist, patriarchal, misogynist, heterosexist, and economically elitist hegemony often endemic to our higher education structures. Educators and administrators of predominantly White institutions must engage in difficult questions about the biases nested within the protocols and procedures of admissions process to begin reconciling the barriers African American applicants face in graduate education matriculation. Our counseling programs, too, hold the onus to question how, why, and for what purpose our student demographics appear as they do both on paper and within the classroom. Engaging with these questions proliferates the idea that

education and mental healthcare is a profession for all who demonstrate the courage to uplift their communities out of the pain and trauma of their collective past.

While this conclusion provides an opportunity for me to pontificate upon the necessity for advocacy and environmental justice, I choose to yield my voice to those of my brothers, the participants of this study. In doing so, I present a re-presentation of their Future Applicant Letters adapted from the linguistic analytical method of Gee (1991). In it, their voices will speak back to their programs about what will draw them back to their seats while calling other African American men to join them in the room.

Return to Sender: A Letter from African American Male Applicants

Dear Programs,

“First of all...congratulations on making an excellent choice” “You have been given an opportunity to change the world by changing yourself first” “With all the uncertainty that come around...finances...I can understand how crucial this step is.” “You have probably heard this before...” “You have probably heard about how the professional world needs you in general.” “I encourage you to look into yourself to develop...to never silence...to learn from losses”

“With your permission, I would like to provide advice...” “Seek opportunities to build a network that involve people who are like you AND who are not like you.” “Whenever you feel like you want to give up...Don’t.” “Our field needs you.” “Seek guidance when the vision becomes blurry.” “There will be peaks, valleys, and many challenges throughout this journey.”

“Congratulations on taking this first step.” “I promise it’ll be a great story to share one day.”

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Appendices

Appendix A: Review of Narrative Inquiry Studies in Education Literature

Citation	Number of Participants	Type of Data Collected	Source Type (Discipline/Type of Publication)
Bond, V. L. & Koops, L. H. (2014). Together through transitions: A narrative inquiry of emergent identity as music teacher educators. <i>Journal of Music Teacher Education</i> , 24(1), 38-50. doi:10.1177/1057083713494012	2 (Authors of article)	Timebound journaling through Google Drive;	Music Education/Journal of Music Teacher Education
Hannon, M. D. (2014). Smiles from the heart: Humanistic counseling considerations for fathers of sons with Asperger's disorder. <i>The Professional Counselor</i> , 4 (4), 363-377. doi:10.15241/mdh.4.4.363	Sought 5, conducted 4 interviews	35-60 minute interviews, one time; engaged in <i>epoche</i> (Creswell, 2006; Patton, 2002); Member checking during and after interviews	Counselor Education/The Professional Counselor
Hipolito-Delgado, C. P., Cook, J. M., Avrus, E. M., & Bonham, E. J. (2011) Developing counseling students' multicultural competence through the Multicultural Action Project. <i>Counselor Education & Supervision</i> , 50 (6) 402-421	3	Weekly Journals throughout semester; Composed narratives at the end of the course; additional drafts of original submitted narratives	Counselor Education/Counselor Education & Supervision

Review of Narrative Inquiry Studies in Education Literature (Continued)

Citation	Number of Participants	Type of Data Collected	Source Type (Discipline/Type of Publication)
Hinojosa, T. J., & Carney, J. V. (2016). Mexican American women pursuing counselor education doctorates: A narrative inquiry. <i>Counselor Education & Supervision</i> , 55 (3), 198-215.	5	60-120 minute interviews with an interview guide (Broad question with three questions to facilitate depth), researcher journals, member checking	Counselor Education/ Counselor Education & Supervision
Patsiopoulou, A. T., & Buchanan, M. J. (2011). The practice of self-compassion in counseling: A narrative inquiry. <i>Professional Psychology: Research and Practice</i> , 42(4), 301-307. doi:10.1037/a0024482	15	Screening interview (used to clarify the purpose of the study and participant eligibility); Two research interviews, (#1: one question with 10 probes; #2: Follow up for member checking, sharing findings, further elaboration from #1) one hour each	Psychotherapy (Canadian); Professional Psychology: Research and Practice
Phillion, J. (2008). Multicultural and cross-cultural narrative inquiry into understanding immigrant students' educational experience in Hong Kong. <i>Compare</i> , 38(3), 281-293. doi:10.1080/03057920802066568	2	Literature reviews; document analysis of Newly Arrived Children from participants' schools; Individual interviews of participants in schools; individual and focus group interviews with teachers; participant observations; field notes and reflexive journals	Curriculum Design and Instruction/ Compare

Appendix B: Recruitment Letters

Recruitment Email

Dear Counseling Students and Counselor Educators,

My name is Marlon Johnson. I am a PhD candidate in Counselor Education in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling in the College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I am conducting a study to understand the recruitment stories of African American men who choose to enter master's-level counseling programs. This letter is an invitation for your participation in this study.

Participants will be asked to complete a one-on-one interview via Zoom teleconference software for approximately 90-120 minutes. During the interview, I would like to gather the stories which led to your discovery, interactions with, and selection of your current counseling program.

This study specifically seeks to gather stories from participants who meet the following inclusion criteria:

1. Self-identify as African American
2. Self-identify as male
3. Are currently enrolled in a CACREP-Accredited master's counseling program
4. Are currently enrolled in a predominantly White institution
5. Are within the first 30 months of their master's counseling program

Participation in the study is voluntary. You will have the option to withdraw your participation from this study at any time. If you would like to participate in this study, please go to the following link: <https://aamalesnarrative.questionpro.com>. You will be directed to a screening and demographic survey. At the completion of these items, I will contact you to discuss the next steps of this study.

Those who are willing to participate in this study will receive a \$15 digital Amazon gift card at the end of their participation in this study.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at mjohn184@vols.utk.edu. **Please forward this request to any other counseling students who may be eligible to participate in this study.**

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Best regards,

Marlon C. Johnson, MS, LPC-MHSP (TN), NCC

Social Media Recruitment Message

Hello Everyone,

I'm Marlon Johnson, a PhD Candidate in Counselor Education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. For my dissertation study, I am seeking the stories of African American men who choose to enter master's-level counseling programs to better understand recruitment. Participants will undergo one (1) recorded individual interview for approximately 90-120 minutes. During the interview I would like to gather stories which lead to the participant's discovery, interactions with, and selection of their current counseling program.

Eligible participants will meet the following criteria:

1. Self-identify as African American
2. Self-identify as male
3. Are currently enrolled in a CACREP-Accredited master's counseling program
4. Are currently enrolled in a predominantly White institution
5. Are within the first 30 months of their master's counseling program

Participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time. If you, a student, or any other colleague would like to participate, please go to the following link:

<https://aamalesnarrative.questionpro.com>. There, you will find the informed consent, a screening survey, and the demographics survey. At the completion of these items, I will contact you to discuss the next steps of the study.

Those who are willing to participate in the study will receive a \$15 digital Amazon gift card at the end of their participation in this study.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at mjohn184@vols.utk.edu. **Please forward this request to any other counseling students who may be eligible to participate in this study.**

Thank you in advance.

Appendix C: Informed Consent

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: Understanding the Experiences of Counselor Education Recruitment from African American Males: A Narrative Inquiry

Researcher(s): *Marlon C. Johnson, MS, LPC-MHSP, NCC, University of Tennessee, Knoxville*
Shawn L. Spurgeon, PhD, LPC-MHSP, ACS, NCC, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this research study because you are an African American male in a CACREP-Accredited master's counseling program within your first 30 months of matriculation. Your story of choosing a program, applying, and being recruited to the program is central to this study.

What is this research study about?

The purpose of the research study is to understand the African American male's experience of being recruited into master's-level counseling programs. Your participation in this study will help uplift the stories of African American men in counselor education and aid me in fulfilling program requirements for completion of my doctorate in counselor education

How long will I be in the research study?

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to submit your goal statement or purpose statement from your submission to the program. Participants will be asked to complete one 90-120 minute interview via Zoom and to participate in a voluntary member checking interview following the transcription and initial coding of the transcript. Participants will also be asked to write a 1-2 page letter to future applicants. The total duration of participation is expected to be approximately 155 minutes over a one-month period.

What will happen if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research study"?

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to:

- Complete a 5-question, multiple choice screening survey to verify your inclusion criteria for this study
- Complete a 12-question survey, with a combination of open-response and multiple-choice response questions, to collect demographic information
- Submit your goal statement, personal statement, or statement of interest from your application into your master's program

- Participate in a 90-120 minute interview (either in person or via ZOOM). The interview will focus on your stories connected to choosing your master's counseling program, the application and admission process, and your experiences with faculty and staff prior to and soon after accepting an offer and enrolling into the program.
- Complete a 1-2 page written "Letter to future applicants" where you will write a recruitment narrative to other African American males who may apply to your program.
- Participate in a voluntary member check interview by reviewing the transcript from our interview and the initial themes from our interview data.

What happens if I say "No, I do not want to be in this research study"?

Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later. Either way, your decision won't affect your grades, your relationship with the researchers, or standing with the University of Tennessee, Knoxville

What happens if I say "Yes" but change my mind later?

Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time.

However, following the voluntary member checking interview, all transcripts, goal statements, and letters will be deidentified and your ability to request data to be withdrawn will no longer be available.

If you decide to stop before the study is completed, your interview and demographic data will be deleted. In order to withdraw from the study, you must email Marlon Johnson at mjohn184@vols.utk.edu or Dr. Shawn Spurgeon at sspurgeo@utk.edu

Are there any possible risks to me?

It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but we believe this risk is small because of the procedures we use to protect your information. These procedures are described later in this form.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?

We do not expect you to benefit from being in this study. Your participation may help us to learn more about the recruitment of African American men in Counselor Education. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?

All interview recordings will be transcribed through www.Rev.com, a secure, confidential transcription service. After files are transcribed, we will protect the confidentiality of your information by de-identifying all information in the transcripts and erasing all audio files after transcripts have been verified. The PI and faculty advisor will only have access to the audio file, the research assistant in this study will only have access to de-identified information.

If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information we collect about you. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.
- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling.

What will happen to my information after this study is over?

We will keep your information to use for future research or other purpose. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from your research data collected as part of the study.

Will I be paid for being in this research study?

Participants who complete all study activities will receive a digital \$15 Amazon gift card for their participation in this study.

Will it cost me anything to be in this research study?

It will not cost you anything to be in this study.

What else do I need to know?

Because of the small number of participants in this study, it is possible that someone could identify you based on the information we collected from you. Thus, you will be asked to develop a pseudonym to help encourage confidentiality with your interview. The name of your specific institution will not be reported within this study.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers, Marlon Johnson, mjohn184@vols.utk.edu, 803-972-0357, or Mr. Johnson's Dissertation chair, Shawn Spurgeon, sspurgeo@utk.edu, 865-974-4181

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

1534 White Avenue
Blount Hall, Room 408
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
Phone: 865-974-7697
Email: utkirb@utk.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read this form, been given the chance to ask questions and have my questions answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By completing the interview, I understand that I am agreeing to be in this study. I can keep a copy of this consent information for future reference. If I do not want to be in this study, I do not need to do anything else.

Appendix D: Screening and Demographic Survey

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Please fill out the following survey to help be better understand who you are and your connection to the inclusion criteria for this study.

Criteria 1

1. Do you identify as African American either racially and/or ethnically?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Criteria 2

2. How do you identify within your gender?
 - a. Male-identified
 - b. Female-identified
 - c. Genderqueer (with primarily male gender identity)
 - d. Genderqueer (with primarily female identity)
 - e. Other (Please Specify)

Criteria 3

3. Are you enrolled at a predominantly White institution?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Are you currently enrolled in a master's-level counseling program?
 - c. Yes, full time
 - d. Yes, part time
 - e. No
5. Is your program accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)?
 - f. Yes
 - g. No
 - h. Unsure

Criteria 4

1. Are you within the first 30 months of beginning your master's counseling program?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

If one or more of screening criteria are not met: Thank you for filling out this survey. Unfortunately, you do not meet the criteria for this study. Your responses will be deleted and removed from our records. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Marlon Johnson at mjohn184@vols.utk.edu.

If all screening criteria are met: Thank you for filling out the initial screening criteria. If you would like to participate in this study, we would ask that you provide more demographic information to help us know more about you.

1. Full name (First, Last):
2. Preferred name:
3. Where were you born? (City, State)
4. Please note the name(s) and location(s) (city, state) of your undergraduate education (if multiple, please list all).
5. Where are you currently located?
 - a. City, State
 - b. Institution
6. Please note your specific program of study (i.e., school counseling, clinical mental health counseling, etc.)
7. (If applicable) Please upload your personal statement from your current program's application below.
8. Please provide your email address
9. Please provide your best contact phone number

Appendix E: Interview Guide

I-Guide for Dissertation (AA Male recruitment)

RQ:

1. What are the recruitment experiences of African American males enrolled in predominantly White, master's-level, CACREP-accredited counseling programs?
2. What influences African American males' decisions to enroll in predominantly White, master's-level, CACREP-accredited counseling programs?

Opening Script

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this dissertation study. I am grateful to have the opportunity to learn more about your experiences of choosing, engaging in, and completing a counselor preparation program at a CACREP-accredited program. I hope the stories which you share will help me and others to better understand the experiences of African American men as they enter into the counseling field. You are welcome to discontinue this interview at any point and can ask that your data not be used for this study. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Questions

- 1. Tell me about how you began your pursuit of a degree in counseling.**
 - a. How did you know this field was the field you hoped to pursue?
 - b. What factors were important for you as you began deciding to which program you would apply?
 - c. How did race and gender play a role in your decision-making process?
 - d. How many programs did you apply to? Tell me about your interactions with the programs to which you applied.
 - e. What specifically brought you to your training program?
- 2. What stands out in your experiences during your application and interview process for counseling programs?**
 - a. What do you remember about interacting with faculty and staff?
 - b. What do you remember about your interactions with family? Your peers?

- c. Tell me about applying and interviewing at predominantly White institutions.
3. **What stands out in your experiences as an African American male during the recruitment and program choice process?**
 - a. What experiences come to mind as you neared undergraduate graduation?
 - b. (If they did not go straight from undergraduate to graduate program) What played a role in your decision to return to graduate education?
 - c. Tell me a story about a program where you chose to defer your enrollment
 4. **What recommendations do you have for enhancing recruitment of African American men in the counseling profession?**
 5. **Let's take a moment to write a 1-2 page document regarding your letters to future applicants. If you could open a word document, take a few moments to write what you hope to tell future African American Applicants to your program.**
 6. **Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences?**

Remember Possible Probing questions/Statements:

You mentioned____. Tell me more about that.
 You mentioned____. What was that like for you?
 You talked about____. Describe that experience in as much detail as possible.

Closing Script:

Again, thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview today. If at any time you have any further questions or would like to be removed from the study, please let me know. I will follow up with you in the next few weeks for a member checking session. After that session, you will be compensated for your participation. Thank you again.

Member Checking Script:

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. This member checking session is to give you an opportunity to respond to the transcript and initial themes I have provided to you from our initial interactions. What questions arise for you as have reflected on the interview and the initial themes?

Vita

Marlon Chadwick Johnson was born in Sumter, South Carolina on June 28, 1990. He is the son of Cleo and Joseph Johnson and the younger brother of Joseph Rajvi Johnson. Marlon received his Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology with a minor in Music from Clemson University in May 2012. He then obtained his Master of Science degree in Counseling with a concentration in Clinical Mental Health Counseling in May 2014 from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Marlon worked as a clinical mental health counselor within the Knoxville area for two years, providing counseling services primarily to children and adolescents within the foster care system. Prior to his return for his Doctoral degree, Marlon had become the Adolescent Behavioral Health Intensive Outpatient program director, facilitating group therapy sessions and coordinating aftercare services for clients and their families. Marlon has participated in several research teams and led numerous learning experiences for high school and college students within the East Tennessee region. Marlon currently serves as an instructor of Counselor Education at Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas. Marlon will graduate with a Ph.D. in Counselor Education from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in December 2019.