

February 2024

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Recommended Citation

Ngadjui, Olivia T. PhD and Doughty Horn, Elizabeth A. (2024) "Professional Identity Development of Black Doctoral Students in Counselor Education: A Reflexive Model," *Teaching and Supervision in Counseling*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

<https://doi.org/10.7290/tsc06desW>

Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/tsc/vol6/iss1/3>

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Professional Identity Development of Black Doctoral Students in Counselor Education: A Reflexive Model

Received: 05/22/23
Revised: 08/24/23
Accepted: 09/14/23
DOI: 10.7290/tsc06desW

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Abstract

This grounded theory study presents perspectives on the process utilized by past and current Black doctoral students to formalize their professional identity in counselor education. Findings include reflexivity as a central theme within the internal process of Black doctoral students navigating counselor education programs and a model of professional identity development.

Significance to the Public

This study suggests Black doctoral students handle counselor education programs with greater inner reflection and observation (reflexivity) due to dealing with culturally relevant barriers and stressors. Findings include a model of professional identity development focusing on the internal process of pursuing careers in counselor education, which may be useful across fields.

Keywords: reflexivity, professional identity development, Black doctoral students in counselor education, counselor education

There remains a call for diversity within counselor education as demographic statistics showcase lower representation of Black individuals and the need for culturally sensitive care of clients (Meyers, 2017). This goal of diversifying counselor education includes increasing the number of diverse individuals to help expand the understanding and regard for diverse communities (Chan et al., 2018; Meyers, 2017). Black and African American full-time counselor educators represent 17.11% of the academy and 21.32% of doctoral students according to the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; 2023). To become counselor educators, the process of professional identity development in counselor education includes doctoral students completing faculty and supervisor advised experience related to counseling, supervision, leadership/advocacy, teaching, and research/scholarship (Adkison-Bradley, 2013; CACREP, 2016; Dollarhide et al.,

2013). However, literature examining the process of professional identity development of Black doctoral students appears limited, although there is some research surrounding the experiences of Black doctoral students in counselor education (Henfield et al., 2011, 2013).

Henfield et al. (2011, 2013) examined the experiences of African American doctoral students in counselor education programs and their findings included students experiencing isolation and derision, as well as disregard from their faculty members. Similarly, researchers asserted the need for intentional strategies of inclusion when considering the direly concerning experiences of Black and African American individuals within counselor education (Arredondo et al., 2020; Atkinson, 1983; Baker et al., 2015; Brooks & Steen, 2010; Coker, 2011; Crumb et al., 2020; Gomez et al., 2011; Haskins et al., 2013, 2016; Henfield et al., 2011, 2013; Holcomb-McCoy & Addison-Bradley,

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2005). Woo et al. (2015) observed the experiences of international doctoral students, including participants from Kenya and Ethiopia who coped amidst challenges in supervision training within counselor education programs, and their findings revealed Caucasian (White) supervision models lacking cross-cultural understanding. Relatedly, Dollarhide and colleagues (2013) revealed a model of professional identity development for doctoral students without an emphasis on race. The model included a multidimensional linear process with doctoral students gaining experience from varied feedback to become experts in counselor education (Dollarhide et al., 2013).

Literature outside of counselor education consisted of the surveying of Black individuals pursuing higher education. McDougal et al. (2018) examined Black student engagement and asserted the contrast in experiences of Black students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Additional literature included Black individuals obtaining higher education degrees at predominantly White institutions being impacted by microaggressions and not having representation in their assigned curricula (Adams, 2005; hooks, 1994, 2009). Bakari (1997) discussed racial identity development of Black students pursuing higher education at PWIs and acknowledged racial identity development as necessary for both academic achievement and internal growth. Ritchey (2014) relatedly surveyed literature surrounding Black identity development in connection to Black students at PWIs and asserted the Nigrescence theory as support for working with Black students.

In comparison, counselor educators utilize the Nigrescence theory to promote understanding of the racial identity development of Black individuals in career development to inform counselors-in-training of career counseling (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2017). However, there is a need for a model of professional identity development specific to Black individuals to coincide with diversifying the field to aid in integrating the Black identity within the formalization of their professional identity into counselor educators (Cross, 1995; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2017; Vandiver et al., 2001; Worrell et

al., 2001). Furthermore, there is also a need to integrate reflexivity to amplify culture as a lens for professional identity development of Black individuals to combat assimilative or discriminatory assumption.

Asserting culture as a lens for professional identity development, the current study examines Black doctoral students' process in becoming counselor educators. To examine the process of professional identity development of Black doctoral students, the central research question within this study was: "What is the process of professional identity development of Black doctoral students in counselor education?" The purpose of this study was to examine the process of professional identity development of Black doctoral students within CACREP-accredited counselor education programs at predominantly White institutions to create a contextual model to support inclusion efforts.



Method

This grounded theory study utilized a constructivist approach to prioritize and assert participants' perspectives within data collection and data analysis methods (Charmaz, 2002, 2006, 2014). Charmaz (2006, 2014) prioritized the centering of participants' voices as a way to respect their cultural backgrounds. Constructivist grounded theory includes intensive interviews that consist of open-ended questions to gather an understanding of participants' process and related components in acknowledging the potential for an increase in participants' deeper awareness (Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, the use of constructivist grounded theory for this study allowed for a careful examination of Black doctoral students and their perspectives on their process of professional identity development. This study received funding from the Association for Adult Development and Aging (AADA) and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES).

Research Team Positionality

The principal investigator and first author was a Black female-identifying doctoral candidate researcher with multiple heritages completing her dissertation in a CACREP-accredited counselor education program at a PWI in the United States. Her interest in the study stemmed from her continued curiosity about the process of professional identity development of her peers while completing her doctoral degree, recognizing that she had a nontraditional path that led to beginning the doctoral journey (e.g., undergraduate degree in biology, simultaneous work as a K–12 educator while completing master’s-level studies). In acknowledging that participants in this study would be Black identifying, the researcher felt comfortable conducting the study, having an understanding and appreciation of intersectionality as it related to her own Black racial identity development and respect for differences within Black individuals due to having multiple heritages (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989). Currently, the principal investigator is a Black female-identifying counselor educator and counselor.

The second author is a White, female-identifying professor at a predominately White institution in the United States. She comes from a privileged background that includes a family member in academia that served as a guidepost throughout her own doctoral journey. She was the major advisor to the principal researcher and assisted her in this research for her dissertation. The second author was interested in learning more about Black voices in counselor education and how to best support Black doctoral students during their doctoral journey. She saw her role as supporting the primary researcher and learning from these participants as she helped to guide the dissertation process.

Participants

After receiving approval from the university’s institutional review board, more than 50 individuals responded to recruitment through social media and email listserv platforms that included the Counselor

Education and Supervision Network (CESNET) and Chi Sigma Iota Honor Society International (CSI) Facebook forums. Participant criteria included Black current and past doctoral students in CACREP-accredited PWIs; past doctoral students include individuals who were tenure-track and tenured faculty. The research team prioritized selection criteria for participants identifying as Black to acquire a broader variation in Black participants in recognizing that a Black individual could self-identify out of the United States and not identify as African American (Agyemang et al., 2005; Omi & Winant, 2014). Maximum variation was sought through recruitment with participant demographics including one participant from each region within the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (e.g., North Atlantic, North Central, Rocky Mountain, Southern, and Western). Participant selection was also predicated on the relational proximity of participants and the research team in consideration of the smaller number of Black individuals in counselor education (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2018, 2023; Maxwell, 2013).

The study included five participants who were past or current doctoral students of CACREP-accredited programs within varied phases of navigating their professional identity development in counselor education (e.g., entering their programs, beginning comprehensive exams, completing their dissertation, entering counselor education as faculty, being faculty for more than 10 years). The number of participants was intentionally determined in alignment with Charmaz’s (2002) grounded theory qualitative research design, which asserts the necessity of smaller participant sizes to amplify individual voices within studies, as well as Charmaz’s emphasis toward prioritizing participant voices (Charmaz, 2002, 2006, 2014; Maxwell, 2013). The five participants all self-identified as Black with one identifying as African and African American, one as Afro-Latina, and three as African American. Participants’ age ranges were between 27–57. Participants’ self-identified genders were four female and one male, and all five participants self-identified as heterosexual. They also noted their socioeconomic status: one low-income, one low-

middle class, and three middle class. Each participant completed their doctoral programs in one of the five regions outlined by the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (e.g., North Atlantic, North Central, Rocky Mountain, Southern, and Western). To protect their confidentiality, participants created the following pseudonyms: Anais Nin, Crissle Lopez, Esther Freeman, Mark Walker, and Maya Drake.

Data Collection and Analysis

Each participant completed two rounds of intensive interviews, interpretative dialogue, and expressive reflection over a 5-month period. The two intensive interviews were each 45–90 minutes in length via Zoom and explored participants' perspectives of their process of professional identity development, with careful attention toward centering their voices (Charmaz, 2002, 2006, 2014). The first round of intensive interviews included four questions and the second round included two questions, to ensure data saturation (Birks & Mills, 2017). The first round of interview questions included: (a) What is professional identity development in counselor education? (b) How would you describe your doctoral process when considering your professional identity development? (c) What would you name the three chapters of your professional identity development and why? (d) What barriers and triumphs have you faced that you believe have impacted your professional identity development in counselor education? Interview questions of the second round were created from the data gathered in round one and were based upon themes and areas from which more information was desired for saturation purposes. Round two interview questions included: (a) How do you believe being Black has affected your doctoral process of professional identity development? (b) Describe your motivation(s) to fuel your process of professional identity development in counselor education. In addition to interview questions, participants were asked clarifying questions to ensure their perspectives were prioritized (Charmaz, 2002, 2006, 2014).

Interviews were recorded via Zoom and a transcription service provided transcripts for coding. The research team completed initial and focused coding to make sense of the data within transcripts after each round of intensive interviews (Charmaz, 2014). Then, the research team utilized process coding as recommended by Charmaz (2002) and thematic analysis to provide emphasis on the process of professional identity development (Alhojailan, 2012; Saldaña, 2016). Interpretative dialogues, a type of member check, were conducted following each round of interviews, which included participants viewing coded transcripts and giving feedback to note necessary changes to further assert participant voices (Charmaz, 2002, 2006, 2014; Coe Smith, 2007).

In addition to these more extensive dialogues, participants completed an expressive reflection to provide their understanding of their professional identity development with creative observations (e.g., music references, poetry, drawing, collages, letters) centering their internal discoveries after each round of intensive interviews and interpretative dialogues. During the final round, participants detailed positive and cathartic experiences in sharing their professional identity processes during the intensive interviews. Some participants acknowledged being one of few racially minoritized individuals in their programs, and after careful thought and dialogue, and in support to combat isolation, the research team asked participants if they would be open to sharing their confidential expressive reflections anonymously with the other participants during the final round of intensive interviews. All participants agreed to share their expressive reflections with one another. Both rounds of expressive reflections were combined and disseminated to participants by the research team; expressive reflections were kept confidential as they included identifying information based on the comfort of self-disclosure of participants. Expressive reflections detailed their reflexivity in pursuing their doctoral degrees and were used as inspiration during the creation of the model, which all participants agreed aligned with their overall processes of professional identity development in counselor education.

Trustworthiness

The research team implemented extensive efforts to establish trustworthiness within the study. These trustworthiness efforts included varied elements to promote credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity (Amankwaa, 2016; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research team implemented credibility in ensuring that the study's framework aligned with other earlier grounded theory research on the professional identity development of doctoral students in counselor education (e.g., Dollarhide et al., 2013). Dependability was ensured through weekly debriefing sessions with the research team's major advisor, and memo writing. Thick descriptions were utilized to determine transferability, (Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and interpretive dialogues were used to ensure confirmability (Coe Smith, 2007). Authenticity included efforts to amplify diversity with participant selection as participants identified as Black with varied ethnic identities from different regions of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES).

Findings

A grounded theory of the process of professional identity development of Black doctoral students in counselor education emerged after the integration of relevant literature and themes resulting from interviews and interpretive dialogues from participants. The current study specifically addressed the processes of Black doctoral students in counselor education and included their participation in two rounds of intensive interviews, interpretative dialogues, and expressive reflections. These Black doctoral students provided accounts of their process as current doctoral students (e.g., prior and after comprehensive exams to include completing their dissertation) and past doctoral students (e.g., beginning their role as a counselor educator and being tenured as a counselor education faculty). The resulting model includes varied stages of the process of professional identity development

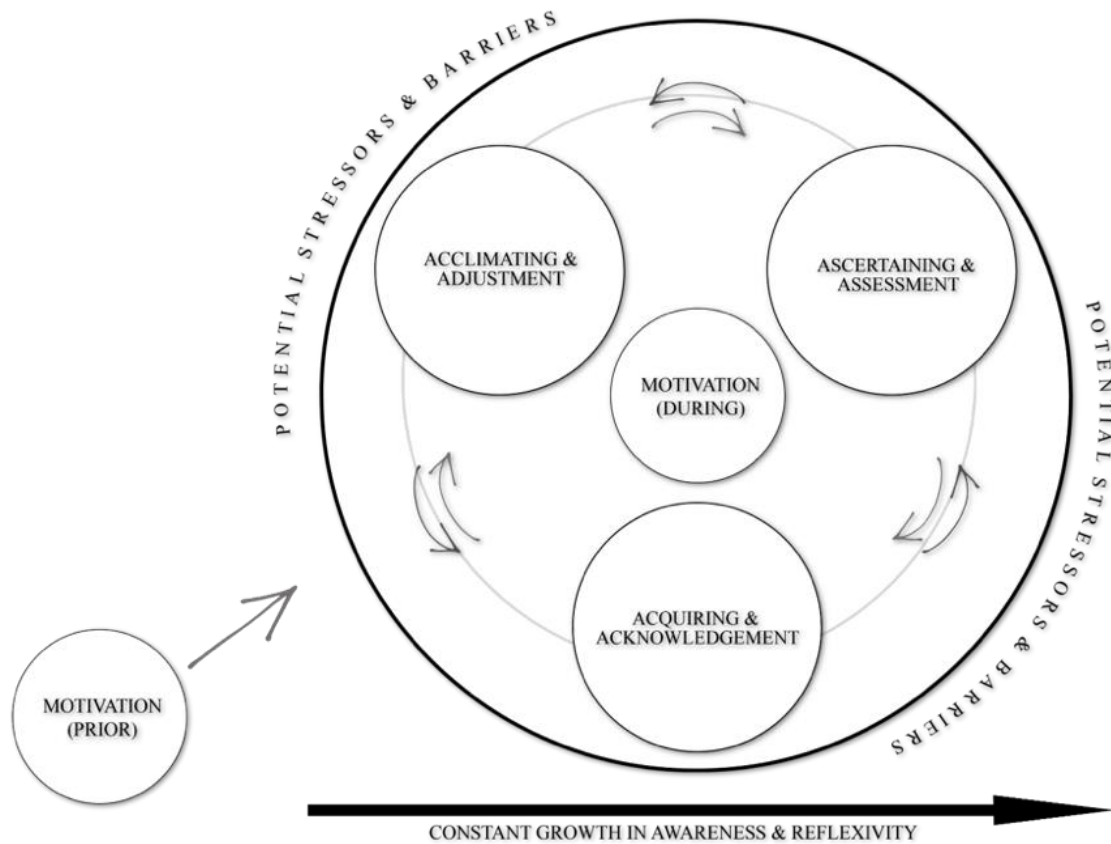
in counselor education and elements impacting the doctoral process of these five Black doctoral students (see Figure 1).

Data analysis of the study produced both collective and individual themes. Collective themes included aligning statements from more than one participant from an interview question, while individual themes arose from solely one participant from an interview question. Themes were coded per interview question (see Table 1). Major collective themes of the study appearing more than once among interview questions included reflexivity, assessing program culture, cultural considerations, and support. Major individual themes of the study appearing more than once among interview questions included representation and mentorship.

Resultantly, the model, titled the Reflexive Model of the Process of Professional Identity Development, promotes a nonlinear process with a cyclical orientation to negate a typical linear goal of reaching competence. Instead, this model bolsters continued and lifelong learning when considering growth in *awareness and reflexivity*. Black doctoral students within this study appeared to receive *motivation (prior)* entering their doctoral program and completed the doctoral process through the impact of *constant growth in awareness and reflexivity*. Through their completion of the doctoral program, participants maneuvered through a series of stages that included *acclimating and adjustment, ascertaining and assessment* as well as *acquiring and acknowledgement* when encountering varied aspects of their counselor education program (e.g., teaching, supervision, counseling, research and scholarship, leadership and advocacy) in alignment with doctoral program requirements as outlined by CACREP (Adkison-Bradley, 2013; CACREP, 2016). To continue through their program, these Black doctoral students discussed *motivation (during)* that promoted their ability to persist. Participants further described *potential stressors and barriers* that impacted their process of professional identity development (e.g., misogyny, socioeconomic concerns) while completing their doctoral programs.

Figure 1

Grounded Theory of the Process of Professional Identity Development of Black Doctoral Students in Counselor Education



Constant Growth in Awareness & Reflexivity

The theme of *reflexivity* emerged throughout the first and second intensive interviews emphasizing the continued increase of these Black doctoral students' insight into their doctoral programs. *Reflexivity* included their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors surrounding their understanding of their doctoral process along with their interactions with others in their program (Rennie, 1992, 2004). This aspect of the model illustrates the potential for Black doctoral students to participate in their development of understanding the program and its components and furthering their experience. Participant Maya Drake showcased reflexivity with their decision making after a concerning

remediation process that occurred abruptly without investigation by faculty. Maya stated:

And, I mean, I did it because I was like, I don't really want this stuck on my record, um, you know, I want to be able to graduate. But it—it was, it was a really hurtful time. And I think from that, I—I, when I went through other things in the program, I was constantly worried, like, oh, if I do this, am I going to be put on remediation again or am I going to get kicked out of the program. (Maya Drake, Rd1)

Dollarhide and colleagues (2013) noted experience being a factor in doctoral students being able to shift from external validation to internal validation. In contrast, this element of the current model promotes the necessity of Black doctoral students to further make sense of their process

Table 1*List of Collective and Individual Themes by Round and Interview Question*

Round	Interview Question	Collective Theme(s)	Individual Theme(s)
1	What is professional identity development in counselor education?	Reflexivity Support Assessing Program Culture Counselor Educator Roles and Responsibilities Misogynoir Representation Transition	Validation Experience Socioeconomic Stressors Pressured Decision Making
	How would you describe your doctoral process when considering your professional identity development?	Reflexivity Support Assessing Program Culture Cultural Considerations Experience	Imposter Syndrome Mentorship
	What would you name the three chapters of your professional identity development and why?	Reflexivity Support Assessing Program Culture Advocacy	Spirituality
	What barriers and triumphs have you faced that you believe have impacted your professional identity development in counselor education?	Reflexivity Support Assessing Program Culture Cultural Considerations	Representation
2	How do you believe being Black has affected your doctoral process of professional identity development?	Reflexivity Support Assessing Program Culture Integration and Impact of Black Identity	Representation Advocacy
	Describe your motivation(s) to fuel your process of professional identity development in counselor education.	Reflexivity Support Representation	Mentorship

through *reflexivity*. Additionally, constant growth in awareness and *reflexivity* appeared to be a highly impactful aspect of Black doctoral students' ability to navigate their doctoral programs in counselor education.

Stages of the Process of Professional Identity Development of Black Doctoral Students

The series of stages proposed in this model are not linear in nature nor did these students necessarily

experience all three. For instance, if a Black doctoral student had a mentor upon entering the doctoral program, there might be less time spent in the stage of *ascertaining and assessment* or if this student participated in a similar program dynamic during their master's curriculum, their *acclimating and adjustment* may not have lasted as long in comparison to other Black doctoral students. Stages could also occur at the same time and irreversibly in any order considering the impact of potential stressors and barriers; these stages also may be repeated as Black doctoral students enter other areas

of their doctoral requirements including teaching, supervising, counseling, research and scholarship, leadership and advocacy (CACREP, 2016). The rest of this section will provide more in-depth explanations of the three stages proposed within the emergent theory.

Acclimating & Adjustment

The stage of *acclimating and adjustment* includes Black doctoral students' ability to initially grow by more fully understanding their program's culture through *acclimating* in alignment with the major theme of assessing program culture. Instances within the theme included faculty's inability to handle their anger about continued discriminatory incidents and observation of power differences. Anais described, "They didn't like me being angry. They didn't like me saying, 'No, I'm not hanging out with you'" (Anais Nin, Rd1). Another instance included Esther Freeman recognizing they were the only Black doctoral student in their program after mentioning that their White peers received more opportunity. Esther specified:

That is correct, and more specifically the only African American [person].... We're all of color. And I'm not sure if they identify as Black [people], but we're all of color. Usually the terms are kind of interchangeable.... I identify as a Black [person]. (Esther Freeman, Rd1)

In addition, awareness is gained for *adjustment* toward their perceived fit or status within the program. Particular consideration is given to their level of safety to disclose. This stage also surrounds their awareness of their cultural identity and its impact within the program when interacting with their peers and faculty. Their *adjustment* within this stage includes their level of comfort being vulnerable or transparent in relation to their identity within their program. Their movement within *acclimating and adjustment* may be impacted by the receipt of reflective advice during interactions with other current or past Black doctoral students from their program.

Ascertaining & Assessment

The stage of *ascertaining and assessment* included these Black doctoral students seeking support from their peers, faculty, and surrounding communities while making judgments about the available support provided. Support, a major collective theme within the study, included guidance and advising about navigating program requirements from department faculty and other willing faculty on their campuses. Anais Nin explained the importance of seeking support outside of their department. Anais noted, "I found other friends ... in other areas, the women center ... and a collegiate NAACP, you know, other White people would be around, other Black people would be around, you know" (Anais Nin, Rd1).

Relatedly, the individual theme of mentorship included one Black doctoral student noting a need for detailed and specific assistance to aid in their process of professional identity development of becoming a counselor educator; Anais Nin recognized a need for intentional mentorship during their process of professional identity development. Anais expressed, "I look at that whole process of being a counselor educator and wishing that I would have had more people to give me some better feedback and some, um, you know, was willing to mentor me" (Anais Nin, Rd1). Instances related to *ascertaining and assessment* further included receiving directional advice from other Black doctoral students along with collective processing of events to validate their perceived reality. This stage also relates to safety as students are able to discern and recall locations of support during times of need. Awareness regarding areas of support appeared to provide comfort to aid in stability.

Acquiring & Acknowledgement

The stage of *acquiring and acknowledgment* encompassed these Black doctoral students' ability to develop in their capabilities as required by their CACREP-accredited programs including teaching, supervising, counseling, and research and scholarship, as well as leadership and advocacy (Adkison-Bradley, 2013; CACREP, 2016). The continued *acquiring* of understanding involved

varied requirements of their doctoral programs and increased their capability to manage the required areas. The *acknowledgement* of self within their programs helped to further their identity development as Black doctoral students. Instances related to this stage included developing their understanding and focus of advocacy, whether self-oriented or specialized, which occurred through discussion of a major collective theme of *cultural considerations*. The theme of cultural considerations included participants providing critical feedback for improvement of concerning circumstances that they experienced while in their programs. Crissle Lopez asserted the need for consideration of individualized experiences of Black doctoral students while navigating counselor education programs. Crissle stated:

Because they, you know, with doctoral programs, it's not, um, so much intelligence, but your perseverance to get through Because a lot of people do stay ABD, and then, that's it. And so I understand that rigor is there, and that in a sense puts you in survival mode. But it's like, I've been in survival mode all of my life. [Laughs]. So now you're just throwing me into more of survival.... Uh, just to get through this program. Where I feel like, wow, like, I—I made it in here, um, and here it go, here it goes again, more [surviving]. (Crissle Lopez, Rd1)

Relatedly, this stage also included the *acknowledgment* of their ability to manage or handle program requirements intentionally (e.g., showing up fully in Blackness in relation to nationally relevant events).

Motivation (Prior & During)

Motivation (prior and during) included the factors that inspired these Black doctoral students and aided in beginning and continuing in their programs. Motivation to begin their doctoral journey included mentors communicating a belief in their ability to achieve at this level of study. The individual theme of representation included one Black doctoral detailing the influence of Black visibility and how it aided in their motivation to

become and continue pursuit of doctoral study in counselor education. Mark Walker described their experience prior to enrolling in the counselor education program as a doctoral student:

Um, so before actually entering the program, I talked with the chairperson, and then I talked with, um, the professor, that African American [person], uh, professor just to kind of get their perspectives on things, chop it up with them. Um, so that was good just, and, like it was a good sense of, like, a good realization that, you know, like, there is someone that looks like me that's in a position that I would, that I strive to be in someday. (Mark Walker, Rd1)

Other instances of *motivation* included a curiosity toward other available career options after completing their master's degree in counseling.

Motivation during their doctoral process included collective and familial ties, specifically surrounding parental guardians or their own children, to promote advancement in their familial legacy. Instances related to generational legacy also included recognizing the representational impact of pursuing their doctorate on others in their communities. Other instances included awareness of other Black women being impacted by misogynoir and using those reflections to move forward. Additional instances related to *motivation* during their doctoral process included communicating with past Black doctoral students who completed their studies and provided a representational impact as well as through advising and other opportunities to discuss their management of selected career choices.

Potential Stressors and Barriers

The model's area of *potential stressors and barriers* included individual themes of misogynoir and socioeconomic concerns. Misogynoir included times when the mistreatment of Black women was present regarding gender and racial oppression (Bailey, 2021; Ngadjui, 2022). Socioeconomic concerns included recognizing the added layer of needing to consider finances to pursue their doctoral degree. Other instances included recognizing

harmful elements of program culture (e.g., experiencing microaggressions during evaluations, essentialism with disregard for intersectionality of their identities). *Stressors and barriers* included the emphasis of having different experiences that included experiencing imposter syndrome in contrast to their White peers and recognizing the impact of other Black doctoral students providing guidance to navigate racially taxing circumstances (e.g., discriminatory faculty).

Discussion

The intent of the model is to provide contextual information for considering support surrounding enrolling and retaining Black doctoral students in counselor education programs. This model does not intend to be a how-to guide for operating with Black doctoral students, but a means of expanding their narratives to combat potential essentialism and to allow for more cross-cultural empathy and creativity when interacting with them (Crenshaw, 1989). These Black doctoral students provided a vast amount of context that acknowledged varied experiences when considering their process of professional identity development. Moreover, this model hopes to provide and expand further thought as counselor educators brainstorm modes of support and to promote openness to the potential intersecting identities of Black doctoral students.

It cannot be overstated how important it is to work with Black doctoral students individually and to disregard reflexive generalizations during interactions. In alignment with results from Henfield and colleagues (2011, 2013) and instances related to the theme of reflexivity in the current study, there is a need for decreasing instances of faculty disregarding the perspectives of Black doctoral students especially during remediation involving environments lacking racial diversity. It is also important for counselor education programs' faculty demographics to include racial diversity as a means of providing racial minoritized support to Black doctoral students and inspiration to enroll in counselor education programs in considering this

study's themes of representation and support as well as earlier seminal literature providing detail of racial climate of counselor education departments (Holcomb-McCoy & Addison-Bradley, 2005).

Considerations for Determining Supportive Strategies for Black Doctoral Students

Faculty are encouraged to deeply consider the varied intersects of identity of Black doctoral students in support upon enrollment, in the same way they would consider culturally sensitive treatment planning for counseling diverse clients (Ivey, 1995; Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2018). As asserted by Crenshaw (1989), emphasizing intersectionality allows for the alleviation of potential harm caused by essentialism that could limit or hinder the professional identity development of Black doctoral students. Relatedly, promoting openness to broaching culture, to include varied intersects and perspectives of Black doctoral students, may alleviate the occurrence of relational trauma (Day-Vines et al., 2007, 2020; see also Chan et al., 2018). Consideration should be given to the harm done when negating or invalidating experiences due to other Black doctoral students who potentially do not have the same experience. It is also important to dissuade faculty from recalling the experience of another student as dominant, and instead, prioritize multiple perspectives when interacting with Black doctoral students. Similarly, faculty are further encouraged to continue the dialogue surrounding the identities of Black doctoral students and to broach culture throughout their program curriculum and requirements (Day-Vines et al., 2007, 2020; see also Chan et al., 2018). Continuing to broach cultural dialogue surrounding the intersecting identities of Black doctoral students may promote confidence in their ability to show up fully in their identities as counselor educators or in other selected professions upon completion of their doctoral degree.

To create comfort in broaching with Black doctoral students, it is recommended that faculty first explore their own cultural identities and bias as

proposed by the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC; Ratts et al., 2016; see also Chan et al., 2018). The continuation of developing awareness of faculty's own biases and intersects in culture may expand their ability to provide culturally sensitive and critically conscious support to Black doctoral students (hooks, 1994, 2003; Rendón, 2014). Intentional development of faculty's own awareness regarding bias and intersects may promote the ability to increase their openness and affinity for differences in culture, resulting in greater cross-cultural connectedness (Ngadjui, 2019). Even with the addition of cultural awareness and sensitivity, the likelihood of a full understanding of the Black narrative remains low when considering lesser representation of both Black doctoral students and faculty (as noted earlier, Black and African American full-time counselor educators represent 17.11% of the academy and 21.32% of doctoral students, according to CACREP [2023]). In addition, every Black doctoral student varies in their experiences and identities (Vereen et al., 2017) so it is imperative to employ individualized strategies to support these students' processes of professional identity development. In parallel to providing customized counseling to clients, individualized strategies may promote the betterment of care provided to Black doctoral students (Ivey, 1995; Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2018). Example strategies outlined by the aspects of the Reflexive Model of the Process of Professional Identity Development for supporting Black doctoral students include:

- For the stage *Acclimating and Adjustment*, faculty asking Black doctoral students questions such as, "How do you identify?" or "How does this [event or circumstance] apply to you?" to broach culture as a means of gaining awareness toward intersecting identities.
- Faculty using macro-affirmations in group settings through acknowledging and hearing the perspectives of Black doctoral students to model support and affinity for non-Black students and faculty (e.g., like [Black doctoral student] said, it

sounds like you and [Black doctoral student] agree).

- Faculty creating lists of external department support after inquiring about the interests of Black doctoral students for the stage *Ascertaining and Assessment*. This can be particularly helpful due to the higher likelihood that they are transitioning out of state or away from their community to pursue their doctoral journey (e.g., restaurants, grocery store locations, university or local chapter of national cultural organizations, religious groups).
- Faculty providing intentional opportunities for mentorship (both cross-racial and opportunities for connecting Black doctoral students to Black counselor educators, or if possible, past Black doctoral students of the program).
- Faculty allowing an open timeframe of office hours geared toward creating a safe space to allow Black doctoral students to discuss any unanswered questions and to promote accessibility. It is important that these office hours are known by students and faculty encourage them to drop in.
- Faculty establishing events allowing Black doctoral students to include their loved ones (e.g., virtual open houses).
- For the stages of *Ascertaining and Assessment* as well as *Acquiring and Acknowledgement*, faculty creating a hub or listserv with opportunities for leadership and advocacy as well as research and scholarship to combat Black doctoral students receiving secondhand information.

Limitations & Future Directions

Limitations surrounding this study included the reality of these Black doctoral students being easily recognizable due to the lower statistical prevalence of the Black identity of 21.32% within counselor education programs (CACREP, 2023). Another limitation included a lower amount of male-identifying participants in this study, which aligns with prior literature that asserted the need for an increase of Black male-identifying representation in

counselor education (Brooks & Steen, 2010). Participants risked being impacted by their respective programs with potential internal attacking or shaming from whistleblowing about their processes of professional identity development in counselor education in acknowledgement of seminal literature that detailed faculty's ridicule of Black doctoral students in counselor education programs (Gray & Drew, 2012; Henfield, 2011, 2013). Their participation in this study provided context to formalize a model that would support future Black doctoral students.

Future directions of research may incorporate varied research styles to include both qualitative and quantitative studies. Qualitative studies may provide the opportunity for an expansion of voices of participants and this grounded theory provides context for literature related to the importance of attentiveness to consideration of the participants' reflections of their process. Quantitative studies may provide statistical support to data surrounding the experiences of Black doctoral students with potential of quantifying varied elements of their process of professional identity development (e.g., encounters with potential stressors and barriers, motivating factors). In acknowledgement of the outreach of Black individuals interested in this study, future studies could include foci surrounding varied cultural identities within Blackness, such as, but not limited to, gender expression, multiple ethnicities, sexual and affective identities, or those with roles of parenthood or guardianship.

Conclusion

This study resulted in a model that allows opportunity for internal understanding of racially minoritized voices and promotes a more inclusive space for those newly invited into counselor education. This grounded theory study provides support in the literature to bolster necessary culturally sensitive consideration when accepting Black doctoral students into PWIs. It is important for counselor education programs at PWIs to develop a plan of support and strategies for

retention of Black doctoral students. Without intentionality, these students may encounter harm as they face stressors and barriers that their non-Black peers and faculty may never experience. The hope of the research team is that this model will provide inclusive insight toward the process of professional identity development of Black doctoral students and expand the capacity of faculty to support their journey while emphasizing and showing attentiveness about their wellness and growth as budding counselor educators.

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Author Information

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

The authors reported no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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How to Cite this Article:

Ngadjui, O. T., & Doughty Horn, E. A. (2024). Professional identity development of black doctoral students in counselor education: A reflexive model. *Teaching and Supervision in Counseling*, 6(1), 25–38. <https://doi.org/10.7290/tsc06desW>