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Climbing the Academic Ladder While Black: Exploring the Experiences of Institutional Belongingness for Black Counselor Education and Supervision Doctoral Students at Predominantly White Institutions

Jasmine Alicia Hawa Griffith
Old Dominion University

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by

Jasmine Alicia Hawa Griffith
B. S. May 2018, Virginia State University
M.A. May 2021, Hampton University

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Approved by:

Shuntay Z. Tarver (Director)

Felecia Commodore (Member)

Judith Wambui Preston (Member)

Bianca R. Augustine (Member)

ABSTRACT

CLIMBING THE ACADEMIC LADDER WHILE BLACK: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF INSTITUTIONAL BELONGINGNESS FOR BLACK COUNSELOR EDUCATION AND SUPERVISION DOCTORAL STUDENTS AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

Jasmine Alicia Hawa Griffith
Old Dominion University
Director: Dr. Shuntay Z. Tarver

Although ample research investigates students' belongingness experiences in counselor education (CE) programs, existing literature only marginally explores the realities of Black master students, and there is a notable lack of empirical attention to Black doctoral students' belongingness experiences in counselor education and supervision (CES) programs. Investigating Black CES doctoral students' belongingness experiences at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) is critical to understanding how the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) accredited CES programs can address the troubling statistic that Black doctoral students are least likely to become full-time CE faculty. Consequently, this study utilizes critical phenomenology from a critical race theory perspective to explore how Black CES doctoral students experience institutional belongingness through interactions with institutional agents (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff). Thematic findings suggest that institutional agents significantly influence Black CES doctoral students' navigation through their program environments, sense of institutional belongingness, and future career pathways. Black CES doctoral students' experiences illustrated the pervasive nature of racism and how it impacted their lived embodied experiences at PWIs. The discussion of findings offers a broadened awareness and understanding of unique social and cultural challenges that impede Black CES doctoral students from experiencing institutional

belongingness. Implications for counselor educators (CE faculty), CES programs, and the governing body of CACREP are presented to increase diversity and adhere to the commitment to fostering multiculturalism and social justice within the counseling education field and academia.[1]

Keywords: Belongingness, doctoral students, institutional agents, predominantly white institutions, career pathways, counselor education and supervision, critical phenomenology, critical race theory

[1] The intentional decision to refrain from capitalizing "white" in this critical study emphasizes my conscious effort and commitment to proactive inclusion rather than avoidance by rejecting linguistic patterns that historically and socially align with injustices perpetuated by white supremacist ideologies (Laws, 2020).

This dissertation is dedicated to my Father in Heaven, my grandparents, Inez, Ralph, and Mary, my parents, Reginald and Miatta, my best friend and love, Denzel, my African Ancestors, and future generations.

GLORY BE TO GOD! Little Ole Me, I started this educational journey at the young age of 4 in the year 2000, and I never imagined that 23 years later, I would be holding the earthly title of Ph.D. If it were not for my Father in Heaven, I would not have been able to achieve this earthly title. His unconditional love, grace, mercy, and unchanging hands covered me over and over again. He remained omnipresent, standing abundantly in the gap for me when I felt weak, fearful, incapable, unworthy, and hopeless. The daily reminders of His calling on my life, the revelations He gave me early on in my career, His safe embrace when weapons formed against me on this educational journey; through it all, He was there, and He will always be there.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This qualitative study aims to unearth Black counselor education and supervision (CES) doctoral students' experiences with institutional agents (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff) at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). This study explores the role that institutional agents at PWIs play in shaping Black CES doctoral students' institutional belonging and future career pathways. Chapter one encompasses a problem statement, theoretical underpinnings, and the purpose of this study. An overview of the research design, research questions, and a conclusion are also included in this chapter.

Problem Statement

Black students have significantly different academic experiences than their white counterparts who attend PWIs (Booker, 2016; Campbell et al., 2019). Due to racial campus climates at PWIs, several of these academic experiences negatively impact Black students and result in social alienation, intellectual and cultural isolation, microaggressions, and discrimination (Gray et al., 2018; Harris, 2020; Hope et al., 2013). These challenges are burdensome for Black students and impact their emotional and mental health (Henfield et al., 2013; Lewis & Shah, 2021; Shavers & Moore, 2019). Subsequently, institutional patterns at PWIs' such as Eurocentric curriculums and a lack of diverse faculty, contribute to maladaptive patterns such as academic disengagement, internalization, and withdrawal for Black students (Graham & McClain, 2019; Harris, 2020).

Consequently, a persistent lack of belongingness exists for Black students enrolled at PWIs (Booker, 2016; Eakins & Eakins, 2017; Gray et al., 2018; Harris, 2020). Scholars have defined belongingness as a student's connectedness and perceived value and acceptance from

their school community (Booker, 2016; Foxx, 2021; Hausmann et al., 2007; Housenecht & Swank, 2022; Strayhorn, 2019) and a vital component for students' academic persistence (Hausmann et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2019) and future career pathways (O'Meara et al., 2017; Ostrove et al., 2011). However, institutional agents' (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff) negative interactions with Black students impede their belongingness (Foxx, 2021; Johnson, 2022; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016).

Specifically, Black CE students have reported discriminatory experiences with institutional agents threatening their matriculation (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2004). Interestingly, the belongingness experiences of Black CES doctoral students at PWIs are limited, and a comprehensive understanding of the institutional agents' contribution to their belongingness is unexplored. For Black CES doctoral students who are required to complete rigorous coursework, engage in counseling internships, and produce scholarly work with their faculty and peers, these experiences that are salient to their racial and cultural identity may further complicate and influence their academic experiences and career trajectories (Acosta et al., 2015; Lewis et al., 2004). According to the 2021 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) Vital Statistics report, Black CES doctoral students were among the least likely to become full-time CE faculty in non-tenure or tenure track positions compared to their white counterparts (Brooks et al., 2023; CACREP, 2021). This significant lack of diversity is evident. Therefore, exploring Black CES doctoral students' interactions with institutional agents is critical to identifying barriers preventing institutional belonging.

Theoretical Underpinnings

To explore the belongingness experiences of Black CES doctoral students attending PWIs, *Strayhorn's Model of College Students' Sense of Belonging* through a *Critical Race Theory* (CRT) lens is utilized as the guiding theoretical framework for this study. Strayhorn, a scholar in the field of higher education, presents this model of college students' sense of belonging to address the distinct and contextual factors that contribute to students' belongingness on their college campuses. While many scholars have defined a sense of belonging, Strayhorn's model addresses the gap in the literature in which there is a lack of understanding of how organizational or institutional attributes, conditions, and practices influence students' sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2019). Strayhorn's model of college students' belongingness is most appropriate for this study, as existing literature lacks sufficient awareness of the experiences of Black CES doctoral students and their belongingness in the context of their interactions with institutional agents.

Through a CRT lens, I address and acknowledge the unique institutional experiences that Black doctoral students in the field of CES have as they relate to the role of race and racism in higher education. CRT, developed by Derrick Bell and later expounded upon by other scholars, including Alan Freeman, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Williams, Richard Delgado, and Mari Matsuda (Delgado, 2017), examines the role of race, racism, and power in the United States surrounding the disparities between dominant and racialized groups (Hiraldo, 2010) and can be used as a framework to address the social inequities that exist within higher education. Utilizing CRT attends to the relationship between race and racism, central to the social inequality that may exist for Black CES doctoral students within Predominantly White Institution walls. Overall, both guiding frameworks are uniquely suitable for the context and population of this study.

Strayhorn's Model of College Students' Sense of Belonging

According to the model, which stems from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, college students achieve a sense of belonging when they feel a sense of connectedness, membership, and belongingness to their institution (Strayhorn, 2019). When students lack the basic human need of belongingness and, in turn, feel alienated, it can influence their affect and behavior (Strayhorn, 2019). Consisting of seven core elements, a sense of belonging (1) is a basic need of college students, (2) a fundamental motive sufficient to drive human behavior, (3) takes on heightened importance (a) in certain contexts, and (b) at certain times, (4) is related to, and seemingly a consequence of, mattering, (5) social identities intersect and affect college students' sense of belonging, (6) engenders other positive outcomes, and (7) must be satisfied continually and likely changes as circumstances, conditions, and contexts change (Strayhorn, 2019). Strayhorn's model of belongingness underpins this research. While all seven core elements of Strayhorn's study may be applicable to Black CES doctoral students' institutional belonging, for this study, three elements will be highlighted to emphasize how the institutional structure of PWIs impact Black CES doctoral students' affect and behavior and their overall institutional belonging. These three elements are (1) a sense of belonging takes on heightened importance in certain contexts and at certain times, (2) a sense of belonging is related to, and seemingly a consequence of, mattering, and (3) a sense of belonging engenders other positive outcomes.

A Sense of Belonging Takes on A Heightened Importance. The theoretical element, "a sense of belonging takes on a heightened importance in certain contexts and at certain times," posits that belongingness is context-dependent (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 34). Research suggests that because belongingness is context-dependent, those who experience lower levels of belongingness face significant barriers in progressing through their programs (Osterman, 2000; Strayhorn, 2019). Moreover, Black students attending PWIs lack belongingness due to the

unsupportive and racial campus climates (Lewis et al., 2021; Von Robertson & Chaney, 2017), thereby threatening their basic human need to belong. During such a crucial period of matriculating in their doctoral programs, Black CES doctoral students may face this same fate, further contributing to their urgent need to belong as a vital means to cope with such negative experiences.

A Sense of Belonging is Mattering. The theoretical element "a sense of belonging is related to, and seemingly a consequence of mattering" posits that belonging is intricately linked to the feeling of mattering, defined as being valued and appreciated by others (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 36). Strayhorn emphasizes the importance of socialization experiences in college in significantly impacting undergraduate and graduate students' belongingness (Strayhorn, 2019). Specifically, graduate students experience a high level of socialization in several ways, such as faculty-student advising, program gatherings, orientations, conference attendance, research labs, and internships (Strayhorn, 2019; Sverdlik et al., 2018). Such socialization experiences can provide graduate students with skills, competencies, and dispositions necessary to enhance their professional identities and significantly contribute to their persistence and achievement outcomes in graduate school (Gardner, 2010; Strayhorn, 2019; Weidman & Stein, 2003).

As a result, when graduate students feel competent and others in their academic communities validate this competence, they, in turn, feel valued and accepted as members of the group. At the same time, the literature indicates that Black students' interactions with institutional agents at PWIs are often plagued with racist and discriminatory messages that further engender their belonging (Ellis, 2001; Harris, 2020; Johnson, 2022; Shavers & Moore, 2019). For Black CES doctoral students whose careers depend on these supporting relationships they build with members of their respective fields, it is expected that negative socialization experiences will

detrimentally influence Black CES students' sense of mattering and, therefore, belongingness, potentially compromising their matriculation and career pathways.

A Sense of Belonging Engenders Other Positive Outcomes. The theoretical element "a sense of belonging engenders other positive outcomes" posits that when college students satisfy their need to belong, it enhances their ability to achieve positive outcomes (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 39). Literature supports that when students satisfy their need to belong, it enhances their academic achievement and persistence (Booker, 2016; Brooms, 2020; Foxx, 2021; Hausmann et al., 2007; Housenecht & Swank, 2022; Strayhorn, 2019). It is essential that institutions foster a sense of belonging for students, as a lack or loss of belonging can produce adverse academic, social, and psychological outcomes (Strayhorn, 2019). For Black CES doctoral students aspiring to transition to academia, the proposed adverse outcomes may profoundly impact their doctoral matriculation and future career pathways. All three elements are crucial in framing this research study, focusing on the interactions between Black CES doctoral students and institutional agents and their profound impact on Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness and future career pathways.

Critical Race Theory

Emerging as a call to action to deconstruct systemic racism in American society, CRT analyzes how race and racism are embedded in the legal system (Delgado et al., 2017). Since its emergence, CRT has been applied across various disciplines, one being in the field of education (Landson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In the context of education, CRT is also used to deconstruct racist institutionalized practices that impact students. Guided by five tenets, CRT is committed to understanding and counteracting the systemic nature of racism as it has affected and undervalued people of color in various institutions. Specifically, these five tenets are (1) permanence of

racism, (2) counternarratives, (3) interest convergence, (4) whiteness as property, and (5) critique of liberalism (Hiraldo, 2010; Landson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

To illuminate and address the endemic nature of race and racism within the confines of PWIs while centering the voices of Black CES doctoral students and highlighting the incongruence that exists within CES programs as it pertains to their inability to establish institutional belongingness for their Black doctoral students, CRT is the lens through which I frame this study. Collectively, these three theoretical tenants, the permanence of racism, counter-storytelling, and interest convergence, provide tools for uncovering the perpetual systemic issues of privilege and oppression that may impact Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness at PWIs.

Permanence of Racism. This tenant emphasizes that racism is at the helm of everyday life and controls the very nature of politics, social, and economic entities in U.S. society (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Consequently, the very facet of white supremacy is interwoven into all institutional structures of society, including the higher education system. This tenant of CRT is specifically relevant as higher education institutions are a part of the framework of driving citizenship in this country. For example, when students are immersed in curriculum and education in the classroom and within the institution, they are provided with the knowledge to evolve into active citizens who play an essential role in the democratic process. Unfortunately, the same curriculum and institutional practices provided to students perpetuate racist ideologies in higher education. A couple of examples can be seen in the delivery of a Eurocentric curriculum and the tolerating and ignoring of stereotypical messages (Gray et al., 2018; Hurtado & Alvarado, 2015; Lewis et al., 2021; McCoy & Parker, 2019; Schmahl & Nguyen, 2022).

The historical construction of PWIs rests on the fact that only white individuals were afforded the right to access the institution before desegregation. However, according to CRT, this desegregation in educational institutions only mirrored the image of integration while still reinforcing the practices of institutional racism (Baker, 2005). This illusion of change is prevalent within U.S. society and can even be seen in the low retention and graduation rates for Black students who attend PWIs (Johnson, 2013; William et al., 2019). In addition, the underrepresentation of Black faculty and the psychological impact that Black students experience are just a few of the outcomes due to the embeddedness of institutional racism (Bridget et al., 2017; Henfield et al., 2013; Lewis & Shah, 2021; Shavers & Moore, 2019). For this reason, Black CES doctoral students' ability to learn and persist may be negatively impacted by the endemic nature of racism, which further impedes CACREP and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts.

Counternarratives. This tenant highlights the importance of allowing historically oppressed and marginalized people to present their stories and perspectives pertaining to their lived experiences in a racially oppressed society (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Counternarratives serve as a means of affirming the narratives of people of color as they are the creditable informants of their lived experiences (Lynn & Parker, 2006). This study seeks to elicit Black CES doctoral students' narratives regarding their institutional belongingness experiences in PWIs. To amplify the voices of Black CES doctoral students while also deconstructing the common or normative narratives, this study utilizes semi-structured and open-ended interviews. By employing interviews, I precisely capture the meaning of belonging and emphasize the critical need for institutional belongingness from the perspectives of Black CES doctoral

students. This further contributes to the discourse on racial issues within higher education and the pursuit of advocating for institutional reform to better support Black CES doctoral students.

Interest Convergence. The third tenant, *Interest Convergence*, asserts that the rights of people of color are considered or advanced when they converge with the interests of white people (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Specifically, desegregation was one of the first steps taken toward integration in higher education to grant Black students guaranteed access to the same resources as their white peers. However, such a decision was strategically aligned with the interests of the U.S. government to demonstrate an equal society during the Cold War (Watras, 2013). Such integration efforts are disingenuous as these efforts were not solely in the interest of providing Black students with equitable access and did not sweep away the foundation of PWIs, which were founded upon discriminatory ideologies (Baker, 2005).

Similarly, the field of counseling has attempted to diversify to provide multicultural mental health care (American Counseling Association, 2017). Despite these efforts, a report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) found that 88% of mental health counselors were white (Kim, 2022). Current statistics present long-standing differences in health outcomes for those of ethnic descent, particularly African Americans, heightening disparities between Black people and other racial and ethnic populations in the United States (Funk, 2022). These disparities are common in the realm of mental health care, where counselors are predominately white and are unable to appeal to people of color and marginalized communities (American Counseling Association, 2017). McGuire & Miranda (2008) assert that increasing the amount of racial minority mental health care providers is a significant factor in improving mental health disparities for racial and ethnic minorities as such diversity within the workforce can foster culturally appropriate care practices. Therefore, increasing the recruitment and retention of Black

and other racial and ethnic faculty in CES programs can prepare counseling students with the tools to assist Black clients and other historically oppressed and marginalized communities.

Although CES programs have increased enrollment, which narrows the diversity gap, the lack of representation among counselor educators is a clear indicator that Black CES doctoral students and other racial and ethnic minorities may be lacking the support and a sense of belonging necessary to persist in counselor education (American Counseling Association, 2017). It may be in the interest of CES programs to recruit Black CES doctoral students and other racial and ethnic minorities as a means to increase their enrollment numbers and profess their commitment to multiculturalism. However, concern for Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness is unclear. Importantly, this pattern speaks to the capitalist nature of institutions and how their enrollment interests are of more importance than racial progression and lasting social change. Moreover, CRT provides a lens through which I view institutional belonging through the lived experiences of a historically oppressed and marginalized population such as Black CES doctoral students. In addition, the three tenants above are most appropriate for this study because they focus on addressing the systemic issues of racism that contribute to Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness at PWIs.

Epistemological Stance

The driving force behind my engagement in this study, exploring the institutional belonging experiences of Black CES doctoral students at PWIs, is deeply rooted in my identity as a second-generation African American woman and my philosophical belief in social constructivism. Specifically, reflecting on the eve of my undergraduate graduation, I am reminded of the profound impact my educational journey has had on my professional scholarship and personal growth. Receiving my Bachelors and Masters from Historically Black Colleges and

Universities (HBCUs) was an empowering and transformative experience much different from my grade school experience, where I rarely encountered educators who mirrored my identity. The ability to have a sense of community and culture away from home began a pivotal work within me in which I realized there was a way to integrate my passion for supporting individuals who descended from the African and Black Diaspora within my chosen career.

I have continued cultivating a critical consciousness through self-reflection and deepening my understanding of systemic inequalities. As a CES doctoral student and throughout my academic journey as a novice researcher, I have gravitated towards research rooted in critical work, enabling me to actively disrupt oppressive systems. Through my lived experiences encompassing my cultural background, social identities, and social constructivist lens, I have attained a diverse and global worldview and an unwavering commitment to activism and advocacy for historically oppressed and marginalized communities.

Adherence to the principles of social constructivism, which assert that knowledge is a product of social interactions influenced by historical and cultural norms within individuals' lives, and acknowledging my transformative worldview, I understand the critical importance of understanding how individuals shape their perceptions based on the meanings and interpretations akin to their lived experiences and the crucial need to confront social oppression. Because of this, I take on a critical epistemological stance, which allows me as the researcher to center race as a core influence on the social and educational experiences of Black CES doctoral students at PWIs.

Purpose of The Study

By utilizing critical phenomenology, I explore the phenomenon of institutional agents' (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff) influence on Black CES doctoral students'

institutional belongingness at PWIs. This study will further increase knowledge of Black CES doctoral students' experiences with institutional agents at PWIs and provide insight into institutional changes that can be made to increase Black CES doctoral students' persistence and promotion toward academic careers. With such a strong emphasis placed on CES programs' systematic efforts to recruit, employ, and retain a diverse faculty, this study will highlight the importance of diversifying the field and provide significant implications for PWIs to foster institutional belongingness for Black CES doctoral students.

Research Design and Questions

Critical phenomenology informed by a critical race perspective design aligns with the nature of this study. To uncover the essence of the phenomenon, it is necessary to explore from the standpoint of the individuals' lived experience and address research inquiries centered on the subjective meanings and perceptions associated with the phenomenon (Ferrari, 2022). To this end, the overarching research questions of this study are: (1) What are the experiences of Black doctoral students who are enrolled in PWI CES programs? (2) How do Black CES doctoral students at PWIs describe their institutional belongingness? (3) How do institutional agents impact Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness?

Summary

In this current chapter, I provide an overview of the research study exploring the phenomenon of institutional belongingness for Black CES doctoral students enrolled in PWIs and how institutional agents influence their institutional belongingness. Chapter One provides an introduction to the study, including a problem statement, theoretical frameworks, the purpose of the study, and research design and questions. Chapter Two presents a review of current literature relevant to the phenomenon being studied, Chapter Three details the study's methodology,

Chapter Four presents the findings of the study, and Chapter Five provides noteworthy implications derived from the findings.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, I present an empirical literature review that supports the vital need to explore the role that institutional agents (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff) at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) play in shaping Black counselor education and supervision (CES) doctoral students' institutional belongingness and future career pathways. The review encompasses synthesized literature to highlight the key concepts that influence belongingness for Black students and gaps in the current literature. First, I introduce the concept of belongingness and the theoretical underpinnings guiding this study. Second, I present a review of the historical relevance and structural issues of higher education centered on PWIs and their profound influence on Black students' belongingness and their well-being. This culmination of literature will provide support for the need of Black CES doctoral students' institutional belonging at their PWIs, followed by the research design and questions. Lastly, this chapter will conclude with a summary and a brief introduction of chapter three.

A Sense of Belonging

Originally coined by Maslow, a sense of belonging is a psychological fundamental need for human motivation (Maslow, 1962). Rooted and driven by one's desire to be accepted by others or social groups, lacking a sense of belonging or being unable to meet their belonging needs may lead individuals to experience negative emotional, behavioral, and mental health issues, further hindering their ability to achieve their full potential (Maslow, 1962; Strayhorn, 2019). The concept of belongingness has since been extended to fit various contexts. Particularly in higher education, scholars have expanded upon Maslow's theory of belonging and have found

that the theoretical concept of belonging is different for varied populations, as several factors can drive belongingness. Within higher education, researchers assert that when students feel connected and perceive value and acceptance from their campus community, they belong (Booker, 2016; Foxx, 2021; Houseknecht & Swank, 2022; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; O'Meara et al., 2017; Strayhorn, 2019).

A sense of belonging propels students toward academic success and enriches their social and emotional health, and as a result, students are able to persist academically. Academic persistence is defined as the effort and determination that students obtain from institutional experiences that propel them to achieve their educational goals and college degrees (Tinto, 1993). Thus, belongingness is a fundamental need for higher education students. Conversely, a lack of belongingness for students can lead to feelings of isolation, alienation, and disconnection from their peers, professors, and respective institutions (Strayhorn, 2019). This can ultimately lead to high attrition rates, limited participation in the classroom, and potential susceptibility to mental health issues (Hale et al., 2005; Walton & Cohen, 2011).

Students deprived of belongingness lose opportunities to enhance their personal and professional development (Strayhorn, 2019). It is essential to realize that there are, however, several contextual factors, such as race, institutional climate, and interpersonal relationships, that influence students' sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hurtado & Alvarado, 2015; Strayhorn, 2019; Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, by acknowledging the contextual factors influencing belongingness, it is essential to catalyze positive change, fostering an environment in higher education that enhances a sense of belonging for Black students. Through this awareness, it is imperative that scholars commit to actively working towards a more equitable academic community.

Strayhorn's Model of College Students' Sense of Belonging

Derived from the theory of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, debuts *Strayhorn's Model of College Students' Sense of Belonging*. A model grounded in a positivist approach, Strayhorn implores quantitative regression methods to systematically observe quantifiable aspects related to the intricate relationship between core elements shaping college students' sense of belonging. As depicted in Figure 1, the model emphasizes the hierarchical progression of needs, beginning with physiological needs to the highest of needs, such as self-actualization. Strayhorn contends that satisfying the fundamental need for belongingness significantly influences students' behaviors and perceptions (Strayhorn, 2019).

Importantly, Strayhorn's model highlights the dynamic nature of students' sense of belonging, underscoring that contextual factors such as time, place, and socialization experiences significantly influence college student belongingness and associated outcomes (Strayhorn, 2019). The characteristics of students' various contexts and how they navigate them during their college careers while satisfying their most basic psychological needs are significantly important and influential in their belongingness needs being met. These belongingness needs are driven by extrinsic and intrinsic motivations and are connected to students' ability to persist academically. Hence, when a college student's belongingness is satisfied, outcomes such as college student's behaviors and perceptions measured by academic performance indicators such as GPA and observable academic skills are positive. At the same time, a lack of belongingness can lead to adverse psychological challenges such as mental and emotional distress (Strayhorn, 2019).

It is asserted that students' belonging needs must be satisfied before they can achieve other needs of knowledge and self-actualization specific to the higher education context (Strayhorn, 2019). It is important to note that this integrated model represents the interconnected

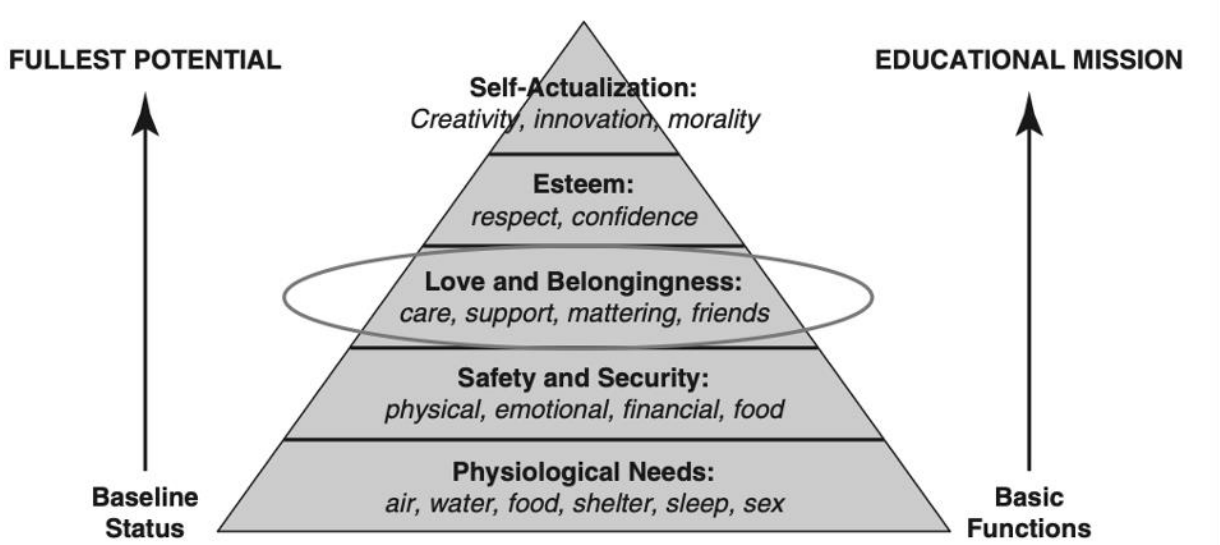
nature of human needs. Strayhorn (2019) asserts that students may seek other needs within the model in the absence of their genuine need to belong. This further emphasizes that needs within the hierarchy are not independent but interconnected, emphasizing the importance of a sense of belonging in fulfilling students' overall well-being.

Building upon the foundation of this theoretical underpinning of Strayhorn's model, I draw from a social constructivist and transformative approach to further my methodology in recognizing the subjective and cultural phenomenon inherent in college students' belongingness. Extending beyond Strayhorn's framework, I implore a critical view exploring the historical and social contexts of PWIs to further delve into the subjective nature of belongingness. Although Strayhorn's theory serves as a theoretical guide to further explore and understand how the contextual structures of PWIs negatively impact Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness, I intently acknowledge the limitations of Strayhorn's positivist approach as it cannot fully reveal the complex and nuanced ways in which belongingness manifests for advanced college students.

Therefore, through a transformative and social constructivist lens, I embrace a qualitative approach to deeply explore and unveil the contextual intricacies of institutions and their influence on institutional belongingness for students who are historically oppressed and marginalized. By way of my critical epistemology, which served as the foundation for this exploration, I intended to contribute towards a comprehensive understanding of institutional belongingness for Black CES doctoral students at PWIs, primarily due to the existing gap in research on doctoral students' belongingness and the persistent nature of racism and systemic inequities within broader societal institutions.

Figure 1

Strayhorn's Model of College Students' Sense of Belonging



Note. A theoretical model adopted from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs for developing steps to belonging for higher education students.

A Sense of Belonging Takes on A Heightened Importance

A central tenet of the theory is the awareness that a sense of belonging is *heightened in certain contexts or at certain times*, which further impacts students' adjustment and achievement (Strayhorn, 2019). For graduate students, Strayhorn has noted that departments and programs within institutions are comprised of their own specific values, norms, and practices that take on a predominate role and can impact students who may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable with these traditions or customs (Strayhorn, 2019). When students lack the ability to follow such norms, values, and practices, it can severely impact graduate students' skills and performance, in which they may acquire an outsider status.

Specifically, this connection between contextual factors and students' academic performance is demonstrated in a qualitative study conducted by Shavers and Moore (2019) in

which they identified recurring themes: *tokenism*, *unwelcome spaces*, and *outsiders* when interviewing Black women doctoral students who experienced racial discrimination at their PWIs. The students attributed their outsider status to discriminatory messages, negative interactions with faculty and peers, and classroom experiences. For Black CES doctoral students at PWIs, an urgent need to satisfy their belongingness may be driven by their experiences at PWIs and their historically oppressed and marginalized identities. It may very well be that their academic cultures, considering both the counseling field and PWIs, are incongruent with their culture of origin.

A Sense of Belonging is Mattering

It is important to realize that Black CES doctoral students are well past the emerging adult developmental phase and are not looking to satisfy social needs in the same manner as many undergraduate students. Strayhorn (2019) notes that graduate students' academic persistence and membership within their department and discipline are dependent on their social needs and interactions. It is, in fact, through these engagements that graduate students acquire a sense of belonging. For example, for many of these students who are simultaneously engaging in rigorous coursework and advancing their scholarship to pursue a career in academia, it is highly likely and expected that they will be well-immersed in various academic socializations, such as attending conferences and participating in research. Even more so, due to their student status, they will experience a higher level of engagement with faculty, peers, and staff as they academically persist.

Illustrated in the tenet, a *Sense of belonging is related to, and seemingly a consequence of mattering*; when students perceive they matter through positive socialization experiences with their institutional agents (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff) and their overall

institutional community, they feel accepted as a member of the group, further enhancing their professional identities (Strayhorn, 2019). Specifically, through several research analyses, Strayhorn posits that a sense of belonging for graduate students indeed begets their socialization experiences (Strayhorn, 2019). Strayhorn (2019) emphasizes that the three socialization occurrences, (1) developing competency, (2) forming supportive relationships, and (3) affirming one's professional identity, are part of a recursive pattern of attaining a sense of belonging for graduate students. Particularly when graduate students gain awareness of formal and informal knowledge through various socialization experiences with institutional agents, they can perform well and are able to exemplify their performance, which further grants them connection, respect, and value by their institutional agents.

At the same time, students who lack care from their respective institutions can expect to not satisfy their belongingness needs (Strayhorn, 2019). Literature examining socialization experiences among Black doctoral students found that race was a contributing factor, and racial and discriminatory interactions from peers and faculty in their professional relationships at PWIs led to feelings of not mattering and ultimately impeded their professional development as they prepared for faculty and leadership roles (Felder et al., 2014; Franklin, 2021; Strayhorn, 2019). For Black CES doctoral students enrolled at PWIs, their socialization experiences may include encounters with overt and covert racism and discrimination from their institutional agents, which may potentially create a barrier for them as they academically persist and pursue academic careers.

A Sense of Belonging Engenders Other Positive Outcomes

Additionally, a sense of belonging has been widely recognized as a catalyst for positive student outcomes. As the tenet, a *sense of belonging engenders other positive outcomes*, it is

claimed that a lack of belonging among students can hinder even the most highly advanced students' persistence rate (Strayhorn, 2019). This is evident in Strayhorn's analysis of the statistical relationship between a sense of belonging and success in graduate school. Strayhorn highlights that there is indeed a positive association between a sense of belonging and success in graduate school, particularly for doctoral students (Strayhorn, 2019). As other scholars have documented, doctoral students of advanced scholarship invest a significant amount of time in their programs, developing professionally and contributing to their academic fields (Dickens et al., 2016; Horton-Parker & Wambui Preston, 2021). CES doctoral students, in particular, are prepared by their programs to generate new knowledge that can inform their professional practice (CACREP, 2024). Among those students, Black CES doctoral students may, however, face unique challenges compared to their peers if they do not belong, further leading to a plethora of adverse outcomes that may impact their success and even psychological well-being (Horton-Parker & Wambui Preston, 2021). For Black CES doctoral students, this troubling reality may even engender adverse outcomes that influence their persistence and career trajectories.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory **(**CRT) is a theoretical framework that systematically examines the pervasive nature of racism within all societal institutions in the United States of America (Bell, 1980; Bell, 2004). At its core, CRT theorists affirm that racism is normal and deeply embedded in American society, never ceasing to exist (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Before its expansion in various fields of discipline, its roots can be traced back to the legal system, emerging as Critical Legal Studies (CLS), a prominent legal movement of the 1970s derived from the civil rights movement to bring about structural change. CLS emerged to critique traditional legal theories

and their lack of regard for the relationship that existed between the law and social and political issues. Specifically, CLS scholars believed that the law is inherently encompassed with social biases and only supports the interests of those who founded its conception (Fitzpatrick & Hunt, 1987). These biases ultimately construct differing impacts, where white people are protected, and people of color are harmed through discriminatory practices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Through discourse regarding CLS, Critical Legal scholars developed CRT to critically examine and address the role of race and racism and its interconnection to the hegemonic system of white supremacy in the United States judicial system (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). These scholars included Derrick Bell, Kimberle Crenshaw, Alan Freeman, Cheryl Harris, Patricia Williams, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, and Charles R. Lawrence III (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). To support this claim, these scholars made critical assertions that racism is deeply embedded in all aspects of society, including legal and educational institutions, making it unidentifiable at times. Scholars contested the establishment of European Americans as the normative standard and the inherent disregard for people of color as true informants of their experiences. Further, they scrutinized the fallacy of the law as an act of liberalism, resulting in the law's failure to foster an equitable society and contribute to the oppression of people of color (Crenshaw et al., 1999; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Ultimately, these founding assertions foregrounded the conception of CRT and core tenets, the permeance of racism, whiteness as property, critique of liberalism, interest convergence, and counternarratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Hiraldo, 2010; Landson-Billings & Tate, 1995), as a means to oppose the illusionary aspect of the liberal ideology and instead expose the perpetual maintenance of white supremacy and the subsequent systemic racial inequalities that exist within institutions.

Resting on the notion that racism is permanent, the framework of CRT has since been expanded by scholars, who assert that racism is present in all institutions, such as higher education, that the experiences of people of color are credible, and liberalism and the inherent belief in the law maintain the ideology of white supremacy (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Since, CRT has been adapted and expanded across several disciplines, resulting in various theoretical tenets fitting for the field of discipline. In this exploration of the concept of institutional belongingness among Black CES doctoral students, it is paramount to examine the historical and current inequities that have played a role in Black students' experiences in higher education. For the purposes of this study, the adaption of CRT within the educational context is fitting. Core tenets, the permeance of racism, whiteness as property, the critique of liberalism, interest convergence, and counternarratives (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006) best highlight the perpetual existence of race and racism and discriminatory practices within educational settings. To elaborate further on these theoretical assertions, I will begin with the core tenet, whiteness as property.

Whiteness as Property

Whiteness as property is the theoretical assertion that in the capitalistic society of the United States, whiteness and having white skin have always been regarded as valuable and subsequently treated as property (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This ingrained belief that whiteness as property (i.e., asset) confers rights to privileges, hierarchical status, and power to those who possess white skin further results in racial injustice and systemic inequities. This societal structure grants white individuals advantages such as the right to use and enjoyment, rights of disposition, reputation and status property, and the absolute right to exclude (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 59), while Black and African American people continue to

endure oppression. This poignant interconnected relationship between race and property, particularly within the United States, underscores the historical significance of slavery and the barbaric stealing of human rights from Black and African American people, who were regarded as property, ultimately contributing to the persistence of legal and societal privileges for whites and systemic disparities for Black and African American people.

Critique of Liberalism

Critical race theorists recognize that the system of white supremacy, where white superiority is considered the dominant power, is politically, economically, and culturally ingrained in American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) or arguably globally. This system, which recognizes whiteness as the norm for all people and is maintained by the governing systems of society, further reinforces racist systemic practices and policies that impact Black and African people to this present day. As previously mentioned, CRT opposes this philosophy of liberalism, which creates a facade of equality without addressing the overarching ideology and systemic practices that uphold existing inequalities (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004)—specifically, critiquing three aspects associated with liberalism.

The first and second liberal critiques are the notion of colorblindness, characterized by the denial of racial differences and the neutrality of law asserting equal opportunity for all (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). It is important to note that both of these critiques examine the nature of liberal ideology and expose the denial, disingenuous notion of colorblind, failing to acknowledge that the very construct of race was built upon Eurocentrism and white supremacy, which is ingrained in the foundational societal structures of the law and various institutions (Camara, 2020; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Weiss et al., 2020). These critiques show the reasoning as to why race-based policies and practices enacted, designed to create equality in the law and

various institutions, do not resolve the endemic nature of racism, and still, covert racism and social disparities remain unchecked and continue to exist today for Black and African American people.

Lastly, the notion of incremental change asserts that progress for those historically oppressed and marginalized remains slow to appease those in power (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Theorists present this critique as a means to underscore the significant difference between fostering equality versus equity. Incremental change, often carried by the efforts of those who embody the lived experience of an oppressed and marginalized individual, reflects the pursuit of equality, which assumes that all are afforded equal rights and opportunities. This results in the disingenuous belief that such progress will help to level the playing field when, in reality, the very endemic nature of racism contributes to the undermining of progression and inclusive efforts. Hence why, theorists critique the notion of incremental change as it merely puts a cover over the existence of racism and fails to acknowledge that "race and experiences based on race are not equal," resulting in a lack of equity, where fair and just rights and opportunities continue to be afforded to those in power (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 29).

While the critique of liberalism and whiteness as property core tenets present the perpetual maintenance of white supremacy and the subsequent systemic racial inequalities that exist within institutions and support the necessary need to dismantle such race-based policies and practices that fail to address societal inequities, these tenets, do not expressly provide a critical view to explore the consequences of these inherited beliefs and practices and their impact on Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness. Therefore, to highlight the importance of social justice change within the confinement of post-graduate education, the tenants' permanence of racism, interest convergence, and counter-narrative will be discussed. To further

elaborate, these three tenets will provide a critical lens to explore the consequences of these inherited beliefs and practices and their impact on Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness.

Permanence of Racism

The basic premise of CRT indicates that racism is a permanent component of American life (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Specifically, this permanency can be seen in the consistent pattern of backpedaling in legislative rulings regarding Black students' access to higher education being contested. This is illustrated in Plessy v. Ferguson, a landmark decision in 1896 that upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation (Golub, 2005), as well as Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, a landmark decision declaring racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional (Mac A. Stewart, 2020). These rulings further led to Black students like James Meredith obtaining the civil right to attend PWIs and several affirmative action policies that upheld the use of race in college admission processes to promote diversity (Bollinger, 2023). Alas, this year's supreme court rulings in SFFA v. Harvard and SFFA v. UNC overturned the established equal protection law and impending past Affirmative Action efforts and policies (Bollinger, 2023). It seems as if the promise of education for Black students has and always will come with its casualties. For today, many Black students, even if they pursue higher education, are still disadvantaged by the long-standing structural inequities in the U.S. Despite legislative rulings meant to address the historical inequities and integration efforts, Black higher education students remain underrepresented and under-supported at PWIs (Harper et al., 2009; Harris, 2020; McDougal et al., 2018).

Interest Convergence

The CRT tenant interest convergence asserts that racial progress only occurs when it aligns with the interest of those in power (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). For example, some, along with Derrick Bell, would argue that the response to the end of racial segregation in educational institutions and the acceleration of civil rights came well after the Cold War when the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union drove federal officials to reflect on the ways in which they could protect their image and represent the core beliefs of democracy (Watras, 2013). In a strategic decision to serve the interests of the U.S. government, the Brown v. Board decision depicts how the interests of those oppressed are considered only when they converge with those in power. Illustrated from Bell's account, “Blacks obtain relief even for acknowledged racial injustice only when that relief also serves, directly or indirectly, to further ends which policymakers perceive are in the best interests of the country” (Bell, 2004, p. 56).

Counternarratives

Recognizing that the history of the U.S. has systematically affected Black students and their institutional belongingness at PWIs, it is vital to illuminate the effects of this impact from Black student's perspectives. The CRT tenant of counternarrative is a powerful tool for validating and amplifying the voices of historically marginalized people (Delgado et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In addition to amplifying the voices of Black students, their narratives challenge privileged discourses, providing a critical need to explore the “untold” lives of these students from their perspectives rather than from the myths of the majority (Delgado et al., 2017).

Permanence of Racism

The type of institution that Black students attend significantly impacts their experiences due to the pervasive interpersonal and institutional discrimination they consistently encounter in

their daily lives (Hope et al., 2013). Research by Campbell et al. (2019) reveals that Black students regularly receive messages of hate within the confines of PWIs. It is important to note that the historical establishment of PWIs is directly tied to the exclusion of Black students. PWI's origin and institutional mission and goals have historically predominately served the interests of white students and still perpetuate systemic racism through discriminatory and exclusion practices (Feagin et al., 1996; Hurtado et al., 1998). To date, emerging as a response to this exclusion, aforementioned legal rulings during the civil rights era provided Black students with access to higher education that was initially denied to them during slavery and segregation. While today's PWIs' student enrollment may include Black students, still the enrollment of 50% or more of white students at these institutions further contributes to the indoctrination in white cultural norms lacking purposeful cultural and educational experiences centered around Black students' cultural heritage (Crewe, 2017; Gaston & Ojewuyi, 2022; Safi, 2020).

Today's Black student finds themself in a conflict, occupying institutional spaces that were not created for them and are still systemically oppressive (Anderson, 2020). As W.E.B. Du Bois echoed, "The problem of the 20th century is the color line" (Du Bois, 2017, p. 5). W.E.B Du Bois argued that racial segregation and discrimination would remain a significant barrier to social and economic progress for Black people. Although the civil rights movement sparked the beginning of legislative changes aimed at resolving racial segregation and discrimination against Black people, still, today, current inequities remain, especially within higher education institutions. This perpetual existence of racism within all institutional structures of society may present unique challenges for Black CES doctoral students, especially those enrolled at PWIs, which have historical roots tied to systemic racism and exclusion. These institutions, lacking reform of systemic practices and policies, can either motivate or hinder students' matriculation.

PWIs' academic environments may be inconducive to Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness and salient reminders that they do not belong.

Campus Environment

Researchers argue that belonging is not experienced equally among all groups and that Black students lack belongingness in PWIs (Harper, 2009; Strayhorn, 2019; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Literature asserts that while Black students are part of a minoritized people, they experience a significantly higher frequency of racial microaggressions compared to other minoritized groups, which leads to a lower sense of belonging (Lewis et al., 2021; Hurtado & Alvarado, 2015; Hussain & Jones, 2021). In a qualitative study by Lewis and colleagues (2021), interest convergence methodology was utilized to examine how Black students interpret their PWIs' diversity and inclusion initiatives. The study's findings concluded that Black students' experience of racial microaggressions differed from their institution's practices and policies, further impacting their sense of belonging.

The prevalence of discriminatory messages within PWI institutional climates can significantly impact Black students' persistence and achievement as these students have minoritized backgrounds and salient racial identities at PWIs (Lewis et al., 2021). When Campbell and colleagues (2019) employed a study exploring the significance of race in success and satisfaction in African American college students enrolled in both Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and PWIs, they found that factors like self-esteem closely related to a sense of belonging for Black students and were significantly higher at HBCUs than PWIs when assessing for students' academic achievement. This lack of self-esteem among Black students is reflected in the differences in campus climates (McDougal et al., 2018). Black students at PWIs are consistently met with negative images or stereotypes associated with their racial identity

rather than positive images of their racial and cultural heritage (Campbell et al., 2019; Cokley, 2002).

Additionally, in a qualitative study assessing a sense of belonging in privileged and minoritized students, Vaccaro and Newman (2016) found dissimilar perceptions of belongingness among minoritized students compared to their privileged counterparts. While minoritized students' white counterparts emphasized the need to fit, they instead emphasized the need for authenticity, respect, and safety. This authenticity, respect, and safety for Black students is essential to their sense of belonging. These uncovered themes can be seen through literature and are particularly manifested through their ability to be true to themselves and their cultural identity (Booker, 2016; Cox, 2020), not having to worry about the repercussions or backlash from openly discussing negative racialized experiences on campus (Baker & Moore, 2015; Lewis & Shah, 2021; Shavers & Moore, 2019), not being targets of stereotypical comments and judgments when they show up in their authentic physical presentation (i.e., dress attire and natural hairstyles) (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Lewis et al., 2021), and not having transactional and disingenuous faculty and peer relationships (Payne & Suddler, 2014).

Unfortunately, establishing a sense of authenticity, respect, and safety may very well be a lucid dream for Black students, particularly those enrolled at PWIs, as they often experience the prevailing trend of othering and unbelonging (Harper, 2009; Lewis et al., 2021; Strayhorn, 2014; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Specifically, due to PWIs' racist and oppressive structures, Black students who attend PWIs are not afforded the same privilege as their white peers and often experience unfair and unjust treatment in academic spaces where they go to learn and seek new knowledge as they prepare for their careers. These spaces, in particular, continue to ignore and further perpetuate subtle and overt messages of inferiority that support Black students'

perceptions of unbelonging and enhance implicit bias among other students (Hurtado & Alvarado, 2015; Johnson, 2022; Lewis et al., 2021; Shavers & Moore, 2019).

Institutional Statements

Among the importance of cultivating safe campus environments, institutional messages of support are significant to the foundation of institutional belongingness for Black students. These written and publicized statements of support and institutional missions during the occurrence of sociopolitical events released by the heads of colleges and universities highlight the role of higher education in shaping campus climates, supporting historically oppressed and marginalized communities as well as their faculty, staff, and students, and their contribution to the broader global network. Such messages are ever present and crucial in reflecting the institution's broader institutional mission, values, and intended purpose (Burke, 2020; Garcia et al., 2020; Johnson & Justice, 2022).

Amidst the growing sociopolitical challenges of the past and current decade, the presidential election of Donald Trump was notably marked by a significant increase in racist rhetoric. This led to an emerging climate of racial tension and an accelerated rate of racial injustice within the United States, further fueling social race-related events such as the assassinations of Black people by police officers and white supremacist hate crimes on college and university campuses (Lane et al., 2020; Lewis et al., 2021). Too recently, the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the aftermath of the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and many more prompted many colleges and universities to issue institutional statements acknowledging the Black Lives Matter Movement and their commitment to DEI (Burke, 2020; McKenzie, 2020; Martin, 2022).

For PWIs at the center of historical legacies of institutional racism, such institutional responses may have very well come with swift action, even employing faculty from diverse backgrounds (Schwab, 2021) in order to emphasize the importance of their DEI commitment. Yet, many argue that such a swift movement was met with no transformational change (Arday & Jones, 2022; England & Purcell, 2020; Ezarik, 2021). As Martin (2022) illustrates in their article examining the backlash and betrayal faced after the aftermath of the assassination of George Floyd, such actions of solidarity taken by stakeholders within and without colleges were met later with minimization and erasure of Blackness in the conversations and plans regarding DEI practices and policies. One particular example, noted by Martin (2022), is that the lack of mentioning Black students, staff, faculty, or Black injustices in such institutional messages intentionally leaves out instrumental forces behind the movement to remain supported by the majority.

Still, these intentional and harmful tactics of disingenuous messages delivered by PWIs leave Black bodies within the institution once again dismissed, exploited, and overall, a consistent lack of strategic planning to address and cultivate a safe environment in which Black faculty, staff, and students feel supported and are able to thrive. The fact remains that even after the height of previously mentioned sociopolitical events, Black students, faculty, and staff at PWIs still report high levels of racial microinsults, overt and covert racism, and discrimination (Bauer-Wolf, 2019; Jones & Reddick, 2017; Lewis et al., 2021; Miles et al., 2020; Rosen et al., 2020). The historical pattern is evident in the literature that even when Black students, faculty, and staff engage in efforts to resist and challenge structural racism at PWIs, they encounter backlash and resistance from the majority community (Feagin et al., 1996; Jones & Reddick, 2017; Newsome, 2022). Specifically, when Appalachian State student organizations led protests

regarding George Floyd's assassination, and in response to the historical oppression faced by Black people in America, students were met with condemnation and threats of arrests (Newsome, 2022).

Race matters, and now more than ever, Black bodies within institutions are examining the weight of institutional statements, as their often salient and solitary social justice activism is met with an emotional and taxing toll instead of structural change (Martin, 2022; Walton et al., 2021). It should be noted that while the American Counseling Association (ACA) released a statement on anti-racism a month after the assassination of George Floyd (ACA, 2020), along with colleges and universities nationwide during the height of the dual pandemics, showcasing their commitment to making intentional changes to counteract racism and discrimination and the fulfillment of equity, stark differences exist within those statements. Specifically, in a report examining the strengths and weakness of statements made by college leaders after the assassination of George Floyd, it was found that PWIs often included language about "equality, respect, and fair treatment for all" rather than calling out the prevalence of institutional and structural racism and its effects on Black people compared to Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs') statements (Whitford, 2021).

The lack of explicitness to call out the atrocities faced by Black people in America can be seen as yet another disingenuous effort to put a "Band-Aid on it" or "sweep it under the rug," echoed by Ebony White, an assistant clinical professor who provided her experience of what it has been like to work in a predominately white field that fervently dismisses the role that racism has played in the profession and the broader society (Phillips, 2021). In addition, even if addressed in symbolic gestures such as institutional statements, the lack of action to dismantle systemic racism within the institutional walls proves that efforts are only performative. A survey

conducted by Inside Higher Ed and College Pulse presented that out of 2,000 students, many feel that substantive change in their respective colleges and universities is occurring more slowly than expected (Forte, 2021).

While it is true that institutional statements provide students, especially Black students, with the assurance that they are seen, such statements speak to the history-long performance of appeasing in real-time rather than advancing racial justice for Black people. It would not be surprising if attrition and retention rates decrease significantly due to recent news of the Supreme Court ruling on Affirmative Action (Anderson, 2023). Suppose PWIs are genuinely committed to the DEI mission and desire to create a more inclusive environment and not solely invested in increasing their institutional diversity to maintain capital. In that case, they should begin to consider ways in which they can increase institutional belongingness for Black students. Attending and systematically addressing sociopolitical events in real-time, such as the newest Supreme Court ruling on Affirmative Action, as an effort to oppose anti-DEI advocacy can provide Black students with messages of support and overall belongingness. Moreover, PWIs' commitment to active efforts in dismantling systemic racism can further contribute to closing the educational and wealth gap for Black students (Joint, 2021).

Interest Convergence

Today, the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights requires that all educational institutions receiving federal financial assistance commit to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training and efforts consistent with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR), 2023). Particularly in post-secondary education, universities and colleges are charged yearly to recruit diverse students. Along with Title VI and other federal legislation like the Education Act of 1965, PWIs with such a high

enrollment of 50% or more white students remain continuous in their efforts to recruit and retain Black students and other racially diverse students. It is important to note that DEI recruitment and retaining efforts can provide institutions with high-quality enrollment and extensive capital gain to appease the global market economy (Boham et al., 2022; Morphew, 2009).

With a lack of historic competition, PWIs have a high percentage of revenue, much more than HBCUs and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and continue to benefit financially, educationally, and socially from their high enrollment numbers (Boland & Gasman, 2014; Gasman et al., 2017; Elliot & Kellison, 2019; Sav, 2010). Since PWIs highly lack campus diversity, such achievement to enroll a more diverse student population may influence PWI stakeholders to perform at an accelerated rate to actively promote and achieve DEI on their campuses. This financial advantage from diverse student enrollment contributes significantly to the economic stability of PWIs, further increasing their revenue, ability to maintain federal or state funding, and further attract endowments, grants, and various partnerships within the community (American Council on Education 2012; Boham et al., 2022; Boland & Gasman, 2014; Brown, 2020; Elliot & Kellison, 2019; Gasman et al., 2017; Harris, 2020; Sav, 2010).

In addition to the financial gain that PWIs gain from enrolling Black and other racially diverse students, PWIs also reap educational benefits (Boland & Gasman, 2014; Gasman et al., 2017). It should be noted that providing students with the opportunity to learn from their peers who come from diverse backgrounds further contributes to an enriching learning environment and experience. Therefore, this educational advantage cultivates social interactions within the educational environment that can create an inclusive academic culture and prepare students for global citizenship (Brown, 2020; Schattle, 2008). Ultimately, the enrollment of Black students and other racially diverse students allows PWIs the ability to provide students with knowledge,

skills, and experiences, which will additionally lead to a variety of potential marketable candidates that can serve in a multicultural society (American Council on Education 2012; Brown, 2020; Schattle, 2008).

Furthermore, PWI's commitment to DEI and pursuit of enrollment of Black and other racially diverse students extends well beyond educational and financial gains. In fact, such diverse and inclusive campus environments can increase PWIs' image, maintaining their elite status as leaders in higher education and crucial assets in shaping academia (Anderson, 2005; Nana, 2012). This not only increases PWIs' global revenue in which they can attract international students, but such attention and glorified fame increases their global competitiveness overall, giving PWIs a marketable reputation. However, Black students enrolled at PWIs still lack capital gains (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Joint, 2021; Harris, 2020; Pedulla & Pager, 2019; Weller, 2019).

Overall, PWIs reap tremendous benefits from enrolling Black and other racially diverse students. However, the numbers of retainment of Black students and Black faculty at PWIs do not reflect civil rights legislation efforts nor justify PWIs' genuine commitment to DEI (Baggerly et al., 2017; Chancellor, 2019; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Zeligman et al., 2015). This perpetual cycle of interest convergence is reflected in the current state of higher education and how the desegregation of schools did not improve the life chances of Black students nor their racial equity in PWIs (Bradley, 2005; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Perna, 2006). This self-serving interest is illustrated in the capital that PWIs gain by enrolling Black students and in the educational experiences and psychological, social, and economic outcomes that contribute to the oppression of Black students enrolled in PWIs. This will be discussed further in this review.

Undoubtedly, a sense of institutional belonging for Black CES doctoral students at PWIs is vital, as fostering an immersive and supportive community is essential for Black students to fit in their academic institutions. Contextually, scholars like Cross (1991) and Strayhorn (2019), in their continual analyses of Black students, emphasize that contextual settings are a significant component in fostering Black student's identity development and belonging. As previously mentioned, belongingness takes on a heightened importance in certain contexts and at certain times. For Black CES students who are enrolled in PWIs, the ongoing racist and discriminatory experiences alongside the unsupported and culturally unfamiliar environment may contribute to a lack of institutional belonging.

For Black CES doctoral students who already possess a strong sense of identity, personally and professionally, and lean more towards culturally gratifying environments, their desire to enhance their counseling expertise and pursue advanced scholarship within counselor education may come with a conflict pertaining to their institutional choices in obtaining an accredited doctoral degree in the field of CES. Black CES doctoral students may be more inclined to pursue a CES program at a PWI primarily because out of the 449 colleges and universities that offer a Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) doctoral degree, only one identifies as an HBCU, and 14 identify as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) (CACREP, 2023). The means of achieving a doctoral degree from a CACREP program is of great importance, particularly since many doctoral students are searching for academic positions upon completing their doctoral studies. It should be noted that the choice to pursue an accredited degree is congruent with the fact that employers in the United States often recognize these degrees due to these degrees demonstrating quality education and training (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Contextually, CES programs enclosed in PWIs present a

unique experience for Black CES doctoral students (West & Moore Iii, 2015). Thus, a review of the field of counseling and associated CACREP standards and the CES programs within PWIs is crucial in understanding the institutional impact of PWIs' CES programs on Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness.

CES Programs & CACREP Standards

The field of counseling, although it emerged in response to social reform movements, aimed to address societal issues and provide support for individuals (Capuzzi & Gross, 2017). It is, however, important to note that the field remains deeply entrenched in a colonized paradigm (Baker et al., 2015; Jangha et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2020). A field founded by predominantly white men intersects with the pervasive issue of white supremacy in various ways. Since its founding, the field has grown and diversified, further emphasizing the need for the profession to dismantle the existing structures of white supremacy to maintain its mission of empowering diverse individuals and families to achieve mental well-being and overall wellness and advance in education and career pursuits.

Since its establishment in 1981, CACREP, one of the organizations to support the field in its formative years, provides standards by which counselor training programs are assessed on the basis of their credibility and has played a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of counseling education. Growing out of several divisions within the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA) (Bobby, 2013), CACREP has been instrumental in establishing standards that guide counselors' education and clinical training globally. Today's CACREP (2016) standards provide CE institutional units with specific guiding principles to provide and cultivate ethically and culturally relevant learning to prepare all students with advanced knowledge in counseling training. Specifically, for doctoral programs, CACREP requires CES institutional

units to prepare doctoral students with advanced knowledge in five areas: (1) counseling, (2) supervision, (3) teaching, (5) research and scholarship, and (4) leadership and advocacy. Within these five areas are specific competencies that guide CES institutional units in preparing doctoral students to be experts in the counseling field and produce academic scholarship.

Notably, since CACREPs' implementation, there has been a consistent review of standards, which have consisted of significant changes leading up to the current 2016 and the most recent introduction of the 2024 CACREP standards. Both standards represent a pivotal shift that reflects noteworthy changes in the expectations for counseling education institutions. This is more so evident in the multicultural language emphasizing inclusivity and underscoring the importance of creating and supporting an equitable institutional community. This shift, in particular, recognizes that true belongingness extends well beyond inclusion.

For example, nurturing an equitable environment ensures that all counseling students, regardless of their cultural and social backgrounds, can genuinely belong in their respective institutional programs. Specifically, the 2024 CACREP standards call for CE institutional units to integrate counseling education and practice within a diverse, multicultural, and global society with specific attention paid to global and marginalized populations. This represents a departure from the prior and the current 2016 CACREP standards, which focused primarily on counseling education and practice in a multicultural and pluralistic society without emphasizing global and marginalized perspectives.

Still, both standards require CE institutional units to "make continuous and systematic efforts to recruit, enroll, and retain diverse students and to recruit, employ, and retain diverse faculty that create and support an inclusive learning community (CACREP, 2016, p. 6); identify underrepresented populations and make continuous and systematic efforts to recruit, enroll, and

retain diverse students and to recruit, employ, and retain diverse faculty that enhance and support the diversity of programs" (CACREP, 2024, p. 4 & 5). In addition, both the 2016 and 2024 CACREP standards also require that CE institutional units "implement strategies for identifying and eliminating barriers, prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination" (CACREP, 2016, p.10; CACREP, 2024, p. 13).

However, as previously mentioned, Black CE and CES students have reported feeling invisible, disregarded, and discriminatory experiences with institutional agents threatening their matriculation, along with frustration and disappointment in the lack of diversity in faculty, students, and overall CE curriculum (Baker & Moore, 2015; Baker et al., 2015; Henfield et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2004; Seward, 2019). In fact, the numbers among both Black CES doctoral students and faculty do not reflect a diverse representation of the field (Brooks et al., 2023; CACREP, 2021; Meyers, 2017). Overall, there is a significant lack of diversity within higher education (Cartwright et al., 2018). Based on substantiating reports, the enrollment of CES Black doctoral students at PWIs may very well converge with the interest of benefiting both DEI and CACREP missions while failing to adequately foster the institutional belonging of Black CES doctoral students.

Classroom Learning

Classroom learning is a crucial factor contributing to students' academic achievement or persistence (Tinto, 1997). At the same time, however, the classroom is where Black students often experience exclusion and marginalization due to such Eurocentric curriculum practices and pedagogies (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2008). Such Eurocentric teaching and learning practices are not centered on empowering Black students and can further marginalize them. Gray et al. (2018) assert that this pattern of dehumanization of the Black student's classroom

experience is heavily centered around academic curriculum and instruction. As a result, these students' opportunities to belong are absent as educators frequently present instruction that dismisses students' cultural backgrounds and perspectives.

Scholars argue that a lack of culturally responsive andragogy or curriculum practices within PWIs further perpetuates social inequalities (McCoy & Parker, 2019; Nasir et al., 2006; Sealey-Ruiz, 2007). Black students attending PWIs are pressured to assimilate or obtain knowledge in a more colonized fashion and may be keenly aware of the expectation of them to whitewash their culture. In a qualitative study by Brooms (2020) investigating the collegiate classroom experiences of Black students at historically white institutions, findings revealed that faculty and peer classroom interactions were significant to student success. Findings are consistent among literature where students of color's classroom experiences are often compromised due to discriminatory and harmful messages conveyed by their faculty and peers (Feagin et al., 1996; Solorzano et al., 2000). Students then internalize these messages, leading them to feel like they do not matter or are intellectually different from their peers while simultaneously feeling the pressure to perform or prove their academic abilities (Brooms, 2020).

PWIs have struggled to create socially well classroom environments that help to cultivate Black students' sense of self and motivation to persist toward academic achievement (Brown, 2016; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Helm et al., 1998; Harper, 2007). This is concerning as PWIs, among other institutions, are required to prepare their students for global citizenship while cultivating classroom experiences surrounding culturally sustaining curricula that include diverse perspectives, histories, and contributions. This culturally sustaining environment ensures that all students, particularly Black and minority students, can connect their racial and cultural heritage and diverse lived experiences to classroom learning.

For example, in a quantitative study conducted by Hope and colleagues (2013) examining how sociopolitical attitudes along with civic education relate to civic engagement, findings found that education or classroom learning acknowledging systemic inequity promoted civic engagement among Black students. Therefore, educators who employ culturally sustaining pedagogical frameworks are consciously aware of how sociopolitical events impact the classroom environment. Henceforth, educators should consider curriculum practices that foster race-related discourse and further affirm Black students' identities. Such cultural immersion may serve PWIs in attaining and promoting cultural responsiveness among Black students and their counterparts to further prepare the next generation of conscious leaders.

As previously mentioned, both CACREP standards emphasize the importance of creating a learning environment that is inclusive (2016) and equitable (2024). Within CES programs, doctoral students are expected to be immersed in educational curricula and training geared towards enhancing their practitioner skills in preparation for their academic career pursuits. At the same time, the CES curriculum may be encompassed with Eurocentric theory and counseling practices that inadvertently reinforce racial bias and systemic inequities (Johnson et al., 2022). Therefore, when CES programs lack the commitment to address and dismantle white supremacy within the educational curriculum, the discipline perpetuates white supremacy, potentially impacting Black CES doctoral students and future clients. In counseling, this lack of awareness of the endemic nature of racism and its impact on client's mental health issues may manifest within the therapeutic relationship between clients and counselors and further persist in therapeutic care and increase detrimental effects such as faulty prognosis and pathologizing labels among systemically oppressed people (Johnson et al., 2022).

Black doctoral students' enrollment in CES programs at PWIs may converge with the interest of benefiting CACREP missions. However, a lack of equitable and inclusive learning environments at PWIs may present challenges in retaining Black CES doctoral students, which ultimately do not reflect the profession's interests in promoting social justice and enhancing multicultural responsiveness within the field. Such disingenuous practices to meet their enrollment needs may further reflect a need for more interest in retaining a diverse field.

Thus, it is crucial that PWI CES programs examine and amend the counseling education curriculum to be anti-racist, which is defined as the "practice of identifying, challenging, and changing the values, structures, and behaviors that perpetuate systemic racism and its residual effects" (Harris et al., 2021, p. 1) and culturally responsive, as the systemic nature of racism impacts equitable mental health care. Such anti-racist practice within the CES curriculum can produce critical race thought, recognizing that racism is central to creating group disadvantage and further highlighting and promoting interdisciplinary research to eliminate racial and intersecting forms of oppression for oppressed communities (Annamma et al., 2018).

Institutional Agents

Institutional agents (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff) play a pivotal role and have been positively aligned with undergraduate and graduate students' persistence and belongingness (Brooms, 2020; Strayhorn, 2019; Weidman & Stein, 2003). Through socialization with their faculty, administrators, staff, and peers, students are able to obtain mentorship, support, and guidance necessary for their scholarly pursuits. In a study by O'Meara et al. (2017), researchers found that departmental/program support was a crucial factor in underrepresented minority graduate students' academic skill development, performance, critical thinking ability, and level of satisfaction with graduate school and high interest in pursuing academia.

Unlike undergraduate students, whose desire to belong is rooted in social acceptance, graduate students aspire to socialize in a manner relevant to their academic and career interests (Pascale, 2018). For doctoral programs, doctoral students represent a unique group with varying developmental distinctions, goal orientations, and career positionalities. Therefore, it is important to realize that a sense of belonging may differ for these students advancing their academic careers. Developmentally, these students embody various life stages and ages and are often influenced by different motivations to pursue doctoral studies. Thus, goal orientations for these students may also vary. For example, doctoral students may be driven by their passion for research, leadership, teaching, career advancement, and better financial earnings. In addition, doctoral students may also differ in their career positionalities, which are reflective of their pursuits toward academic or non-academic careers.

Doctoral students represent their universities and take on several institutional tasks and duties (i.e., teach undergraduate or master's level courses, serve as graduate research assistants, participate in service leadership, and engage in regional or national conferences to promote their scholarly work) along with completing their coursework. Depending on the student's discipline, they may also be expected to engage in additional related program tasks like CES doctoral students, who are expected to supervise practicum and internship students and engage in counseling residency to obtain necessary licensure (Horton-Parker & Wambui Preston, 2021). For the most part, doctoral students engage heavily with faculty, administrators, staff, and peers and spend much time developing their professional identities at their institutions.

Doctoral students may often be a part of a cohort model, a structured approach where a group of individuals follow a shared course of study toward their doctoral degrees (Nimer, 2009). Cohort models can significantly increase doctoral students' chances of successfully

completing coursework and provide them with support and validation from their peers who are also embarking on their peculiar journey. This supportive community can even extend to lifelong collaboration opportunities within their professional careers. Notably, a significant, intimate relationship exists between doctoral students and their institutional agents and institutions overall; therefore, the term institutional belongingness is more harmonious for this unique population as it refers to a student's sense of belonging concerning how they fit in at their university (Bean, 1985; Cabrera et al., 1992).

Yet, the question remains: Do Black CES doctoral students enrolled at PWIs institutionally belong, particularly given the limited representation of diverse faculty within these institutions (Baggerly et al., 2017; Brooms, 2020; Graham & McClain, 2019; Harris, 2020; Hussain & Jones, 2021; Zeligman et al., 2015). Literature has documented Black students' narratives, detailing the significant support and familiar regard that many institutional agents at HBCUs have for them, aiding them as they face crises while matriculating. These familiar supports have been referred to as “other mothering or other fathering” (Allen, 1992; McDougal, 2021; Reeder & Schmitt, 2013). In addition, in a mixed methods study, data analysis findings found that graduate students who felt they belonged reported feeling safe, respected, and comfortable when interacting and socializing with institutional agents (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 134).

It is well known, however, that Black students at PWIs are met with adverse socialization experiences that ultimately affect their matriculation (Baggerly et al., 2017; Chancellor, 2019; Haynes et al., 2016; Seward, 2019; Zeligman et al., 2015). In many cases, Black students reported feeling unwelcomed by institutional agents or lacking opportunities to form connections with their academic community, resulting in less engagement and having fewer relationships with institutional agents at PWIs (Lake, 2021; Shappie & Debb, 2019; Shavers & Moore, 2019;

Sue et al., 2009). For Black students at PWIs and in CE programs, feeling burdened by the difficulty of finding an institutional agent who shares their racial identity is common (Baggerly et al., 2017; Brooms, 2020; Graham & McClain, 2019; Harris, 2020; Hussain & Jones, 2021; Zeligman et al., 2015). While encouraged to increase the diversity of faculty, students, and staff, PWIs still struggle to retain them (Martinez-Acosta & Favero, 2018; McClain & Perry, 2017; Kayes, 2006). This very well may be indicative of the structural racism that exists in PWIs.

This lack of representation for Black students, particularly those in CE programs, may further exacerbate negative interactions with institutional agents and the ability to create healthy, genuine cross-cultural relationships (Brown & Grothaus, 2019; Horton-Parker & Wambui Preston, 2021). In fact, the literature demonstrates that a salient contributor to Black students' adverse experiences is their negative interactions with institutional agents (Brooks et al., 2023; Foxx, 2021; Johnson, 2022; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). These negative socialization experiences or the absence of support from institutional agents can severely affect Black undergraduate and doctoral students' mental health and matriculation outcomes, leading to feelings of alienation, a lack of belonging, maladaptive patterns such as academic disengagement, internalization, and withdrawal, and overall resulting in psychological and emotional distress (Baker & Moore, 2015; Graham & McClain, 2019; Harris, 2020; Lewis et al., 2004; Lewis et al., 2021; Shavers & Moore, 2019; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016;).

Moreover, these socialization issues for Black students lead to a lack of access to mentorship and networking opportunities, which provide all students with exposure and support to succeed in their chosen career paths (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Strayhorn, 2017). In Harris's (2020) empirical review exploring belonging and educational capital accrual for Black students at PWIs, Black students' educational capital gain (i.e., employment, better wages, investment

opportunities) varies drastically from their white peers. It is evident that the endemic nature of racism and the historical legacy within the United States, often leading to employment discrimination, continues to lead to educational achievement and wealth disparity gaps for Black students regardless of how high they climb the academic ladder (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Joint, 2021; Pedulla & Pager, 2019; Weller, 2019). While educational achievement promises to improve lifetime earnings for all, Black CES doctoral students enrolled at PWIs may lack capital gain.

Clinical Careers

In a profession where Black CES doctoral students are trained to mentally care for others, many of these students may lack care from their respective PWIs. For Black CES doctoral students enrolled in PWIs, this pattern of socialization issues with their institutional agents (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff) may very well exist and overall threaten their institutional belongingness as they academically persist. It is important to realize that Black CES doctoral students are critical to the development of the counseling field. Therefore, measures such as fostering positive cross-racial socialization and relationships and institutional belongingness within PWI CES programs may help to address the explicit reminders that Black CES doctoral students may often receive from their socialization experiences with their institutional agents, suggesting that they do not institutionally belong. Such fostering may further ensure Black CES doctoral students' academic achievement and positively impact their mental health.

It is imperative that PWIs reflect on the role of institutional agents in shaping the institutional belongingness experiences of Black CES doctoral students as it is evident that Black students, mainly, are more likely to feel a lower sense of belongingness than their white

counterparts, especially within different institutional contexts (Graham & McClain, 2019). This lower sense of belonging manifests as a greater sense of isolation and alienation, leading to psychological challenges such as anxiety, depression, racial battle fatigue, and imposter syndrome for Black students at PWIs (Anderson, 2020; Baker & Moore, 2015; Booker, 2016; Cokley et al., 2013; Chancellor, 2019; Francois et al., 2023; Harvey, 1984; Jangha et al., 2018; Stone et al., 2018). The number of significant barriers, such as lack of financial support, stigma, racism, discrimination, and academic pressures that Black students face can lead to mental health disparities between them and their white peers (Horton-Parker & Wambui Preston, 2021; Masuda et al., 2012). Specifically, in a review addressing Black doctoral students' matriculation in doctoral programs, Horton-Parker & Wambui Preston (2021) emphasized that the "dual pandemics" of COVID-19 and the racial injustice movement exacerbate preexisting challenges such as microaggressions, discrimination, economic inequities, and limited support systems for Black students, further harming their matriculation and well-being and emphasizing the need for comprehensive support structures that extend well beyond the confines of doctoral programs and are ingrained in the broader context of higher education.

It may be very well that Black CES students, in particular, may benefit from socially just counselors and counselor educators who are prepared to work with them in a culturally sensitive and responsive manner (Shavers & Moore, 2019). As such, therapeutic and academic infusion within PWI CES programs may provide Black CES doctoral students with healthy coping mechanisms as they persist. This may lead to further beneficial outcomes necessary to heal and recover from their on-campus trauma but also assist them in fostering their counseling identities as they engage in a reciprocal process where they, too, will provide therapeutic care to their clients.

Academic Careers

Amongst the detrimental effects on their psychological well-being, in the quest to advance their careers as a member of their professional groups, Black CES doctoral students may lack positive socialization from their institutional agents (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff), ultimately engendering other positive outcomes, such as their desire to become full-time tenured or non-tenured CES faculty (Strayhorn, 2019; Weidman & Stein, 2003). It is clear that counselor educators play a critical role in the professional development of their students. Specifically, Black CES doctoral students at PWIs who may encounter negative interactions from peers and faculty in their professional relationships, feelings of not mattering may ultimately deter them from persisting within the academic realm, especially when the academy reflects the pervasive nature of racism (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Hannon et al., 2018).

This pervasive nature of racism and the existing systemic barriers may prevent Black CES doctoral students from progressing into full-time CE faculty positions. Recognizing the emerging outcomes and trends resulting from these barriers is crucial, as the limited representation of Black CES doctoral graduates in full-time CE faculty positions impacts their career trajectories as counselor educators and researchers and further perpetuates underrepresentation within the CES community altogether, affecting all CE students. Therefore, as outlined in the Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014), it is imperative counselor educators commit to recruiting and retaining a diverse student body and faculty as it is essential for fostering a comprehensive and effective curriculum encompassed of multicultural and diversity-related content to support diverse student well-being and their academic and competency performance. Until then, a lack of representation within the CES community will further impact the

advancement toward a more inclusive and equitable learning environment that reflects diversity and upholds CACREP standards and the governing Code of Ethics.

Counternarratives

For Black CES doctoral students navigating the educational landscapes of PWIs where systemic racism and associated barriers are permanent components of the institutional foundation, such institutional belongingness may be significant and crucial to their academic persistence. Their urgent need to institutionally belong may be jeopardized as they may not feel that they matter to their respective PWI CES programs, which may engender their doctoral experience, academic persistence, and other positive outcomes, such as their career pathway, as they matriculate. As the fundamental change agents that Black CES doctoral students are, it is vital to understand the institutional belongingness experiences of these students, as literature has yet to capture the essence of their institutional belonging nor the influence of institutional agents on their academic persistence and career pathway.

By applying Strayhorn's Model of College Students' Sense of Belonging through the lens of CRT, I intend to contribute to the growing literature on the sense of belonging among college students (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Lewis et., 2021; Strayhorn, 2019) and address the paucity of research on doctoral student's sense of belonging. As a result of this gap in the literature, this study explores Black CES doctoral students' interactions with institutional agents and identifies the barriers that may prevent institutional belongingness for Black CES doctoral students and further impact their academic persistence and career pathways. Therefore, in this study, I utilize semi-structured and unstructured interviews and critical phenomenological through a critical race perspective design to explore the counter-narratives of Black CES doctoral students, recognizing them as credible sources of insight into

how institutional agents at PWIs may impact their institutional belongingness and future career pathways. By capturing such essences, CE institutional units can begin to address the institutional factors that may prevent Black CES doctoral students from institutionally belonging. Such awareness and acknowledgment can further advance systemic reform to promote multiculturalism and social justice within the counseling profession and higher education.

Summary

This literature review provides an in-depth overview exploring the significance of fostering institutional belongingness for Black CES doctoral students, drawing from the theoretical underpinnings of Strayhorn's Model of College Students' Sense of Belonging and the foundations of CRT. Fundamental to this review is the awareness that Black students encounter unique challenges in PWIs that disrupt their ability to satisfy their belonging needs. CRT provides a critical view to examine the deeply rooted systemic racism embedded in PWIs to expose the inequalities and disparities that exist for Black students and impact their educational experience.

Additionally, Strayhorn's Model of College Students' Sense of Belonging serves as a theoretical framework to capture the belongingness experiences of Black students and highlight how crucial institutional factors are to Black students' academic persistence. Overall, this review illuminates the significance of fostering institutional belongingness for Black CES doctoral students, a unique population that may lack a sense of inclusion with their academic community in PWIs and is crucial to the advancement of global change within the counseling field. This study aims to capture the positive influence that institutional belongingness can have on Black CES doctoral students' academic experience and future careers while contributing to DEI efforts within higher education.

Research Questions

This study aims to explore the following research questions "(1) What are the experiences of Black doctoral students who are enrolled in PWI CES programs? (2) How do Black CES doctoral students at PWIs describe their institutional belongingness? (3) How do institutional agents impact Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness?" This will guide my explorative study and capture the unique experiences of Black CES doctoral students at PWIs. Henceforth, in chapter three, the methodological design of critical phenomenology through a critical race perspective is presented as the most suitable approach for this study as I engage in a deep exploration of Black CES doctoral students' lived experiences while examining the role of racism and structural inequalities within higher education. By utilizing critical phenomenology through a critical race perspective, I shed light on the historical and social contexts that influence the phenomenon of institutional agents' (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff) influence on institutional belongingness for Black CES doctoral students at PWIs.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the research approach and the design to explore institutional agents' (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff) influence on Black counselor education and supervision (CES) doctoral students' institutional belongingness at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). The chapter begins with an introduction to the research approach and design, followed by the researcher's role and positionality. Then, the purpose of the study, including the research questions guiding the study, is presented, followed by a description of the data collection and analysis procedures. The chapter will then conclude with an overview of strategies for trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Purpose of the Study

To better understand and analyze the influence of institutional agents (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff) on Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness at PWIs, I considered the phenomenology of a Black CES doctoral student enrolled at a PWI and the influence of the institutional environment they inhabit and the other bodies they interact with within the institution as a potential factor in affirming or alienating these students who operate naturally in their bodies. This critical phenomenological design by way of a critical race perspective is an appropriate methodology for this study as I recognize the crucial need to capture the narratives of Black CES doctoral students while uncovering and revealing the systemic and structural inequities that Black CES doctoral students may encounter during their academic matriculation at PWIs that further shape and influence their institutional belongingness experiences. Employing this critical phenomenological method through a critical race

perspective advances my understanding of these students' experiences and contributes to the pursuit of social justice within the counseling education field.

To garner this deep understanding of Black CES doctoral students' subjective meanings and perceptions regarding their encounters with institutional agents and to effectively capture the essence of institutional belongingness, this research study was guided by three overarching research questions:

1. What are the experiences of Black doctoral students who are enrolled in PWI CES programs?
2. How do Black CES doctoral students at PWIs describe their institutional belongingness?
3. How do institutional agents impact Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness?

These questions served as a north star directing this study toward a thorough exploration and understanding of the Black CES doctoral students' lived embodied experiences at PWIs. These questions allowed me to gather rich and illustrious data for this study and highlight how social and historical structures of PWIs shaped and influenced Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness.

Qualitative Approach

To explore the lived embodied experiences of Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness, this study uses a qualitative approach to explore how the historical and social structures of PWIs influence Black CES doctoral students' interactions with their institutional agents, their academic persistence, and their promotion toward academic careers. This explorative research interprets individuals' experiences and the meaning they attribute to them

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Thus, to understand the institutional belongingness experiences of Black CES doctoral students, I utilized a critical phenomenological design from a critical race perspective, allowing for a comprehensive description and analysis of how historical and social contextual environments of PWIs shape the subjective-lived embodied experiences of Black CES doctoral students. Overall, this qualitative approach contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of these students, providing a counternarrative that rejects the dominant perspective.

Critical Phenomenology

Critical phenomenology is a critical investigation of human inequality based on race, ethnicity, and gender (Camara, 2020; Magri & McQueen, 2022; Weiss et al., 2020). An extension of classical phenomenology, in which phenomenological description is tailored to the power dynamics that shape experiences and influence the analysis of those experiences, critical phenomenology seeks to mend the social world by encouraging a reflexive inquiry into the relationship between diverse lived experiences and historically established power arrangements (Camara, 2020; Magri & McQueen, 2022; Weiss et al., 2020). The ultimate goal of critical phenomenology is not just to interpret the world as desired in classical phenomenology but also to expose and change it. Critical phenomenology is both a way of doing philosophy and engaging in political activism.

Rooted in feminist thinking as a means to center the lived experiences of women and other individuals often marginalized and oppressed in society, critical phenomenology, unlike classical phenomenology, recognizes that the universal structures in the lived world affect individuals' consciousness experiences in dissimilar ways (Camara, 2020; Magri & McQueen, 2022; Weiss et al., 2020). Unlike classical phenomenology, critical phenomenology

acknowledges that the world's social structures, like white supremacy, existing within the universal structures in the lived world impact an individual's being and how their body moves and experiences the life world (Camara, 2020; Magri & McQueen, 2022; Weiss et al., 2020). Critical phenomenology encourages a reflection of such quasi-transcendental social structures (i.e., white supremacy, socio-political environment, gender discrimination) to restructure the lifeworld and generate new and liberatory possibilities to create a more meaningful human experience and existence. This design underscores the profound role of social and cultural contexts in shaping individual experiences and their sense of meaning-making in the world (Camara, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Magri & McQueen, 2022; Van Manen, 2014; Weiss et al., 2018).

By way of exploring the lived embodied experiences of individuals, specifically focusing on one's embodiment, unlike classical phenomenology, critical phenomenology seeks to investigate individuals' perceptions and interactions within their life worlds (Camara, 2020; Magri & McQueen, 2022; Weiss et al., 2020). Concerned with how an individual's interpretation of societal values influences their physical body movement, sense of self, interactions with other bodies, and the life world environment, critical phenomenology recognizes that lived encounters are heavily influenced by imposed societal values, ultimately shaping one's perceptions, embodiment, and lived experiences. This influence is systemically ingrained within the lifeworld structures and can be seen in the existing inequalities and power differences within various modern-day institutions. Much like educational institutions designed to teach, it serves as a system that reinforces such values, ultimately perpetuating oppressive social patterns generationally, resulting in unjust disparities for those who inhabit bodies deemed as "other."

Therefore, exploring institutional agents' influence on Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness at PWIs, critical phenomenology through a critical race perspective allows me the ability to acknowledge how the structures of white supremacy generate the norms for these students, further influencing their embodiment, experiences, and perceptions (Camara, 2020; Magri & McQueen, 2022; Weiss et al., 2020). A powerful and liberating way of conducting research, this convergent design examines how the permanence of racism, a central tenet in Critical Race Theory (CRT), is endemic within the United States and embedded in institutional structures like PWIs, further shaping the norms and attitudes within the lifeworld and ultimately influencing individuals' consciousness experiences.

To understand Black CES doctoral students' lived embodied experiences, I examine the way in which systemic racism influences their experiences with institutional agents and their academic persistence and promotion toward academic careers. I draw from the critical philosophy of Frantz Fanon, whose work focuses on the subjectively lived philosophy of embodiment, a key component in critical phenomenology, and his elements of the *racial body schema* and *white gaze* to highlight how the structures of colonization and white supremacy generationally impact Black people throughout the African Diaspora (Camara, 2020; Fanon, 2008; Whitney, 2018; Weiss et al., 2020). The subjective philosophy of embodiment of the Black body consists of the generational consequences of colonization and white supremacy. The longstanding trauma and reciprocal disadvantages can be seen in the historical roots of Western colonialism to the practices of slavery in the "new world" known today as America. Systemically, the shackles bonded by racism are deeply seeded and continue to meet Black people and their bodies with contemporary challenges influenced by institutional structures and

societal systems that not only dictate how one moves in their body but also experience their biology.

For Black people throughout the African diaspora who have been subjected to this history of inferiority and oppression, their bodies have indeed endured not only physical pain but psychological disruption. Overburdened by the torment from others who are conditioned by white supremacy, Black bodies endure stigmatization through forms of implicit bias and overt and covert racism. From education to legal treatment, it remains clear that white advantages will always persist across economic, political, and social domains. This pattern, where white is historically regarded as superior and anything other than is unhuman, is at the core of the difference in body schema for Black people (Fanon, 2008).

For Black bodies, the individual and collective experiences that have been marked by colonialism and systemic racism form a historico-racial schema, co-existing with the natural body schema. This additional layer of complexity creates a conflict for the Black body, impacting their physical body, sense of identity, and lived experiences. For the Black body, even if they wanted to get rid of their history, the intentional structure of a permanent racialized society further reminds the Black body that it does not belong and guides their perception and delimits their embodiment.

Fanon asserts that those who inhabit Black and colonized bodies living within anti-Black societies experience an embodied conflict that is activated by their encounter with the "white gaze," which encompasses the dominant and oppressive power of white superiority (Fanon, 2008; Weiss et al., 2020, p. 71). This existential traumatic experience where the Black body internalizes the white gaze or colonizers' perspective of judgment further poses a threat to the Black body schema. This further creates a lifeworld conflict in which the colonized respond to

their bodies, the colonizer, and other bodies in a manner in which they constantly feel compelled to meet the motor demands of the colonizer.

In the context of a Black CES doctoral student enrolled at a PWI, this may be captured in a distressing classroom or socialization experiences they may have with their institutional agents that further exemplify the CRT tenant's permeance of racism and interest convergence. For example, a Black CES doctoral student, like their white peers, may fully embrace this new level of autonomous scholarship, often feeling motivated to engage in class discussions and share their perspectives. At the same time, if they are met with microinsults or other forms of microaggressions from their white institutional agents, this "white gaze," with an undertone of stereotypical judgment, may leave them feeling less than human (Haynes et al., 2016; Seward, 2019; Zeligman et al., 2015).

This and similar academic socialization experiences plagued with racial bias and judgment may leave the Black CES doctoral student alienated and unwillingly forced to embody a distorted third body image referred to as the historical-racial schema in which they can better adapt and conform to their institutions' standards (Fanon, 2008; Weiss et al., 2020; Whitney, 2018). This interest convergence may be evident in the fact that PWI CES programs may lack inclusive and equitable academic environments that conflict with the institutional mission and the professional standards in promoting social justice and enhancing multicultural responsiveness (Baker & Moore, 2015; Baker et al., 2015; Henfield et al., 2013). As a result, Black CES doctoral students may continue to endure academic experiences marked by various forms of "disorientation, disruption, ontological distortion, and corporeal malediction" (Fanon, 2008; Weiss et al., 2020, p. 69) in which they may experience a profound lack of institutional

belonging further contributing to significant challenges and barriers that impede their academic matriculation.

The awareness that racism is endemic and embedded within the structures of society impacting every facet of daily life (Camara, 2020; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Weiss et al., 2020), critical phenomenology informed by a critical race perspective is crucial in centering the voices of historically oppressed and marginalized Black CES doctoral students while exploring their lived embodied experiences within their lifeworld (i.e., PWI CES programs). Through the integration of the CRT tenant's permeance of racism, interest convergence, and counternarrative, this endeavor is rooted in exposing the pervasive nature of white supremacy and its influence on the educational realm. Hence, the integration of the CRT tenant permeance of racism provides an authentic capture of how the pervasiveness of white supremacy is embedded within the institutional framework of PWIs and how this manifests within CES programs (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The integration of the CRT tenant interest convergence provides an authentic capture of how the pervasiveness of white supremacy is embedded in the historical origin of the counseling field and how this perpetuates an incongruent pattern of capital gain that exists for Black CES doctoral students (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). The integration of the CRT tenant counternarrative provides an authentic capture of their lived experiences and a description of the phenomenon, which uncovers the true essence of institutional belongingness for Black CES doctoral students at PWIs (Delgado et al., 2017). Overall, this study illuminates the multifaceted nature of Black CES doctoral students' experiences and contributes to a deeper comprehension of the pervasive nature of racism within the academy.

Researcher Role and Positionality

One does not simply do critical phenomenology but arrives at it naturally, through curiosity to explore and discover what is not hidden but what others have decided not to talk about, as is the root of the "critical" in critical phenomenology (Behal, 2022). Specifically, critical phenomenology recognizes that the lifeworld is built on societal structures like white supremacy and is relevant when delving into the lived experiences of individuals. This commitment to exploring what evidently exists but is often disregarded or ignored is significant to capturing the essence of individuals' lived experiences. Therefore, my inquiry for this study is rooted in my own lived embodied experience within my CES doctoral program and my critical epistemology. My personal and research positionality encompasses my critical lens in which I am able to clearly view how the broader context of this phenomenon is deeply rooted in historical and social inequalities. It is because of my own lived embodied experiences and my critical stance that I found critical phenomenology, and it found me. Hence, I centered my subjective experience as the researcher in this section. The methodological strategy of regarding the researcher as a significant part of the driven work is a central aspect of critical phenomenology in recognizing that the research plays a pivotal role in shaping the study's outcomes (Behal, 2022).

> In order to achieve a critical phenomenology, phenomenology must be seen as a philosophy of difference rather than identity. Or, to put it another way, when our personal identity is disclosed to be intersectional, we can come to disclose our sociopolitical identities as the difference of differences. True to the spirit of the phenomenological method, this allows us to see our identities, personal and public, as intersectional phenomena—as coming to appear as encroachment or overlapping (Weiss et al., 2020, p. 8)

In acknowledging myself as a critical aspect of this study, I engaged in introspective reflection to think about the critical aspects within my own lived experience. Through this exploration of myself, I centered my social constructivist lens, which has been shaped by my cultural heritage and the societal norms within the lifeworld. With my view of knowledge as a product of interactions with others and within my CES program, it is clear that one's lived experience is influenced by historical and social structures (Weiss et al., 2020). Therefore, as the researcher of this study, I first began with myself before delving into the exploration of Black CES doctoral students' embodied experiences.

As a second-generation African American woman born to a Liberian mother and an African American father with intersecting identities, I acknowledge that my positionality informs my perspective and understanding of this research's historical and social context (Holmes, 2020). I, with the honor and privilege to engage in this philosophical endeavor, understand that it did not transpire overnight. Specifically, it first began with my encounter with the white gaze during my doctoral program, which left a lasting impact and reminded me once again that I had entered into a space in which I questioned my belonging. Despite my credentials and qualifications, my Black body was questioned. This encounter, among others, further propelled the crucial need to explore the lived experiences of other Black CES doctoral students in similar academic spaces.

Notably, while I inhabit the body of someone from African ancestry and share some aspects of identity with other Black CES doctoral students, my cultural and socialization experiences as a second-generation African American and Historically Black College and University (HBCU) graduate distinctly will differ from other Black CES doctoral students ' lived embodied experiences. Therefore, it is essential to note that the African diaspora encompasses several world views, perspectives, and experiences. Henceforth, I found it pertinent to

acknowledge the reciprocity that exists within power and privilege, even amongst same-race communities. I recognize that I, as the researcher, coming from a two-parent household with socioeconomic stability and access to higher education, to name a few of my intersecting social identities, have been afforded the privilege that provides me with advantages in navigating the system of white supremacy. For instance, my background of financial security and support allows me accessibility to resources and socialization experiences, producing various opportunities that further my post-graduate education and provide me with the tools to be in a position of power and privilege. By recognizing these privileges I embody, I was better able to understand and examine the structural inequities that exist and are perpetuated by white supremacy for other Black CES doctoral students.

Furthermore, as the researcher of this study, I approached this philosophical endeavor with humility, self-reflection, and a commitment to listening and learning from Black CES doctoral students, as I am not an expert and merely a student of this critical work. I wholeheartedly recognize the importance of using my position to reveal the inequities present within the academic environment. In undertaking critical phenomenology, I sought to provide a platform for Black CES doctoral students to share their narratives of institutional belongingness, deeply understand their lived embodied experiences within their CES programs, and further contribute to the broader mission of social justice and dismantling of white supremacy.

Data Collection

Recruitment and Sampling

Aligned with my critical phenomenological method, upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for this study, I purposefully selected a sample of seven Black CES doctoral students enrolled in PWIs from four out of five in the Association for Counselor Education and

Supervision (ACES) regions. These seven informants were especially able to offer their embodied experiences in a non-generalizable way (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Hays & Singh, 2012). In purposefully selecting this sample of seven informants, I utilized convenience sampling as such sampling technique was feasible and culturally relevant, presenting me with the ability to first establish rapport with informants and gain considerable access with my limited resources to identify and select these informants from whom I gained rich insight and learned the most from (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015). Specifically through convenience sampling, I was able to reach and recruit seven informants that met the demographic inclusion criteria of: 1) 18 years or older, 2) self-identify as Black, African American, and/or any of the Black racial groups within the African Diaspora, 3) a current or previously graduated CES doctoral student after the year 2019, and 3) a current or previously graduated doctoral student enrolled in a CES program at a PWI after the year 2019, to partake in this research study (Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Priya, 2017).

Year of Enrollment

It is important to note that the 2016 and 2024 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards serve as pivotal standards in the evolving nature of the CES field, particularly as it relates to the significant changes surrounding the importance of addressing the systemic importance of multicultural and socially just practices within institutional units. Previous standards, before the year 2016, lacked sufficient guidance on how institutional units could effectively integrate multiculturalism and social justice into their missions and program practices. For example, previous standards before 2016 merely advocated for institutional units and agents within them to have an awareness and understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

Consequently, this intentional decision to limit the inclusion of CES doctoral students enrolled before 2016 in this research design is strategically applied to this study's inclusion criteria, aligning with the significant changes in CACREP standards. It is important to note that focusing on the institutional belongingness experiences of Black CES doctoral students enrolled in their CES programs within PWIs before 2016 may elicit differing experiences than students enrolled in their CES programs within PWIs after 2016 due to the enhanced focus on multicultural and equitable practices that were introduced in the 2016 CACREP standards, such as the requirement for academic units to make continuous and systematic efforts to create and support an inclusive learning community (CACREP, 2016). This further allowed me to explore the institutional belonging experiences of informants as they related to the converging conflict that contributes to their social, economic, and psychological outcomes.

It is important to note that the inclusion criteria reflect my intent to reveal the unique relationship between institutional factors at PWIs and their impact on the institutional belongingness experiences of Black CES doctoral students. By exploring how informants perceived their interactions with institutional agents and their overall lived embodied experiences at a time after when CES provided explicit directives on fostering diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environments, I found it necessary to limit the inclusion criteria to the partaking of informants who were enrolled in CACREP programs before 2016. In addition to the evolving nature of the implementation of multiculturalism and social justice within CACREP standards, this study's methodology places a specific emphasis on the historical structures that shape the lived experiences of informants. For this reason, I also found it necessary to limit the inclusion criteria to the partaking of informants enrolled in CACREP programs after 2019. This inclusion decision to closely hear stories from informants, a unique group of individuals during

their matriculation or even shortly after their graduation who encountered the socio-political events of the Black Lives Matter Movement during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is intentional and further aligned with this research study's purpose to illuminate how historical social and cultural structures embedded in society affect the consciousness experiences of those who are historically marginalized and oppressed.

It is important to realize that amidst times of racial unrest and racial reckoning, such as the recent socio-political event, the Black Lives Matter Movement, for Black students at PWIs, there is an increased need to reflect on their identities and their sense of belonging (Arday & Jones, 2022; Francois et al., 2023; Sulé & Brown, 2023). For informants attending PWIs, this time period of campus unrest and climates of resistance fueling academic protests surrounding the history of institutional treatment impacting Black students overall, I speculated, would have had a profound impact on their academic persistence and overall institutional belongingness. Henceforth, I felt this was necessary to include within the inclusion criteria to delve into the narratives of informants currently or previously enrolled in CES programs within PWIs after 2019, to shed light on their salient institutional belongingness experiences in the context of the contemporary racial and social justice movement.

The overall inclusion of these specific demographic aspects is crucial in fully capturing and illuminating the intricate link between institutional and informants' demographics that may significantly influence informants' institutional belongingness experiences. Furthermore, this capturing of a rich amount of data allowed me to deeply understand the interplay of the social and cultural dynamics within informants' lived world while also providing an authentic and illustrative description of their lived experiences. It is important to note that in valuing informants' privacy, informants were thoroughly informed of the research study's aims and were

given the option to disclose any broader demographical insights that could provide detail on the broader contextual environment of their lived world.

Moreover, in acknowledging the CRT tenet counternarrative and striving to amplify the underrepresented stories of Black CES doctoral students, utilizing convenience sampling procedures allotted me the ability to promote cultural connection with all seven informants whose stories are incredibly underrepresented. This amplification of counternarratives is a tool to advance the true nature of informant's experiences from their unique cultural lens and further propel progress for those within the Black community (Delgado et al., 2017; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Convenience sampling underscored the importance of agency, providing informants with the option to participate and share their deeply personal narratives in the present research study. Because of the endemic nature of racism deeply ingrained in PWIs (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), convenience sampling further enhanced the trust between myself and informants who may have been susceptible to experiencing academic systemic barriers directly perpetrated by those with power, therefore reluctant to partake due to the historical marginalization of research on Black people. While often utilized in qualitative research, this sampling strategy held a more significant weight within the critical nature of this study's methodology. Specifically, as it pertains to the critical nature of race relations, it is imperative to recognize the historical nature of the role of race and racism and its perpetual existence in the lives of Black people, especially considering that Western historical roots of research centered on Black people and their lived experiences come with a persistent lack of access to resources and further lead to generational barriers that continue to endanger Black people and their advancement in society.

First and foremost, I constructed a recruitment flyer that included a brief description of this study's purpose and my email address so that informants could contact me to express their voluntary interest in partaking in the research. I then shared the recruitment flyer on the Black Women Doctorate Facebook Group and in the Counselor Education Black Women Affinity GroupMe Chat after receiving permission from the administrators. Holding private membership in both of these networks, along with other Black women currently in their CES Ph.D. programs or in faculty roles, provided a sense of trust, a crucial aspect necessary for engagement in critical phenomenological research (Camara, 2020; Magri & McQueen, 2022; Weiss et al., 2020). Additionally, after obtaining approval, I then shared the recruitment flyer on the Counselor Education and Supervision Network Listserv (CESNET-L), a professional network for CES professionals, which gave me access to broadly recruit informants who were not in the aforementioned academic networks who also met the inclusion criteria and had valuable insights and experiences to share.

To gather an in-depth understanding of informants lived embodied experiences and ensure they met the inclusion criteria, I collected an array of demographic information from informants. Specifically, as informants emailed me regarding their interest in partaking in the proposed study, I provided them with a link to an electronic consent form and a qualifying demographic questionnaire form, which altogether took them 10-15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire requested informants confirm they were over eighteen years of age, to provide their race/ethnicity, year of enrollment in their CES program, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) region of their CES program, and optionally, the name of their PWI. It should be noted that all informants provided the name of their PWI, and I cross-checked their institution's racial demographics. Yet, I have excluded this demographic

information to protect informants' confidentiality. In addition to obtaining written data derived from the demographic questionnaire, I provided informants the space to fully present any further insights regarding demographic factors of their institutional agents to acquire a more in-depth understanding of the racial context and broader institutional context that influenced and impacted their institutional belongingness.

It is important to note that due to the nature of this critical research endeavor and my unwavering commitment to fostering a relationship of trust and reciprocity between myself and informants, I requested that informants who expressed interest in partaking in this study reach out to me via email rather than clicking on the link to access the qualifying demographic questionnaire and consent form. By engaging in personalized communication via email with informants, I intended to build a relationship with informants grounded in trust and further assure them that I would approach this endeavor with cultural sensitivity and sincere gratitude. In critical phenomenology, this bilateral relationship between a researcher and informants further underscores the significance of approaching the work from a collective effort. This also demonstrates an understanding of the importance of trust and rapport-building, which is crucial in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Stahl & King, 2020; Sundler et al., 2019; Weiss et al., 2020). Furthermore, in acknowledging the role of the CRT tenant counternarrative, I am keenly aware that cultivating a relationship from the beginning is essential, especially considering that for these informants who shared their stories, such divulgement is sacred; therefore, it was necessary throughout the research study that I reassured them that they would be valued and that their stories would be protected as well as told accurately from their lens.

Engaging in this critical phenomenological endeavor by way of critical race theory, I also recognized the pivotal role of language in shaping the reporting of the narratives and institutional

belongingness experiences of informants within this research study. In reflecting upon the importance of decolonization, I conscientiously and actively released the term "participants," as defined by the IRB as "a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information" (Marshall, 2003). Instead, I adapted a more appropriate and non-stigmatizing and pathologizing term, known as "informants" and identified and referred to the seven Black CES doctoral students as such throughout this research study. This terminological shift is paramount in my critical epistemological stance as I fully embrace my consciousness, maintain and recognize the race relations that exist, and contribute significantly to the operating culture of society.

With this being said, I fully acknowledge that the appearance of "participants" carries historical connotations rooted in the embedded structures of abuse, exploitation, and experimentation for Black people within the context of American academic and scientific research. Specifically, I recognize the long-standing disparity outcomes experienced by Black people who have engaged in research that has cultivated a culture of mistrust, further preventing Black people from partaking in research (Scharff et al., 2010). Hence, the intentional replacement of the term *participant* to *informant*, derived from the field of anthropology and regarded as a culturally appropriate term, is imperative in this critical research study (Magnarella, 1986; Tremblay, 1957). Therefore, this intentional choice of using the term informant aligns with my commitment to fostering a relationship of trust and reciprocity between myself and informants.

Moreover, as I delved into the narratives of informants, I viewed and acknowledged these individuals as the only true experts on the phenomenon and the primary sources of insight to

better help me, as the researcher, understand the phenomenon and the significant aspects associated with the phenomenon. I honor these students as key informants, and I recognize that identifying them as such further propels the fight towards systemic equity, underscoring the transformative power of social language in dismantling the perpetual systemic oppression and inequity within research and broadly. Furthermore, I employed this terminology in both written and oral components of this study, further aligning with the critical race nature of this study in portraying informants' authentic narratives as the only accurate narratives of the phenomenon explored.

Informants' Demographics

This research study includes the experiences of seven informants, all enrolled at public R1 and R2 PWIs throughout the United States of America. Informants identified as Black women currently enrolled in their CACREP-accredited CES programs after the year 2019. Two informants were enrolled at PWIs in the Rocky Mountain (RMACES) region. One informant was enrolled at a PWI in the North Atlantic (NARACES) region, one informant was enrolled at a PWI in the North Central (NCACES) region, and three informants were enrolled at PWIs in the Southern (SACES) region. All seven informants from all but one ACES region, [Western (WACES)] were included. In addition, six informants identified as Black American, while one informant identified as Black Jamaican.

To uphold the integrity of this research endeavor and understanding of the critical nature of this study, informants were asked to provide a preferred pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. Therefore, I have intentionally chosen to redact the names of informants from the record and, throughout this research study, have utilized informants' self-selected pseudonyms

that they chose at the beginning of their interviews. Informants Vivica, Sophie, Brenae, Thirty-One, Alicia, Jackie, and Africa demographics are provided below in Table 1.

Table 1

Informant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Race/Nationality	ACES Region
Vivica	Black, Jamaican	RMACES
Sophie	Black American	NARACES
Brenae	Black American	RMACES
Thirty-One	Black American	SACES
Alicia	Black American	SACES
Jackie	Black American	SACES
Africa	Black American	NCACES

Interviews

To delve deeply into and collect luminous, rich data to uncover the subjective-lived embodied experiences of informants, I conducted one 60-90 minute semi-structured individual interview followed by a 30-45 minute unstructured individual interview with each informant via video conferencing through a password-protected meeting room within the Zoom platform, as informants resided in various locations throughout the United States. These qualitative interviews were grounded in the principles of critical phenomenology through a critical race perspective. Specifically, these interviews were not one-sided and comprised of a bilateral relationship between informants and me, wherein we influenced each other throughout the interview dialogue (Behal, 2022). For example, during semi-structured individual interviews

with informants, seeking to understand what was happening in regard to the phenomena of institutional belongingness and the specific associated cultural and social contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Weiss et al., 2020), I shaped the conversation with preconstructed questions illustrated in Appendix A allowing informants to respond openly while not infringing on what they said during our conversation.

Unstructured individual interviews with informants were employed soon after I transcribed their semi-structured individual interviews in Otter AI. These unstructured interviews provided additional time for informants to share anything additional they may have wanted to in the prior interview. It also allowed informants the opportunity to review their transcription from their semi-structured interviews. During this time, they were given time to clarify or provide additional input that they felt I may have missed or misinterpreted. Upon conclusion of the unstructured interviews, informants were also provided with their interview transcriptions to additionally provide them with the opportunity to clarify or provide additional input that they felt I may have missed or misinterpreted.

Additionally, both semi-structured and unstructured interviews were particularly well-suited as they offered me the opportunity to explore informants' perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and their overall lived embodied experiences that were enveloped with complex and sensitive issues (Dearnley, 2005). Such open-ended flexibility within both interviews allowed me the ability to ask open-ended questions and gave me the privilege to probe to gather a more textural and structural description of informants lived embodied experiences while still giving them the freedom to engage more deeply as we conversed (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Notably, the recognition of the permeance of racism underscores the significance of the CRT tenet counternarratives in authentically highlighting the presence of racism and its

interconnectedness within the lives of those who are historically oppressed and marginalized (Brown & Jackson, 2022). Thus, both semi-structured and unstructured interviews served as powerful data collection methods to amplify the voices of these informants and capture in their own words an in-depth essence of the phenomenon of institutional agents' influence on their institutional belongingness at PWIs. Upholding the bilateral relationship between informants and myself as a researcher, these data collection methods and trusting strategies of member checking with informants provided them with the agency to convey their stories authentically and created a more secure and connected experience to this collaborative research process.

Moreover, guided by this critical endeavor within this research study, it was crucial to illuminate the theme of healing and present a sense of safety for informants as they shared their stories that may be encompassed with racialized trauma. Considering informants may lack access to healing spaces within their institutions and recognizing and acknowledging that informants' well-being would be potentially impacted as they divulge their lived embodied experiences, I provided informants with cultural-specific web-based mental health resources illustrated in Appendix B. These resources provided to informants were personally accessible if they needed mental health support or psychoeducation on coping strategies due to the culturally sensitive nature of these interviews. Lastly, at the conclusion of both interviews, to acknowledge informants' time and contribution, I provided each informant with a Visa gift card in the total amount of fifty dollars (USD).

Data Analysis

Soon after data collection, the transcribed interviews underwent thematic analysis. Analysis in critical phenomenology is defined as a rigorous process of recovering structures of meaning that are embodied and illustrated in human experience represented in a text (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2015; Van Manen, 2014; Weiss et al., 2020). Drawing from a critical race perspective underscoring Strayhorn's Sense of Belonging Model, thematic analysis guided by Moustakas (1994) of transcribed interviews allowed me to recover structures of meaning represented in informants' narratives that accounted for a broader historical and sociocultural context of their perceptions, feelings, beliefs and lived embodied experiences.

Utilizing a thematic lens, I analyzed the collected data by leaning on the methodological process of interpreting interview data that revealed patterns and themes within informants' narratives (Guest et al., 2012; Moustakas, 1994). In addition to this framework, I further ensured informants' privacy and protection from potential repercussions. Recognizing the critical nature and purpose of this study to present a phenomenological description that exposes the power dynamics within the contextual structure of a PWI that shapes and influences the lived embodied experiences of informants, I systematically identified thematic patterns. This allowed me to discern informants' narratives and uncover the existing structural pattern while informants' identities remained anonymous. This analytical approach was also well suited as a tribute to informants and the African Diaspora, acknowledging the rich tapestry of our collectivist culture, which embraces storytelling to present a detailed and vivid depiction of the interconnected factors that influence one's lived embodied experience.

Thematic Analysis of the Phenomenon

A thematic analysis of the phenomenon was guided by Moustakas' methodological framework to uncover the essence of the phenomena of this study (Moustakas, 1994). These guidelines allowed me to better identify, analyze codes, and organize emerging themes that emerged from informants' narratives of their institutional belongingness experiences and their intersection with the broader societal aspects of race and structural inequity. At the same time,

these guidelines were adapted and modified due to this study's pursuit and my critical epistemology. The step processes of the thematic analysis consisted of my engagement in reflexivity, horizontalization, coding, themes, textual and structural description of themes, and essences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994) to uncover the true essence of informant's narratives regarding their embodied experiences in their PWI CES programs.

Reflexivity

While Moustakas underscores the significant importance of bracketing in which researchers suspend their biases, preconceptions, and beliefs to remain curious and delve deeper into informant's lived embodied experiences (Moustakas, 1994), critical phenomenology rejects this notion of bracketing and instead urges researchers to engage in reflexivity throughout the methodology (Weiss et al., 2020). Distinct from classical phenomenology, reflexivity does not require researchers to bracket or suspend their biases and act as detached mere observers of informants' life worlds but rather to acknowledge and reflect upon their subjectivity and positionality to address the social structures of the lifeworld that organize informants' way of being (Weiss et al., 2020). Therefore, I adapted the approach of reflexivity, rejected the notion of bracketing, and engaged in self-introspection to reflect upon my subjectivity and positionality, which allowed me to center my identity as a Black CES doctoral student and my critical epistemology while remaining mindful of setting aside my personal biases, assumptions, and preconceptions. These acts of reflexivity, in which I engaged in weekly journaling, self-talk, and peer debriefing, maintained the integrity of my analysis and offered me the opportunity to acknowledge my own social and cultural background. In addition, such an empathetic manner foregrounded a more authentic understanding of informants' experiences as I engaged in a deep understanding and analysis of how my prospective informants' social and cultural environments

shaped their perceptions and lived embodied experiences. Lastly, these acts of reflexivity prevented interference with the data while still capturing the richness of the essences and addressing the historical and social structures that influenced informants' lived embodied experiences.

To do this, I engaged in weekly journaling, where I wrote down emerging thoughts, feelings, observations, and frustrations as I engaged in both data collection and analysis processes. Journaling twice a week ensued when I began interviewing my informants. Precisely at the conclusion of every interview, I took thirty minutes to write a journal entry, which consisted of a self-reflexive writing manner, in which I stayed abreast of my power and influence, my experience of the interview, and additional emerging thoughts, feelings, and observations. It should be noted that this was helpful for my own personal growth as a critical researcher. While I had also spent time communicating with my inner self, I also engaged in bi-weekly meetings with my peer debriefers, in which I consulted with them on my reflexivity endeavors and my interpretation of the emerging data. All of these reflexive steps, overall, allowed me to immerse myself in the lived, embodied experiences of informants and richly gather data to uncover the true essence of the phenomenon, which is echoed by Moustakas (1994).

Horizontalization

The following steps in the thematic analysis rooted in Moustakas (1994) involve horizontalization, which consists of an iterative review of interview transcripts to acquire a comprehensive understanding. This careful re-reading and review of each transcript is necessary for researchers to familiarize themselves with the transcripts and ensure accuracy and clarity. It is important to note that coding is a subsequent phase of horizontalization in which researchers list

every expression relevant to the experience and then determine which core aspects of the experience reflect a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). To engage in these phases of thematic analysis, researchers must familiarize themselves with the transcripts and treat every statement as having equal value before eliminating and reducing statements irrelevant to understanding the moment of experience. Therefore, I meticulously reviewed and familiarized myself with the interview transcripts. To do this, after each interview, I uploaded transcripts into Otter AI transcription, a secure web-based transcription service allowing for recording and reviewing of transcripts in real-time (Corrente & Bourgeault, 2022), and read through the transcripts line by line to ensure accuracy and clarity. After engaging in 3-5 readings and reviews of each informant's transcript, I then sent them to informants so they could also review for accuracy and clarity. Upon receiving confirmation of review from two informants, which entailed correction of grammatical errors, I then prepared for the subsequent interviews, which after the conclusion of the interviews, I repeated the same steps in which I uploaded transcripts into Otter AI transcription software and engaged in a thorough line by line reading and review of the transcripts.

Coding

This next step of data analysis consists of coding of the data to gather initial themes that emerge from the data (Moustakas, 1994). This act of coding allowed me to capture the empirical nuances present in informants' narratives, allowing for the discovery of initial emergent themes that reflected informants' lived experiences of the phenomenon and allowed me to understand how informants experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). As previously mentioned, it was of significant importance for me to uphold my critical epistemology as I engaged in these analytical steps. Henceforth, in acknowledging the importance of informants' narratives and

valuing the entirety of informants' transcripts containing their statements, sentences, paragraphs, expressions, and quotes regarding their lived embodied experiences, I carefully engaged in the subsequent coding phase and only reduced and eliminated informants' statements, sentences, paragraphs, and quotes that were not reflective of their response to the questions and were not relevant to informant's lived embodied experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Specifically, after such an iterative review of informants' interview transcripts, I uploaded all transcripts into an Excel spreadsheet coding book and individually highlighted informants' statements, sentences, paragraphs, expressions, and/or quotes that contributed to an understanding of the nature of institutional belongingness to capture the social and cultural contexts that shape informants lived embodied experiences.

Specifically, in acknowledging this study's research questions and drawing from my theoretical lenses, I highlighted informants' statements, sentences, paragraphs, expressions, and quotes of informants' encounters with their institutional agents that encompassed racism, discrimination, historical symbolism, cultural norms and standards within their institutional environments; informants' social, academic, and psychological outcomes; informants' overall sense of institutional belongingness; and their view on institutional belongingness and its influence or lack thereof on their academic persistence within their programs and future career pathways. This led to emerging labeled codes ranging between twenty and seventy-six codes representative of each question and an accurate observation of the content of the data totaling five hundred and eight codes. This step allowed for the next step of clustering of codes into thematic labels, which Moustakas defines as the step where researchers cluster codes in a systematic manner in which they are related to one another in content and meaning, representing informants lived embodied experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Themes

After concluding the coding of the data, I clustered the codes into thematic labels. To do this, I took all of the emerging codes from informants' transcripts and once again reviewed them against transcripts to once again maintain reflexivity and be mindful of accurately interpreting informants' narratives and then collectively grouped all codes systematically based on common patterns representative of their lived embodied experiences that captured the pervasive nature of white supremacy and its impact on their socialization experiences and future career pathways within their PWI CES programs (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Strayhorn, 2019). These common patterns resulted in eight thematic labels and 20 original subthemes organized in an Excel spreadsheet. Upon completion of thematic labels, I once again reviewed them against transcripts to ensure that thematic labels were reflective of the emerging codes.

Soon after, I engaged in debriefing meetings with my peer debriefers in which they reviewed the clustering of codes and thematic labels and provided insight and guidance on my intent to make sure informants' narratives accurately aligned with the portrayal of the themes. In upholding the integrity of this research and protecting my informants' confidentiality, I ensured that informants' counternarratives were de-identified and any potentially identifying information was indistinguishable as my peer debriefers and I engaged in a review. Shortly after expert guidance, I printed and cut out thematic labels and engaged in an iterative sorting process of collapsing themes. I once again reviewed informants' transcripts to ensure the themes represented a congruent pattern among informants' narratives encompassing their lived embodied experiences. This resulted in five themes and three subthemes illuminated by informants' text that illustrated the pervasive nature of racism embedded in PWIs, the

psychological, educational, and physical impact that PWI CES programs have on informants, contextual factors of PWI CES programs, and their impact on informants' institutional belongingness and future career pathways.

Textual and Structural Descriptions

After the completion of emerging themes, the following steps involve the creation of textual and structural descriptions, which Moustakas (1994) defines as the researcher's extraction of verbatim examples in informants' narratives that describe the occurrence of the phenomenon and the researcher's description of contextual and intrapersonal factors of how the informants experienced the phenomenon within their PWI CES programs. To do this, I meticulously extracted statements, sentences, paragraphs, expressions, and quotes from informants' counternarratives that accurately described and represented the thematic labels. In upholding the critical race perspective in amplifying informants' counternarratives, I made sure not to remove any linguistic style capturing informants' authentic style of speech. It was of significant importance to receive informants' feedback to ensure I accurately illustrated their lived embodied experiences.

After engaging in member-checking with informants and applying feedback from two informants encompassed with grammatical revisions, I presented descriptive narrations of the verbatim examples extracted from informants' narratives that were representative and illuminated their perceptions of the occurrence of the phenomenon. In addition, I constructed an individual structural description, encompassing my consideration of their PWI CES programs and informants' feelings, beliefs, and thoughts that were connected to and influenced how they experienced the phenomenon. These descriptions were synthesized to better illuminate the

phenomenon and the social and cultural contexts that shaped informants lived embodied experiences.

Essences of the Phenomenon

Lastly, Moustakas (1994) defines the essence as the last step in which the researcher constructs a comprehensive written description of the meaning and essences of informants' experiences. To do this, I synthesized the themes, the individual textual-structural descriptions, and the counternarratives of informants to create a single description capturing the core results and aspects of the experience of the phenomenon for all informants. This capturing resulted in the essence of the phenomenon.

Trustworthiness

In this study exploring Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness in PWIs, I was committed to exemplifying trustworthiness throughout the entirety of the research process, which is a crucial aspect of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Moustakas, 1994; Stahl & King, 2020; Sundler et al., 2019). In the context of the critical nature of this work, I wanted to ensure that the narratives of informants would be accurately portrayed, especially considering many People of Color's stories are often told from the lens of the majority rather than themselves (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Therefore, to ensure the integrity of this study, I engaged in various trustworthiness strategies in the process of recruitment and sampling, data collection, data analysis, and reflexivity. Moreover, in the context of the critical nature of this work, I intend to ensure that the narratives of these informants are accurately portrayed, especially considering many People of Color's stories are often told from the lens of the majority rather than themselves (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006).

Specifically, I was ethically considerate and transparent with informants during the recruitment and sampling process, from my obtained approval from the IRB to my engagement in purposeful sampling procedures and obtaining permission from recruitment sources. Specifically, throughout the use of purposeful sampling procedures, I recruited informants from trustworthy networks and provided clear information on the purpose and intent of the study, along with receiving informed consent from informants, which further established and cultivated our rapport, trust-building, and equal guarantee this study is foregrounded in credibility.

Throughout the data collection process, I engaged in triangulation by employing semi-structured and unstructured interviews, which provided me with prolonged engagement with informants and accounted for multiple ways of collecting data to ensure dependability (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2020). Member checking was also employed during both interviews, during which I shared informants' transcription with them after the conclusion of their interviews, giving them time to clarify or provide additional input that they felt I may have missed or misinterpreted. Specifically, within the second interview, informants were able to engage in additional one-on-one reviews with me to ensure their transcribed narratives that emerged from the first interview were accurate.

By continuing this collaborative and critical endeavor of ensuring informants' stories are accurately told from their lens, I engaged in member checking again soon after I analyzed the data and identified themes. Through email exchange with informants, I provided them with an Excel spreadsheet detailing their statements, sentences, paragraphs, expressions, and quotes that accounted for their values, attitudes, or beliefs representing their subjective lived embodied experiences regarding the phenomenon and the identified theme categorized based on those components. Informants were provided two weeks from the sending date to read and review the

themes and respond with any questions, concerns, or statements they may have. After receiving four to five grammatical revisions from one informant and one miscommunication correction regarding the capturing of their narrative from another informant, I implemented this feedback to reflect the study results.

Additionally, by engaging in reflexive journaling throughout the study, I maintained reflection of my subjectivity and positionality, in which I consistently remained aware of my own personal biases, assumptions, and preconceptions as a researcher and a Black CES doctoral student. In addition to my own reflexivity, I also engaged in peer debriefing throughout the data analysis process with two scholars in the field of CES who engage in critical research to further seek credible perspectives. These meetings helped me identify and mitigate any biases that emerged and could have influenced my interpretation of the data.

It was essential that I engaged in peer debriefing in this study. In light of my identity as a Black CES doctoral student, peer debriefing served as a crucial trustworthiness strategy that further enhanced this research study's credibility and authenticity. As emphasized in the literature, peer debriefing provides the researcher with the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with an expert in the particular field of research, in which they can engage in reflection regarding their methodological procedures, data meaning, and interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Janesick, 2007).

As I engaged in these bi-weekly individual debriefing sessions in the months of January and February with Dr. Aiesha Lee, a scholar and a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) currently working as an Assistant Professor at Pennsylvania State University, and Dr. Briana Gaines, a scholar and a LPC currently working as a Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Florida, in which I discussed my feelings, attitudes, questions, and reflective thoughts that

arose during the data analysis process. These sessions and personal journaling afterward allowed me to gain new insights and reflect on my personal biases, assumptions, and preconceptions, which mitigated infringement on the collected data. Additionally, through these dialogues, I further ensured that I engaged in a rigorous review of the collected data and analyzed data in an appropriate interpretive manner.

As I engaged in this study, I employed an audited Excel Spreadsheet. Significantly, audit trailing was employed at the beginning of the study to maintain a clear record as I engaged in the research process and further analytical steps. Maintaining documentation throughout the study ensured genuineness as I engaged in the study procedures and further interpretation of findings. A thick description of my analysis procedures also ensures the transferability of this study to further enhance future pursuits centered on advancing systemic equity and belonging within the CES field.

Peer Debriefers

Dr. Aiesha Lee has a background in Counselor Education and Supervision and her expertise spans across individual, family, and trauma counseling. Dr. Lee's research primarily focuses on the generational trauma in Black communities and the professional development of Black women in Counselor Education. Her noteworthy contributions include exploring the intergenerational transmission of the strong Black woman narrative, spiritual coping among spiritual Black women, and examining race-based trauma and spiritual wellbeing.

Dr. Briana Gaines has a background in Counselor Education and Supervision, specializes in marriage and family counseling, and has practiced as an outpatient therapist and clinical case manager at a non-profit organization where she worked with underserved and underrepresented populations. Dr. Gaines’s research primarily focuses on Black motherhood and the

intergenerational lessons that are passed from mother to daughter. Other research interests include trauma, particularly race-based trauma, and historical trauma, as well as Black women in Counselor Education. As a researcher, Dr. Gaines holds a position that is both constructivist and advocacy-participatory and as a Black woman, she advocates for culturally relevant and equitable mental health interventions and treatment.

Ethical Considerations

In summary, I have been ethically considerate throughout the entirety of this research process. By obtaining permission from the IRB before engaging in research procedures, I ensured that this study adhered to ethical guidelines and protected informants' human rights. In addition, I engaged in transparency by clearly communicating the study's purpose at all times. Informants' privacy and confidentiality were upheld and protected. Specifically, after receiving informed consent from informants, I used pseudonyms throughout the entirety of the study; I stored all of their personal data and additional data collection materials in a password-protected Google Drive folder.

Moreover, due to the critical nature of my study, cultural sensitivity was crucial. Thus, as I engaged with informants throughout the study to eventually amplify their narratives, I remained committed to having a genuine regard for them by exemplifying trustworthiness and maintaining integrity and transparency throughout the research study. Overall, it is important to note that the incentives presented to informants were merely a token of appreciation, as their narratives were not viewed as a self-serving gain or a coercive act to produce academic work but to further contribute to necessary social justice research to advance systemic change within higher education.

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the purpose of this study and delves into the qualitative approach of critical phenomenology by way of a critical race perspective aimed at understanding the institutional belongingness experiences of Black CES doctoral students at PWIs. A detailed description of the research design, including data collection methods and thematic analysis procedures, is also included. In conclusion, this chapter provided strategies for reflexivity, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the study results that illuminate Black Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) doctoral students' lived embodied experiences at their Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). Results in this chapter provide insight into the three research questions guiding this study: (1) What are the experiences of Black doctoral students who are enrolled in PWI CES programs? (2) How do Black CES doctoral students at PWIs describe their institutional belongingness? (3) How do institutional agents (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff) impact Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness? Collectively, this engagement in critical phenomenology from a critical race perspective offered subjective meaning to informants' institutional belongingness experiences. In amplifying the voices of Black CES doctoral students five themes were uncovered from the counternarratives of Black CES doctoral students enrolled at PWIs: *I Do Not Institutionally Belong*, *No One Looks Like You*, *They Get It*, and *Play The Game.* These four themes and three subthemes are presented in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2

List of Themes & Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
I Do Not Institutionally Belong	Racial Insults, Assaults, & Harassments Racial Objectification Neglect of Racial and Intersecting Identities
No One Looks Like You	N/A
They Get It	N/A
Play The Game	N/A
If It's Happening Here, It's Gonna Happen There	N/A

Theme 1: I Do Not Institutionally Belong

When asked if they institutionally belonged, five informants expressed they did not institutionally belong. One informant stated, “No.” Another informant expressed, “No, absolutely not;” another informant asserted, “Yeah, It's just hard. *It's hard*;” (Brenae shrugs her shoulders and shakes her head); while another informant alluded to the reasoning of why she doesn’t institutionally belong and expressed, “Ideally, would they want me there, no;” Lastly another informant expressed, “No, I do not belong.” Their expressions reflected a central theme that encompassed informants’ encounters with their institutional agents (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff), which were characterized by racial insults, assaults, harassment, objectification, and neglect of their Black bodies.

Racial insults refer to institutional agents' derogatory remarks, intrusive questions, and comments, including offensive jokes, stereotyping, demeaning and belittling informants, and undermining their student identity based on their race. This was illustrated by Brenae, “All I heard was the help,” as she reflected on the insulting encounter she had with a CE faculty candidate. Racial assaults refer to institutional agents' verbal violence, including derogatory language, racial slurs, and forms of intimidation motivated by prejudice and/or discrimination directed towards informants based on their race. Alicia explained, “They just would use all kinds of slurs and profanity,” when reflecting on the racial harassment she experienced by white fraternity members on her campus.

Racial harassment refers to institutional agents' acts of verbal or physical behavior that target informants based on their race. This harassment is not invited or desired by informants and often makes them feel uncomfortable, such as described by Jackie when reflecting on the harassment she experienced in her encounter with a custodian. She stated, “It was just so

uncomfortable.” Racial insults, assaults, and harassment can lead to physical and emotional distress, such as how Sophie explained the insult a CE faculty uttered during their meeting, “I felt hot, I was angry. *I was angry*” (Sophie took a deep sigh and shook her head as she shared her explanation). Africa emphasized her experience of psychological distress when reflecting on the insult she encountered from a professor by asserting, “I just could not get over it.” Racial insults, assaults, and harassment may also lead to internalization of stereotypes, such as noted by Africa, who stated, “Is it because I'm Black? Or is this just truly an innocent thing?;” and a lack of safety as described by Alicia, who explained, “all that made me feel like I wasn't safe.” These encounters with racial insults, assaults, and harassment were captured in the subtheme: Racial Insults, Assaults, & Harassment.

Subtheme: Racial Insults, Assaults, and Harassments

Six informants spoke about their encounters with institutional agents in which they experienced insults, assaults, and harassment that were racially motivated and undermined their student identity. Such experiences caused informants physical, emotional, and psychological distress, indicating that they do not institutionally belong. Informants additionally detailed their embodiment during and after experiencing these insults, assaults, and harassment. Specifically, Brenae describes an encounter in which she was insulted by a CE faculty candidate:

> I helped with a faculty interview and this woman who was white. I picked her up from her hotel, and I took her to breakfast, so that was one of my duties. The running joke became, oh my God, you're just such a great Uber driver. Now, the next few days, she said, oh, there goes my little Uber driver. I think the more she said it, all I heard was, there's my good little color girl like that's just another thing. The more she kept saying, it was almost like that's my little negro girl. It was, like, there's my Uber driver, and all I

> heard was the help. It was giving Jim Crow. It's the cut by 1000 cuts, right. Like, it was just like, you probably didn't peep how that really made me feel.

Jackie describes a harassment encounter involving a custodian:

> I came up, I think it was a late Thursday, and usually, faculty aren't there, and I came to get some work done, and I was going to my door, and she said, "Whoa, whoa, what are you doing here?" I said I'm going into this room. She says, "oh, no, these are for students; you can't be here." I said this is my key; this is actually my office. She said, "Oh." So, I opened the door, and I go in, I leave my door open, and I walk out of my doorway, and I see her in the hallway with, I guess, her supervisor, or whoever else, and they come to the room and kind of like, "oh, this is so nice, is this your office." She was like, "Oh, this room used to be decorated different, "When did you get here?" It was just so uncomfortable. I'm sure they did call and make sure that I belonged there. I will never forget that feeling. Why am I getting questioned? I have a key. Where do you think I'm gonna get this key from? University policy is to have these issued and signed out. How else would I get this? I just remember feeling angry. I felt just like almost heat. But I couldn't react because I know that would be the thing that they wanted.

Sophie described an insulting encounter during a Zoom call with a CE faculty member:

> She says something about how she was driving; she definitely should have been or could have been stopped by the police, and she states, “You know I was gonna tell a joke, but it's not funny.” Then she's like, “You know, I'm just gonna say the joke.” So, she says, “Oh, well, at least I'm not Black because if I would have gotten stopped, like, I wouldn't have made it out alive, or I would have got arrested or something like that.” I was livid and expressed that anger to my loved ones in the home. I personally contacted my co-

chair, who I have her personal number. I felt hot, I was angry. I was

angry.

Three informants expressed their embodied feelings after experiencing racial insults, assaults, and harassment. For example, Alicia, when reflecting on the racial slurs she and her Black cohort members encountered from white fraternity members after leaving their evening class, expressed, “There's been several times where my cohort members and I would walk out together to make sure we safely got in our cars because we didn't know what would happen;” Africa when reflecting on a time her professor asked her some rather personal questions about her identity and family origin, expressed, “I literally cried for like, a little under 10 minutes. I just could not get over it;” and Thirty-One when reflecting on a comment made by her cohort member in class that was ignored and not addressed by her professor, said, “It turned to anger. I felt it from head to toe like I could not bring myself out of it. I stayed in class, and I couldn't focus on anything else.” These expressions of informants’ embodied feelings indicate the physical, emotional, and psychological toll of racial insults, assaults, and harassment on informants’ well-being and further indicate that they do not institutionally belong.

When reflecting on their lack of institutional belongingness, informants expressed how their encounters with their CE faculty led to feeling racially objectified. The subtheme *Racial objectification* refers to institutional agents' verbal and non-verbal actions and behaviors that reduce informants to “physical objects” or “numbers” in which they are “used” by their CE faculty for self-serving and CES program interests based on their race. Racial objectification can result in tokenism. Tokenism is the intentional practice of making an effort to include individuals from historically oppressed and marginalized communities solely for self-serving gains. For example, an informant described an experience where a CE faculty member asked her to share

the “Black perspective” in class or when CE faculty engaged in “using” behavior in which they asked informants to show up to “equity or diversity meetings” without valuing their input. Informants have noted their CE faculty make strong efforts to recruit for “diversity” to be reflected in their enrollment numbers, while neglecting to provide informants with crucial support necessary for “retention.”

Subtheme: Racial Objectification

Five informants detailed their embodied thoughts and feelings related to being racially objectified. Specifically, described by Jackie in which she questions her white CE faculty's motives in wanting to work with her, “I don't know if they want to keep me because I'm the first Black person. It's like, we have to manage this really well to get our numbers so that we can have increased diversity.” Similarly, Thirty-One, when reflecting on her institutional experiences and her lack of institutional belongingness, said, “You're not even a second thought; you don't even go into the planning for retention.” Similarly, when reflecting on her institutional experiences with her CE faculty, Alicia reported, “I feel very much used up at this point. I feel like being at this university has made me realize that it doesn't really matter how smart I am or like what I can bring; at the end of the day, I'm still Black.” In a different fashion than Alicia and Jackie, Africa described tokenism as a form of racial objectification in which one is reduced to an object to be used for self-serving purposes. For example, she expressed, “I've been asked the questions to understand the Black perspective. I'm like, well, do I answer because this is important, or are you asking me because of me being in a cage again?” Similarly, this level of voyeurism, which Africa also alludes to with her words “cage,” can also be seen in Brenae’s expression of how her CE faculty and students react when she wears certain clothing and her natural hair, “I'll wear a hoodie that says a slang from where I'm from. Then they'll ask, "what does that mean?" I think I

switched my hair, and my students were like, [Brenae makes *wow* facial expressions], and the attention felt weird."

Subtheme: Neglect of Racial and Intersecting Identities

When reflecting on their lack of institutional belongingness, informants detailed their encounters with their CE faculty, in which they were racially neglected. The subtheme *Neglect of Racial and Intersecting Identities* refers to CE faculty failing to recognize informants' intersecting identities as Black women, age, marital status, economic status, and their roles as mothers and caregivers and failing to provide them with "funding," "resources," and "support." This racial neglect can result in CE faculty not providing informants equitable academic support (i.e., Graduate Assistant (GA) funding, scholarship opportunities such as grants and research projects, and concern and care for their well-being). This racial neglect can result in "disparities" in which informants do not receive the same support as their white counterparts, such as illustrated by Thirty-One, who explained, "I have personally observed, and witness allowances being made for people that are not Black and not female to where they don't have to work as hard."

Six informants describe how they lack equitable academic support. Specifically, when reflecting on how her CE faculty moved to support her white cohort members, Thirty-One said, "Everybody [CE faculty] jumping in to figure out, 'oh, let's go find this grant, and let's go find this scholarship for this person that doesn't have a full-time job, that doesn't have a family to support.'" When reflecting on her intersecting identities, Africa said, "I'm feeling very behind in a lot of ways where people can take advantage of opportunities that I can't." Similarly, Alicia expressed, "I didn't get any additional funding outside of my GA, although I was promised that when I was recruited. I didn't realize that professors had certain people they wanted to support

and certain people they didn't." Jackie, when reflecting on what would have contributed to her institutional belongingness, said, "Having funding that is going to pay most of the bills because a lot of Black women are single, not married, some of us don't have kids."

While Thirty-One, Alicia, Africa, and Jackie expressed the lack of tangible academic support that they have not received from their CES programs, Sophie, Brenae, and Thirty-One described how they lacked care from their CE faculty that was necessary for their well-being and overall institutional belonging, highlighting the broader neglect of their racial and intersecting identities within their PWIs. For example, Brenae and Thirty-One discussed how their white CE faculty fails to provide them with culturally responsive self-care. For example, Brenae said, "I'm glad you're reading the research, but my lived experience is different. Maybe even asking about what is your self-care as a person of color and no, not just assuming bubble baths." Similarly, Thirty-One said, "They say self-care is important, so, you hear that it's a part of the ethical code, you know, but it's like, you're left on your own to figure out what that looks like for you." In a different fashion, Sophie reflected on her violent experience and described how she received a lack of support from her CE faculty, "If I was a white woman, the faculty would be more concerned to not make me feel uncomfortable." Informants' descriptions indicate experiences in which they were neglected and did not receive crucial resources and support necessary for their overall well-being and sense of institutional belongingness.

Theme 2: No One Looks Like You

Six informants detailed their lived embodied experiences as Black CES doctoral students in their PWIs. *No One Looks Like You* refers to the notion of "noticeability," which informants described as a lack of racial representation of Black CE faculty, Black CES doctoral students, and Black counselors within their academic environments. Their expressions encompassed

informants' embodied feelings of loneliness, frustration, and misunderstanding, and even shock at knowing that other Black CE faculty and students exist. For example, Vivica described, "When I go to like conferences and stuff, I'm actually surprised to see how many Black people I see because I don't see that where I am." Alicia expressed her frustration about the lack of representation by stating, "I hate it here. I hate it here. There are not many people that look like me here." Similarly, Brenae also expressed her feelings and said, "It's exhausting to feel secure in a place where no one looks like you."

Alternatively, Jackie, Africa, and Vivica spoke to just how salient their racial identities are within their PWI CES programs. For example, Jackie expressed, "You're noticed. I walk around campus I see no one that looks like me." Similarly, Africa said, "Well, there's not a lot of Black CES doctoral students," and Vivica explained, "When I got here, there were three cohorts above me. None of them were Black." For Sophie, however, when reflecting on her experience as being a part of one of the first cohorts of color in her program, she said, "I can say since my cohort as it relates to recruiting and retaining Black CES students, they're not doing a good job."

Theme 3: They Get It

"They Get It" was said by Thirty-One when describing her relationship with her Black CE advisor and how he normalizes her experiences. This theme was defined as informants describing how their Black CE faculty, non-Black CE faculty, or Black peers understand their lived experiences as Black CES doctoral students in their predominantly white environments and provide them with genuine support such as empathy and "solidarity." For example, Brenae described her relationship with her Black CE advisor as one that provided her with "comradery."

They Get It was identified by four informants as expressions of institutional factors that contributed to institutional belongingness.

In reflecting on one of her professors who has normalized her experience with her intersecting identities as a mother and caregiver, Thirty-One said, “I feel connected to him even though it's not said, there is a level of I see you, you see me, and I get it.” Similarly, Brenae said, “I found a lot of comradery with my advisor who just pours back into me. She's like, white people be white peopling, so like she gets it.” In a different turn of events, when reflecting on a new white faculty member, Jackie said, “She has been my saving grace because she came to me and she said, ‘How are you…are you fine as a Black woman in this town in this program?’” For Alicia, while she could not receive the support she needed from her CE faculty, she described the importance of receiving support from an academic peer within her institution. Specifically, she said, “There was one person who I mentioned, we just hit it off because he was real. You know, he just stood there in solidarity with me.”

In addition, this theme also referred to five informants describing how necessary it is for CE faculty to provide them and other Black CES doctoral students with access to “spaces” in which they were able to connect, have an affinity with, and receive mentorship from Black CES doctoral students, Black CE faculty, and Black people. Such institutional agents were identified as key institutional factors necessary for fostering institutional belongingness, especially considering the lack of representation in their PWI CES programs. In reflecting on the lack of representation within her PWI CES program and what institutional factors would contribute to her institutional belongingness, Africa expressed, “The right mentorship. When I was in undergrad, the Black professors, they would say, ‘go find your people.’ It's like, the same is true here but it's different because you don't live on campus. …institutions can do better with having

spaces for us." Similarly, Thirty-One also expressed the vital role of mentorship, "Match students with a mentor or advisor that maybe share some of the same experiences. Because having an affinity group, having someone that has been where you are, that can help you along is important." Similarly, Brenae describes this affinity as:

> Like people who can give me the real, like here's the past faculty, here's the past students who have graduated, they can tell you what it's like. That there is racism when you sign your teacher's contract. Like what is research like for people of color, like be prepared someone may not take your journal submission because they feel like your topic is too racially charged.

This affinity in a different way as it relates to community spaces is illustrated in Jackie's thoughts of how lonely the journey is for [her] and other Black CES doctoral students and what she believes CE faculty members need to do to foster institutional belongingness when there is a lack of representation in PWI CES programs. Specifically, she said, "If it'd be a church home or if I can connect you with the Black Student Union and not just saying it in passing but genuinely having someone that I can talk to." In comparison, when reflecting on her institutional experiences, her lack of institutional belongingness, and the limited amount of Black CE faculty and other Black institutional agents on her predominantly white campus, Alicia said, "You can't have community without diversity. For Black CES students in these programs, they need to feel like they're a part of community. …it ain't about me seeing other Black people; it's about me seeing myself there."

Theme 4: Play The Game

Play the Game was described by six informants, including Sophie, Thirty-One, and Jackie, who described that this central theme encompassed informants' encounters with their CE

faculty in which they can't be their authentic selves and have to "code switch," "perform," "act ignorant," "be stoic," "quiet their voice" "walk a tightrope," and become "a chameleon" as described by Alicia when reflecting on her cohort member, "She became exactly what they wanted her to be. As a result of that, she received a tremendous amount of funding. She was able to finish early and could have worked anywhere she wanted to." Additionally, *playing the game* with their CE faculty resulted in academic and career support such as "funding," "recommendation letters," and "co-teaching opportunities." However, informants also detailed the resulting physical and psychological embodied feelings of *playing the game*, highlighting the extreme and unfair burden placed on them to conform to their CE faculty's dominant standards and cultural norms to attain opportunities and receive
support.

Specifically, when Thirty-One described how she "plays the game" during interactions with her CE faculty, she said:

> I feel like I have to code-switch. I don't feel like I can be myself. I feel like I have to make them comfortable with me so I can get what I need. As long as I play by the rules and make relationships with the people I need to make relationships with, they will, you know, write the letters and support me in terms of getting the position. I feel like I have to play the game in order for me to reach my goal.

Similarly, Brenae talked about having to engage in code-switching with her white CE faculty:

> They're saying express how you feel, but am I doing too much like, I can't tell you all my thoughts because you might judge me for like, is she too rash is she, you know, it's very much a tightrope. ...When you have faculty who've been in the game 30 years, and they know, and you know, CES is not that big of a profession, you gotta be careful. I am not

> an introvert at all, but I truly had to become more introverted. I look forward to having three weeks of authentic Blackness and just no code-
>
> switching.

While Africa did not use the words “code switch,” she illuminated this below:

> I'm hyper-vigilant because you have the key to my recommendation after I graduate, or you have the key to slide an opportunity my way or co-teach with you. So, there's still an act of performance, which could maybe be a testament that everybody has. But I think, in particular, when it comes to being Black, there's another onion layer. Like, I can't just go to you and say something that racially happened... I can't talk with my fingers when I'm talking to you.

Conversely, Sophie and Jackie described how “playing the game” leads to the support necessary for their academic careers. Specifically, Sophie said:

> Sometimes, the interactions give me anxiety. I have to almost like submit to you so that I can eventually get that power and use it for good. But I get this anxiety because it's just like, I've always heard in our profession, especially as Ph.D. students for Black students play the game, play the game, and a lot of times, I don't think we realize that we're doing it to each other too and we're causing more harm than anything. And there's this concept of, like, I went through all XYZ, so like, you gotta prove it too, and you don't even realize what you're doing. ... [Sophie goes on to describe her embodied feelings] The somatic responses are definitely all in my stomach, I'm feeling it all in my tummy. Tense, in the shoulders and in the jaw area, and then having to be more stoic than I like to, that's not my personality. I need to get out and just leave the meeting as soon as possible, but I also

> have to get what I need from you because, again, you hold that
>
> power.

Jackie details the embodied toll of "playing the game" below:

> So sometimes, just acting ignorant. It's so many like nuances that you have to go through to play the game, and it feels like such a mental struggle to be able to just have a conversation when you are just here for school; you are here to be an advocate in the field to be a researcher, and you can't do that without playing a game.

Theme 5: If It's Happening Here, It's Gonna Happen There

If It's Happening Here, It's Gonna Happen There said Sophie when describing how her institutional experiences have influenced her career pathway. This theme was identified by five informants who described their institutional experiences as influential in choosing their career pathways. Some informants described their experiences as deterring them away from choosing "traditional routes" (tenure-track positions) and others toward alternative career paths where they could be "safe," "have better pay," and have a "foot in the community," or "supporting on the ground" (clinical advocacy careers). Both Alicia and Sophie describe their reasoning for not pursuing tenure-track positions. Specifically, when reflecting on her prospective student application and her reasoning for pursuing the Ph.D., Sophie said, "I do not feel the same, and it makes me sad because I think I would be really good at the role, but I don't feel safe doing the role because I don't feel safe as a student." For Alicia, different feelings emerge as she reflects on her career pathway, "Having a horrible experience helped me get this job. So, I actually can be very grateful to these people."

In reflecting on her institutional experiences, Africa describes her reason for pursuing a career path as a part-time professor, "I see that this (racism) still exists, in the institution, I'm not

blind, and because I'm not blind, I can see a little bit more of where I'm going." On the other hand, Jackie and Thirty-One did not explicitly state if they would pursue full-time faculty positions, but similar to Africa, Sophie and Alicia expressed how their institutional experiences contributed to their future career pursuits. Thirty-One, a professional school counselor reflects on the lack of cultural sensitivity provided to Black K-12 students and says, "I am looking forward to after I finish this doctoral program getting a job where I can train school counselors. I would love for it to be in the university realm because I see where my training was lacking." While Jackie, a professional school counselor, is uncertain about her career pathway, she describes the paramount importance of representation, "I know that I need somebody that looks like me on the other side of my problems, but I also need me in a classroom setting. My end goal would be to be at an HBCU."

Essence: Integrated Results

The integrated results from informants' narratives that align with the respective emerging themes, *I Do Not Institutionally Belong, No One Looks Like You, They Get It, Play The Game,* and *If It's Happening Here, It's Gonna Happen There*, represent the essence of informants lived embodied experiences within their CES programs. Clearly, informants are among those who have salient experiences at their PWIs, leading them to encounter various systemic challenges and barriers as they academically matriculate. Informants endure racial insults, assaults, harassment, racial objectification, and racial and intersecting identity neglect from their institutional agents (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff), in which they experience dehumanization, exclusion, and marginalization within their PWI environments. These encounters with their institutional agents contributed to a lack of institutional belongingness for

informants and resulted in significant physical, emotional, and psychological distress and a lack of safety.

In addition to informants' descriptions of relentless encounters of institutional racism, informants reported that they were left feeling isolated and alienated due to the lack of Black CE faculty, Black CES doctoral students, other Black agents, and/or Black counselors within their predominantly white environments. This lack of representation resulted in informants feeling misunderstood, lonely, and frustrated with the awareness that nobody can understand what it is like to be them. At the same time, this lack of representation leads informants to lean on the few Black CE faculty and the supportive non-Black CE faculty accessible within their programs. Through these CE faculty, informants can be authentic and receive empathy, solidarity, and genuine support, giving them a brief window to belong. Yet, informants having an urgent need to institutionally belong speak to the importance of their CES programs providing them with additional spaces to connect with Black people on and off of their campus environments to receive necessary support and mentorship as they navigate their academic journeys.

Moreover, informants continue to provide significant insight into how their institutional agents, especially their CE faculty, are instrumental in cultivating their institutional belongingness. Specifically, informants illustrate how the inability to be authentically themselves and freely express themselves results in significant distress to their Black bodies. These students find themselves engaging in strategies such as code-switching, silencing their voices, and performing to make themselves more appealing and acceptable to their CE faculty to attain academic and career support. Informants described that the harsh reality of diminishing themselves to navigate their climates is complex and a salient experience that results in physical, emotional, and psychological distress such as anxiety, hypervigilance, mental distress,

personality changes, and discomfort. Overall, informants' counternarratives authentically represent their lived embodied experiences and tell the tale of the trauma that their Black bodies endure, citing their institutional experiences as a pivotal influence for their current career pathways.

Summary

Based on the narratives shared by these seven intelligent and distinguished informants, the thematic findings from this study illustrate their lived embodied experiences as Black CES doctoral students enrolled in PWIs. Through their narratives, five themes are presented, shedding light on the specific institutional factors influencing their institutional belongingness experiences and their career pathways. From institutional racism to a lack of representation among their institutional agents, to pressures to conform to their academic and cultural standards and norms, to resulting psychological, emotional, and physical distress, these themes capture the unique social and cultural challenges that informants face within their PWIs. Moreover, these themes result in findings that provide considerable insight into the lived embodied experiences of Black CES doctoral students within PWIs.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss the results and implications of this research study. The research study employed a critical phenomenology grounded in critical race theory (CRT) to understand the lived embodied experiences of Black Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) doctoral students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) and their institutional agents'(i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff) influence on their future career pathways. The sample of seven Black women (six Black American and one Black Jamaican) enrolled in CES programs throughout various Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) regions were able to partake in this study, sharing their lived embodied experiences as Black CES doctoral students enrolled at PWIs. Through one semi-structured interview and one unstructured interview, I gained considerable insights into how cultural and social factors within informants' lived world influenced and shaped their embodied experiences and had the privilege to explore informants' narratives aligned with this study's guiding research questions: (1) What are the experiences of Black doctoral students who are enrolled in PWI CES programs? (2) How do Black CES doctoral students at PWIs describe their institutional belongingness? (3) How do institutional agents impact Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness?

Five themes and three subthemes illuminate the systemic challenges faced by Black CES doctoral students at PWIs. From encounters with racism and tokenism, all resulting in disparities without equitable resources and support, these students are left isolated, underrepresented, and to conform and assimilate to their academic environments that contribute to emotional, physical, and psychological trauma. As recommended by informants, it is evident that Black CES doctoral students lack institutional belongingness as they don't receive culturally sustaining mentorship

and supportive networks, further impacting their academic journeys. Altogether, these findings support the urgent necessity for PWI CES programs to genuinely commit to DEI and CACREP efforts to ensure Black CES doctoral students are provided with equitable support and resources to achieve their academic goals and values. This chapter includes a discussion of the findings, limitations, implications of findings, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

Discussion of The Findings

In the present study, I explored the influence of institutional agents (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff) on Black CES doctoral students' experiences of institutional belongingness at their respective PWIs. This research study seeks to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of Black CES doctoral students' lived embodied experiences, offering the counseling profession and academia considerable awareness of how to better support Black CES doctoral students matriculating at PWIs. Black CES doctoral students' narratives revealed five main themes: *I Do Not Institutionally Belong*, *No One Looks Like You*, *They Get It*, *Play The Game*, and *If It's Happening Here, It's Gonna Happen There*. These themes illuminate the critical impact of influences of institutional norms and systems on the experiences of Black CES doctoral students enrolled in PWIs, Black CES doctoral students' description of institutional belongingness, and the impact that institutional agents (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff) have in shaping Black CES doctoral student's institutional belongingness and future career pathways.

It is essential to understand that Black CES doctoral students are more than just students within the academic realm; they are socialized to be contributors to the higher educational field. Therefore, when Black CES doctoral students lack institutional environments that are supportive and inclusive in which they can thrive academically and academically persist, their well-being is

negatively impacted. The findings reveal it is paramount for Black CES doctoral students enrolled in PWIs to institutionally belong, as there is a strong relation between their institutional belongingness and the governing standards of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and the mandates of the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. Hence, it is crucial for PWI CES programs to address the institutional factors revealed from this study's exploration that inhibit Black CES doctoral students from institutionally belonging.

CACREP standards require the implementation of strategies to "identify and eliminate barriers, prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination" (CACREP, 2016, p.10), which is critical for addressing the systemic issues that hinder the institutional belongingness of Black CES doctoral students. Similarly, the mandates of the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights require educational institutions to commit to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training and efforts consistent with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR), 2023) aiming to ensure that all institutions create environments, free from discrimination and oppression.

Yet, informants' narratives illuminate the pervasive experiences of racism, discrimination, marginalization, exclusion, and dehumanization that they face within their PWI environments. These experiences, encompassed with their encounters with their institutional agents, led to students being alienated, invisible, and unsupported by them, resulting in a lack of institutional belongingness. Their narratives reveal how covert racism operates through interpersonal interactions within the academic environment. For example, informants described how institutional agents' verbal behavior in which they racially insulted, assaulted, and harassed them,

undermining their student identities, led to significant emotional, physical, and psychological distress (Harris, 2020 & Johnson, 2022). Informants also reported in their experiences that they were reduced to stereotypes and treated as commodities by their institutional agents, which made them feel undervalued by their CES programs. This tokenism in which informants were used by their institutional agents to be representatives of their race and dehumanized as objects reveals a systemic pattern of exploitation in which they are viewed as insignificant and replaceable, further highlighting how systemic racism perpetuates white supremacist behavior of objectification or historical ownership of Black bodies, undermining the humanity and agency of Black CES doctoral students.

Informants also discuss how it is evident to them that their CES programs prioritize accepting them for their enrollment numbers rather than providing them equitable access to support and resources. Informants asserted that such priorities are evident when their institutional agents neglect to offer them the necessary access to equitable resources and academic support that align with their intersecting identities either as women, mothers, caregivers, and economically disadvantaged doctoral students. This neglect is a systemic occurrence, deeply embedded within the fabric of their PWI environments, further illuminating the systemic pattern of racism where institutions prioritize enrollment of non-white students to fulfill accreditation standards and DEI mandates to increase their capital revenue, yet failing to dismantle racism and address the systemic barriers for Black CES doctoral students hindering their institutional belongingness. For informants, this neglect revolved around this unique intersection of their race and intersecting identities, exposing the intricate layers of discrimination and marginalization that they face in their CES programs, resulting in structural inequities. These structural inequities

are significantly different than the experiences of their white and male counterparts, who continuously benefit from structural systems historically made to support and empower them.

Additionally, CACREP standards serve as the criteria to foster academic counseling units that are inclusive and equitable. By requiring CE institutional units to "make continuous and systematic efforts to recruit, enroll, and retain diverse students and to recruit, employ, and retain diverse faculty that create and support an inclusive learning community (CACREP, 2016, p. 6), CACREP standards aim to foster academic counseling units where individuals from historically oppressed and marginalized backgrounds, including Black CES doctoral students are supported and treated fairly. Yet, the systemic pattern of underrepresentation and diversity of Black institutional agents in CES programs described through informants' narratives in which they detail their minority status makes it challenging for them to feel seen, heard, or valued, which is deeply rooted in the broader context of higher education where Black students are repeatedly isolated and alienated in their PWIs (Baggerly et al., 2017; Harris, 2020; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The lack of diverse representation among institutional agents within PWI CES programs further details the pervasive nature of racism and how it perpetuates a cycle where Black CES doctoral students are deterred from pursuing full-time CE faculty positions, resulting in fewer Black CE faculty. Consequently, leading to a pattern of cultural erasure and lack of capital gain for informants while preventing the advancement toward a more inclusive and equitable learning environment (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Consequently, this systemic issue leads to a lack of access to mentorship and networking opportunities, which ultimately foster equitable access to educational capital gain in which Black students receive resources and support necessary to advance toward their careers (Brooms, 2020;

Harris, 2020; Pedulla & Pager, 2019; Strayhorn, 2019; Weidman & Stein, 2003). It is also important to note that this cyclical pattern significantly limits the accessibility of Black clinicians available to provide therapeutic care to Black communities (Johnson et al., 2022).

Furthermore, informants' narratives expose the complex strategic and unique embodiment they are forced to adopt when interacting with their CE faculty to receive support for their academic careers. This navigation of the power dynamic in which informants are pressured to code-switch and suppress their racial and cultural identities to fit in to maintain relationships with their CE faculty is rooted in the pervasive nature of white supremacy consisting of an academic hierarchy wherein white CE faculty in positions of authority, with abundant years of tenure, uphold academic, cultural norms and standards (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). This insidious game is harmful to informants' Black bodies, taking a toll on their psychological well-being and leading to feelings of isolation and alienation. It is essential to understand the nasty nature of this game in which informants are always "hypervigilant" of their presentation when interacting with their CE faculty and have to silence their voices, suppress their authenticity in speech, and shift their embodiment for the sake of advancement in their academic careers.

Moreover, these emergent socialization issues in which CE faculty perpetuate white supremacist ideology or superiority have a significant influence on informants' career pathways. Informants detailed descriptions of how their negative socialization experiences with their CE faculty, overcast with hostility, have shaped the pursuit of their career pathways. It is because of these interactions that despite some informant's desires to become full-time CE faculty, the pervasive nature of racism persisting throughout the academy engenders positive outcomes such as their pursuit toward these full-time tenure track or non-tenure track positions (Bradley &

Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Hannon et al., 2018; Strayhorn, 2019). Overall, these interactions and their institutional experiences have deterred some informants from pursuing full-time CE faculty positions. At the same time, some have chosen to seek part-time positions and/or choose alternative routes to remain rooted in their clinical and academic pursuits. Altogether, informants embody resilience as they overcome adversity that is salient to their experiences, recognizing that they can pave a pathway for future scholars to feel represented and attain access to resources and support to further advance the mission of addressing and dismantling systemic inequities prevalent within the clinical community and academia.

It should be noted these findings contribute significantly to existing literature on the experiences of Black students' belongingness in PWIs in which racist and discriminatory encounters from their institutional agents, encompassed with a lack of positive socialization experiences, have been salient factors threatening their matriculation and engendering other positive outcomes (Ellis, 2001; Harris, 2020; Johnson, 2022; Shavers & Moore, 2019; Strayhorn, 2019; Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et a;., 2013; Lewis et al., 2004). This draws substantive attention to the inequitable institutional experiences of Black CES doctoral students, plagued with racist and discriminatory encounters and negative socialization experiences that impact their psychological well-being and influence their academic journeys. Collectively, informants' narratives illuminate the lived embodied experiences of Black CES doctoral students and the significant challenges they face in their PWI CES environments that ultimately hinder their institutional belongingness.

While this study's findings may not be broadly applicable to all Black CES doctoral students, they offer credible and valuable insights into the unique social and cultural challenges of Black CES doctoral students' institutional experiences and their overall institutional

belongingness at their respective PWIs. These findings ultimately lend a missing voice within the CES field, the counseling profession, and academia. Amplifying the voices of these courageous, esteemed, and gracious informants will contribute to addressing the gaps as they pertain to Black CES doctoral students' institutional belonging and how institutional factors, specifically institutional agents, contribute to their institutional belonging.

Limitations

This research endeavor, while deeply rooted in intentionality to engage in processes that uphold the critical nature of the study's exploration, protect the confidentiality of informants, and present ethically sound non-generalizable findings that are reflective of trustworthiness, it is, however, not without limitations. Specifically, as the researcher of this study, I employed two interviews to collect data and engage in a deeper exploration of informants' institutional belongingness experiences, providing me with an additional opportunity to gather comprehensive data, which exemplifies triangulation of the data and enhances the trustworthiness of the research findings. Yet, despite using two interviews, the time constraint of sixty to ninety minutes in the first interview may have hindered the depth and thoroughness of informants' narratives. For example, this explorative study was employed to obtain a profound understanding of Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness experiences, and the time constraint may only offer a limited comprehension of the phenomenon with an awareness that the absence of time limitations would have led to uncovering more richness and the various nuances within informants' narratives.

In addition, two limitations within this study closely relate to sampling and recruitment procedures. While I used culturally appropriate and accessible sampling strategies to reach potential informants to explore the experiences of Black CES doctoral students and provide

considerable insight into their lived embodied experiences of a highly underrepresented community, the sample size of seven informants limited this study's ability to capture a more diverse understanding of Black CES doctoral students lived embodied experiences with considerable awareness that Black people within the African Diaspora encompasses a rich variation of lived experiences. To have included more informants within this study would have offered more in-depth insights and strengthened the understanding of Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness experiences. In addition, with such a small population size, I was also unable to recruit Black men CES doctoral students, which are even more difficult to reach due to the limited population of Black men within the CES field.

While making active efforts during the recruitment process to limit the inclusion criteria of informants to those enrolled in their PWI CES programs after 2019 to closely explore the narratives of Black CES doctoral students who encountered the socio-political events of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement and the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic, it is essential to note that informants did not mention these socio-political events as significant factors related to their institutional belongingness experiences. Although literature has suggested that times of racial unrest, such as the BLM Movement, and world health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can have a profound impact on Black students' belonging at PWIs (Arday & Jones, 2022; Francois et al., 2023; Sulé & Brown, 2023), it is crucial to recognize that these socio-political events did not influence informant's perceptions of institutional belongingness. This may be due to informants' doctoral student status, racial identity, and lived experiences as Black people. This limitation within my inclusion criteria may have limited the recruiting of Black CES doctoral students enrolled in their PWI CES programs before the year 2019 and prevented a

more in-depth capture and analysis of Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness experiences.

As a privileged researcher with considerable awareness of the hierarchy that exists among researchers and informants, I made sure to employ member checking as a strategy to increase my trustworthiness efforts. It is important that I note that I engaged in member checking during both the data collection and data analysis phases to ensure I interpreted informants' narratives accurately and remained mindful of my identities and their influence on the presented data findings. While I believe my efforts align with my intention for this research study, it is worth acknowledging that my identities and my critical epistemological stance may lead to findings that differ significantly from researchers with different identities. For instance, this genuine bilateral relationship that I had with informants may have formed more easily due to my racial and cultural identity.

It may also be imperative for researchers to consider additional ways of engaging in additional methodological designs to capture a more comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors that influence Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness experiences. Specifically, assessing for demographic information such as age, socioeconomic background, and employment status may have provided a more in-depth understanding of how these demographics influence informants' narratives. While some informants mentioned how their intersecting identities influenced their institutional belongingness experiences, being more intentional about assessing for informants' intersecting identities may have illuminated the various complexities and nuances within their narratives. Notably, engaging in quantitative measures of assessing academic outcomes, such as informants' academic persistence related to their CES programs' academic timeline, may also yield comprehensive data that can further offer

an in-depth exploration and understanding of the contextual factors, offering a more holistic narrative of informants' institutional belongingness experiences.

Furthermore, the diverse realm of Black people within the African diaspora is worth noting. The diversity within the diaspora alone is just one of the significant factors that highlight the diversity within Black peoples' experiences and perspectives. Therefore, a key limitation of this study centers on my engagement in recruitment, which consisted of inclusion criteria to reach people who come from any of the Black racial groups within the African Diaspora. Specifically, while I do have an awareness of various cultural distinctions that exist between various cultures within the Black Diaspora due to my identity as a second-generation African American, I recognize that this was a limitation as I did not account for the variability among informants' cultural identity and contextual environments influencing informants' institutional belongingness experiences. This specifically showed up in this study's findings. Informant Vivica, who identified as a Black Jamaican woman enrolled in a PWI CES program, presented distinctly different responses than the other six informants and highlighted how her cultural identity, being born and raised in her mother nation, Jamaica, prevents her from having the same institutional belonging experiences as other Black CES doctoral students. A noted illustration from Vivica's narrative in which she discusses how her experiences might vary from other Black CES doctoral students is provided below:

> I wonder for me, as a Jamaican Black student, if that doesn't skew my lens a little, because what I tell people is because I didn't grow up where I was discriminated against because of my skin color, if something happens, even now as an adult, my first thought is not it's because I'm Black, because I've never had to think through those lens before. It's almost like I'm treated differently, and that has been my experience, and I don't know

> how to explain it. But the minute people realize I'm not African American, they act different. I'm almost favored because I'm Jamaican versus African American. And I've seen where African Americans and I work together and they're treated slightly differently then me. I don't get the same reactions or responses or treatment as I've seen African Americans get, and so again, for me, I feel like the difference is because I don't have the same baggage as African Americans, and I don't mean that in a bad way. It just means because of how I was cultured. I understand why African Americans see things the way they do because all their lives in this country, they have been treated less than because of their skin color. So because I come into this now not having that mindset that I will be treated less than, one, I might not even recognize it, and two, I'm not even going to care because that's not my story or my experience.

It is important to note that while both Black Jamaicans and Black Americans encounter systemic racism rooted in white supremacy, the historical and social contexts of their respective countries ultimately shape the nuanced differences presented within their experiences (Augustine, 2021) and specifically concerning this study on their institutional belongingness experiences. These differences in Black Jamaican's historical and social context can be seen even within their nation's ongoing fight for freedom throughout the periods of colonialism. Jamaicans, while having endured and still enduring racism and inequities, their history of resistance and rebellions against their European oppressors indeed illustrates their collective culture of resilience and resistance against oppression. Echoed by Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican and Pan-African activist, Black Jamaicans and Black Americans may continue to endure this long-standing fight with the oppressor. Yet, due to Black Americans being captured from their mother continent and enslaved, they remain a minority within a foreign country and are subjected to a

different dynamic of oppression and collective unconsciousness that guides their behavior (Beckford & Charles, 2017).

This difference in unconsciousness that guides one's behavior is depicted in Fanon's illustrations of how Black bodies who endured the transatlantic slave trade, specifically Black Americans who endured barbaric bondage and Jim Crow segregation and continue to encounter pervasive systemic racism, are distinctly impacted by the white gaze (Camara, 2020; Whitney, 2018; Weiss et al., 2020). For this reason, it would better serve researchers who, too, are invested in exploring the existence of white supremacy and its long-standing impact on the Black community to consider the differing historical and social contexts that exist within the African diaspora, influencing and ultimately shaping the consciousness and perspectives of Black people as they encounter racism and inequitable challenges throughout their lifespan. The collective psyche of Black Americans may saliently be dependent on the historical and social contextual factors associated with their intergenerational trauma and their lived world environment in the United States of America (USA), which has a unique history deeply embedded in the nation's foundation and has contemporary connections due to the enduring racialized context of the USA. This embeddedness is rooted in the legalization of slavery, which constructed and shaped the economic, political, and social foundation of the USA.

Implications of Findings

The findings of this study specifically highlight the significant influence of institutional factors on the institutional belongingness experiences of Black CES doctoral students. As a result, I provide a discussion of implications designed for counselor educators, CES programs, and the governing body of CACREP. These implications inform a broader understanding and create academic discourse necessary to advance knowledge, foster systemic change, and

illuminate the urgent need to foster institutional belongingness for Black CES doctoral students who will fulfill the prospective roles of counselor educators. These implications also support recommendations for future research efforts centered around Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness experiences.

Implications for Counselor Educators

The institutional racism and the negative socialization experiences that informants face within their PWI CES programs lead to marginalization, dehumanization, and exclusion, which further hinder their ability to institutionally belong, illustrating a pervasive pattern of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination within their academic environments. These negative socialization experiences and the institutional racism they face contradict significant elements necessary for their institutional belonging. Therefore, it is imperative that counselor educators engage in racial and cultural responsiveness training to identify and eliminate processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination, as echoed in the CACREP standards (CACREP, 2016, p.10).

CE faculty should be required to partake in continuing education immersive training workshops and sessions centered on racism, power, and privilege, ensuring they exemplify the skills, knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes to cultivate racial and cultural responsiveness within their academic environments. CES program administrators must proactively organize and foster these continuing education training workshops and sessions for their CE faculty to partake in. It is of significant importance that CE faculty engage in racial and cultural responsiveness training and self-introspection, especially if they identify as white or non-Black, to ensure that they are engaging in healthy and genuine cross-cultural relationships with Black CES doctoral students and their colleagues, especially when a lack of representation is persistent within their academic

environments. Notably, these cross-cultural relationships are essential for healthy socialization experiences (Brown & Grothaus, 2019; Horton-Parker & Wambui Preston, 2021). Such active efforts to implement continuous required racial and culturally responsive training would create environments that not only acknowledge and affirm Black CES doctoral students' racial and cultural identities but also equip and ensure CE faculty have and are using the tools necessary to dismantle systemic racism and provide essential support to Black CES doctoral students.

The 2016 CACREP standards call for all CE institutional units to integrate counseling education and practice within a diverse, multicultural society (CACREP, 2016, p. 9) with regard to the upcoming 2024 CACREP standards emphasizing specific attention paid to global and marginalized populations. Therefore, it is essential that counselor educators and supervisors remain critically engaged and develop a critical consciousness to improve overall belonging and equitable mental health care within the profession at large. To do this, counselor educators and supervisors should systematically and continuously engage in active and thorough reviews of existing core courses and clinical courses to ensure they are centered on racial and culturally responsive counseling theories and modalities that do not erase or whitewash Black CES doctoral students' cultures.

This includes taking a systematic and continuous approach in including founding literature of Black psychologists, Black counselors, and other Black scholars within the mental health care field to present a curriculum that provides both Black CES doctoral students and their non-Black counterparts with courses centered on the implementation of experiential activities such as racially and culturally responsive case studies, immersive reading, community-based projects, integration and infusion of race-based dialogue even during sociopolitical events and outside of the classroom environment, and other additional engaging assignments. Furthermore,

a racial and culturally responsive curriculum ensures that counselor educators are providing all CES doctoral students with a foundational understanding of systemic racism and oppression that would equip all CES doctoral students, especially non-Black CES doctoral students, with evidence-based, racial and cultural care support techniques that would help to ensure their awareness of racial and cultural humility and foster knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs necessary for all CES doctoral students to create racial and culturally responsive knowledge. This will promote responsive clinical practice to better support and care for the mental health needs of Black CE students, Black clients, and K-12 students. It is also important to note that while racialized trauma experienced by informants in the findings is not included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), it is suggested that a reformed curriculum consider the unique and complex trauma that informants experienced as such consideration can foster program endeavors that advocate for a comprehensive understanding of racialized trauma and promote the utilization of inclusive and culturally appropriate mental health interventions.

Implications for CES programs

Due to the pattern of a lack of representation that pervasively exists among Black CE faculty and Black CES doctoral students within CES programs, CES programs must commit to systematic and continuous efforts to identify ways in which they can genuinely attract, recruit, employ, and retain Black CE faculty and attract, recruit, enroll, and retain Black CES doctoral students to dismantle systemic barriers for Black CES doctoral students and defeat stigma within the Black community at large. Specifically, the more intentional CES programs are about addressing this pervasively and increasing representation of Black institutional agents within their CES programs, the more likely it is that Black CES doctoral students can gain the necessary

access to connect with others who share their racial and cultural identities, receive racially and culturally curated support, and feel a sense of community and belonging within their predominantly white campus environments.

Addressing such representation within CES programs can also enhance the application of racial and culturally responsive counseling. Specifically, the increased representation of Black institutional agents within CES programs can create pathways in which individuals with diverse knowledge coming from diverse backgrounds can foster and enhance racially and culturally responsive academic and clinical discourse necessary to provide Black CE students, Black clients, and K-12 students with access to equitable resources and support for their mental well-being. Specifically, including ways in which racially and culturally responsive coping mechanisms such as mindfulness and value-based techniques and skills can be implemented into program endeavors to create counseling knowledge rooted in the direction of promoting healing and transcendence for both Black CES doctoral students, Black CE students, Black clients, and Black K-12 students (Gregory & Harper, 2001; Martinez et al., 2022).

Taking into account the significant impact of neglect that Black CES doctoral students have experienced from their CE faculty, impacting their well-being and their institutional belongingness, CES programs should mindfully implement formal mentorship programs fostering pathways in which CE faculty members can mentor Black CES doctoral students, provide guidance, support, and networking opportunities tailored to their academic and career goals and values. In addition, CES program administrators must prioritize resources to foster affinity groups and student organizations specifically for Black CES doctoral students where they can connect with past or future Black CES doctoral students, share lived experiences, and access additional support resources that foster community building.

Furthermore, these mentorship programs can serve as foundational platforms in which CES programs organize events, workshops, and seminars centered on professional development, cultural affirmation, and additional academic and career strategies. In addition, such mentorship programs can also increase visibility and representation, in which Black CES doctoral students can gain access to mentors with similar racial and cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. Ultimately, by actively promoting mentorship programs, CES programs can create supportive and inclusive environments that empower Black CES doctoral students as they matriculate toward their academic careers.

Implications for CACREP

It is clear that CACREP standards play a significant role in shaping institutional policies and practices that facilitate active plans to foster institutional belongingness for all students, specifically those who have been historically oppressed and marginalized within higher education, such as Black CES doctoral students. Therefore, it is crucial that the governing board of CACREP remain critically conscious of this pervasive pattern illuminated within these findings and systematically and continuously ensure that CE institutional units at PWIs are genuinely adhering to these standards and are actively promoting practices and policies aimed at diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB), and multiculturalism and social justice efforts to create inclusive and equitable academic environments to ensure Black CES doctoral students institutionally belong.

To do this, the governing body of CACREP should require CES programs to engage in reformative practices that identify and create pathways to attract, recruit, employ, and retain Black CE faculty and attract, enroll, recruit, and retain Black CES doctoral students to further increase representation not just in numbers but within the overall counseling field to cultivate

diverse and socially well classroom and program environments that foster institutional belonging and social justice. In addition, the governing body of CACREP should continuously engage in a systematic and continuous review of CES programs' recruitment and admissions processes to ensure there are outreach initiatives implemented to actively recruit and retain Black institutional agents, which include and are not limited to Black CE faculty, Black administrators, and Black CES doctoral students. The governing body of CACREP should encourage outreach initiatives that require CES programs to offer equitable funding support and provide ongoing support services to alleviate financial barriers and inequities commonly faced by Black CES doctoral students and Black CE faculty.

To further ensure CES programs foster institutional belongingness, it is recommended that the governing body of CACREP engage in active efforts to diversify its task force team to include diverse perspectives. Such a diverse task force can enhance CACREP's awareness and insight when conducting reviews and evaluations on the unique challenges Black CES doctoral students encounter in their PWI CES programs. It is also suggested that the governing body of CACREP, in addition to their campus site visits, employ the use of anonymous surveys and focus groups to gather all CES doctoral students' perspectives on institutional belongingness. This active and inclusive approach can assist the governing body of CACREP in tailoring CACREP standards to better meet the support needs of Black CES doctoral students and ensure PWI CES programs foster a more inclusive and equitable environment for all students.

Furthermore, it is crucial the governing body of CACREP address and attend to the underrepresentation of CACREP-accredited HBCUs and HSIs, as this underrepresentation presents a systemic issue, particularly since many Black CES doctoral students are searching for academic positions upon completing their doctoral studies and are looking to do so in healthy

contextual environments. In addressing this issue, the governing body of CACREP should engage in systematic and proactive efforts to expand accreditation opportunities to HBCUs and HSIs. By engaging in these active efforts to accredit more CES programs at HBCUs and HSIs, the governing body of CACREP can increase the representation of Black CES doctoral students and faculty alike within CES-accredited programs while contributing to the fostering of inclusive and equitable CE institutional units and further, ensuring the active dismantling of systemic barriers uniquely faced by Black CES doctoral students and the promotion of their institutional belongingness as they professionally advance.

Overall, the governing body of CACREP must remain consistently aware of recognizing, addressing, and identifying systematic and continuous efforts that CES programs can make to foster structural change. As previously mentioned, such enforcement of policy and practice efforts aimed at diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB), and multiculturalism and social justice efforts to create inclusive and equitable academic environments within CES programs can address these pervasive issues of systemic racism, underrepresentation, negative socialization experiences, and the lack of equitable resources and support needs that are significant elements in fostering institutional belongingness for Black CES doctoral students. It is more than paramount that the governing body of CACREP address these pervasive issues as the empowering and transformative potential of institutional belongingness enables Black CES doctoral students the ability to academically persist and pursue academic career paths as full-time CE faculty that create a reciprocal pattern in which they have the agency to propel their advocacy and activism works centered on the Black community at large to advance the mission of socially just change within academia.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study elicits valuable and credible findings that provide insight and a more in-depth understanding of the significant role that institutional agents (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff) play in influencing the institutional belongingness experiences of Black CES doctoral students at PWIs. However, it is essential to see this research endeavor as a foundational framework to further guide future research endeavors that deepen the profession's and academic understanding of this phenomenon and support Black CES doctoral students as they matriculate. With this in mind, I offer recommendations to advance the fields of CES and higher education.

Firstly, future studies should aim to conduct a longitudinal analysis of the institutional belonging experiences of Black CES doctoral students as they matriculate over time. Gathering data in a longitudinal manner accounts for informants' experiences as they begin their programs to explore their academic persistence and as they enter into their career pathways. These analyses would provide a richer understanding of institutional factors and their impact on Black CES doctoral students' matriculation throughout their academic journey. Such future research would provide additional insight into notable changes that may occur, whether it pertains to their encounters with racism, academic persistence, career pathways, and their overall institutional belonging.

Secondly, it is recommended that future research endeavors consider conducting an intersectionality analysis specifically concerning intersecting identities such as age, gender, family status, and socioeconomic status and how Black CES doctoral students' intersectionality intersects to influence their institutional belongingness experiences at their respective PWIs. Such future research can provide a deeper understanding of intersectionality and its impact on Black CES doctoral students' institutional belonging and career pathways, further providing

tailored support interventions to Black CES doctoral students and recognizing that the nature of one's intersecting identity can shape their institutional belonging experiences.

Thirdly, in considering the role of institutional agents and overall institutional contextual factors that influence Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness at their respective PWIs, it would be beneficial for future researchers to conduct an analysis that evaluates the effectiveness of PWI CES programs facilitation and implementation of culturally sensitive and responsive curriculum and modeling within interpersonal interactions between institutional agents and Black CES doctoral students. Such evaluation can illuminate institutional barriers and provide PWIs and CES programs with best practices such as policy change and institutional reform, racial and culturally responsive curriculum, mentorship programs, and racial and culturally responsive training for preventing institutional harm, promoting multiculturalism, diversity, and social justice within PWI CE units.

Fourthly, it is recommended that future research consider conducting a comparative analysis of PWIs, Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs), and other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). Such future study aiming for a more extensive and diverse sample of Black CES doctoral students can provide a richer understanding of the institutional belongingness experiences of Black CES doctoral students at institutions that are not predominantly white. This comparative analysis of HBCUs and MSIs can offer insights that PWI CES programs can learn from and further illuminate the potential differences in institutional contextual factors that prevent the unique social and cultural challenges faced by Black CES doctoral students at PWIs. This analysis would additionally contribute to academic literature centered on the systemic inequities faced by Black students in higher education and the pervasive impact of white supremacy.

Conclusion

By embracing critical phenomenology rooted in critical race theory to delve into the lived embodied experiences of Black CES doctoral students enrolled at PWIs, this study uncovers the essence of the phenomenon, shedding light on institutional agents' roles. These findings also address a gap in current literature, particularly regarding the influence of institutional factors on Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness, their pursuit of career pathways, and, additionally, offering insights into the unique institutional belongingness experiences of Black CES doctoral students at PWIs. The findings additionally illuminate the pervasive nature of racism and white supremacy within higher education and the disparities existing in the CES field and counseling profession at large that impact Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness. This contributes valuable insights into the underrepresentation and disparity of Black CE faculty within the CE field. This research study additionally amplified the unheard and underrepresented voices of Black CES doctoral students, yielding five key themes: *I Do Not Institutionally Belong, No One Looks Like You, They Get It, Play The Game,* and *If It's Happening Here, It's Gonna Happen There* that illuminate the institutional belongingness experiences of Black CES doctoral students within PWIs. These themes emphasize the vital role institutional agents (i.e., faculty, peers, administrators, and staff) play in shaping Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness. This study's findings underscore the profound significance of understanding the long-standing and pervasive impact of institutional racism and oppression embedded within PWIs, which lead to unique social and cultural challenges that impede institutional belongingness for Black CES doctoral students and set them apart from their white and non-Black counterparts.

Specifically, institutional agents perpetuate harm onto Black CES doctoral students in the form of interactions encompassed with racial insults, assaults, harassment, objectification, and neglect that profoundly shape and influence Black CES doctoral students' institutional belongingness. Black CES doctoral students look to their institutional agents for support and guidance on how to navigate the academic world, yet the pervasive nature of racism leaves a lasting impact on Black CES doctoral students and influences their lived embodiment with institutional agents. At the same time, Black CES doctoral students are expected to navigate their doctoral journeys while enduring the harsh realities of racially hostile PWI environments, bearing the responsibility of being resilient and protecting their racial identities, often leading to lived embodied conflicts that hinder their ability to institutionally belong. These institutional barriers presented within informants' narratives lend themselves to the historical, social, and cultural context of PWIs and the embeddedness of white supremacy, perpetuating the pattern of a doctoral livelihood of alienation, isolation, marginalization, and exclusion resulting in psychological, emotional, and physical trauma that white CES doctoral students do not experience.

In response to the CACREP standards, it is evident that there remains an institutional pattern where Black CES doctoral students are placed in environments that are not adhering to the commitment to fostering inclusivity, multiculturalism, and social justice within academic environments. The psychological, social, and educational harm that PWI CES program environments perpetuate against Black CES doctoral students leads to an inability for Black CES doctoral students to institutionally belong. These narratives from these seven intelligent and distinguished Black CES doctoral students foundationally support previous findings of Black students' belongingness within PWIs and provide circumstantial evidence as to why Black CES

doctoral students are among the lowest rates likely to become full-time CE faculty compared to their white counterparts. Henceforth, this study's findings and insights hold practical implications such as the crucial need for representation among CE faculty and students, culturally responsive and sensitive continuing education and training, mentorship action plans to provide equitable resources and support, and reformed policies and practices rooted in DEIB, multiculturalism, and social justice for CE faculty, PWI CES programs, and the governing body of CACREP to consider as they address and prioritize the dismantling of white supremacy, uphold the integrity of inclusivity, diversity, multiculturalism, and social justice to mitigate trauma and harm for Black CES doctoral students. To further ensure the promotion of an inclusive and equitable educational environment for Black CES doctoral students to institutionally belong and further advance the field of counseling and academia at large.

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APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did you elect to participate in this study?
2. What feelings do you have about your institutional experience?
3. Tell me about yourself as a Black student in a PWI.
    a. Can you remember a time when you experienced racism in your institution? If so, how did it feel, and were there any physical sensations, emotions, and thoughts present in your experience?
4. What is it like to be a Black doctoral student in a CES program?
    a. Did you have prior expectations of your program before applying?
    b. What are your current expectations of your program?
5. What comes to mind when you hear the term institutional belongingness (i.e., a sense of connectedness, membership, and belongingness that college students have about their institution)?
    a. What factors contribute to your institutional belongingness?
    b. Do your professors, cohort members, administrators, or staff contribute to your institutional belongingness? If so, how?
    c. How do you feel when you interact with professors, cohort members, peers, or staff at your institution?
    d. Have you experienced any negative interactions or encounters with your professors, cohort members, peers, or staff at your institution? If so, how did it feel, and were there any physical sensations, emotions, and thoughts present in your experience?

    e. To what extent, if any, does your race or ethnic background contribute to your institutional experiences? If so, how?
    f. How have these experiences influenced your institutional belongingness and ability to achieve academic tasks and goals?
        i. What does your current career pathway look like?
            1. To what extent, if any, do your institutional experiences impact your career pathway?
6. What coping strategies have you used during your matriculation in your program?
7. Do you have any recommendations or insights on how your institution or others can create or improve institutional belongingness for Black CES doctoral students?

APPENDIX B

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

https://resourceguide.borislhensonfoundation.org/

https://onemindpsyberguide.org/apps/liberate-meditation/

https://therapyforblackgirls.com/

https://blacktherapistsrock.com/

https://blackmentalhealth.com/connect-with-a-therapist/

VITA

Jasmine Alicia Hawa Griffith, M.A.
Department of Counseling and Human Services
4301 Hampton Blvd, Suite 2101
Norfolk, VA 23529

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision May 2024
Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA
(CACREP)

M.A. in Counseling May 2021
Clinical Mental Health Counseling Concentration
Hampton University, Hampton, VA
(CACREP)

B.S. in Psychology May 2018
Virginia State University, Petersburg, VA

PEER REVIEW JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS

Gantt-Howrey, A., Park, C. J., **Griffith, J. A. H**., Jones, J. L., Robins, L. B., & Johnson, K. F. (2023). Addressing social determinants of health: Supporting ex-offenders' employment through use of the systems theory framework. *Journal of Employment Counseling*.