THE REFLECTIVE EXPERIENCES OF
MATRICULATED BLACK FEMALES
FROM CACREP ACCREDITED DOCTORAL PROGRAMS

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The purpose of the study was to discuss the reflective experiences of matriculated Black females from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP) accredited doctoral programs. The study focused on issues such as significant experiences, academic and outside contributing factors to successful matriculation, non helpful environmental contributing factors related to matriculation, support systems, survival skills and the role of faculty and staff in the women’s programs.

The study was a qualitative study that investigated the reflective experiences and perceptions of four Black females who have matriculated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs.

The overall research question was: What are the reflective experiences of matriculated Black females from CACREP accredited doctoral programs?

The conclusions were discussed in four major themes gathered from the interviews. The first theme, Connectedness, involved concepts such as isolation, relationships and support from cohorts, and relationships with family and friends. The second theme was Mentoring Relationships. This theme consisted of topics such
as relationships and support from faculty members, relationships and support from
outside faculty members and relationships and support with Black female faculty
members. The third theme, Cultural Differences, discussed issues related to culture
shock, collectivist culture and exposure. The last theme was Spirituality and Self-
determination, in which the matters of prayer, spirituality, self assurance and commitment
were discussed.
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I also dedicate this work to all of the Black women in PWIs who are pursuing doctoral degrees. My hope is that those women will embrace all of the challenges and rewards that accompany this endeavor.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Pursuit of doctoral studies can potentially have a significant impact on one’s life (Dongen, 1998; Golde, 1998; Hughes & Kleist, 2005). The demands of doctoral studies may add to academic and personal pressures, stress (Valdez, 1982), isolation, burnout (Hughes & Kleist, 2005), and an added amount of external obstacles (Golde, 1998). Feelings of uncertainty, stress-producing anxiety, an overload of responsibilities, vulnerable feelings, and a loss of self-esteem have also been reported (Dongen, 1998; Hughes & Kleist, 2005). However, Dongen also reported that due to the impact of doctoral studies, students reported an increase in the use of coping skills such as relying on friends and family, exercising, eating more healthily, and the increased use of humor (Hughes & Kleist, 2005). Doctoral students also reported positive experiences related to forming caring relationships with students and faculty, gaining opportunities for collaboration with faculty in research, confirmation of their ability to matriculate throughout their doctoral program, and increased preparation for demands of their future career (Anderson & Swazey, 1998).

Research on doctoral students’ experiences frequently are focused on what causes doctoral students to cease or persist in their doctoral studies, which falls under the research umbrella of attrition (Nesheim, Guentzel, Gansemer-Topf, Ross, & Turrentine, 2006). Research on doctoral student experiences focuses on understanding the perceptions of the experiences, which inquires about the environment and the evaluation of the students’ experiences (Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Nesheim et al., 2006). The
current research focuses on the latter of the two, by investigating the perceptions of the
doctoral students” experiences as a whole, and by focusing attention on the experiences of
black female doctoral students” experiences in particular.

**Purpose and Rationale**

The purpose of the current study is to discuss the reflective experiences of
matriculated Black females from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and
Related Programs (CACREP) accredited doctoral programs. In order to discuss this
topic, it is necessary to review related aspects of experiences, such as the experiences of
doctoral students as whole, experiences of female doctoral students, experiences of Black
students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), and the experiences of Black
women obtaining doctoral degrees in the United States. Chapter I reviews doctoral
student experiences including counselor education students as a whole, and particularly
identifies the importance of the study of Black female graduate student experiences. The
reviewed literature supports ideas that state that Black students, regardless of the
discipline or academic level attending PWIs, are presented with issues such as isolation,
alienation, and depression (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002; Lett & Wright, 2003;
Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004; Williams, Brewley, Reed, White, & Davis-
Haley, 2005).

It is vital to add to the breadth of literature with studies that examine experiences
of Black female doctoral counselor education students, in order to further assess their
needs and implications related to successfully completing their doctoral studies. There
are implications in the reviewed literature that due to certain challenges imposed on
Black women by society and majority standards, it may be necessary for Black female students seeking a doctoral degree to seek out social, familial, and academic support from other Black females (Dowdy, 2005; Gregory, 2001; Moyer, Salovey, & Casey-Cannon, 1999; L. Smith, 2005; Williams et al., 2005).

Although there is research related to the experiences of Black counselor educators (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004), there is a scarcity of literature related to the experiences of Black women seeking doctoral degrees in counselor education. By researching the experiences of these women, a wealth of information may be obtained in learning about their challenges, needs, and recommendations.

**Definitions**

Due to the specialized nature of the current topic, some definitions are presented in order to assist in the understanding of the literature review. Included are the definitions of Black, Predominantly White Institutions, and Counselor Education programs.

**Black:** The term African American is generally used in the literature and in the United States Census Bureau to describe people of African descent. However, in the current study, the term Black was used for the purposes of the representation of people of African descent throughout the African Diaspora. The term African Diaspora is used to describe the voluntary, forced, and induced migration of African people throughout the world, which have resulted in the relocation and re-definition of African peoples’ culture in a range of now international locations (Florida Africana Studies Consortium, 2007).
The term African American was only used in direct quotes in the current study. According to Robinson (2005), the 34.6 million people of African descent in the United States are of diverse cultures. These cultures include but are not limited to African, the Caribbean, Central European, and South American. Of all the people considered to be African American by the United States Census Bureau (2001), 6% are foreign born, coming from the Caribbean, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, and others. Due to the conglomeration of differences within what is usually considered to be African American, the term Black is used to honor and recognize the diversity amongst people of African descent.

*Predominantly White Institutions:* The term Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) for this study was described as a learning institution that was not originally intended on primarily educating minority students such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities, or Tribal Colleges. These institutions are predominantly serviced by and for majority Caucasian students, faculty, and staff. Although some historically Black colleges and universities exist throughout the United States, due to many factors such as higher costs of private schooling, limited choices of schools and programming, and the sometimes common assumption of poorer education and facilities resulting from the lack of financial support provided by federal funding, the majority of Black students attend PWIs (Lett & Wright, 2003).

*Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs):* The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, defines an HBCU as:
Any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission and is the education of black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accredited agency or association determined by the Secretary [of Education] to be reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation (Department of Defense, Office of Small Business Programs, 2007).

*Counselor Education Programs:* For this study, the term Counselor Education Program is defined as a program that provides an advanced level of preparation for counselors in various public and private human services and mental health settings, as well as to prepare individuals to be counselor education professionals in colleges and universities. These programs fall under the category of accredited master’s and doctoral degree programs recognized by CACREP, an independent agency recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. Some of these programs include by are not limited to: (a) career counseling; (b) college counseling; (c) community counseling; (d) gerontological counseling; (e) marital, couple, and family counseling/therapy; (f) mental health counseling; (g) school counseling; (h) student affairs; and/or (i) doctoral degree programs in counselor education and supervision (CACREP, 2008).

**Review of Literature**

This review of literature includes experiences of general education students, doctoral students, and doctoral students in Counselor Education programs, female doctoral students, Black female graduate students, and Black women in general. Also
discussed are survival skills, and considerations of the importance of mentoring and other supportive relationships for Black female doctoral counselor education students. The review concludes with thoughts of the limitations within the current body of literature which endorses the research questions under consideration.

**Experiences of Doctoral Students**

As stated previously, doctoral studies can add an immense amount of pressure and stress in any student’s life. There are reports that doctoral studies can impact a student’s life in many different ways. Anderson and Swazey (1998) conducted a qualitative study on the reflections of the graduate student’s experience, their faculty, their department, their academic work, and their prospective careers. The results of that study suggested that doctoral students occasionally experienced negative reactions to faculty demands of expectations of the responsibilities of being a student, which can overshadow other responsibilities previously held. The results also suggested that as a result of graduate school, doctoral students underwent changes in their personal lives that they perceived were negative in nature. However, it was noted by the study’s authors that not every aspect of graduate school is or should be made pleasant.

The respondents reported experiences of role conflict related to conflicting demands from faculty and supervisors, the workload effects on the quality of their work, and the interference of work with their personal lives. Suggested by the respondents were also several stressors related to their perceived self-concept, which was affected by faculty demands and expectations. With these reports it is plausible to assert that certain amounts of stress may, naturally, negatively affect doctoral students’ self-concept by role
conflict and a various amount of other stressors. The respondents reflected on feelings of becoming somewhat different in character from before their graduate studies. This conflict in self-concept can create stressors which may infringe upon successful completion of doctoral studies. The suggestions, based on student responses, were for faculty members and programs to improve communication between faculty and students and to increase the socialization and concrete expectations of doctoral students in the beginning of their doctoral programs.

In order to combat the above-mentioned stressors, Fischer and Zigmond (1998) suggested four basic survival skill categories for graduate students in general. The researchers suggested that graduate programs, along with faculty and administrators, strive to help their graduate students master these skills in order to enhance their success not only as a graduate student, but subsequent to graduation as well. These survival skill categories included: (a) basic skills; (b) communication skills; (c) job skills; and (d) advanced skills.

The basic skill category is explained by Fischer and Zigmond (1998) as taking steps toward success by graduate students choosing an advisor conducive to their personality, learning style, and research interests, and building a group of mentors by seeking this group out on their own. It is suggested by Fischer and Zigmond that by seeking out these mentors, minorities especially will benefit due to the potentiality of a lack of role models in their particular fields. Other aspects of the basic skill category are learning how to be creative, developing a plan of study, selecting a sufficient dissertation topic, and establishing and using an advising committee.
In the communication skill category, much emphasis is placed on successful communication between the graduate students and their respective faculty and advisors. Fischer and Zigmond (1998) stressed the importance of writing, speaking, and networking skills for graduate students in order to continue development of their career. Within this category the importance of written communication was highlighted in terms of research, as well as the explanation of research results. Oral communication skills were deemed relevant for presentations of research and in seminars also. Networking was seen to be very pertinent in that it is vital to graduate student success in the development of his or her career, adding a source of moral and intellectual support, as well as friendship.

When discussing the job skills category, Fischer and Zigmond (1998) discussed topics such as considering a wide range of career options and applying for jobs. In their research, the authors stated that, typically, most graduate students enter their programs with the narrow thought of only obtaining tenure track positions. However, it was suggested that due to a decline of open positions, and the competition in the job market in their academic field, it is a good idea for graduate students to research other career options in their field in which they may be able to apply. Again, finding a network of mentors and role models is beneficial in this plight of the graduate student. Applying for jobs included the graduate students having a comprehension of how to actually apply and interview for particular positions, keeping in mind that they are not only interviewing for the position, but are interviewing their prospective employers as well.
The last category is the advanced skills category. In this category, topics such as developing certain additional skills such as teaching, grant writing, supervising, and mentoring were discussed. Another advanced skill postulated is the ability to demonstrate responsible conduct by the graduate student. In demonstrating responsible conduct as a graduate student, Fischer and Zigmond (1998) stated that ethical practices are of key concern in research and that of practitioners as a professional in training and a graduate student.

With all of these categories there is a connection made between survival skills and the success of a graduate student. The survival skills appear to be strongly academic in nature; however, there is an emphasis on creating networking opportunities as well as relationships with peers and their faculty members. It is important to note also that these skills are designed to be introduced by the particular programs and their administrators, in order to increase the success level in their graduate students.

Also important when discussing the experiences of doctoral students is the reality of attrition. Many factors are associated with how successful a doctoral student is in his or her academic career, as well as survival and coping skills to combat the above-mentioned stresses associated with the demands of doctoral studies. R. L. Smith, Maroney, Nelson, Able, and Able (2006) listed several personal factors that contribute to attrition in doctoral students. These personal factors include relationships with significant others, family responsibilities, community issues, employment responsibilities and financial strains, and problems with personal relationships. According to R. L. Smith
et al., these personal demands can drastically increase the stress levels of doctoral students.

The first personal demand discussed in the above-mentioned research is the impact of the doctoral students’ relationships with their significant others. There are time constraints on doctoral students’ maintaining a healthy relationship with significant others, as well as being able to meet the emotional needs of others. There is also concern of the pressure and fear of finding a life partner during or shortly after pursuing a doctoral degree for many doctoral students. This concern can be heightened if the individual considers that an added degree or higher level of education may limit the amount of accessible partners due to their success. According to R. L. Smith et al. (2006), any relationship with significant others, whether it be the lack of the relationships or the responsibilities due to the level of commitment, can be a source of tension, stress, and anxiety.

Family responsibilities are also included in personal factors that can create stress for doctoral students. These responsibilities include multiple family roles such as the role of sibling, child, aunt, uncle, stepparent, or parent, which can be overwhelming. Time and guilt are two factors linked with balancing family responsibilities, with the doctoral student potentially feeling torn between the tasks of academic life and their familial responsibilities. This also includes the doctoral student questioning the amount of time spent on their studies as compared to the amount of time spent fulfilling their family duties. This factor is related to the work cited above in Anderson and Swazey’s (1998) research that respondents reported role conflict as related to their responsibilities.
academically and their responsibilities to their families. It is postulated in the current study that role conflict is not only present in Black female doctoral students, but is exacerbated due to other factors including gender, race, economic factors, and others.

Another important factor that can create stress for doctoral students is the lack of support systems, which is referred to as community issues in R. L. Smith et al. (2006). It is stated in much of the literature that support systems provide graduate and doctoral students with an environment of acceptance and understanding, along with the opportunity to receive help in dealing with difficult situations as opposed to dealing with the problems on their own (Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Dowdy, 2005; Fischer & Zigmond, 1998; Gregory, 2001; Moyer et al., 1999; L. Smith, 2005; R. L. Smith et al., 2006; Williams et al., 2005). R. L. Smith et al. (2006) cited the lack of a support system as a potential cause of attrition, due to the fact that without a support system, the doctoral student may prematurely leave the program in lieu of finding support or receiving guidance about their particular problem.

Other strong factors that may contribute to stress for doctoral students are employment responsibilities and financial strain. R. L. Smith et al. (2006) reported this factor as one of the most pertinent factors due to the steady rising costs of graduate school. Therefore, it may be necessary for students to seek employment outside of their graduate studies in order to pay for the costs of doctoral school. This process of seeking employment outside of their academic study may possibly exaggerate their demands on time, increase role conflict, and add more challenges in terms of completing their academic coursework. Also related to this factor are the major financial decisions the
doctoral student may have to make related to seeking financial help from financial institutions and incurring additional debt to support themselves throughout their doctoral career. This decision making process may also ensure more stress on the doctoral student, adding to the probability of attrition.

R. L. Smith et al. (2006) concluded by stating that attrition is a strong possibility due to the strains and demands on doctoral students to balance their personal relationships, fulfill family responsibilities, obtain a support system, manage employment loads, and meet financial commitments. All of these factors weigh in on the experiences of doctoral students, which may translate to negative experiences without a strong support system and skills in order to survive the ensuing strain (Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Dowdy, 2005; Fischer & Zigmond, 1998; Gregory, 2001; Moyer et al., 1999; L. Smith, 2005; R. L. Smith et al., 2006; Williams et al., 2005).

**Experiences of Female Doctoral Students**

The literature suggests that female doctoral students experience a substantial amount of challenges beyond the challenges presented to male students. From 1970 until the year 2000 enrollment in graduate programs for females has increased from 39% to 58% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004). This increase indicates the increased amount of females pursuing postsecondary degrees, however, it is noted that with this increase was little accompanying increase of mentoring, diversity awareness, and other opportunities necessary for the academic success of women (Moyer et al., 1999; L. D. Patton & Harper, 2003; Ulku-Steiner, Kurtz-Costes, & Kinlaw, 2000).
Because of these concerns, high attrition of female doctoral students can be an issue that can be dramatically decreased with an increased amount of social support from family, peers, and mentors (Ulku-Steiner et al., 2000). Along with the concerns related to family, stress can be exacerbated by a lack of status, competition, financial duress, high workload, performance anxiety, and continuous evaluation. This is not only common for doctoral students in general, but especially for female doctoral students.

In regards to the challenges facing female doctoral students, Moyer et al. (1999) surveyed 224 women in the life sciences, social sciences, and the humanities about their most critical professional and personal concerns in order to identify factors that could potentially contribute to attrition in White and non-White women as doctoral candidates and recent graduates. The results of this study reported concerns by the participants about academic or professional development, balancing professional and personal responsibilities, dealing with stress and time pressures, problems with faculty or administrators, a lack of a supportive environment, and psychological health issues.

When reporting concerns about academic or professional development, 38% of the respondents reported that dealing with academic or professional development concerns were their most critical concern. These concerns included apprehension related to achieving the necessary targeted objectives in their field and becoming a successful scholar. Networking with other professionals in their field; improvement in communication skills; scholarship in terms of writing, publishing, and teaching; as well as research were also of concern.
As previously cited in R. L. Smith et al. (2006), doctoral students in general report difficulties in balancing their professional and personal responsibilities. In the Moyer et al. (1999) study, 36% of respondents noted these difficulties in terms of struggling between academic work and personal relationships and family as their most pressing issue. In terms of balancing both professional and personal goals, it was also reported by respondents that being a woman heightens these concerns in regards to starting a family and having children. In fact, Ulku-Steiner et al. (2000) noted that graduate school typically overlaps with periods in which issues associated with forming families are presented. These issues include childbearing and parenting of small children along with other family concerns. Due to these concerns, it is necessary for departments to provide general support and an atmosphere conducive to the sensitive needs of a family (Ulku-Steiner et al.).

In reporting concerns about stress and time pressure, 30% of the sample reported this as being their most pressing issue. Within this response were reports of feeling strain while attempting to complete the required work in order to graduate before a stipend ran out. There was also reported stress related to trying to balance the responsibilities of teaching and research. Some of the respondents accounted that the workload was at times unmanageable, with course work, clinical practicum, and research responsibilities averaging anywhere from 80-90 hours per week.

Along with balancing stress and time pressure were also reports of 21% of the respondents experiencing problems with faculty or administrators as their most pressing concern. Complaints included reports of faculty failing to provide adequate feedback or
guidance, as well as seeming distracted by their own research and demands rather than preparing students for postgraduate careers. Other respondents reported a sense of frustration when dealing with the imbalance of power between students and their advisors. Ulku-Steiner et al. (2000) reported the importance of support from mentors and faculty on the professional development of women.

Related to problems with faculty or administrators, one of their most critical concerns is the report of 17% of the respondents labeling the lack of a supportive environment. These problems were generally reported in the areas of inadequate mentoring from advisors, as well as a lack of understanding or sensitivity to the hardships that graduate students had to face. Having a supportive environment both personally and academically is helpful in reducing the stress related to doctoral studies and can significantly reduce the probability of attrition (R. L. Smith et al., 2006).

Related to all of the above stressors were concerns about emotional and psychological health. About 17% of participants reported that their main concerns dealt with maintaining emotional and psychological health while balancing the stresses and demands of doctoral school. These concerns involved depression, lack of self-esteem, isolation, and strains on social relationships. These reports are consistent with the literature which states that doctoral students in general experience psychological hardships throughout their doctoral careers (Dongen, 1998; Golde, 1998; Hughes & Kleist, 2005; Valdez, 1982). In the Moyer study, respondents reported these general feelings as well as an exacerbation of these feelings due to the added stresses of being a
woman in academia. Some of these responses were related to feelings of oppression and inadequate treatment as compared to the treatment of men by faculty and administrators.

In fact, Moyer et al. (1999) reported that some of the barriers that women and minorities face during their graduate careers include extenuating family responsibilities, symbolic racism and prejudice, the denial of support systems, lack of important information, and the lack of financial resources. The researchers continued by suggesting the increased likelihood of women to be part time students more frequently than men, and having family obligations that may interfere with requirements related to tenure achievement. Suggestions from the participants included recommendations to create more family friendly programs that place less focus on the theme that childbearing and parenting is detrimental to their promotion and progress. Other suggestions included improving mentoring, while making more opportunities available for the possibility of having more female mentors and role models. There were also suggestions of increasing ethnic or gender diversity. This diversity would not only be amongst the doctoral students but in terms of faculty as well.

In addition to the previously reported challenges that women face during doctoral studies, Younes and Assay (1998) discussed some positive aspects related to women pursuing a doctoral degree. In their 1998 study, Younes and Assay investigated the resiliency of female graduate students and how they negotiate their various roles. In this case study, the eight female participants provided insight into issues such as (a) significance of the graduate degree, (b) roles negotiated during the graduate degree program, or (c) feelings or thoughts that resulted from the negotiation process and their
implications. When asked to identify the roles in which they were balancing, the participants identified the roles of being a wife, student, employee, mother, daughter, volunteer, friend, advisor/sponsor, daughter-in-law, sister, entrepreneur, school board member, private music teacher, Sunday school teacher, grandmother, and supervisor. The authors noted that regardless of the gender of the student, it is necessary to manage multiple roles; however, it was their intent to highlight the negotiation of these multiple roles as well as the discoveries that each participant made about their self-image.

**Significance of the graduate degree.** One of the positive aspects reported by the participants was the significance of the graduate degree and the opportunities that it would present. In these positive reports, the participants discussed the desire to “leave their mark on the profession,” and the desire to become a role model to other women, not only in their field or profession, but in their family as well. The women also reported the pursuit of a graduate degree as a means to personal fulfillment and societal improvement. Financial stability and job protection were also reported as important factors related to gaining a graduate degree.

**Roles negotiated during the graduate degree program.** When asked to discuss the roles that were negotiated throughout their program, the participants discussed role conflict related to taking care of their family, including their children and spouses. The participants reported feelings of being torn between their family responsibilities and their educational commitments. Despite these conflicts, the participants reported the recognition that their graduate degree would benefit the whole family and in some
respects would dedicate their degrees to the spouses that supported them. The participants also reported positive feelings associated with some support from colleagues and employers. Balancing personal friendships was also a negotiated role the participants indicated. Though the participants reported conflicts within their personal relationships with friends, there was also a sense of satisfaction experienced by becoming a role model for the important women in their lives.

**Feelings or thoughts that resulted from the negotiation process.** The participants reported the graduate degree process as stressful and difficult at times, but reflected on the opportunity to discover new things about themselves. Some of these self-discoveries included the sense of gaining strength, and power by persisting through the graduate period, as well as feeling a sense of empowerment throughout their “struggles.” Some of the respondents reported having more assurance in their capabilities, having a new outlook on life and having a promise of a better life in the future.

**Black Students at Predominately White Institutions**

Since the elimination of segregation, Predominantly White institutions (PWIs) have been responsible for educating an immense majority of Black students in the United States (Lett & Wright, 2003). It is reported that only 25% of Black students attend Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs) meaning that the majority or Black students attend PWIs. However, Black students are less likely to attend four-year institutions than White students, whereas they are also less likely to complete their degree (Russell & Atwater, 2005). McCauley (1998) reported that the attrition rates for Black
Due to the aforementioned factors, more efforts have been made towards enrollment and retention of Black students enrolled at PWIs. Lett and Wright (2003) reported that Black students may often feel isolated and alienated in PWIs, having a difficult time adjusting to the environment.

The literature provides evidence of feelings of isolation through a study conducted by Lewis et al. (2004) examining the experiences of African American PhD students at a PWI. Themes discussed in the interviews included “feelings of isolation,” “we stand out,” “relationships with peers,” and “negotiating the systems.”

“Feelings of isolation” included feeling invisible and alone in terms of other students and faculty and staff. Regarding Black women, the feeling of isolation at PWIs is in concurrence with the current study’s curiosity of whether or not Black women may undergo a sense of isolation due to the lack of both faculty and students of color on campus.

In the theme “standing out,” the students reported difficulty associated with not being able to see other students that look like them. Also associated with the theme “standing out” was a common feeling of a lack of understanding by the faculty and university as a whole. Similar to the questions being raised in the current study and several other studies reviewed in the literature (Dowdy, Givens, Murillo, Senoy, & Villenas, 2000; Patton & Harper, 2003; Williams et al., 2005), the students stressed the importance of having relationships with peers and feeling a source of limited resources such as networking and students services.
The theme discussed as “negotiating the system” revealed the emphasis of the importance of finding support as soon as they arrived on campus in order to succeed on campus. The conclusion made from the above-mentioned study was that students discussed several themes related to feeling as if they were uninvited guests in a strange land.

Based on these reports and conclusions made in the literature, the current study raises the question of whether or not it is beneficial for Black female doctoral students to have an increased selection of Black faculty and students at PWIs. The increased selection would enhance the feeling of having a sense of belonging and connectedness with other students, faculty and staff at PWIs.

Regarding social adjustment of Black students enrolled at PWIs, Russell and Atwater (2005) reported that several factors add to success and may reduce attrition rates for Black students attending PWIs. These factors are family support and expectations, high school preparation classes, and coping strategies aimed at facilitating students through cultural dissonance and culture shock.

According to Littleton (2003), the transition experiences can be challenging for some Black students including Black women, attending a PWI. Haralson (1996) added that due to the rise of the number of Black students not only achieving admission to PWIs but also continuing to graduate level status, there is a need for these institutions to become more aware of the possible social isolation and alienation often perceived to be present within this particular environment.
**Black Women Obtaining Doctoral Degrees in the United States**

Suggested in the research are the ideas that in addition to the normal effects of the demanding nature of a doctoral program, adding the factors of being a woman and being Black more so complicates the experience of being a doctoral student in many ways (Dowdy, 2005; Gregory, 2001; Moyer et al., 1999; L. Smith, 2005; Williams et al., 2005).

In 1997, only 2.9% of terminal degrees, including but not limited to doctoral degrees, were awarded to Black women in the United States (Jones, 2000; Mabokela, 2001). It is suggested that female doctoral students reported concerns about financial hardships, which may affect minorities disproportionately (Gibbons, 1996; Moyer et al., 1999; Wyche & Graves, 1992).

There have been reports that there is an upward trend by Black students to attain doctoral degrees in the United States since the reported statistic in 1997 (Jones, 2000, Mabokela, 2001). Hence, Black students make up 7.1% of all doctorates awarded to American citizens in 2004 (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Jones, 2000; *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2008). Although the numbers of Black Americans obtaining doctoral degrees are rising, reaching 1,869 in 2004 (*The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2008), there remains an underrepresentation of women and minorities in universities, which is problematic due to the fact that it places limitations on the possible opulence and array of perspectives within the learning environment (Barinage, 1996; Gibbons, 1996; Moyer et al., 1999).
The projected benefits of enrolling in graduate degree programs for Black women include enhancement of social status, higher lifetime earnings, enhanced occupational status, improved working conditions and environments, and lower probability of unemployment (Perna, 2004). These benefits combat some of the challenges facing Black women in America which include high rates of poverty, less health care, under-education, and the lack of resources and support systems (Dowdy, 2005; Gregory, 2001).

There are many challenges involved in living in America as a Black woman. Some of these challenges include high rates of poverty, less health care, under-education, and the lack of resources and support systems (Dowdy, 2005; Gregory, 2001). There are also challenges involved in being a Black woman attending a PWI (Moyer et al., 1999). Alienation, isolation, and depression may occur in the lives of Black women attending PWIs due to the possible lack of social support, mentoring relationships, familial support, and lack of resources.

When examining whether or not Black women report any differences in treatment or learning experiences as a result of being a minority, several instances in the literature examined Black students” and other minority”s experiences at PWIs. Jones et al. (2002) examined ethnic minority students” experiences at PWIs using a case study approach through focus groups. These groups were conducted with African American, Asian-Pacific American, Latino, and Native American students. The purpose of the study was to examine the ethnic minority students” experiences at PWIs, discuss the similarities and differences of the experiences among the four groups, and identify the perspectives of the delivery of the institution”s student services. Several themes emerged including: (a)
“general campus climate,” (b) “student experiences,” (c) “student involvement,” and (d) “lack of resources for diversity initiatives on campus.”

Within the theme of the students’ perceptions of the general campus climate, the students reported a limited amount or lack of support for diversity on campus as well as a non-welcoming environment. The students also reported a sense of non-representation of “people of Color” on the staff and campus as a whole. In the theme of student experiences, the students discussed the sense of alienation and facing of discrimination, whereas the students also expressed the feeling of color lines and separation between minorities (Jones et al., 2002).

In addition to examining the reported experiences of Black women related to navigation, survival, and success at PWIs, the current study also investigated the perceptions of these experiences. It is proposed in the literature (Dowdy, 2005; Gregory, 2001; Moyer et al., 1999) that Black women at PWIs may experience forms of isolation among other negative feelings, due to the limited amount of Black faculty and students on the predominantly White campus.

The importance of community and mentoring relationships for Black female doctoral students. Along with reporting the experiences of isolation and alienation of Black female students at PWIs, the literature also depicts the importance of forming community and mentoring relationships in order to promote success for the aforementioned. The current study inquired whether or not feelings of isolation and differences are experienced by Black female counselor education students at PWIs in order to provide implications for educators and doctoral programs at PWIs regarding the
educators and doctoral programs at PWIs regarding the importance of the provision of mentoring relationships from Black female faculty for Black women attending doctoral programs at a PWI.

The literature suggests that in order for Black graduate students, including Black women, to perform well in graduate school, a part of the navigation required includes mentoring and other opportunities to network (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Debord & Millner, 1993; Mabokela & Green, 2001; Smith & Davidson, 1992; Williams et al., 2005). Related and connected to interpersonal relationships between Black women enrolled in Ph.D. programs at PWIs is the interpersonal mentoring relationship between Black women faculty members and the Black women themselves. It is noted that gaining inspiration, motivation, guidance and strength from a faculty member who has experienced a sense of what the Black woman is currently experiencing, is an essential part of reducing feelings of isolation, alienation, and oppression. Furthermore, participating in a mentoring relationship is a foundational representation of success in graduate education, fueled on the interpersonal relationships directed by confidence, veracity, opportunity and acceptance.

Patton and Harper (2003) labeled mentoring as the missing link for African American women, arguing that due to the low number of Black female faculty at PWIs, it is usually difficult to interact with same-race female faculty members. Jackson, Kite, and Branscombe (1996) reported that Black women preferred Black female mentors. Subsequently, it was reported by Jackson et al., that Black women and other non-White graduate and professional female students stated that participating in a mentoring
and who possessed similar professional and academic interests is extremely important. However, the authors acknowledge that some sort of mentoring is better than no mentoring.

**Survival skills.** In order to explore the experiences of Black female doctoral students at PWIs, the current study inquired about the presence of any particular survival skills exhibited by Black female doctoral students. L. Smith (2005) reported feelings of isolation, alienation, and angst when describing her experiences at PWIs. Smith depicted an “ugly” side to living as a Black woman navigating her way through a Eurocentric environment. Smith’s reported “ugliness” included racism, sexism, and classism; however, these depictions did not hinder her from continuing on the path to successfully navigate her way through either one of the three PWIs that she has attended. From this article, the question is then raised as to what is necessary for the success of Black female doctoral students, related to graduating and surviving an atmosphere in which they are clearly the minority. Smith proposed that in order for Black female doctoral students to successfully survive the racist and male dominated systems of PWIs, they must be literate in “surviving the system.”

“Surviving the system” is a skill that is related in the literature to research that Dowdy et al. (2000) described as feeling like a “fly in the milk.” Dowdy et al. described the feelings of acknowledging the reality of the “us” and “them” structuring of PWIs, where non-White students are “them” and therefore should be grateful just having the opportunity to be on the campus. With these feelings of being a “fly in the milk,” Dowdy et al. (2000) wrote of the importance of non-White students being able to articulate their
feelings in a safe, non-resistant environment with each other. It was proposed by the current author that “surviving the system” entails the knowledge of Black women to reach out for support in the form of emotional, mental, and academic support from other survivors of the system (Dowdy et al.). Related to this line of research in the literature, it was suggested that it is important for Black women at PWIs to become knowledgeable not only in the traditional sense of education, but in the sense of survival. Talking about similar experiences of oppression, isolation, and alienation may reduce the stress involved in carrying these burdens alone. It was suggested by Dowdy et al., that it is essential for Black women to explore and declare their sense of worth by communicating with other Black women in academia and employing survival techniques used by those survivors as well.

**Empowerment.** Connected to the area of survival and the related techniques employed by Black female students is empowerment. Williams et al. (2005) reported that the use of dialogue among Black woman at PWIs fosters empowerment by encouragement. In their article, Williams et al. based their thoughts of empowerment through community experiences among Black women at PWIs on Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000). This theory emphasizes the need and use of four basic themes: (a) the lived experiences as a criterion of meaning, (b) the use of dialogue, (c) ethic of caring, and (d) ethic of personal accountability (Collins, 2000; Williams et al., 2005).

The first theme; the lived experiences as a criterion of meaning consists of a woman acknowledging what she knows through lived experiences in her life. Being
The first theme: the lived experiences as a criterion of meaning consists of a woman acknowledging what she knows through lived experiences in her life. Being knowledgeable in their experiences and the reality of their experiences affords Black women the opportunity to create alternative definitions of themselves and their existence.

By discussing their experiences together, through the use of dialogue, the second premise in Black feminist thought, Black women can establish bonds and relationships with one another (Cott, 1987). Therefore, this necessary dialogue builds relationships that act as social agents for authorizing change which leads to resilience against the hostile environment of PWIs. Building relationships through dialogue with other Black women at PWIs is a survival tool or technique that should not only be suggested but encouraged for Black women at PWIs to become literate and active.

The third thought entails the ethic of caring. This thought is surrounded by the belief that using expressions, feelings, and compassion brings out a greater understanding by other Black women. Therefore sharing their hardships with others will help Black women be able to negotiate the system differently, knowing the possibilities that may lie ahead.

The fourth theme, the ethic of personal accountability is explained as the importance of staying within the boundary of the focus of discussion when making knowledge claims. According to Black Feminist ideology, the importance of this ethic is illustrated by stating any bias in relation to a certain point or position. If utilized as a literacy tool in the realms of survival skills in the face of adversity, oppression, and
alienation, these four tenets may be support segments leading to the empowerment of Black women at PWIs.

**Perceived Institutionalized Racism by African American Women in Academia**

With the added number of Black women entering Academia, some attention must be paid to the experiences the women report when actually becoming members of the academic environment. Bryant, Coker, Durodoye, McCollum, Pack-Brown, Constantine, and O’Bryant (2005), report that African American female counseling professionals face serious organizational, intrapersonal, and interpersonal challenges to gaining success in academia. Some of these challenges range from earning tenure and promotion, coping with sexism, managing the challenges of motherhood and/or other family responsibilities, seeking fair and equitable salaries, and penetrating the “good old boys network.” These challenges add to the struggle that African American female counselor educators face because they are both black and female in a society that has a rich history when referring to the discrimination of race and gender (Coker, 2003). These challenges may also include discussing their graduate school and post graduate work with others, in fear that they may be seen as disloyal, therefore jeopardizing their success within academia.

The combination of these factors along with historical stereotypes that may affect the way academia treats them, may be attributed to institutional racism. The premise of institutional racism consists of the manipulation of societal institutions to grant preferences and privileges to Whites while limiting choices, rights, mobility and access to minorities (Diller, 2007). Institutional racism can be understated or blatant, however this form of racism is intertwined in the rules, systems and procedures of social institutions.
difficult experiences related to racism, sexism, discrimination and systematic oppression (Bryant et al., 2005; West, 1995). These roles are Mammy, Sapphire, and overachiever. For the current study, the two roles that are most relevant are Mammy, and Sapphire.

**Mammy.** The role of Mammy is characterized as a black woman who embraces faithfulness, obedience and being a servant to a fault (Bryant et al., 2005). These characteristics may also lead to the woman placing the well-being of others before her own. Historically, the Mammy image derived from the Southern region of America during slavery. In the framework of the academic environment, Black female counselor educators may be evaluated based on the portrayal of the Mammy role. This measurement may manifest overtly or covertly, and represents White Americas’ view of the relationship between White male power and the Black woman in Academia (Bryant et al., 2005).

It is suggested that while in this role, the Black woman is considered by whites in academia as the loyal and submissive worker who is required to support the goals and ambitions of not only her White colleagues but even the institution itself above and beyond her own professional needs and desires (Haslett, Geis, and Carter, 1992). These behaviors may include such loyalty that the woman may be fearful of repercussions as a result of her speaking about any negative issues or opinions that she may have related to her colleagues or the institution in which she is employed.

**Sapphire.** The next role portrayal relevant to the current study is that of the Sapphire. The Sapphire image is derived from and was reinforced by a character on the Amos ‘n’ Andy radio show (Bryant et al., 2005). Sapphire’s character was represented as
a loud, animated and strong-willed Black woman who emasculated Black men with her strong contempt for their untrustworthiness, and irresponsible actions (West, 1995).

Societal norms often disapprove of Black women displaying formidable accounts of anger and assertiveness. However, according to Bryant et al. (2005), Black women in academic environments have many reasons for being angry, such as discrimination and social injustices. Although, some characteristics of the Sapphire image may be embraced as a positive attribute for Black women, it becomes professionally challenging when this image is the only one attributed to Black women displaying discontent or frustration in the work setting, hence rendering the label, “angry Black woman” (West, 1995).

In order to combat this “angry Black woman” image and to appear non-threatening to others, Black women may suppress any legitimate negative feelings they have about the academic setting, thus leading them to become soft-spoken, or silenced. It is proposed that the internalization of the Sapphire image may cause Black women in academia to screen, analyze and alter their behaviors and thoughts in order to reduce the chance that they may be seen as a threat by colleagues, administrators and students in the academic setting (Bryant et al., 2005).

Research in the area of Black feminist thought exposes the attempt to combat the above mentioned stereotypes by Black women developing the personification of the Superwoman (Collins, 2000; Mullings, 2006; Woods-Giscombe, 2010, Wallace, 1978; Wallace, 1990). The development of the Superwoman is a mechanism of survival adapted to battle the realities of racism, subjugation, legal deprivation and the lack of resources historically placed on Black women and their spouses by society. The superwoman
Superwoman (Collins, 2000; Mullings, 2006; Woods-Giscombe, 2010, Wallace, 1978; Wallace, 1990). The development of the Superwoman is a mechanism of survival adapted to battle the realities of racism, subjugation, legal deprivation and the lack of resources historically placed on Black women and their spouses by society. The superwoman archetype has both positive and negative effects on a Black woman’s physical strength, achievement, stress level, mental health, physical health, emotional well being and the relationships with their families.

In a study conducted by Woods-Giscombe (2010), 48 black females ranging from 19-72 years of age were asked how they characterize the Superwoman role, their beliefs about the contributing factors, and the benefits and liabilities of the role for them personally. From the eight focus groups conducted, five themes of the characterization of the Superwoman were discussed. These themes were 1) obligation to manifest strength, 2) obligation to suppress emotions, 3) resistance to being vulnerable or dependent, 4) determination to succeed despite limited resources, and 5) obligation to help others. Within all of these characterizations the sense of obligation is manifested and an abundance of pressure is placed on the women to fulfill all of the qualities involved in the Superwoman role.

The women discussed the need and pressure to uphold the perception of “the strong one” for those that came before them who have undergone treatment far worse than their own, as well as those to come such as their children, family members and friends. The participants spoke about being distressed by the pressure to show strength all of the time.
When discussing the suppression of emotions to uphold the superwoman role, the women spoke about issues related to not feeling as if anyone would understand how they are feeling if they actually exposed their feelings, as well as not knowing how people would perceive those feelings. Most of the women felt that this obligation was distinct for black women due to the pressures from society to remain strong. This obligation can also relate to combating the stereotype of the “angry or emotional black woman” as mentioned above in the Sapphire section.

When discussing this aspect of the characterization of the superwoman role, the participants noted a difficulty accepting asking for or accepting support. Some of the participants stated that resisting dependency defends them from getting hurt by others; however, they also stated that by resisting outside support, they go through “unnecessary struggles.”

The participants discussed issues related to pride and exceeding expectations of others as reasons for their extreme determination to succeed. The women discussed negative aspects of this theme in terms of overworking, not taking work breaks, depriving themselves of sleep, and sacrificing their health. Related to the above referenced societal sexist and racist restriction placed on Black women, the women stated that they felt as if they had to work twice as hard as anyone else in order to be successful.

The last theme, obligation to help others, was discussed in regards to the women feeling the need to commit to helping others. By committing to give back or nurture those around them, the women stated that it forced them to take on multiple roles, becoming more of a stressful and burdening situation, then a beneficial one.
In addition to the characterization themes of the superwoman role, the researcher of the study also concluded that contributing contextual factors for the development of the role were historical racial and gender stereotyping, tradition, a traumatic history and spiritual values. The benefits of the existence of the superwoman roles were: the preservation of self or survival, preservation of the African American community and the preservation of the African American family. The liabilities of assuming the superwoman role are: interpersonal relationship strain, stress related health behaviors, and the personification of stress.

Experiences of Doctoral Students in Counselor Education Programs

By researching experiences of doctoral students in counselor education programs, an increased understanding of the needs, perceptions, and future experiences of future doctoral students can be attained. This research is also vital due to the lack of research conducted on black female experiences in counselor education. Placing attention on counselor education doctoral students” experience is vital, due to the fact that doctoral students that matriculate through the doctoral process will enhance the counseling profession on the master’s and doctoral level (Engels & Muro, 1986; Hughes & Kleist, 2005).

In a qualitative study exploring counselor education doctoral students” first semester experiences, Hughes and Kleist (2005) found a variety of feelings related to the pursuit of a doctoral degree. These experiences varied included (a) vicissitude, (b) integration, and (c) confirmation.
In the vicissitude phase, the participants reported alternating thoughts and emotions wavering between introspection and awareness. Introspection included self-examination and contemplation of their experiences which led to feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt. The feelings of uncertainty were characterized by feelings of concern about the unknown. Self-doubt was related to the questioning of the participants’ capability to succeed within the program. Awareness involved an appreciation of the participants’ abilities, including the participants’ use of strengths and their belief in their own capabilities. With the participants’ use of strengths, the participants reported the use of prior understanding of themselves to adapt to new situations.

The integration stage was reported by the participants’ desire to learn how to participate in the process of beginning doctoral study. Within this phase, the participants reported subcategories of engagement and knowledge. The participants described engagement as the process of deciding how to participate in the doctoral process through making decisions based on the choice of involvement and responsibility related engagement such as teaching, participating in conferences, and social functions within the program.

Also within the integration phase, the participants reported a desired amount of knowledge based on wanting and needing information. The participants reported gaining positive feedback and useful information through affirmative messages about their capabilities and qualifications from experiential opportunities with their program. These positive affirmations derived from experiential training led to what the participants reported as confirmation. In the confirmation phase, the participants reported an absolute
assurance of their capabilities to succeed, based on positive feedback from professors and peers. With this achieved self-confirmation, the phases of vicissitude and the emotions related to it were considerably reduced.

**Conclusion**

Review of the literature supports two extensive conclusions about the current body of literature and provides support for the research question of the current study. The current literature is challenge-based rather than focusing on experiences and suggestions and lacks studies focusing on black female doctoral counselor education students. These conclusions endorse a necessity of a further exploration into the experiences of this particular population.

**Research Question**

Building upon the review of the literature, the current study investigated the following question: What are the reflective experiences of matriculated Black Females from CACREP accredited doctoral programs?

Similar to the research conducted by Lewis et al. (2004), and Williams et al. (2005), the researcher was interested in investigating the reflective experiences and the perceptions of Black females who have matriculated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs. This particular viewpoint relates to previous research that suggests that Black students at PWIs experience isolation, alienation, and depression due to a possible lack of social support, mentoring relationships, familial support, and resources (Dowdy, 2005; Gregory, 2001; Moyer et al., 1999).
Associated with the interest of the reflective experiences of matriculated Black females from CACREP accredited doctoral programs at PWIs, was the interest of any reported survival skills and resiliency displayed by these females during their doctoral programs. These interests are also connected to literature suggesting the use of survival techniques such as mentoring, empowerment, and embracing a collective community (Dowdy et al., 2000; Patton & Harper, 2003; L. Smith, 2005; Williams et al., 2005).

Summary

The literature review revealed several premises related to the experiences of Black students at PWIs. Some of these premises are directly related to the experiences of Black females in CACREP accredited doctoral programs, although others are a generalized summation of experiences of Black students as a whole. Within these premises include the existence of isolation, alienation, and depression (Dowdy, 2005; Gregory, 2001; Moyer et al., 1999), and the need for empowerment in the forms of mentoring and collective community (Dowdy et al., 2000; Patton & Harper 2003; L. Smith, 2005; Williams et al., 2005). This study adds to the breadth of literature that examines experiences of Black women enrolled in CACREP accredited doctoral programs in order to further assess their needs and suggestions related to successfully matriculating through the doctoral process.
CHAPTER II
METHODOLOGY

This chapter summarizes the research methodology and design of the current study. The current study was designed to explore how Black females who have matriculated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs describe their doctoral experiences in those programs. The main research question for this research study was: what are the reflective experiences of matriculated Black Females from CACREP accredited doctoral programs? This chapter is divided into the following sections: 1) the use of a qualitative study, 2) operational research questions, 3) design of the study, 4) explanation of the procedures and participants and 5) data analysis.

Qualitative Methodology

A qualitative design was utilized to investigate the experiences of Black females who have matriculated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs. The researcher was interested in the lived experiences and perceptions of these women. The vital factor of the research is the meaning of the experiences reported by the participants.

Interpretive qualitative research affords the researcher the opportunity to comprehend the meanings people construct about their experiences and their world, as well as how they make sense of that world (Merriam, 2002). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), qualitative inquiry is designed to discover, recognize, and depict the experiences of the participants in their own words. In the current study, the researcher was interested in the experiences of Black females who matriculated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs during their interaction within their doctoral programs.
Qualitative inquiry presented the researcher with the opportunity to study the participant and the selected phenomenon in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning the participants placed on them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In qualitative research, the researcher constructs an intricate, holistic picture, while analyzing the words and reporting thorough views of the participants in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998).

According to Creswell (1998), several factors should be considered in order to qualify as a qualitative study. The first qualification is the nature of the research question. In qualitative research, the research question generally starts with what or how. In the current study, the research question is: How do matriculated Black females from CACREP accredited doctoral programs at predominantly White institutions report their experiences of their doctoral education? This sort of question describes what is going on with that particular topic.

The second characteristic of qualitative methods is the need for the topic to be explored. According to Creswell (1998), with this characteristic, the variables cannot be easily identified and there are no theories accessible for the explanation of the behaviors of the participants in the study. In the case of the current study, there is research that discusses the experiences of Black female counselor educators, as well as the experiences of Black women at PWIs; however, there is a lack of studies aimed at exploring the doctoral experiences in CACREP accredited programs of Black females.

The third characteristic which should be considered is the need to offer a detailed view of the particular topic (Creswell, 1998). The researcher chose qualitative methods
due to its nature to produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases, such as Black females who matriculated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs at PWIs. This increases the depth of understanding of the cases and a situation studied, but reduces generalizability (Maxwell, 2005).

A key to qualitative research is that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in reaction to their world (Merriam, 1998); however these meanings fluctuate and change over time. Therefore the interest lies in understanding these interpretations at a particular time and in a certain framework. Therefore, the current study drew from social theory (Merriam), by taking into consideration that social and political attributes may shape the realities of the interpretations of the participants.

**Research Design**

Qualitative research involves subjectivity on the part of the researcher’s experiences. In order to combat certain biases that may be held by this researcher, the phenomenological term epoche was used. In essence, the term epoche involves the act of putting aside one’s assumptions or biases with respect to the study. The researcher used epoche in order to put her biases and assumptions about the experiences of Black females who matriculated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs aside. According to Moustakas (1994), epoche occurs when the researcher sets aside his or her own experiences as much as possible, in order to have a fresh perspective of the phenomenon under examination. The researcher attempted to utilize epoche by acknowledging any preconceived judgments about the experiences of the women in the study, as well as
keeping a journal throughout the process in order to separate feelings and experiences from those of the participants.

In order to begin to achieve epoche the researcher utilized bracketing, by acknowledging and putting aside personal attitudes or beliefs about the experiences of Black females who have matriculated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs. This process allowed the researcher to attempt to uncover the true underpinnings of the phenomenon itself (Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas, the epoche process helps to push the study towards a broad state without prejudgments or preconceptions from the researcher concerning the phenomenon being studied. This process allows the participants to clearly and openly describe their experiences. A description of the researcher along with bracketed assumptions is presented in the next section in first person.

**Description of Researcher**

I am a 31-year-old female doctoral candidate in a CACREP accredited doctoral program. I consider my identity as consisting of two separate but related parts. These identities include being a Black person and being a woman. When conducting this study, it was important to acknowledge the fact that these identities affected the lenses in which I was viewing the study. I have attended PWIs for all three of my collegiate experiences. All of these experiences were different; however, similar in several respects. Similarities between these encounters include my close identity and association with the black community on campus, feelings of isolation, and mentoring relationships with other black female students. One distinct difference between my experiences includes the lack of
involvement with black administrators in my doctoral experience, as opposed to my undergraduate collegiate career. Within these experiences, my identity both affected and was affected by my experiences. My most recent experience as a doctoral student was filled with rich experiences that were not only affected by my being Black and being a Black woman, but were also shaped by outside factors such as: (a) being a single parent, (b) obtaining a graduate assistantship and being a teaching fellow, (c) having support from my family and friends, and (d) having community resources.

My first identity is that of a Black woman which was chosen due to the fact that, in my experiences in life, being Black has affected every facet including my worldview—how I view the world and how the world views me. I refer to being Black due to the fact that it encompasses my culture along with my racial origin, whereas the term African American does not truly cover my cultural characteristics, beliefs, and practices. My identity has always been shaped by the foundation of being a Black person first, and then being a woman. With this identity I would consider myself having strong ties to the Black community and its interests. Therefore, studying what it is like for other Black women to attend PWIs as doctoral students in CACREP accredited programs has become increasingly important to me. Within this area of study, it was important for me to stay aware of my assumptions about my own doctoral experience as well as the experiences of other Black women in CACREP accredited programs. My assumptions include the following:
1. Obtaining a doctoral degree in a CACREP accredited doctoral program is a stressful and life-changing event for the majority of students, regardless of sex, race, or ethnicity.

2. Obtaining a doctoral degree in a CACREP accredited doctoral program will personally affect me in positive and negative ways. Some of the positivest are professional marketability, financial success and personal achievement. Some of the negatives are added stress and financial strain.

3. Black women who have matriculated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs encounter similar experiences throughout their academic programs. These experiences may be affected differently by varying outside circumstances such as marital, economical, and parental statuses (Dowdy, 2005; Gregory, 2001; Moyer et al., 1999).

4. Compared to other doctoral students, experiences of Black women in CACREP accredited doctoral programs are unique. This unique aspect is related to the fact that the women may experience increased factors of isolation, alienation and depression. However, Black women may also experience a sense of empowerment and accomplishment for their peers, along with a gain of community resources and relationships.

5. The experiences in CACREP accredited doctoral programs for Black women may be affected by the amount of time they are present in their respective departments, and also whether or not they hold teaching fellowships or assistantships in that department.
6. Attending a PWI results in differing experiences between Black doctoral students and other doctoral students.

7. Having the identity of both a Black person and a woman contributes to the experiences in regards to perceived treatment by fellow students, faculty members and staff.

8. Black female doctoral students in CACREP accredited doctoral programs may experience a sense of racism, sexism, and classism at higher rates than other doctoral students in CACREP accredited doctoral programs.

**Procedures**

The researcher followed the phenomenological procedures described by Moustakas (1994). These procedures consisted of: (a) identifying a phenomenon to investigate; (b) bracketing out the researcher’s experiences, biases, and assumptions; (c) collecting data from several participants who have experienced the same phenomenon; (d) analyzing the data by condensing the information into significant statements or quotes; (e) combining the statements into themes; (f) writing a detailed description based on the experiences of the participants; (g) depicting a structural description of the circumstances, conditions, or state in which the participants experienced the phenomenon; and (h) merging the detailed descriptions of the experiences with the descriptions of the circumstances, conditions, and state of the experiences to express the essence of the experience itself.

The first step provided by Moustakas (1994), identifying a phenomenon to investigate, was explained extensively in the previous chapter when the researcher
discussed the purpose and rationale of the current study. The second step, bracketing out the researcher’s biases, by way of epoche, has been discussed in the previous section of this chapter. The third step is discussed extensively in the sampling procedures and instrumentation sections below.

**Sampling Procedure**

Step three in the phenomenological procedures (Moustakas, 1994) involved collecting data from several participants who have experienced the same phenomenon. Purposeful sampling was chosen in the current study in order to achieve representativeness and heterogeneity in the population (Maxwell, 2005). The researcher saw fit to use purposeful sampling in order to gain insight from participants who offered useful manifestations of what it is like to be a Black female who matriculated from a CACREP accredited doctoral program. Purposeful sampling offers information-rich descriptions of the selected phenomenon (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005), in which case the participants explained their retrospective experiences as Black doctoral students who have graduated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs at PWIs. It is suggested by Polkinghorne (1989) to interview 5-25 participants in order for rich descriptions of experiences to develop.

**Participants**

The chosen participants for the study were Black women who graduated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs and were current faculty members at CACREP accredited doctoral programs. The participants were required to have matriculated from their respective programs three years or less from the date in which the study began. The
participants varied in age, economic, marital, and parental statuses. Factors that the participants were required to have included: (a) the identification of themselves as Black women, (b) matriculation from a CACREP accredited doctoral program, and (c) status as a current faculty member at a CACREP accredited doctoral program. CACREP accredited programs were chosen in order to control for differences amongst programs that are not regulated by an accrediting body.

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher contacted the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and approval was obtained (See Appendix A). The researcher placed a request for participation (See Appendix B) on CESNET, a counselor education and supervision Internet network explaining the study and asking interested participants to either call or email the researcher if interested in participating in the study. An IRB approved incentive of a $50 gift card was offered to the participants for completing the interview process.

After receiving correspondence from potential participants, the researcher sent a return email including the participation cover letter (see Appendix B), consent form (see Appendix C), Demographic Questionnaire (see Appendix D), peer review consent form (see Appendix E), and Audio Taping consent form (see Appendix F). The participants were then requested to complete and fax the documents to the researcher.

According to M. Q. Patton (2002), qualitative research findings are developed out of three kinds of data collection: (a) in depth, open-ended interviews; (b) direct observations; and (c) written documents. Interviews yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. Semi structured open-ended
interviews were also used in order to determine the experiences of the participants. This instrumentation afforded the participants the opportunity to tell their story about what it is or was like to be Black female doctoral counselor education students.

One semi structured open-ended phone interview with each participant was conducted. Before the interview, the participants were made aware of the fact that participating in the study was completely voluntary, and that each participant had the right to discontinue their participation at any time. Also before each interview, the researcher reviewed the contents of the consent form, reminding the participants of their consent to participate in the study, peer review procedures, and audio taping consent. Each interview was conducted via a speakerphone in a private setting in order for the interviews to be audio taped by a digital voice-recording device. Each interview lasted approximately one and one half hours.

Each participant was given a number in order to store data, as well as a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. The collected data were stored in a locked filing cabinet prior to being transcribed. After transcription, each digital recording was stored on a password-protected computer and labeled with assigned numbers for each participant. Backup copies of the interviews were recorded on CDs and stored in a locked filing cabinet.

**Instrumentation**

Also included in the third step of the phenomenological procedure (Moustakas, 1994) was the instrumentation method used to collect data from the participants. According to Merriam (2002), in qualitative research, the researcher is the primary
instrument in the study. The researcher is the main tool in collecting and analyzing data, by expanding understanding through nonverbal and verbal communication processes, by clarifying and summarizing for accuracy of interpretation of responses given by the participants. The researcher is a Black female who is currently enrolled in a CACREP accredited doctoral program at a PWI. The researcher has personal experience with the current topic, which is useful in phenomenological research. According to Merriam, the researcher’s personal familiarity and insights are an important part of the investigation, and is critical to understanding the phenomenon being researched.

**Demographic Questionnaire**

Also included in the instrumentation is the Demographic Questionnaire. The Demographic Questionnaire was a form used by the researcher to ask the participants questions in order to gain basic information about the participants. The Demographic Questionnaire included questions such as: (a) age, (b) marital status, (c) current occupational status (assistant or associate professor), (d) number of children, and (e) religious or spiritual affiliation.

**Interviews**

The interviews contained approximately 10 open-ended questions. These questions were derived from the suggestions in the literature about Black women at PWIs possibly experiencing forms of isolation, among other negative feelings, due to the limited amount of Black faculty and students on the predominantly White campus. Also suggested in the literature, and used as a guide, was the use of survival techniques such as mentoring, empowerment, and embracing a collective community, from which questions
were also derived (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Debord & Millner, 1993; Mabokela & Green, 2001; Smith & Davidson, 1992; Williams et al., 2005).

Interview Questions included:

1. How would you describe your experiences of attending a PWI?
2. What experiences stand out as being significant for you?
3. What factors about the academic environment contributed to you completing your program?
4. What factors outside of the academic environment contributed to you completing your program?
5. What factors if any were not helpful about the environment of the doctoral program that you attended?
6. How would you describe any forms of supports you utilized during your doctoral program?
7. How did those supports contribute to you surviving and matriculating through and from the program?
8. What advice would you give a Black woman considering entering a CACREP accredited doctoral program?
9. In what ways did the faculty and staff play a role in your success in the program?

Data Analysis

In keeping with Moustakas’ (1994) procedural steps, steps four through seven are discussed in the data analysis section. These procedural steps were completed separately
for each participant. In the fourth and fifth steps, the researcher analyzed the data by condensing the information into significant statements or quotes as well as combining the statements and or quotes into themes, using interview summary sheets (see Appendix I). These interview summary sheets contained information on frequently used words, cues, attitudes, themes, and reflective feelings given by the participants (Littleton, 2003). The analysis of data followed an inductive approach, meaning patterns, themes, and categories emerged from the data rather than being forced prior to data collection (Littleton, 2003; Merriam, 2002). The participants’ interviews were segmented or de-contextualized, by separating pertinent portions of data from their context (Littleton, 2003; Tesch, 1990). By doing this, the researcher summarized certain significant statements of each participant using the interview summary sheets by filling in the appropriate table. This process afforded the researcher the opportunity to treat all data as being equally important to the data collection process (Yeh & Inman, 2007).

The statements were then grouped into clusters of themes using color-coded poster board and color-coded markers in order to classify differences and similarities connecting the participants’ statements. This categorization allowed the researcher to identify related themes between participants pertaining to the experiences of Black females who matriculated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs.

After the statements were grouped into clusters, the researcher then followed the sixth step by writing a detailed description based on the descriptions reported by the participants in the study. This detailed description included several short paragraphs using the themes, attitudes, and reflections collected in the interview summary sheets.
The next step involved the researcher creating a theme map to describe the circumstances and conditions in which the participants experienced the phenomenon (see Appendix J). The theme map provided a structural depiction of how the participants reported their experiences of matriculating from a CACREP accredited doctoral program, being Black females.

After the researcher created a theme map as a structural description of the participants’ experiences, the researcher completed the last step by merging the detailed descriptions with the structural descriptions by creating a narrative in order to express the essence of what these Black females reported as experiences related to matriculating from a CACREP accredited doctoral program.

**Member Checking**

The researcher attempted to establish credibility by involving the participants in member checking (Creswell, 1994; Maxwell, 2005). Member checking occurred after all data were collected, by the participants receiving transcripts of their own interviews. The participants were emailed an interview transcript and asked to review it for accuracy. This email included a request for the participants to email the researcher any comments or questions they had related to the accuracy or content of their respective transcripts.

**Triangulation**

Peer reviewing also took place in order to provide credibility through triangulation (Merriam, 2002). One of the peer reviewers was a female counselor educator at Middle Tennessee State University. The other peer reviewer was a Black female doctoral student attending the Counselor Education and Supervision program at
Kent State University. These reviewers signed a consent form for purposes of confidentiality. The reviewers reviewed the data, making comments on the recorded themes that emerged during data analysis.

Also in terms of credibility, an auditor was used to examine both the procedures and results of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The auditor was an individual who is knowledgeable in qualitative research procedures and is not part of the researcher’s formal dissertation committee. This role differs from that of a peer reviewer in that the auditor is involved after the completed study, whereas the peer reviewers contribute during the data analysis procedure. Subject to the auditor’s review were the researcher’s research methods including instrumentation, transcripts, themes, structural descriptions, and thematic descriptions. This audit occurred in order to establish whether or not the researcher followed the proposed research process.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

The third chapter presents the results of the phenomenological study which focused on the reflective experiences of matriculated Black females from CACREP accredited doctoral programs. The chapter will be comprised of three sections: The first section of the chapter will focus on a summary of the participants, including demographics, details about each individual, as well as a summary of each participant’s experiences of their doctoral program. The second section of the chapter will focus on a summary of the results of the research findings related to the reflective experiences of the participants. Related to the results of the research findings, three major themes will be discussed. These themes were: 1) Connectedness, 2) Mentoring Relationships, 3) Cultural Differences and 4) Spirituality and Self Determination.

Participants

There were four participants ranging from 34-39 years of age. Each participant met the requirements of identifying as a Black woman, as well as having matriculated from a CACREP accredited doctoral program. All of the participants are assistant professors at a CACREP accredited doctoral or master’s leveled counseling program. The following is a summary of the demographic information provided by each individual. This information includes age, marital status, occupational status, their number of children and religious or spiritual affiliation. Each participant is listed by her assigned pseudonym. Only pseudonyms assigned by the researcher are used to describe the
participants in the study. None of the participants’ actual names, the names of their matriculated institutions or current institutions are mentioned.

**Janice**

Janice is a 39-year-old Black woman, who is originally Caribbean born. Janice is married with a five-year-old child. When asked about the degree of affiliation related to her religion or spirituality, Janice reported “much affiliation.” Janice was the first participant to complete an interview. The interviewer contacted Janice and conducted the interview over the phone. Janice appeared to be very relaxed when answering the interview questions, as marked by her readiness to offer information. As gathered from the interview, Janice attended Historically Black Universities (HBCUs) for her undergraduate and first graduate degrees. She described her experience of attending a PWI for her doctoral degree as being “different.” This experience was different for her due to the fact that she is from a predominantly Black country, as well as having attended HBCUs for most of her educational career. Janice pointed out the fact that at the beginning of her program there were no African American faculty members in her department. Janice reported that not having Black faculty and colleagues was “a difficult culture shock for her.” She stated that “she felt disconnected from the faculty due to the lack of Black faculty in her department.” She credited her department as having provided her with a good education; however she felt “as if she was not afforded the assistance she thought she needed to be successful in her program.” Janice offered the example that “her advisor was admittedly not very knowledgeable about diversity or multicultural issues.” According to Janice, culture is and was a very important interest in regard to her
dissertation topic. However, her assigned advisor was not able to offer her the amount of support needed for her to successfully complete the dissertation process. Janice noted that “of the possible advisors, her assigned advisor was the most knowledgeable in her particular area of interest.” Because of this, and with the help of her advisor, Janice reported going outside of the university for assistance with her dissertation process. Related to the lack of assistance, Janice reported having “to work twice as hard to seek out resources than students who were of the majority population in her program.” Janice credited her father and brother who are both involved in academia with having provided her with the assistance that she felt she needed.

When asked about what factors contributed to her completing her program in and outside of the academic environment, Janice stated that “her self-determination is what really helped push her through the doctoral process.” Related to her self-determination, Janice also stated that “her spiritual convictions, including prayer, helped her stay motivated to complete her degree.” After self-determination and spiritual convictions, Janice acknowledged that she and her peers had a “good relationship that gave them the opportunity to support one another through very rough times in their doctoral process.” Another factor that Janice attributed to helping her complete her program was her family. She stated that “hearing her family’s encouraging and motivating words helped her to stay focused on her goal of finishing her doctoral program.”

Janice also stated that one significant thing that stood out for her in her program was the lack of support from other African American females who were further along in the program. Janice reported feeling surprised about other Black women not being
willing to help someone who had so much in common with them. Another significant factor that stood out to Janice was the fact that she and others in her cohort were able to point out various situations where white privilege played a role in White students having more opportunities than the minority students. She contributed feeling as if she had to work twice as hard as people of the majority population to be just as good or better in the eyes of her professors, to this White privilege.

When asked what advice she would give other Black women who may be considering attending a CACREP accredited doctoral program at a PWI, she had several pointers to offer. The first suggestion was to do research about available support systems within the department and the university. Associated with collective support systems, Janice advised that Black women considering attending a CACREP accredited doctoral program conduct research pertaining to whether or not there are minority individuals who may be willing to “take them under their wings.” Janice added that if there are no minority faculty members within the department, to find one outside of the department for mentoring or support, professionally and emotionally.

Janice stated that she thought it was important for Black women to have other Black women as role models or mentors during their doctoral process. She attributed this to her opinion that “a Black female may have more knowledge about what other Black females may have to encounter while in their programs than people of other sexes and ethnicities. This knowledge,” Janice added, “may be helpful in providing leadership, mothering and correction for Black women.” She also stated that “having a mentor that looked like her and represented what was important to her as a black woman, helped her
stay grounded and focused, and that that is something that may be helpful for other Black women as well.”

**Etta**

Etta is a 37-year-old Black woman who is married with two children ages four and six. Etta reported “much religious or spiritual affiliation,” when asked about the level of affiliation related to her religion or spirituality. Etta was the second participant to complete a phone interview for the study. She too, was very open and ready to provide as much information as she could. When asked about her experiences completing her doctoral degree at a PWI, Etta reported mixed feelings. She stated that “because all of her educational experiences had previously been completed at PWIs she felt like she knew what to expect.” Therefore, Etta reported “not being surprised by the treatment she received.” When describing these experiences, Etta stated that “she felt isolated, due to the fact that she was the only minority student in the program throughout the three year process.” Etta continued the description of this feeling of isolation, stating that “she often times felt like an outsider.” Etta stated that “she felt as if others in her cohort and program as a whole, had made personal connections; however, she never felt part of any of those connections.” She added that “the people in the program were always friendly, but she always felt like an afterthought.”

When asked about what factors contributed to her completing her doctoral program, Etta answered that it had to be her determination. Etta stated that “she knew she was going to finish the program and the she could not fail and could not give up.”
Etta reported that a negative factor about her experience in her doctoral program was not having a support system. She stated that “she felt as if she was never in the loop, and lacked the opportunity to receive pertinent information needed to be successful as a doctoral student.” Not only did Etta report experiencing a disconnection from her peers, but also experiencing disconnection from the faculty as well. She stated that “she was never offered the opportunity to work with individual professors on writing projects or even taught about the process of getting those opportunities.” Unlike Janice, Etta reported a lack of support from friends and family. Etta contributed this lack of support to her friends and family being “ignorant of what it takes to complete a doctoral program.”

When asked to describe any forms of support that Etta used in her program, her first response was prayer. Etta stated that “prayer assisted in her keeping the determination to continue her program.” The next form of support that Etta reported was a minority professor who took out the time to help her as much as she could. Etta continued, “The professor was new and limited, however she acted as a sounding board when Etta felt the need for one.” It was also reported that the minority professor supported Etta in the interview process during her job search.

When offering advice to black women considering entering a CACREP accredited doctoral program at a PWI, Etta suggested “finding a professor of color that may be willing to act as an ally or mentor.” She suggested that “perhaps that person could provide the woman with information that would potentially contribute to her success in the doctoral program and in a professional sense also.” Etta stated that “a mentor may
help with navigation through the doctoral process as well as helping with professional connections.” Etta also suggested that “the woman actively seek out support systems, whether in a different school, a cohort or program.” Etta stressed the importance of being around people that understood what it was like to be a doctoral student as a form of support as well.

Courtney

Courtney is an international Black woman who is married with a two-year-old child. Due to cultural reasons, Courtney reported no age. When reporting her level of religious or spiritual affiliation, Courtney reported “much affiliation.” Courtney was very cautious at the beginning of the interview, stating that “she wanted to make sure all of her information was confidential and did not lead to her factual identity.” After she was assured that the interview process would be strictly confidential and that her past and present universities would not be mentioned, Courtney appeared open and eager to answer any questions posed to her. Courtney described the experiences in her doctoral program as “being set up for a different group of people.” She stated that she felt as if, “due to a lack of exposure, the majority of the faculty did not understand nor were they interested in minority issues.” Courtney reported feeling “as though she missed out on several opportunities due to her minority status. When asked about these missed opportunities, Courtney discussed the fact that she observed many of the opportunities going to the majority students, with the leftovers being given to the minority students”. These opportunities included research, writing projects and teaching responsibilities.
When asked what factors contributed to the completion of her program, Courtney stated that “the cohort system was very useful to her.” She stated that “being able to have a support system consisting of a group of people to hold her accountable during the candidacy and dissertation phases contributed to her success.” Courtney added that having “really good” professors that were very encouraging despite their lack of knowledge of minority issues was also a contributing factor of her success. She reported “having professors who were actively involved in leadership, had strong professional identities, were involved in research and had good work-life balance.” She stated that all of these characteristics made for good role models for her future career as a professor.

When answering the question of what factors outside of the academic environment contributed to her completing her program, Courtney credited her commitment to her goals as well as the support of her family and friends. Courtney stated that “her family and friends continuously encouraged her to persist throughout her doctoral program regardless of the bumps and hardships that she faced.” Courtney reported that “spirituality was also a form of support that she utilized during her program.” Courtney explained that her spirituality, family and friends provided encouragement through the very tough times that she encountered. Courtney also reported having a mentor of color outside of her department, who encouraged her as being a contributing factor to her success in the program. The last factor that Courtney attributed to her success in her doctoral program was “taking time for herself and her family outside of the doctoral process.”
A negative factor that Courtney reported was “not being able to start the dissertation process earlier in her program.” She reported that “starting the dissertation process after her comprehensive exams was an unaccommodating factor that was both frustrating and delayed her progress in her program.” Another negative factor was inconsistent mentoring from faculty members. Courtney reported, that “at times she felt as if there was a mentoring relationship; however, that relationship only lasted for short periods of time and only carried so many benefits.”

When offering advice to Black women considering enrolling in a CACREP accredited doctoral program at a PWI, Courtney reported a multitude of suggestions. The first suggestion was “to find a person of color that could act as a mentor, who would encourage and guide them through the doctoral process.” The next suggestion made was “to continue to have a life outside of the doctoral and dissertation processes by taking time to smell the roses and spending time with family and friends.” Another suggestion was “for the woman to choose her dissertation committee wisely.” Courtney also recommended not working or working part time if the woman could afford it, in order to speed up her process. Courtney added to her suggestions with the recommendation of “connecting with a group of people or a cohort that would hold the woman accountable, especially in her dissertation process.” Courtney also stressed the “importance of having a timeline relating to the dissertation process.” Lastly, Courtney suggested that the woman begin to write her dissertation early in her program. She added that the topic may be changed on several occasions, but the woman would at least have had the experience of writing, before the actual dissertation phase began.
Katrina

Katrina is a 34-year old Black woman who is single with no children. When asked about her level of religious or spiritual affiliation, Katrina stated that she would consider herself to have much religious or spiritual affiliation. Katrina openly answered all of the questions presented to her. Katrina described her experiences during her doctoral program with several responses. First, Katrina noted that “all three of her educational experiences were at PWI, and that she had nothing to compare her experiences to.” Next, she noted that there always seemed to be very few students of color. Katrina stated that “having such a few number of students of color sometimes hindered the opportunity to form supportive network systems.” Katrina also described her feelings about “constantly being stereotyped by the majority peers and faculty members.” Katrina explained that “there were several occasions where her peers and faculty members would seem shocked or amazed at her level of success because she was a Black woman.” Due to this “stereotyping”, she stated that she felt as if she always had to work “extra hard” in order to be just as good or better than other students. The last point made by Katrina related to her experiences in her doctoral program. In her eyes, “there seemed to be a lot of talk about diversity and diversity issues, but very little done to improve the conditions for minority students as a whole”.

One significant thing that stood out for Katrina about her doctoral process was “the lack of support from other Black faculty members.” Katrina reported that there were several Black faculty members in her department; however she reported “being shocked at the lack of interest placed on the black students by the Black faculty members.”
Katrina described the attitudes of the Black faculty members as being “waterish, and likened it to a hazing.” She added that “there was often a sense of having to go through the Black faculty members in order to be successful in the program.” Katrina reported that the black students had a sense that these “negative” attitudes were specifically directed to the black students in the program rather than to everyone.

Katrina stated that “some factors about the academic environment that contributed to her completing the doctoral program included having supportive departments like graduate retention programs, and statistic refresher classes.” Katrina added that “the support and collaboration of and with her colleagues was also a positive academic factor that contributed to her success in the program.”

There were also factors outside of the academic environment that Katrina contributed to her successfully completing the program. Katrina stated that “her faith played a big part in helping her stay determined and self assured.” She reported “having coping mechanisms, such as spending time with family and friends during social gatherings.” Katrina also noted that she has had previous work experience and was familiar with the politics and how to endure them. Katrina stated,“ some of the support systems that she utilized was having a connection with advocates across campus and outside of her department, as well as relying on other doctoral students for normalization.”

When reporting factors that were not helpful about her doctoral environment, Katrina stated that “having to navigate through the politics was limiting.” Katrina reflected on having to “rework” her dissertation committee and how much negative
feedback she encountered because of this. In addition to this instance Katrina reported that “the students would often times feel like children of divorced parents, due to the constant bickering amongst the faculty as a whole”. Another negative factor mentioned by Katrina was her opinion that “self care for students was not promoted.” She added that “at times the pressures placed on students by the faculty made it impossible to balance the demands of work, teaching, research, class and family.” Katrina elaborated about the “faculty not doing a good job of promoting this work-life balance as well as lacking understanding of what the students were going through.” She stated that “she would use the faculty as role models for what not to do with her future students.”

When offering suggestions to Black women considering entering a CACREP accredited doctoral program, Katrina recommended that “the women be careful about selecting a dissertation committee”. She stressed that “the women should not choose their committee based on rapport, but based on who they will be able to finish with.” Katrina added that “it is important to stay focused on the goal of graduating and not settling for the „ABD” label.” Katrina warned that “the process would not be easy and may include hard times emotionally, physically, and financially, but for the women to remain persistent and tenacious about completing the process.”

Summary of Results and Themes

The participants’ statements were segmented and placed into cluster themes during the analysis of the data. All of the women shared very interesting points about their experiences during their doctoral programs. Interestingly, the varied answers were similar on several levels. Consequently, there were five major themes that were derived
from the participants’ answers. The themes gathered from the interviews were: a) Connectedness, b) Mentoring Relationships, c) Cultural Differences and d) Spirituality.

**Connectedness**

The leading question for this study inquired about the participants’ reflective experiences during their doctoral program. All of the women reported negative and positive experiences when answering this question. Clusters were derived from this theme based on the responses given by the women. These clusters were a) isolation, b) relationships/support from cohorts, and c) relationships with family and friends.

Feeling connected to fellow students and faculty members is a strong component of experiencing a sense of community (Rovai, Wighting, and Liu, 2005; Rovai, 2002; Smith et al., 2006). Rovai (2002) suggests that connectedness consists of experiencing a sense of belonging and approval while developing genuine relationships with peers and faculty members. In the professional literature, it is explained that the more a student feels recognized as a member of the learning community, cultivates friendships and feels as if they fit in the community, the more likely they are to persist through their program. Further, the more connected a student feels the less likely the student feels isolated during their doctoral program.

In the current study, with regards to connectedness, two of the women reported some positive points in addition to the negative experiences. The one negative feeling word that was used by all of the participants was “isolation.” All of the women described their experiences as feeling like an outsider, not only with faculty but with their peers as
well. Other word segments used were “disconnection,” “afterthought,” “underexposed,” “white privilege,” “limited amount of black people,” and “the lack of work-life balance.”

Etta was very careful when she answered the following,

I did feel isolated in the program being the only minority student in the Ph.D. program for the entire three years. I felt that the other people in the program sort of connected. I always felt like the outsider. Everyone was very friendly and nice and open, but still there was a sense of disconnect. I didn’t go out, not that I wasn’t invited, but to me I was like an afterthought. If someone was going out for a get together, I was always invited. But it still didn’t feel like a true connection. So that will always stand out to me.

Related to the concept of community, is the climate of the institution. The climate of the institution may influence matriculation and program satisfaction. The three shaping factors of community climate are 1) individual student attributes, 2) environmental interactions and 3) the culture of the environment (Lovitts, 2005).

Individual student attributes includes concepts such as the level of intelligence, personality and learning style of the student. These attributes cannot be manipulated after entering the program of study.

Environmental interaction consists of the location of the institution, location of the department, and interaction between peers, faculty and staff. Katrina reflected on her experience by discussing the lack of black students in her program:
The one thing that I can say about attending PWIs is that there always seems like there are so few black students. This makes it really difficult to form support groups with people in the cohort.

Lastly, the cultural environment is depicted as the culture of graduate education and discipline. Courtney described her experience as believing that the program was “set up for a different group of people”:

I did feel like there was one faculty member who was pseudo- minority who kind of understood the minority issues, but the majority of the people did not quite understand. I also felt that it was set up for a different group of people. I felt that a lot of the opportunities that came were to the majority counseling students, and then if there was anything left to the minority students.

Janice described a situation about her experience that referenced white privilege:

I felt like I had to prove myself. I felt like I had to go the extra mile. One of my good friends was the only white man in our cohort, and it was just so evident how he was treated differently. He actually admitted this because one of the things we did was challenge each other a lot on our worldview, diversity and our perceptions of privilege and those kinds of things. On more than one occasion he said, “I know that I get more than you do.” Of course he wasn’t ready to give it up!

Lovitts (2002) suggests that both the environmental interaction and the culture of the learning environment should be managed in order to influence program satisfaction as well as the likelihood of the student continuing and matriculating from their program.
A positive theme that was reported by the women was the relationships with their cohorts. All but one of the women reported positive feeling words such as “encouraging,” “accountability,” “motivating,” and “normalizing” when describing this relationship. One of the women described her cohort as being “unsupportive” and “isolating.” Rovai (2002) suggests that emotional connectedness plays a significant role in increasing the sense of association and belongingness. Having this sense of community entails an elevated level of involvement, peer confidence, and commitment to cultivating this sense of community. By reaching this sense of connection, improved satisfaction and program matriculation is increased.

The participants that reported having positive experiences with their cohort described their cohorts and/or study groups as being a large supportive factor in their doctoral experience. Courtney elaborated on the helpfulness of her cohort:

The cohort system was definitely great. I think that even within the cohort, we were able to get along regardless of minority or majority status for the most part. Definitely just the holding each other accountable was a positive factor for me.

Janice also spoke about her cohorts as being helpful to her success:

I also had classmates who were really, really helpful. We came in as a cohort and we really just held each other’s hands. We also walked each other through stuff. And the cohort before us they just kind of took us in, and that also helped.

Katrina described her relationship with her cohorts as positive as well using words such as “supportive” and “collaborating”: 
I would say my colleagues were supportive. Even though we had some real interesting experiences, I would say the Black students, amongst ourselves, provided a support system for each other. It was kind of like, “we can’t go to them, so we might as well support each other.” I think that was another part of it, just us supporting each other. Just us saying to each other, “Hey, hang in there.” Us encouraging each other and saying, “Hey you’ll make it, you’ll get through.” And helping each other with presentations and you know collaborating at these conferences and presenting together, going to each other’s houses and homes having potlucks and playing Taboo, Spades, and anything that we could do to just not think about school. I think that was a coping mechanism for me.

Smith et al. (2006) note that having a lack of support systems is a factor that can create stress for doctoral students. Without certain support systems the students lack the experiences of an environment that provides acceptance and understanding along with resources that help cope with difficult situations that arise as a result of their doctoral program (Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Dowdy, 2005; Gregory, 2001; Moyer et al., 1999; Williams et al., 2005).

Etta mentioned negative aspects about the relationship between her and her cohort group:

I would say… for me not having a support system (was not helpful). Um that’s the big one. And when I say support system, um like I said everyone was friendly and nice but I still felt like I was not in the loop. There are certain, there are bits and pieces of certain information that other people got that I didn’t get.
Um things like that um, not you know not being published. Like the other people got the opportunity to work with professors you know on articles and I didn’t you know I wasn’t taught how you go about doing that. Or the things I needed to do. So you know pieces of information like that were not given to me as readily as it was given to other people in the program. Um you know not having a study group. Like other people in the program would get together and study for things and you know I didn’t have that so I call it that support to me was the biggest factor.

The third cluster reported under support systems was family and friends. All but one of the women expressed relying on their family and friends as a resource during their doctoral career. The women used words like “motivating,” and “encouraging” when referring to this particular support system. All of the women that reported family and friends as being a helpful support system spoke about them affectionately and with pride. Courtney also discussed how her family and friends were supportive in the doctoral process for her. She too used feeling words such as “encouraging” and “supportive”:

Courtney elaborated:

My family was very intimately involved with the process. My family and friends were also very supportive. They knew when to give me space, when to kick me behind the back just to make me keep going, and I appreciated that. I needed to get done and they definitely encouraged me. I also had friends who had either just completed a dissertation or were in the process of completing one, and so
they too were helpful. Especially when people started graduating, they were like ok, “What’s going on, you’re being left behind.” That kind of motivated me to move on.

Janice discussed the relationship between her and her family members as a being a sense of “encouragement” and “support”:

And my family supports were encouraging. My family saying, “You know you can do this you can get through this.” They helped me realize that the PhD is not me, that I’m working on a PhD and it doesn’t define who I am.

Katrina also described her family as being supportive and encouraging in her doctoral program:

My family was supporting me and encouraging me to during that process.

Etta reported negative experiences with friends and family using such words as “isolated”:

And (I experienced a) lack of support from family. My family wanted me to succeed, you know, but I don’t think they knew what it all entailed. So it’s one thing to say “yes I support you going to school and I know you’re going to be studying,” but not knowing what goes into doing a dissertation; so that factored into it as well. That’s a difficult question for me because, throughout the program I felt very isolated, not just from the cohort but from my own friends. I didn’t have a life outside of the program anymore. So friends, you know, didn’t really know what it took to, you know, move through the program.
Mentoring Relationships

All of the women reported having some form of mentoring throughout their doctoral program. In addition to these reports, all of the women reported some positive experience associated with a mentor while in addition to her positive experiences, Courtney reported one negative feeling as well. All of the women reported both positive and negative experiences related to establishing support systems or mentoring relationships during their doctoral program. These support systems included support within their individual departments as well as people and groups outside of the academic environment. Some of the word segments used to describe the mentoring relationships were “black woman”, “encouragement”, “Understanding”, “support and understanding” and “reaching outside of the department.” When asked to elaborate on their thoughts of having mentors, all of the participants stressed the importance of having a female mentor of color that would understand what other black women encountered on a day-to-day basis.

Clusters were derived for this theme based on the participant responses on their support systems and mentoring relationships. The clusters were: a) relationships/support from faculty members, b) relationships/support from outside faculty members c) relationships/support with Black female faculty members.
**Relationships/support with program faculty members.** The negative aspects of the support system were reported by all four participants. This negative aspect was the report of a lack or limitation of support from the faculty. The women used words such as “unknowledgeable,” “uncaring,” “isolating,” “stereotyping,” “majority” and “inconsistent” to describe their experiences with faculty in their department.

Janice explained that her advisor was significantly older than she was. She also explained that he admitted that he was not very interested or knowledgeable in her research area, and may not have been very helpful to her during her research process. Janice continued, explaining that her advisor assisted her with finding an outside faculty member to help her with her research:

I didn’t feel like I was given all the assistance I could have been given. It was very obvious that I could see some privilege going on. Because of this and other reasons, I felt like I had to seek out assistance from other places to feel supported and to feel like I could accomplish what I wanted to. My advisor was much older than I am. He was very honest about the fact that he didn’t know very much about diversity, and didn’t know very much about culture or multicultural issues. So he was just not very helpful in terms of my research interest because as he admitted, he didn’t know much about it.

Courtney described her “mentoring/support” relationship with the faculty members at the institution she attended as follows as “inconsistent” and “static”:

I felt like it was not continuous, like we had a mentoring relationship and then… it’s like you are watching an analogue television set and then you got the static
When asked about the relationship between her and her program’s faculty members, Katrina described a lack of support specifically from Black faculty members:

What stands out the most is the lack of support from other black faculty. If you talk about what has been the biggest shock, that would be it. Professors that profess that they support diversity and that they support multiculturalism somehow treated black students like they were second class citizens. The way I would liken it is to the experience of Barak (Obama) and Jessie (Jackson), “having to go through me and some of the other Black leaders.” It was sort of like that. I heard of white students getting together with white faculty members academically and socially. We (Black students) didn’t have that in my program. We were going through things and experiences that the white students didn’t have to go through, but we didn’t have anybody to go to for help.

There were responses from the women that described their experiences with their faculty members as somewhat positive but limited. Two of the women elaborated about the limited support from faculty. These limitations resulted from “lack of awareness”, “lack of experience” and “politics.”

Etta described her relationship with a Black Professor in her program that was positive; however she stated that “the support was limited due to the lack of experience and politics”:

There was one African American professor who was able to talk to me and tell me some things that I needed to be doing. The downside to that was that she was a new professor herself. So she did what she could within the confines of what she
There was one African American professor who was able to talk to me and tell me some things that I needed to be doing. The downside to that was that she was a new professor herself. So she did what she could within the confines of what she was going through as a new professor. You know, trying to get tenure. I could go in there you know in her office and talk, and complain and vent. So that was there.

Courtney discussed issues that she had with her faculty members regarding a “lack of awareness” with diversity or multicultural issues:

And then there were some really good professors who were just very encouraging. But just to make it clear that sometimes, even those, many times they were not aware of the minority issues that I was facing. However, it was challenging and exposing and eye opening in many ways that I find really exciting.

**Relationships/support with outside faculty members.** All of the participants discussed the lack of minority faculty mentors in their specific departments. Because of this, all four of the women spoke about reaching outside of the university for support from outside minority faculty members. Also when asked what sort of advice they would give a Black women considering entering a CACREP accredited doctoral program at a PWI, all of them suggested finding a support system outside of the program if necessary. Katrina explained:

The people that I could reach out to were wonderful. There was a woman who was to support the minority students and their efforts on campus. Also reaching
out to all of the advocates in other departments was helpful to get validation that I wasn’t crazy and others were experiencing the same difficulties that I was.

Courtney pointed out that she had an outside faculty member with whom she had a relationship with that was helpful to talk to:

I did have a different faculty member who was not from the school. And this person was great, but I almost found that they were so pro-black, that they’re almost anti-white. That doesn’t quite fit with me when it comes to the anti white, but the fact was that it was really important to this person for me to finish and that was very helpful.

Janice spoke about her advisor helping her find a faculty member outside of the university whose research interests aligned more closely with those of her own:

Yes, it turned out to be positive, it turned out to be just what we both needed, and it came to the point where he said to me you do what you need to do. You can seek out assistance elsewhere, so one of my mentors became a professor from Nevis, another one of the Caribbean islands, who was an expert. He taught Caribbean politics and history and so he became one of my helpers because he was more knowledgeable with the topic.

**Mentoring relationships with Black female faculty members.** All of the women discussed the need to have some sort of mentoring relationship with Black female faculty members. Some of the women talked about experiences that they have had, while others spoke about the importance of future Black female doctoral students seeking the support of Black female mentors. When making suggestions to Black women
I think that it’s important for an African American female doctoral student to have a Black female mentor. I think that the recognition is that you could probably get mentoring from anybody, but I think if you are with someone who has walked the road, it’s helpful. Like I said, if you’d asked me that four or five years ago I would say no it doesn’t matter but, at this point I think so. From my own experiences I’m going through, yeah. I think there are just some things that Black women understand that people of other ethnicities just don’t. And I really, really think that you can have all the other people’s help but I think it’s really good to have a mother figure, who will you keep you grounded and tell you when you are messing up.

Etta spoke about an African American professor who she reported to be very helpful not only in the area of academics, but also in a professional sense throughout her program:

As far as the professor, it was just giving me the knowledge and providing that encouragement that I needed. You know, helping me step by step. She was a sounding board and provided me opportunities to do research and to get publications. And I forgot about this. She also helped me when it can to the interview process. She helped me put my portfolio together, listened to me as I did my presentation for the interviews and helped write my letter of intent professional statement. You know all those types of things she was there for. And this was on the weekends. I mean it wasn’t like during her office hours or anything, this was on Saturdays or Sundays.
Cultural Differences

Another theme that was derived from the women’s responses was “Cultural differences.” This theme was discussed in reference to words such as “culture shock,” “collectivist culture” and “exposure.” Three of the women expressed experiences related to having “Cultural differences” with the White professors as well as white cohorts of their respective programs.

Janice discussed her doctoral experience as being “different” due to coming from being a part of the majority to being part of the minority. Not only was Janice from a predominantly Black country, all of her collegiate experiences were at HBCUs. Janice also discussed the experiences she had with professors “not accepting or understanding her culture”:

Having come from a predominately-Black country, it was very different for me. And I think that initially I did not recognize some of the subtleties of, what I term as discrimination. And I didn’t feel like I was given all the assistance I could. It was very obvious that I could see, some privilege going on. … For me one thing that was not helpful was some people not understanding me or my culture. Um for example, in my country we spell the British way, so my computer was always set on the British spelling. I had a professor who made the decision to give me a B- instead an A just because I used the British spelling, cause she just took off for every “misspelled” to use her term word. That was very painful, so that wasn’t helpful. I think also….just feeling like I had to go above and beyond. As a
person of color and as a person who is not American; it’s almost like I felt like I had to prove myself based on the reception I got.

Courtney, also from a predominantly Black culture, expressed her experiences of cultural difference between her and the program faculty. When asked about what some experiences were that “stood out for her” in her doctoral program Courtney explained:

Um, the interviewing was significant for me. I was very excited about joining the program. The people who I interviewed with who ended up being my advisors through and after the candidacy stage were great. After I spoke with them I thought this is it! And I came in and it was it, but then somewhere something changed. Maybe my expectations were different. Maybe I come from a collectivist culture and it was very individualistic in this setting. It was more difficult- I felt like I would have to change my personality for me to get what I needed. And um I feel like I missed a lot of opportunities because of my minority status.

Katrina discussed cultural difference in a different manner. When asked about what “stood out for her,” she discussed her experiences with black professors not being supportive of black students in the program. Katrina also spoke of this experience as being a shock to her and not understanding how “the people that she thought would be an ally for her actually made it more difficult for her.” Katrina noted that “culturally” this went against all of her thoughts about supporting those who are ethnically and culturally the same. This reference is repeated from above; however, this experience also pertains to the shock related to cultural differences that was reported by three of the women.
This is going to be extremely controversial, but what stands out the most is the lack of support from other black faculty. If you talk about what has been the biggest shock that would be it. I heard of white students getting together with white faculty members academically and socially. We (Black students) didn’t have that in my program. We were going through things and experiences that the white students didn’t have to go through, but we didn’t have anybody to go to for help.

**Spirituality**

The last theme gathered from the data was the very strong response of spirituality and determination. When asked the question of what factors contributed to them matriculating from their doctoral program, the one word that was used by each participant was “determination.” “Prayer,” “Spirituality”, “Self assurance” and “Commitment” were also word phrases used by the participants.

One of the questions posed to the women was: “What influences outside of the academic environment contributed to them successfully completing their doctoral program?” In addition to the support systems mentioned above, all of the women spoke in some way about having a sense of self-determination. Some of the feeling words used were “determination,” “tenacity,” “commitment,” “coping mechanisms” and “driven.” The researcher chose to combine “Spirituality” and “Determination” into one theme because the women spoke of determination in a spiritual sense. All of the women referred to their determination being related to their faith and belief systems at one point in time in each of the interviews.
Janice noted that her determination stems from her cultural background.

As my dad said to me, as a Caribbean person, we tend to be very driven. And so I think that that drive inside of me also related to my culture. I’m driven because of where we’re coming from and knowing that this is an honor to be in this country to get an education. Um I think that’s taken into consideration. I think just by nature we’re taught to be very hard working. Because when you live on an island where there were limited resources, you kind of know that you have to work really hard.

Courtney discussed her determination when asked about what outside factors have contributed to her successfully completing the program: “Um I had begun, I was committed to it, I was committed to the process, and um I knew eventually I will return home and I need this credential. It’s part of my life goals so.”

Etta stated that “she had a hard time finding factors of the academic environment that she felt contributed to her completing her program.” She explained that though people were nice, she thought that mainly personal things helped her through her program.

Well, I mean it was just my determination, I knew that I was going to finish the program. More so than anything else, I knew that I would not fail. I knew that I would not give up, and was going to continue. I can’t put my name on any academic piece.
Some of the women described finding a support system in religious groups. For instance, Janice described being very close to her international bible study group and utilizing them as a source of motivation and encouragement.

I was a part of an organization called the international bible study, where there are people from all over the world. Most of us were in academia. There were people from Bulgaria, Egypt, China and Taiwan. We just kind of came together and fellowshipped and prayed for each other. The day I defended my dissertation, there were people from all over the world in the room. And there was a group of them outside having a prayer session while I was defending.

**Member Checking/Triangulation**

In order to establish credibility, the researcher utilized member checking and Triangulation. The member checks were completed by sending the transcripts of the individual interviews to the participants through email. Each participant reviewed and commented on their respective transcripts. All of the participants made minor corrections such as a spelling of a person’s name or corrections of city names. All of the participants reported being satisfied with their individual transcripts.

There were two peer reviewers for this study. The peer reviewers reviewed the study and made comments related to themes and their perceptions of the participants’ responses. From the peer reviewing, two concepts arose: 1) Themes that were mentioned by the peer reviewers and the researcher and 2) Themes that the reviewers mentioned that the researcher did not.
Themes Mentioned by Reviewers and Researcher

The reviewers and researcher agreed on all of the themes that were mentioned in the above chapter. The researcher elaborated on the themes, resulting in the clusters; however, the four basic themes were seen by both the reviewers and the researcher alike.

Themes That Were Mentioned by the Reviewers and not by the Researcher

The following were concepts mentioned by the reviewers that were adapted as themes or clusters:

1. Faculty awareness - Book knowledge vs. life knowledge
2. Internal/external cultural experiences
3. Internal/external support - resources, empathy, understanding
4. Spiritual internal connections
5. Minority vs. majority opportunities/treatment

Triangulation assisted the researcher in conceptualizing themes and clusters based on concepts that were overlooked. All of the above-mentioned concepts were adapted as themes or clusters based on the suggestions of the reviewers.

Some of the perceptions of the peer reviewers were:

1. Shock from the isolated feeling of participants.
2. Disappointment by the political injustices
3. Disappointment by the racial injustices
4. Hope based on the participants determination and tenacity.

The researcher processed the perceptions and suggestions of the peer reviewers in order to decide whether to include some of the suggestions and perceptions in the study.
The conclusions that were made by the researcher were based on not only the feeling words provided by the interviewees, but based on some of the researcher’s experiences related to the themes as well.

**Summary of Chapter III**

This chapter presented the phenomenological research findings of the study investigating the reflective experiences of Black females who have matriculated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs. The themes discussed in this chapter suggest a set configuration to the reflective experiences of Black females who have matriculated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs. This configuration consists of four themes: 1) Connectedness, 2) Mentoring Relationships, 3) Cultural Differences, and 4) Spirituality.

Chapter IV will examine these themes in relation to what has been previously studied about the experiences of Black females who have matriculated from doctoral level CACREP accredited programs. Delimitations of the study will also be discussed. The researcher will then introduce suggestions for future research on the experiences of Black females who have matriculated from doctoral level CACREP accredited programs.
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

The findings of the current study offer an in depth depiction of the reflective experiences of Black females who have successfully matriculated from a CACREP accredited doctoral program. As stated in the previous chapter, the findings of the study resulted in a set configuration for these experiences. This configuration consists of four major themes: 1) Connectedness, 2) Mentoring Relationships, 3) Cultural Differences and 4) Spirituality.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the meaning of the findings. The chapter is divided into six sections: 1) Findings related to the research on the experiences of Black females who have matriculated from CACREP accredited programs, 2) Contributions to the Literature 3) Implications for the field of Counselor Education, 4) Reflections of the researcher 5) Limitations of the current study and 6) Future research and suggestions.

Findings Related to Previous Research

The current study investigated the reflective experiences of Black females who have successfully matriculated from a CACREP accredited doctoral program. The study had one major research question: What are the reflective experiences of matriculated Black females from CACREP accredited doctoral programs? A sub-topic in question focused on the interest of any reported survival skills and resiliency displayed by the females during their doctoral programs.
The intent of the study was to offer a closer look at the experiences of a particular group in a particular setting. The examination of this particular group is missing from the previous literature. The previous literature is focused on graduate student experiences and offers in depth perspectives on the experiences of graduate level minorities and doctoral students in Counselor Education programs. However, what is missing in the literature is a comprehensive synopsis of the experiences of Black women who have previously matriculated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs. The current study aimed to offer just that. Due to the nature of the study, it is not intended to offer generalizations for a large population, but is specific to the chosen sample described in the previous chapters. It is also the intent of the researcher to evoke a sense of understanding of the several themes offered by the participants and its relativity to what has previously been studied.

Related to the above statement, the current study’s findings are both similar to and different from previous research on minority doctoral student experiences in several ways. One difference between the current study and previous research is that the previous research is problem focused and heavily attrition based, while the current study investigated ways in which the participants were able to complete their doctoral program successfully.

This section of the chapter will focus on the similarities and differences between the current study’s findings and previous research on minority doctoral students’ experiences. Themes derived from the current study’s findings which are related to the
previous research were: Connectedness, Mentoring Relationships, Cultural Differences, and Spirituality.

**Connectedness**

The participants reported several topics related to feeling connected. Some of these feelings included feeling isolated in their programs, having support from their cohorts, as well as having the support of their family and friends. These sub-themes are discussed below.

**Isolation.** A major component discussed by all of the participants was how connected or disconnected they felt to others while they were completing their programs. As described in Chapter IV, the women discussed feelings of isolation. This isolation is relative to the closeness or distance that the participants felt from their faculty members, peers, family and friends.

The isolation theme is consistent with the literature. Lewis et al. (2004) examined the experiences of African American PhD students at a PWI. One of the major themes discussed was students experiencing “feelings of isolation.” Similar to what the women offered in the current study, “Feelings of isolation” in Lewis et al. (2004) included feeling invisible and alone in terms of other students, faculty and staff. The participants in the current study described undergoing a sense of isolation due to the lack of faculty and “Students of Color” visible on campus. The women often described feeling like an “outsider” and described themselves as an “afterthought” or “invisible” to their faculty and peers.
The participants in the current study also discussed isolation in terms of not feeling understood by faculty members or their peers. Results from Lewis et al. (2004) also support this finding. Participants in that study described this feeling as “standing out,” which was a common feeling of a lack of understanding by the faculty and university as a whole. Also reflected in the previous literature and related to the theme of isolation, Jones et al. (2002) examined ethnic minority students’ experiences at PWIs. The participants in the Jones et al. (2002) study reported a limited amount or lack of support for diversity on campus, as well as a non-welcoming environment. They also reported a sense of non-representation of “People of Color” from the staff and campus as a whole.

**Relationships/support with cohorts.** Associated with being connected to others, the participants of the current study noted the importance of relationships with their peers, when discussing the factors that contributed to them successfully completing their doctoral studies. According to the participants, one factor that was helpful in their doctoral programs was having the support of their cohorts and peers. The women used descriptive words such as “encouraging,” “accountability,” “motivating,” and “normalizing” when describing these relationships. The notion of acquiring the support of peers or cohorts is supported in the previous research on the current topic. In several studies cited in the literature review, the participants stressed the notion of having relationships with peers and feeling a source of limited resources, such as networking and student services (Dowdy, et al., 2000; Patton & Harper, 2003; Williams et al., 2005).
Fischer and Zigmond (1998) proposed a connection between survival skills and the success of a graduate student. These survival skills have an emphasis on creating networking opportunities, as well as maintaining relationships with peers and their faculty members. Fischer and Zigmond (1998) suggest that the probability of attrition is lessened with the usage of a survival skill such as maintaining relationships with peers.

As noted above, the concepts of stress and attrition are reported as very strong factors in the literature. These are factors that were not necessarily discussed by the women who participated in the current study. Although each of the women described their doctoral experiences as being “different” and “difficult” none of the participants reported having a sense of not finishing their programs. This may be related to the point that R. L. Smith et al. (2006) made, that a lack of a support system could potentially increase the probability of attrition, due to the student not receiving help when dealing with difficult situations. It is also implied in the literature that having a supportive environment both personally and academically is helpful in reducing the stress related to doctoral studies (R.L. Smith et al., 2006). All but one of the participants in the current study reported some relationship with their cohorts or peers that were described as being helpful in successfully completing their doctoral studies.

**Family and friends.** Another concept discussed by the participants in the current study was the support that they did or did not receive from their family and friends. When offering information about this particular subject, all but one of the women used positive words such as “motivating,” and “encouraging.” The concept of family and
perceived by the participants of the current study differs slightly from how it was described in the research as affecting graduate students.

Three of the women in the current study reported the concept of relationship with family and friends as offering a sense of support, while at some points in the literature when discussing family and friends, the participants noted a sense of role conflict related to taking care of family (Younes and Assay, 1998). Even with these reported conflicts, the women reported the recognition that their accomplishing a doctoral degree would benefit their entire family and would in some cases dedicate the degree to the spouses who supported them. This sense of dedication indicates that there was some kind of spousal or familial support for these particular participants.

The one participant, who used negative feeling words such as “isolated” to discuss the concept of family, reported a lack of support from her family and friends. This participant described a sense of not only feeling isolated within her program, but as feeling isolated by her family and friends as well. This participant also mentioned the lack of support as being related to her family and friends not being aware of what it would take to finish a doctoral degree. The concept of conflict with family and friends slightly holds true in the literature. Younes and Assay (1998) noted that although there were reports of conflicts within their personal relationships, the participants also reported a sense of satisfaction by becoming a role model for the people in their lives. It is important to note, however, that in the current study; most of the participants reported the concept of support from family and friends as being a contributing factor to them completing their programs.
Mentoring Relationships

Another major theme discussed by the participants was the topic of having mentoring relationships. These mentoring relationships were with faculty members in the participants’ respective programs as well as with faculty members outside of their programs. All of the participants in the current study referred to mentoring as being an important factor that contributed to successfully completing a doctoral program. Some of the accounts were personal experiences, while others were suggestions offered to other Black women who may be considering beginning a program in a CACREP accredited doctoral program at a PWI. Some of the related words used to describe the importance of mentoring were “black woman”, “encouragement”, “understanding”, “support and understanding” and “reaching outside of the department.” All of the participants in the current study described the support they received from being in a mentoring relationship both with faculty in the program as well as with faculty outside of the program as being beneficial.

There was a major emphasis placed on the importance of mentoring relationships in the review of the literature. Fischer and Zigmond (1998) suggest that by seeking out mentors, minorities would benefit due to the potentiality of a lack of role models in their particular fields. In fact, as noted in the review of the literature, Patton and Harper (2003) refer to mentoring as the missing link for African American women, arguing that due to the low number of Black female faculty members at PWIs, it is usually difficult to interact with same-race female faculty members.
Three of the women stressed the importance of having a role model or mentor that would be there to offer guidance, encouragement, and even correction. This role model or mentor may possibly be someone who has experienced some of the obstacles that accompanies being a Black woman in academia. The notion of benefiting from same race and same gender mentoring is noted in the literature. Several researchers make the point that gaining inspiration, motivation, guidance, and strength from a faculty member who has experienced a sense of what the Black woman is currently experiencing, is an essential part of reducing the feelings of isolation, alienation, and oppression. (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Debord & Millner, 1993; Mabokela & Green, 2001; Smith & Davidson, 1992; Williams et al., 2005)

Along with reporting the experiences of isolation and alienation of Black female students at PWIs, the literature also depicts the importance of forming community and mentoring relationships in order to promote success for Black women at PWIs. Related and connected to interpersonal relationships between Black women enrolled in Ph.D. programs at PWIs is the interpersonal mentoring relationship between Black women faculty members and the Black women female students themselves. Furthermore, participating in a mentoring relationship is a foundational representation of success in graduate education fueled on the interpersonal relationships directed by confidence, veracity, opportunity and acceptance.

Jackson, Kite, and Branscombe (1996) reported that Black women preferred Black female mentors. Subsequently, it was reported by Jackson et al., that Black women and other non-White graduate and professional female students stated that participating in
a mentoring relationship with someone who looked like them, who had experienced similar hardships, and who possessed similar professional and academic interests is extremely important. However, the authors acknowledge that some sort of mentoring is better than no mentoring.

Interestingly, the concept of black females, particularly, older black females fostering relationships with and mentoring younger black women can be traced back to slavery as a survival skill that aided in the transmission of education and transference of cultural history (James, 1993). This tradition: Othermothering, is utilized consciously and subconsciously by black female educators in the educational system across the nation (Case, 1997). Othermothers accept the responsibility of nurturing, teaching, supporting, and shaping the “children” they serve. The women in the current study, referred to several occasions where Black women in and outside of their respective departments played an intricate role in their personal, mental, emotional and professional selves. The older and more seasoned women, not only took the participants under their wings as their mentee, but assumed a mothering role, offering protection and direction as a sense of “cultural transmission.” The term othermother is most widely used in the black community under the precepts of the elementary and secondary educational system. However as noted above, the term is most fitting for the current study when discussed under the context of the community and mentoring relationships.

Contributions to the Literature

In the previous section, similarities and differences between the current study and the previous literature was discussed. The current study”’s findings also include concepts
that were not discussed in the previous literature. These concepts can be added to the
breadth of literature that focuses on the experiences of Black female doctoral students as
a whole. These concepts are “Cultural Differences” and “Spirituality and
Determination.”

**Cultural Differences**

The theme “Cultural Differences” was reported by the women in terms of feeling
“different” and not being understood by their white counterparts and their white
professors. All of the women expressed a feeling of “dissonance” and a lack of
communication with both their peers and faculty members.

Two of the women reported being from predominantly Black cultures. For each
of these women, being part of the minority was a very new experience. Both of the
women discussed issues related to having problems being understood by their peers and
faculty members, as well as having a hard time identifying with the values of the
programs. One of the women discussed the idea that the culture she was from was one of
a collectivist nature, while the program’s values and ideas were much more
individualistic. She expressed feeling torn between the two value systems; adding that
these “Cultural Differences” had a negative effect on her experiences in the program.

The presence of this difference in cultural values was not discussed in the
previous literature; however the notion of preparing students on how to cope with a sense
of cultural dissonance was briefly mentioned by Russell and Atwater (2005). Russell and
Atwater suggested that family support, family expectations and coping strategies aimed at
facilitating students through cultural dissonance and culture shock add to success and
may reduce attrition rates for Black students attending PWIs. The Russell and Atwater study focused on Black undergraduate students at PWIs, whereas the current study focused on Black women at the Doctoral level at PWIs.

When connecting the findings of the current study with the previous findings of the literature, the one concept that was similar to the experience of “cultural difference” was the concept of isolation. As previously noted in Chapter III, the participants in the current study expressed feelings of not being understood not only in the contexts of cultural differences, but also in the contexts of isolation.

Another aspect that was discussed by two of the women was a sense of a “lack of exposure.” These particular participants noted that due to the low number of Black students in the program attended, it appeared as if the faculty was not highly exposed to issues and concerns that would affect Black females. This lack of exposure was mentioned in relation to professional, research and personal aspects of their lives. This kind of cultural difference was deficient in the previous literature.

**Spirituality**

As noted earlier in this chapter, the previous literature’s primary focus was on ways of combating attrition. The current study however, focused on ways in which the women were able to successfully matriculate from their doctoral programs. Though the participants noted several obstacles and hardships, a major theme that arose was their spirituality with the subtheme of determination. All of the participants expressed a strong sense of spirituality that led to determination, when reporting positive aspects of their doctoral experiences. Spirituality was discussed in ways such as using prayer and joining
church groups. The women credited their sense of spirituality with keeping them focused and hopeful through the difficult experiences associated with completing their degrees.

Determination was reported by all the women, who used such terms as “self-assurance” and commitment. Related in some ways to the findings in the previous research associated with attrition, the women in the current study reported never doubting that they would finish their degrees. Each of the women discussed a strong desire to persevere, reported using their self-determination to combat any pressures that they may have had in their programs. Connected to the previous literature, the current study’s findings is relative in that perhaps the women did not have certain doubts about completing their degrees because of the support from friends and family, as well as their spiritual connections. As noted in the review of the literature in Chapter 1, a survival skill displayed by Black women to combat the forces of sexism, racism and oppression is the adaptation of the Superwoman (Collins, 2000; Mullings, 2006; Woods-Giscombe’, 2010, Wallace, 1978; Wallace, 1990). As previously noted, the personification of this role can have both positive and negative effects on the woman’s personal lives. Regarding the participants in the current study, the personification of the superwoman role is interpreted by the researcher as having a dual relationship. On one hand, the women expressed a strong desire to finish their programs despite any obstacles that stood before them. This determination transcended into a strong sense or resilience and strength. As previously stated, the implementation of this level of strength can lead to success but also lead to mental, emotional, and mental stress related problems. All of the women spoke about stress related issues that they experienced throughout their doctoral
career, and in some ways all spoke of this stress related to taking on the responsibility of continuing or persevering no matter what issues they were faced with.

The following is a first person reflection of the researcher’s experiences in her doctoral program utilizing the four themes expressed by the participants:

As I reflect back on my doctoral experiences and begin to put them in writing, I realize how hard it must have been for the four participants in the study. I inquired about their means of success, their interactions with their peers and professors, their support systems and what helped them matriculate through their programs. As noted in the literature, the participants may of have placed filters on some of the answers provided in order to combat any perceived institutionalized racism and sexism. Looking back, I am reminded of the very many things that have impacted my experiences, but like the women, do not feel totally shielded from institutionalized racism or sexism to elaborate entirely. In saying that, my intent is to add my personal reflection on the themes that were discussed by the participants. Reasons for adding the personal reflection is to expand on the data, and somewhat validate it with another viewpoint on the issues from someone who fits the criteria.

My doctoral career marked different levels of feeling connected. In keeping with the clusters gathered from this theme, there were times in which I experienced isolation, positive and negative relationships and support from my cohort. I also experienced positive and negative interactions with family and friends.

Isolation was relative for me in my doctoral career. There were times in which I felt extremely isolated from my peers in the program, while there were times in which I
felt extremely isolated from my family and friends. The deciding factor was the type of work that I was conducting. For instance, in the beginning of my doctoral program, I felt less isolated and very connected to my cohort. As time passed, and the program began to become more competitive in terms of activities, expectations, and faculty attention, my cohort and I grew further apart. I experienced the most extreme feeling of isolation during the dissertation phase. The writing process isolated me from my cohort, family, friends and professors.

In the beginning of my doctoral experience when my cohort and I were close, we would socialize by getting together on weekends, having game night along with other recreational activities. We supported each other by having study sessions, and writing groups in order to prepare for different classes. As time passed there was less time for supporting one another, and more time for competing with each other for rare research opportunities with faculty members.

The labor intensive dissertation process affected all levels of my relationships. Although my family attempted to be as supportive as possible, the fact that they haven’t experienced the doctoral process made it very difficult for them to wholeheartedly relate. This aspect is very similar to at least one of the participants’ accounts, who stated that their personal lives were at times negatively affected by the fact that their family members were not able to support them on the level in which they needed.

Similar to the mentoring experiences of the participants in the study, what little mentoring relationships that I had throughout my doctoral program was through contact outside of the faculty in the department. My “othermother” experiences resulted from a
relationship with a black female staff member in the department. Although, this woman had limited experiences in academia, she was able to provide needed guidance and skills to navigate thought the department. This black female frequently takes the few doctoral and master students of color under her wing, offering advice, guidance and counsel when needed. This experience is also similar to the participants in the study, who discuss their mentoring or lack of mentoring relationships within their departments. Several of the women, stated that they went outside of their department for guidance, and sometimes noted a mentoring relationship with a staff member who was not faculty. This experience also coincides with the literature in terms of black female students being forced to look for guidance outside of their faculty members and/or departments from Black females.

Having a mentor who was a Black female was important for me, because I felt as if I were able to relate to her easier than I would relate to a White faculty member. My mentoring relationship was an unstated mentoring relationship; however the literature focuses on minority students either having to go outside of the department for a mentoring relationship with a Black female faculty, or to build a relationship with a Black female staff person on campus. The lack of Black female faculty members in higher education contributes to the need to search outside of the department for a mentor or to seek help from a Black non faculty member. Also, the lack of diversity in the programs may be a deciding factor in the mentoring choice of Black female doctoral students. Personally, my decision was shaped by the fact that, there was a limited amount of diversity, having one Black faculty member in the college in where the program was housed.
When reflecting on feelings of being culturally different from my peers and professors, there are several instances that arise. First, there were times in which I didn’t feel understood by professors and peers. Some of these misunderstandings were due to the fact that we had different world views. The way that I processed information was different and the kind of research topics that interested me was very different from my peers and faculty members. I also remember feeling that despite the fact that I was not white, my professors and peers expected me to share the same views as whites. For instance, once in class, a professor was speaking about Jimmy Buffett. I stated to the professor, that I really wasn’t sure who Jimmy Buffett was. The professor then said, “Everybody knows who Jimmy Buffett is. How do you not know who Jimmy Buffett is, he’s a legend?” In certain cultures Jimmy Buffett is a legend. In the black community and in my generation, he is not. I proceeded to inform my professor of this fact, and after careful consideration about the subject, the professor told me he “guesses he can understand that.”

One may say that this was nothing more than an average person assuming that another average person knows a very popular musician. The problem with the above example for me was, that instead of feeling as if we just had differences, there were many times in which I felt that in order to survive in the program, thinking differently wasn’t an option. My cultural differences were sometimes more of an impediment, in which I was often forced to change my thoughts and opinions in order to blend in or not be seen as the “Angry black woman” in the program. This blending to cope with certain stereo types coincides with what the literature coins as the mammy role. Most of the time I would
categorize myself in the superwoman role, however, there were many times in which I held my tongue and didn’t question things in order to “fly under the radar”.

My experiences with cultural differences in my program also had positive aspects. In my cohort there were only myself and another woman of color. We became very close, and in the process I was able to learn a great deal about a culture other than my own and the majority culture. This experience was enlightening in the fact that it allowed me to understand how similar experiences for different minorities can be. This other person of color and I were able to support each other emotionally and professionally, educating ourselves on majority etiquette and communication.

There were also times in which I felt as if it were my responsibility to educate not only my peers but also some professors on how certain issues pertained to people of color. The simple intricacies of communicating with people of color became a weekly conversation in some of my interactions with faculty and peers. Although, this responsibility was not always welcomed or pleasant, I felt that if I did not help people understand ways of competently interacting with people of color, ignorance in certain areas would continue throughout the years, making it my successors to survive the program.

When reflecting on the strengths that have helped push me through my doctoral experience to where I am now, much like the participants in the current study, I relied heavily on my faith. I describe this sense of faith as a broad spectrum of my spirituality. Within this broad spectrum of spirituality lie my strength, determination, prayer and success.
The superwoman role has helped me in every aspect of my life. No matter what obstacles whether self imposed or imposed by outside forces, I have relied on my vigor to overcome them. This strength comes from seeing other black women in my life doing what they had to do to survive, as well as my mother showing me firsthand how to navigate through life. This survival skill has played a significant role in helping me to achieve the level of education that I have.

Determination was a subtheme mentioned by the participants as well. This characteristic along with willpower, resolve, purpose and fortitude is shared amongst the participants and myself. I believe that having a sense of purpose was the most important navigational skill used to persist through my program. Personally, the purpose for completing a doctoral degree goes beyond just obtaining it for myself. My success will inspire other minority women, the younger generation as well as those who desire to pursue of doctoral degree in general.

Regarding life changing properties gained from obtaining a doctoral degree, I would say that there was not a transformation, due to the fact that as a woman, I am who I am with or without a degree. However, as far as success is concerned, it was a necessity. My doctoral experience so far has not been transformative, or personality changing; however it has added to my level of success professionally and personally.

**Delimitations**

**Recruitment**

One of the concerns that arose that was not anticipated were the difficulties related to the recruitment of potential participants. Due to a very low response from
potential participants, several changes were made to the recruitment schedule. In addition to the participation announcement placed on CESNET, the researcher recruited at a national conference through flyers. In addition to this change, the researcher comprised a list of CACREP accredited counseling and related programs and emailed the chairs and coordinators of the individual program the participation request letter. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the requirement of having graduated no more than 3 years prior to the study was lifted.

Related to the low number of responses, the researcher also experienced a high rate of refusal to participate. Some of the reasons included: 1) The women not wanting any political ramifications resulting from their participation in research that may shed a negative light on past and present institutions, 2) The women realizing that there are only so many Black faculty members that fit the criteria, and not wanting to be identified and 3) Institutionalized racism. In total, the researcher interviewed four women, and was refused by seven. Three of four of the participants were on a faculty track, while the most forthcoming of all of the participants was not. The previous detail about the presence or absence of a faculty track may shed light on the level of ingenuousness of the participants as well. Depending on the programmatic culture in place, Black female faculty members may have increased expectations and pressures placed on them from coworkers and superiors.

Another problem faced by the researcher was the fact that all but one of the participants was not very forthcoming about their answers. For example, one of the participants asked the researcher to stop the tape in order to protect her from any
repercussions that may have resulted from her participating in the study. When reviewing the transcripts, only one of the interviews contained data that was not surface level. The remaining three participants maintained very rigid boundaries compared to the participant who discussed exceptionally open and controversial issues pertaining to her doctoral experiences. There were actually times when this particular participant prefaced her statements with, “Here”s a controversial subject, but I”ll say it anyway.” This preface indicates an amount of risk taking on the participant”s part in which the other participants for unknown reasons did not partake. The tacit methodical abuse of people of color has shaped a historically based culture of distrust for research involving health and behavioral issues within minority communities (Smith, Johnson, Newman, Greene, Johnson, and Rogers, 2007). It is the researcher”s reflective assumption that the notion and existence of systematic abuse along with institutionalized racism and sexism produced the lack of forthcoming and open participation from the participants in this study. Previous research has determined that the method of interviewing certain groups, including Black female college students is more effective if conducted though focus groups (Guiffrida, 2005). This research concludes that there is a sense of anonymity and an increase of security that may be present in small group settings. This small group setting also allows for the normalization of experiences to be considered, as well as to foster the development of ideas associated with those experiences. By possibly conducting focus groups with the participants, the facilitation of stronger levels of trust and comfort about sharing personal experiences while offering anonymity may have occurred while conducting this study.
Related to these delimitations, may be what the literature describes as Black women in academia portraying several stereotypical roles to combat the difficult experiences related to racism, sexism, discrimination and systematic oppression (Bryant et al., 2005; West, 1995). The roles most closely related to the current study are Mammy and Sapphire. As discussed in Chapter I, the behaviors related to the Mammy role may include such loyalty that the woman may have been fearful of repercussions as a result of her speaking about any negative issues or opinions that she may have related to her colleagues or the institution in which she is employed or matriculated from; hence, the women not wanting to participate openly. The behaviors relating to the Sapphire role are assumed to combat an “angry Black woman” image and to appear nonthreatening to others. Although, the researcher is a member of the Black female doctoral student population, it may have been perceived by the participants that the researcher was acting in the role of researcher, possibly putting the role of Black female doctoral student aside. The participants in the study may have suppressed any legitimate negative feelings they have about the academic setting, thus leading them to become soft-spoken, or silenced. Also, the internalization of the Sapphire image may have contributed to the participants’ screening, analyzing and altering their behaviors and thoughts in order to reduce the chance that they may be seen as a threat by colleagues, the researcher, administrators and students, as a result of participating in the current study.

**Limitations**

The researcher was presented with two main limitations. The first limitation was the low number of participants in the study. The proposed number of participants was
originally six to eight. However, due to the above-mentioned delimitations, there were only four participants in the study. Although, the study is a qualitative study and is not meant to be generalized to all Black female counselor educators, the low number could make it even less representative.

**Implications for Future Research and Suggestions**

Based on the findings of the current study, there are several implications to the field of Counselor Education. These implications include: 1) Mentoring programs for Black female doctoral students, 2) An increased awareness of multicultural issues by faculty and staff and 3) Creations of social networks to acclimate Black females to the climate of the program.

As previously discussed in Chapter III, all of the women reported the importance of mentoring relationships. Whether the mentoring relationship was with a faculty member or an outside faculty member, all of the women reported positive effects on their doctoral experiences by having these mentoring relationships. Also, all of the women stated that they would make a suggestion to other Black women considering attending a CACREP accredited doctoral program to seek out mentoring relationships. The suggestion was also made for them to have a female mentor of color. The suggestion of the researcher is for CACREP accredited doctoral programs to create some sort of mentoring program for all Black female doctoral students in their programs who show interest in having that relationship. While there is a suggestion from the participants and in previous literature, to have a female mentor of color, the researcher does acknowledge that it may be difficult to specifically offer Black female mentors, due to the possible lack
of Black female faculty members. In this case, it is suggested to enlist Black women outside of the program to volunteer a fraction of their time to offer some support to the women who may request it.

In addition to the previous suggestions there is also a suggestion for CACREP accredited programs to establish some sort of social networking organizations for all of the students in the program. It may be helpful for students to socialize with their particular cohorts in order to combat some of the feelings associated with feeling like an outsider or feeling left out, which is mentioned by several of the participants in the current study.

**Summary**

This study focused on the reflective experiences of Black female doctoral students who have matriculated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs at Predominantly White Institutions. The findings of the study will contribute to the literature on the experiences of not only minority graduate students attending PWIs but of the experiences of Black females in CACREP accredited doctoral programs. From the research analysis there was a set configuration for these experiences. This configuration consists of four major themes: 1) Connectedness, 2) Mentoring Relationships, 3) Cultural Differences and 4) Spirituality.

The researcher hopes that the current study will spark curiosity about minority experiences in Doctoral school, as well as ways in which to enhance minority doctoral experiences. There are also aspirations for this study to enlighten scholars, researchers and faculty members to investigate more suitable and non-threatening ways of
conducting research with Black women. Due to systematic oppression and the existence of institutionalized racism, there exists the potential for Black women to display hesitancy and resistance to openly sharing their experiences on very important and ground breaking issues that will add to the breadth of literature aimed at professional development for these future educators and scholars. Further, it is the researcher’s desire to urge committee members to be forthcoming with Black female doctoral students about the possible lack of interest or knowledge on very topic specific issues that pertain to specific groups. It is imperative not only for all doctoral students, but for Black female doctoral students especially, to be encouraged by faculty members to explore topics that are important to them, while being afforded the opportunity to work with someone or referred to someone with the same or similar interests in order to promote successful completion of these particular research studies. This implication should be undertaken rather than stifling originality and imposing the quantification of topics that are not quantifiable.

An implication and suggestion offered to the counselor education community included the establishment of an optimal entry program aimed at improving the experiences of Black female doctoral students related to 1) Connectedness, 2) Mentoring Relationships 3), Cultural Differences and 4) Navigational skills:

- Create a structured Faculty and Peer mentoring program. Facilitate relationships beyond the advising relationship for faculty and encourage doctoral candidates to establish role model/mentoring relationships with entering Doctoral Students.

- Create a minority based mentoring/networking program that would connect minority students with minority faculty within or outside of the department.
• Encourage cohorts to form support “clusters” in order to enhance a sense of community academically, professionally, and socially.

• Establish a professional networking program possibly related to Chi Sigma Iota. This group will educate students in the areas of importance of involvement in professional organization, navigational skills, professional development and interviewing skills.

• Increase Cultural Competencies of students and faculty by regularly addressing issues related to cross-cultural communication and implications of research topics during monthly brown bag seminars.

• Encourage students especially minority students to seek out community resources to enhance coping with the stresses related to pursuing a doctoral degree.

Further research on retention and job satisfaction once the women are faculty members is also a future implication for research in the field.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANT LETTER
APPENDIX A

Participant Letter

Date

Dear Potential Participant:

My name is Michelle Stevens, a doctoral candidate at Kent State University, in Kent Ohio. I am currently working on my dissertation to complete requirements for a doctorate of philosophy degree in the Counseling & Human Development Services program. I have chosen to study the reflective experiences of Black females who have matriculated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs. In order to conduct my study, I am recruiting current Black female faculty members at CACREP accredited counseling programs who have graduated no more than three years ago from a CACREP accredited doctoral program.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will then receive a consent form, a demographic questionnaire, a taping consent form, and a peer reviewer consent form via email. You will be asked to fax those forms back to the researcher on a secure line in order to provide confidentiality.

As a participant in the study, you will be asked to participate in one individual phone interview lasting approximately 90 minutes. The interviews will be audio taped and will be scheduled at a time most convenient for you. All audiotapes will be destroyed at the end of the research study and only limited demographic information and a pseudonym will be included in the final write up of the results. All information will be kept in a secure location and will only be accessed by this researcher. The interview will be audio taped. After the data is collected, you will receive a copy of the transcript from your interview and asked for your input on the accuracy. You will be asked to email any changes or comments that you may have regarding that interview to the researcher. I plan on having between six and eight participants for this study; thus, even if you meet the criteria for the study, you may not be scheduled for an interview depending on how many responses are received. If you are chosen for the study your name will be entered to receive a $50 gift card after I receive your review of your transcript.

If you have any questions regarding this research, please feel free to contact me at 330-475-3553 or 615-898-2557. My dissertation advisors, Dr. Marty Jencius and Dr. Jason McGlothlin, can also be contacted at 330-672-2662 if you have any questions about this research as well. Please contact myself or either professor if you have any questions about the study or your participation in it. This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the rules of research studies at Kent State University you may contact the Institutional Review Board at (330-672-0700).

Sincerely,

Michelle Stevens, M Ed, PCC-S
Doctoral Candidate
APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM
APPENDIX B
Consent Form

I am interested in the reflective experiences of Black female doctoral students who have matriculated from CACREP accredited doctoral programs. There is some research on the experiences of Black faculty members, but a lack of research on the experiences of black females in CACREP accredited doctoral programs. If you decide to participate in this study you will be asked:

- To participate in a 90 minute phone interview.
- Review your dialogue transcript for accuracy.
- Return your transcript review to me.

The interviews will be audio taped and will be scheduled at a time most convenient for you. All audiotapes will be destroyed at the end of the research study and only limited demographic information and a pseudonym will be included in the final write up of the results. All information will be kept in a secure location and will only be accessed by this researcher. At the conclusion of the study all material with be destroyed. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and you can stop at any time.

If you have any questions regarding this research, please feel free to contact me at 330-475-3553 or 615-898-2557. My dissertation advisors, Dr. Marty Jencius and Dr. Jason McGlothlin, can also be contacted at 330-672-2662 if you have any questions about this research as well. Please contact myself or either professor if you have any questions about the study or your participation in it. This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the rules of research studies at Kent State University you may contact the Institutional Review Board at (330-672-0700). You will receive a copy of this consent form.

Sincerely,
Michelle Stevens M.Ed., PCC-S

CONSENT STATEMENT
I agree to take part in this research study. I know what I will have to do, and that I can stop at any time.

Signature

Date
APPENDIX C
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE
APPENDIX C
Demographic Questionnaire

Participant #___________

Demographic Questionnaire

Age: __________

Marital Status: Married Single Committed Relationship Divorced
Separated Widowed

Occupational status:
Adjunct professor Assistant Professor Associate Professor
Part Time Faculty Member Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Member Other

Number of children and ages: ______________________________________
______________________________________
______________________________________
None ____

Religious or spiritual affiliation: No affiliation ____ Little affiliation ____
Some affiliation____ Much affiliation____
APPENDIX D
PEER REVIEWING AND TRANSCRIBER CONSENT FORM (PARTICIPANT)
APPENDIX D

Peer Reviewing and Transcriber Consent Form (Participant)

As a participant in this study your information will be reviewed and transcribed by myself, two peer reviewers, and two transcribers. This consent form allows for these outside parties to review the individual interview audio tapes only.

Each individual has signed consent forms acknowledging their understanding of the participant’s right to privacy and their agreement to keep all knowledge of the interviews confidential. Participants’ names will never be released to the peer reviewers and transcribers, only the participant’s code will be used for their part in the process.

To protect your rights and privacy all data collected involving participants, including the original of this consent form and peer reviewers consent forms will be kept in a secure location and will only be accessed by this researcher. If you want to know more about the peer reviewing or the transcription process in relation to this study, please call me at (330)475-3553 or my dissertation advisors Dr. Marty Jencius or Dr. Jason McGlothlin at (330)672-2662. This project has been reviewed and approved by Kent State University Institutional Review Board. You will receive a copy of this consent form.

Sincerely,
Michelle Stevens, M Ed, PCC-S

CONSENT STATEMENT

I agree to allow the peer reviewers and transcribers to review the interview tapes only. I know what I will have to do, and that I can stop at any time.

__________________________  ________________
Signature of Participant      Date
APPENDIX E
AUDIOTAPE CONSENT FORM
APPENDIX E
Audiotape Consent Form

I agree to audio taping on ___________________.

_______________________________
Date

Signature _________________________________

Date _________________________________

I have been told that I have the right to hear the audio tapes before they are used.

I have decided that I:

_____ want to hear the tapes  _____ do not want to hear the tapes

Sign now below if you do not want to hear the tapes. If you want to hear the tapes, you will be asked to sign after hearing them.

Michelle Stevens may / may not use the tapes made of me. The original tapes or copies may be used for:

_____ this research project

_______________________________
Signature

_______________ Date

Address: ________________________________________________________
APPENDIX F
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR TRANSCRIPTION
APPENDIX F
Confidentiality Agreement for Transcription

I _____________ agree to maintain the confidentiality of any information to which I become privy during the transcription process. I will not reveal any information related to the content or process of the interviews being transcribed to anyone other than Michelle Stevens. I am aware that any violation of this confidentiality agreement will result in termination of my services and may result in further legal action.

Signed __________________________ on __________________________
Name __________________________ Date __________________________

Witnessed by __________________________ on __________________________
Name __________________________ Date __________________________
APPENDIX G

PEER REVIEWING AND TRANSCRIBER CONSENT FORM (PEER REVIEWER)
APPENDIX G
Peer Reviewing and Transcriber Consent Form (Peer Reviewer)

As a peer reviewer in this study the information you review is solely for the triangulation of data. You will critique, question, and look for emerging themes to increase the credibility and transferability of the results from this study. You will only review the taped data from the individual interviews. As a transcriber, you will transcribe the data from the original taped interview.

By signing this consent form, you acknowledge that you understand the participant’s right to privacy and you agree to keep all knowledge of the interviews confidential. Participants’ names will never be released to you in this process, only the participants’ code will be used as a form of identification.

To protect the participants’ rights and privacy all data collected involving participants, including the original of this consent form and peer reviewers consent forms, will be kept in a secure location and will only be accessed by this researcher. This research study has been reviewed and approved by Kent State University Institutional Review Board. You will receive a copy of this consent form.

Sincerely,

Michelle Stevens M Ed, PCC-S

CONSENT STATEMENT
I agree to abide by the privacy and confidentiality regulations set forth by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board, and the State of Ohio Counselor and Social Worker, Marriage and Family Therapist Board. I understand my role as a peer reviewer in this study, and if I violate the privacy or confidentiality of any participant in this study I understand I will be reported to the faculty advisors in this study as well as the Kent State Institutional Review Board. As a peer reviewer or transcriber I understand I am only to review the individual interviews. I know what I will have to do, and that I can stop at any time.

Signature of Peer Reviewer or Transcriber

Date
APPENDIX H
Interview Summary Sheet

Frequently Used Words

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Verbal Cues

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Attitudes, Themes, and Reflective Feelings

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APPENDIX I
THEME MAP
APPENDIX I
Theme Map
REFERENCES


