

ENHANCING OUR STATUS: THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN  
DOCTORAL STUDENT MOTHERS IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION

by

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(Under the Direction of NATOYAL HILL HASKINS)

ABSTRACT

This feminist phenomenological study examined the everyday lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers. The researcher utilized in-depth semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation to elicit stories from participants regarding their experiences as African American doctoral student mothers. The researcher sought to gain insight and better inform counselor education programs of the multitude of challenges and successes experienced by African American doctoral student mothers as they navigate through their academic programs. This study was conducted within a social justice framework and engaged Womanism as a theoretical framework to give voice to the women and explicate the ways in which they made meaning of their lived experiences in regards to the intersections of race, education status, and motherhood. The findings of this qualitative study indicated that African American doctoral student mothers view motherhood as a priority and experience an increase in personal pride, a multitude of challenges, modeling new ways of being an African American mother, marginalization based on race, and perseverance through adaptation and resilience.

INDEX WORDS: African American doctoral student mothers, Counselor Education, Motherhood, Womanism, Feminist Phenomenology, Lived-experience, Photo elicitation

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## DEDICATION

*“I at last accepted mama as my name. Realized that it did not melt down any other designations. Discovered that it expanded them-and me”* (Marita Golden, 1983, p.240-41).

I dedicate this dissertation to African American doctoral student mothers everywhere and to my own children, Ellis Gregory, III and Bailey Alexandria, who have enhanced my status by giving me the name mommy. I wrote this poem for you:

I climb mountains higher than the sky  
 I flow wider than the deepest sea  
 I grow wings when I need to fly  
 I become a rock when others need me  
 I scream with a mighty roar  
 I stand taller than the highest tree  
 I give them wings to make them soar  
 I become invisible so they can see  
 I become a rock when others need me  
 Stand tall my son I do this for you  
 Stand tall my daughter this is my gift to you  
 Have pride mommy in all that you do  
 Stand tall mommy you give the most of you  
 Be proud mommy for these words are true

-Brandee Appling 2013

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*“African American mothers are complex individuals who often show tremendous strength under adverse conditions” (Patricia Hill Collins, 2000, p. 75-76).*

The literature is replete with studies depicting the challenges that both African American and women doctoral students face throughout their matriculation in counselor education programs (Henfield, Woo, & Washington, 2013; Henfield, Owens, & Witherspoon, 2011). However, studies are almost nonexistent on the unique experiences of doctoral student mothers and even more absent in the current scholarly literature are the voices of African American mothers who are also doctoral students. Research the phrase “doctoral student mothers” and most of the results are in the form of blogs and online journals and many of them do not actually relate to the specific topic of mothers in doctoral programs. It was my individual search that led me on my journey to discover the experiences of doctoral student mothers. Because of my frustration due to the lack of scholarly literature centered on doctoral student mothers, I determined that this was a topic worth pursuing (Banks-Wallace, 2000; Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012; Haynes, 2012; Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haiyasoso, 2013). After conducting an exploratory study of graduate student mothers, it became clear that not only were the experiences of this group of women missing from the literature, but also absent from the research were an analysis of the impact of race on the experiences of doctoral student mothers.

Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haiyasoso (2013) addressed the lack of research illuminating the unique experiences of doctoral student mothers in a phenomenological investigation of doctoral student mothers in counselor education. In their study, Trepal et al., discovered that participants perceived a traditional and gendered work environment in counselor education regarding motherhood as a barrier to degree completion. Earlier findings relative to the environmental influences associated to being a mother in academia and specifically motherhood in counselor education (Lynch, 2008; Haynes, 2012; Trepal & Stinchfield, 2012) further support the importance of the current study. Although the previous research on doctoral student mothers informs the practices of counselor education programs, it is still limited in its efficacy with diverse populations (Trepal, et al.) The authors of the aforementioned study stated that a need existed, “to access a diverse group of women’s experiences” (Trepal, et al.) however, 80% of the participants were White women (Trepal, et al.). While the participants included one Latina woman and one Asian woman, no data was collected on the experiences of African American women once again silencing the voices of African American doctoral student mothers (Trepal et al.). This void in the literature compelled me to present more than an analysis of the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers but to tell their stories from their perspectives and explicate the differences in their particular experiences from the experiences of White doctoral student mothers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Over the last decade, there has been an increase in the diversity of those pursuing graduate degrees (Offerman, 2011). Included in this diversity are people of color, women, and individuals that enter graduate school as caregivers, full-time employees,



and parents (Gardner, 2009). From 1900 to 1960 between 89 and 94 percent of all doctoral students were men (National Science Foundation [NSF], 2009). However, that traditional demographic is no longer relevant. Previously released statistics illustrate that 67.5 percent of African-American women and 57.8 percent of White women were in pursuit of graduate degrees at the beginning of the decade ("Gender Gap," 2012). In 2007, women exceeded men for doctorates as they made up 66 percent of the African American doctorates, 56 percent of the Hispanic, and 50 percent of the White (NSF, 2009). In 2008, women received 46 percent of all research doctorates, the 13th consecutive year in which women received more than 40 percent of doctorates awarded (NSF). Recent statistics show that women earned 52% of the doctorates awarded in 2011-12. The academic year of 2011-12 marked the fourth consecutive year in which women earned the majority of the degrees awarded at the doctoral level. Specifically, in the field of counselor education, 77 percent of the doctorates awarded were to females (NSF).

Although they are still outnumbered by White men and White women, the number of African Americans earning doctorates continues to rise as evidenced by an 87% increase in the number of doctorates awarded to African Americans over the past 20 years (NSF, 2014). The proportion of doctorates awarded to African Americans has risen from 4.0% in 1992 to 6.3% in 2012 (NSF). Also in 2012, African Americans were the largest U.S. minority population awarded doctorate degrees in education receiving 14.5 percent of the doctorate degrees in education (NSF). African American women comprise a large percentage of this data as they earned almost 16 percent of all doctorate degrees awarded to women in 2011 (NSF). Although these statistics are impressive and reflective

of the gains that both women and African Americans have made in regards to higher education, they do not include the specific statistics of African American doctoral student mothers (NSF). Nor does the data illustrate the challenges they experience in their degree attainment (NSF). Moreover, there continues to be a lack of empirical research on the experiences of African American female doctoral students and even less on the specific experiences of African American doctoral student mothers (Bhat et al., 2012; Trepal et al., 2013). However, as more African American mothers pursue degrees in higher education it becomes increasingly important to include their perspectives and voices in the literature regarding the reentry of women in higher education (Ntiri, 2001) and their experiences of navigating dual identities of mother and student. Scholarly literature on the experiences of mothers in academia alludes to the fact that motherhood influences issues of persistence and motivation facing academic women (Fochtman, 2011). Researchers cite that combining the statuses of mother and student are one reason for the high attrition rate of women doctoral students (Castaneda & Isgro, 2012; Fochtman; Stimpson & Filer, 2011).

The academic/work life balance is a challenge for most doctoral student mothers but it is often compounded for African American women (Collins, 2000; Phillips, 2006). African American mothers cite fear of marginalization, racism, sexism, and negative stereotyping as psychological barriers to their academic success (Sealey-Ruiz, 2013). Scholars attribute some of the challenges experienced by African American doctoral student mothers to the varying cultural assumptions regarding mothering (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000). Motherhood, like other identities, is an individual process influenced by a combination of social justice issues such as, social, political, cultural, and environmental

factors (Jones, Kim, & Skendall, 2012). Gender stereotypes of motherhood add to our understanding of the complexities that intersections such as racism, classism, and sexism play in the lives of doctoral student mothers (Foquier & Ferrell, 2011).

The multiple and conflicting demands of family, career, and doctoral studies can negatively affect the graduate school experiences for many women (Lynch, 2008).

Stimpson & Filer (2011) posit that many higher education institutions fail to address the reentry woman's multiple and conflicting demands of family, career, and education

which can be a detriment to successful degree completion. Additional research suggests

that women and minority graduate students are more at risk for attrition at the doctoral

level due to lack of assistance, socialization, and support from the University or program

(Bhat et al., 2012). The attrition rate of women doctoral students is higher than that of

their male peers even though they generally have higher grade point averages than the

men (Stimpson & Filer, 2011). Further, even though women enter doctoral programs in

equal numbers as men they take longer to complete their degrees (Stimpson & Filer).

Several scholars postulate that children are one possible reason for the higher attrition

rates among women (Castaneda & Isgro, 2013; Lynch, 2008; Pasque, Errington, &

Nicholson, 2011). Although women are not always the sole parent for children, society

often views them as the primary caregivers (Stimpson & Filer). A study completed by

Maher, Ford, and Thompson (2004) found that women students take on more

responsibility in the home than male students do. In addition, Mason and Goulden (2004)

assert that mothers spend 94 hours per week juggling caregiving responsibilities,

professional responsibilities, and housework in comparison with 80 hours per week for

men with children. Other scholars assert that part of this assumed responsibility stems

from the dominant notion of motherhood, which portrays women as the most involved parent both physically and emotionally (Lynch; Jayita & Murali, 2009; Maher, Ford, & Thompson; Mason & Goulden, 2004; Ricco, Sabet, & Clough, 2009). Doctoral student mothers frequently contend with conflict when trying to navigate their dual roles of mother of student and at times feel as if they must choose between work and children (Stimpson & Filer; Lynch). The results from a study conducted by Stimpson and Filer (2011) indicate that female doctoral students feel less satisfied than males with their ability to balance their academic/work and family life obligations.

The differential experiences of African American women are limited in the literature on doctoral student mothers. However, the issue of race is an important factor in the attrition rates of doctoral student mothers (Castaneda & Isgro, 2013). Vacarro (2005) suggests that women of color may experience the academic environment in vastly different ways than White women in the same environment. Further, although some women of color doctoral students are able to persist in what they deemed as racist academic environments, others are deeply affected which affects their completion status (Vacarro). Sex and racial prejudice and biases continue to block the progress of African American women who identify as scholars and mothers (Castaneda & Isgro, 2013). In addition, several scholars note that race exacerbates the challenges of mothering while a doctoral student (Koro-Llungberg & Hayes, 2006; Patton, 2009). African American doctoral student mothers must compete against others' negative hegemonic perceptions about their mothering ability as well as their scholarly ability in a White dominated patriarchal environment (Perlow, 2013). The intersections of these multiple factors combine to affect the attrition rates of African American doctoral student mothers. While

these challenges are evident, researchers have yet to examine the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers as they matriculate through their education programs.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs and specifically to explore how the intersection of race, gender, and motherhood impact their experiences. This inquiry will provide a platform for African American mothers to give both voice and meaning to their otherwise overlooked experiences. My focus on the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers is meant to describe the shared challenges and collective experiences these women have tackled and continue to encounter in patriarchal contexts while also acknowledging how race and gender intersect with motherhood and contribute to shaping their individual doctoral experience in profound ways. The information gleaned from the participants in this study can inform the practices of counselor education programs to identify and implement ways to support and retain doctoral students navigating multiple identities. Further, I seek to discover the role of race, gender, and motherhood on the experience of African American doctoral student mothers.

### **Research Question**

Using womanism as a lens, I will seek to explicate the ways in which African American doctoral student mother's experience the intersections of race and gender and how this intersection affects their statuses of mother and student, thereby; uncovering the essence of what it means to be an African American doctoral student mother in counselor

education. Toward that end, the following research question (RQ) will be addressed in the current study:

RQ: What are the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs?

Responses to this question will provide a focus for both reviewing the literature about the status of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs and examining this status and its complexities through the lens of womanism.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Researchers must analyze the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers through a theoretical construct that addresses the unique and complex identity of African American doctoral student mothers in American higher education. Based on the assumption that race and gender intersect to play a vital role on the effect of motherhood on the experiences of African American female doctoral students, the construct of womanism frames this study (Pasque, Errington-Nicholson, & Sax, 2011; Phillips, 2006). According to Taylor (2000), “womanist thought is an area of study that combines race, gender, and class in critically assessing the historical, cultural, intellectual, socio-political, and spiritual consciousness of African American women” (p. 213). Rooted in the everyday racial and gendered experiences of African American women, womanism’s focus is to end oppression for all people by elevating all forms of oppression to a level of equal concern (Phillips, 2006). Proponents of womanism assert that traditional theoretical frameworks dismiss the everyday experiences of African American doctoral student mothers (Banks-Wallace, 2000; Borum, 2012; Jain & Turner, 2011). In addition, their experiences have historically been left out of the academy and dismissed from

scholarly investigation, thereby increasing their disenfranchisement and marginalization (Phillips). However, womanism acknowledges the educational experiences of African American doctoral student mothers and affirms the notion that these women are the best and most capable interpreters of their own experiences (Phillips). Utilizing womanism as a theoretical framework in scholarship with African American women ensures that their experiences are at the center of analysis and provides a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers (Collins, 2000; Phillips; Taylor). In doing so, womanist epistemology will serve to instill and/or enhance the self-affirmation and/or self-healing of African American doctoral student mothers (Taylor). Furthermore, the current study will illuminate the individual and collective realities of African American doctoral student mothers by presenting their experiences through the lens of womanist epistemology and methodology. Womanism offers a methodological stance throughout the entire research process that views the relationship between the researcher and participants as collaborative, conversational in approach, and incorporates activism and empowerment (Phillips; Banks-Wallace, 2000). Furthermore, the current study will illuminate the individual and collective realities of African American doctoral student mothers by presenting their experiences through the lens of womanist epistemology and methodology.

### **Significance of the Study**

*“I at last accepted mama as my name. Realized that it did not melt down any other designations. Discovered that it expanded them-and me”* (Marita Golden, 1983, p.240-41).

My doctoral experience, much like the findings of previous scholars, has been impacted by the role of a mother, counselor education doctoral student, and African American woman. There continues to be a paucity of empirical research on the experiences of African American female doctoral students and even less on the specific experiences of African American doctoral student mothers (Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012; Shambley & Boyle, 2004). Consequently, this study has the potential to make significant contributions to the body of existing literature on doctoral student mothers in counselor education. In addition, the current study is significant to the field of counselor education because the results can provide important implications for counselor education programs to support, enhance, and increase the retention and completion rate of African American doctoral student mothers. Furthermore, this study will expand the application of womanism, including yet another marginalized identity.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

For clarity and consistency purposes, the following definitions were used in this study:

*African American* -A U.S. citizen or permanent resident having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa (except those of Hispanic origin).

*Attrition*- a reduction or decrease in numbers, size, or strength.

*Retention*-A measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage.



*Persistence*-The intrinsic motivation that wills an individual to finish something they started despite facing challenges.

*Doctoral Student*- a full-time or part-time student currently enrolled in a Ph.D. program at an institution of higher education at the time of the study in an

*Mother*- a woman who has a child; a woman who acts as the parent of a child; to give birth to and/or bring up a baby; to look after somebody with great care and affection, sometimes to an excessive degree; in Womanism mothers are considered women that take care of children that may or may not be their own sometimes referred to as “other mother.”

*Motherhood*-the state of being a mother; the act of raising children; motherhood should be defined by the individual as the meaning can be different for individual women

*Intersectionality*- “analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation , and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape Black women’s experiences and, in turn are shaped by Black women” (Collins, 2000, p. 320).

### **Delimitations**

There are several delimitations to consider that define the boundaries of this study. First, including only African American doctoral student mothers limited the scope of this study and, therefore, is not meant to represent but may speak to the experiences of other women of color that identify as doctoral student mothers. Although other women of color may encounter similar experiences, this study explores the lived experiences of only African American doctoral student mothers as they continue to be excluded from similar studies (Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haiyasoso, 2012). Further, as an African

American doctoral student mother in counselor education the study has personal meaning to me as the researcher. Secondly, the participants I am selecting are individuals in the state of Georgia. Therefore, my findings will be impacted by this fact as different findings may generate from other areas of the country. Finally, the current study is a phenomenological investigation of the experiences of motherhood in academia as a doctoral student in counselor education. Rather than reflect the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers through quantitative data such as numbers and statistics, the use of the qualitative approach allows the women to remain the experts of their stories as they describe their perceptions of combining the intersections of race, gender, mother, and student.

### **Chapter Summary**

An examination of the experiences and perceptions of African American doctoral student mothers allows the women to tell their story in their own words. Studies show that African American women encounter discrimination in higher education institutions (Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012; Perlow, 2013; Phillips, 2006). Specifically, African American doctoral student mothers' experiences in counselor education doctoral programs differ from those of their male and female counterparts. Womanism offers an explanation and description of the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers and argues for the importance of acknowledging the challenges they face because of their gender and race. The chapters that follow provide the contextual backdrop for the status of African American doctoral student mothers in higher education while highlighting the limited amount of research and literature centered on this population. The qualitative approach will be used to collect and analyze the responses of

the African American doctoral student mothers who lent their voices and insights into this study followed by a discussion, implications, limitations and future research, and recommendations for counselor education doctoral programs.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A vast amount of literature exists documenting the experiences of women in higher education as both students and members of the academy (Association for Study of Higher Education [ASHE], 2011; Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012; Gardner, 2009; Maher, Ford, & Thompson, 2004; Offerman, 2011). Recently, there has been an upsurge in research centered on the experiences of mothers in academia (Casteneda & Isgro, 2013; Pasque & Nicholson, 2011; Schlehofer, 2011; Stinchfield & Trepal, 2010; Tellez, 2013; Tillman, 2011; Trepal & Stinchfield, 2011). These studies focus on the experiences, challenges, successes, and opportunities facing mothers in academia as they navigate the multiple roles of mother and teacher while pursuing tenure and job security. However, the research is much sparser on the experiences of student mothers at the graduate and doctoral level as they negotiate a commitment and obligation to children while trying to nurture their educational aspirations (Lynch, 2008; Trepal & Stinchfield, 2011).

Although there has been some attention given to doctoral student mothers in counselor education (Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haiyasoso, 2013), it is limited in its transferability by its lack of African American participants. The voices and experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs have been silent. African American doctoral student mothers continue to fight against gender and racial discrimination making their experiences unique to their peers and worthy of analysis

(Perlow, 2013). However, to date, the voices and experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs have been silent.

The selected review of the literature in this chapter serves two purposes. First, the literature informs the study's purpose of understanding the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education. Secondly, this chapter will illuminate the gap in the scholarly literature on African American female doctoral student mothers. Specifically, this chapter reviews literature related to: (a) African American women and doctoral studies; (b) motherhood in higher education, and, (c) work-life balance. I begin the chapter with a discussion of womanism because it provides a lens through which the literature in this chapter is interpreted as well as to provide cultural context for the current study and to examine the role of race and gender on the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Women experience their multiple roles through varying intersections of their identity including ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, religion, and ability status (hooks, 2000). Traditional student development theories fail to consider how external variables (e.g., family, work) and intersectionalities influence the educational attainment of doctoral student mothers. Many researchers employ feminist theory in research that focuses on the experiences of women because of its central focus on gender inequality and promotion of women's rights (hooks, 2000). However, feminist theory is more appropriate to examine the historical experiences of White women as it struggles to provide a comprehensive analytical lens to explore the experiences of African American women (hooks). Thus, it is imperative to examine the personal and professional

experiences of African-American women through the lens of a theoretical framework that understands and acknowledges the complex intersections of race, class, sexual, and gender oppression experienced by African American women (Jain & Turner, 2011).

Womanism is a conceptual framework for envisaging how race, class, and gender are linked and how they link with other structures of power and inequality (Ntiri, 2014).

African American doctoral student mothers continue to experience disparities in higher education when compared to their European American counterparts (Grant & Simmons, 2008), yet, their perspectives are not presented in the scholarly literature. The use of culturally relevant theoretical frameworks to structure research conducted with African American women is essential to organizing and understanding knowledge emanating from African American women and their life experiences (Shambley-Ebron & Boyle, 2004). Using womanism as a theoretical framework to study the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers recognizes the impact of race and gender on their lives. Utilizing the culturally appropriate framework of womanism when conducting research with African American doctoral student mothers has the potential to enhance their positive experiences in counselor education doctoral programs and guide future studies. Furthermore, African American culturally appropriate theories, such as womanism, allow African American women to define motherhood and mothering in their own terms. As such, the term motherhood in womanism is comprised of women that have given birth to their own children as well as women that are raising the children of others including family, community members, and children they have adopted. Also, motherhood within the framework of womanism encompasses what Collins (2000) termed “othermothers” or community mothers who take care of, provide guidance to, and

“look after” the African American children in their community. Utilizing womanism in studies centered on motherhood allows the researcher the ability to expand their participant pool to include mothers of children that are not biologically their own but have a major influence in their lives. Therefore, womanism is the lens I am using in the current study to explicate the realities of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education as well as to enhance and expand my knowledge of their individual and collective experiences.

### **Definition of Womanism**

Novelist and poet Alice Walker (1983) coined the term “womanist” to define feminism for women of color that identifies a love for all women and all of humankind. Derived from the term “womanish,” Walker defines womanism as a Black feminist or feminist of color and a woman who loves other women sexually and/or nonsexually that appreciates and prefers women’s emotional flexibility, and women’s strength. Walker (1983) further posits that a womanist is committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. In 2006, in an effort to individuate Womanism from feminism, Layli Phillips proffered an expanded definition of Womanism as a social change perspective rooted in the everyday experiences of African American and other non-White women. In her definition, Phillips (2006) extended womanism to include, “the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the environment/nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension” (p.xx). She further purports that the overarching goal of womanism is to equalize all locales and forms of oppression (Phillips). According to Phillips (2006), womanism has five overarching characteristics; it is (a) antioppressionist, (b) vernacular, (c) nonideological,

(d) communitarian, and (e) spiritualized. Womanism is antioppressionist in that womanists fight to liberate all humankind from all forms of oppression individually and institutionalized (Phillips). Vernacular situates womanism with everyday people and everyday life acknowledging that the power differential serves to dehumanize individuals (Phillips). Womanists believe that anyone can accomplish social justice advocacy (Phillips). The Nonideological concept of womanism refers to the fact that womanism strives to build structures of inclusiveness without the conformity and homogeneity of ideology (Phillips). Womanism views commonweal (collective well-being for all members in a community) as the goal for social change. Finally, womanism is inclusive of the importance of the spiritual world and the relationship between the spiritual world and human life (Phillips). In addition, she states that womanist ideals are not limited to an American context, but can be found in African, Asian/Indian culture, Australian, European, Caribbean, Taiwanese, Latino/Latina American, Canadian, and Chinese as well as a host of other cultures (Phillips).

### **Enhancing the Status of African American Doctoral Student Mothers**

*“Because no matter what anyone says, it is the Black woman’s words that have the most meaning for us, her daughters, because she, like us, has experienced life not only as a black person, but as a woman...” -Alice Walker, 1983 (p.275).*

Emerging out of the African American woman’s need to define their own realities, womanist thought enhances the status of African American women in academia and other aspects of society where they are alienated by focusing on a holistic understanding of the history, culture, and lived experiences of African American women (Collins, 2000). Womanist scholarship eradicates the alienation of African American



doctoral student mothers by positioning them at the center of their own experiences, thereby, allowing African American doctoral student mothers to be the experts of their own experiences, hear their own voices, and present themselves as they know themselves not as others choose to represent them (Hamlet, 2006). Although the literature centering on studies incorporating Womanism specifically with African American doctoral student mothers is limited, several studies utilizing womanism as an organizing framework in studies with African American female participants are present (Banks-Wallace, 2000; Borum, 2012; Dingus, 2008; Lewis, 2004; Littlefield, 2003).

A study conducted by Littlefield (2003) explored the relationship between gender identity and stress in 481 African American women. Findings in the Littlefield study support the womanist perspective hypothesis that African American women who endorse a combined nurture-provider gender role may be less vulnerable to stress. Similarly, Dingus (2008) found that womanism provided a useful theoretical framework to examine mentoring relationships among African American women teachers. Finally, Lewis (2004) conducted a qualitative study of the process by which eight African American mothers participated in formal substance abuse programs. The Lewis study found womanism advantageous for discovering cultural knowledge that African American women use to organize their behavior and interpret their experiences. In addition, findings supported the lens of womanism as a necessary culturally appropriate framework for conducting and interpreting research with substance-abusing African American mothers (Lewis).

Womanism enables researchers examining African American women navigating the challenging terrain of academic life and motherhood to cast off the patriarchal

assumption that children and motherhood are in direct conflict with one another and instead allow African American doctoral student mothers to make meaning of their individual experiences (Abdullah, 2012). For African American doctoral student mothers, intersectional identity necessarily includes motherhood, as the mothering process is an essential part of their everyday life. Viewing the women in this study, through the construct of womanism enables the participants to construct new and reclaimed definitions of African American womanhood, motherhood, and higher education (Abdullah).

### **Motherhood in Higher Education**

The transition to motherhood is a major developmental life event for women of all cultures (Gardner, 2009). As with all transitions, becoming a mother requires the restructuring of goals and dreams, behaviors, attitudes, and responsibilities (Mercer, 2004). This restructuring can lead to a new self-concept facilitated and inhibited by personal and social cultural beliefs and attitudes (Mercer). In some cultures, family and community members view motherhood with respect and as a source of privilege, which provides significant meaning and satisfaction for women (Foquier, 2011). The dominant Eurocentric notions of maternal identity that shape our perceptions of the role of mothers in western society support patriarchal ideology and are socially constructed (Lynch, 2008). Traditional American or Anglo-culture depicts motherhood as an idealized gender role that portrays and expects women to be self-sacrificing (Lynch). This concept of “intensive mothering” (Hays, 1996), requires mothers to devote an extraordinary amount of time, financial resources, and physical, mental, and emotional energy on her children. This concept is considered the dominant ideology of appropriate child rearing in the

western culture (Hays). Based on the ideology of “intensive mothering” society has placed expectations on the proclaimed role of mother (e.g., staying home and taking care of children) (Lynch; Trepal, et al.). Because of these socially constructed norms, women often hold an ideal image of themselves as mothers, and when this “ideal” motherhood image cannot be upheld, emotional and psychological stress results (Mercer). Rubin (1967) termed this psychosocial self-image as maternal identity, which includes the qualities, values, attitudes, and achievements women find desirable in mothering (Mercer). According to Rubin (1967), maternal identity is incorporated into a woman’s self-identity; therefore, mothers grieve the roles of their individual identity that give them pleasure but are incompatible or in conflict with their maternal identity (Mercer). The aspects of doctoral study (e.g., attending classes and conferences, course work, studying for exams, writing the dissertation) that physically, mentally, and/or emotionally take mothers away from their children do not fit into the “intensive mothering” ideology and therefore, are in conflict with their maternal identity (Trepal, et al.). Thus, the challenge for both professional and doctoral mothers in higher education is to figure out how to combine their maternal identity with their self-identity as a scholar. Because limited literature exists on African American doctoral student mothers, this section reviews the literature on general motherhood and higher education as a precursor to the study that will examine the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers.

### **Faculty Mothers in Academia**

Over the last few years several authors have examined and documented the experiences of motherhood in higher education, specifically, as it relates to faculty members in academia (Castaneda & Isgro, 2013; Evans, Grant, & Peskowitz, 2014;

Schlehofer, 2011; Stinchfield & Trepal, 2010; Tellez, 2013; Trepal & Stinchfield, 2012). The experiences documented by these authors range from general experiences of mothers that are also faculty members to academic motherhood for counselor educators, single motherhood in the academy, and navigating the academy as a chicana single mother. The common theme amongst the documented experiences is that faculty mothers in the academy are at a distinct disadvantage in comparison to their male or childless peers (Trepal & Stinchfield; Evans, et al.,; Stinchfield & Trepal; Tillman; Schlehofer; Tellez; Mason, Goulden, & Wolfinger, 2013).

Statistics from the American Association of University Professors [AAUP] (2013) show that women are more likely to receive a Ph.D. at a slightly older median age (34.1 years as compared to 32.8 years for men) than men. The process of gaining tenure is full of intensive work and research overlapping with prime child-rearing years creating a significant source of inequities in faculty status, promotion, tenure, and salary (Hermann, Ziomek-Daigle, & Dockery, 2014; Mason, et al., 2013). Therefore, unlike most of their male peers, women are often forced to make the inequitable choice between a professional career or having children (AAUP, 2013). In a study conducted by Hermann, Ziomek-Daigle, & Dockery (2014), counselor education faculty mothers cited that with the increased tenure demands, increased workload, and increased teaching responsibilities they are finding it more challenging to find time for the scholarship component necessary in the tenure process. In addition, according to Mason, Goulden, and Wolfinger (2013), women having a baby prior to five years after receiving a PhD are less likely than other women to achieve tenure. The same is not true for men. In Mason and Goulden's (2002) study of a nationally representative sample of PhD recipients

between 1973 and 1999, they found that raising children, especially early in one's academic career, has a negative effect on women but not men's careers. The author's findings further suggest that faculty women who give birth early in their academic careers are more likely to be in the academic "second tier": in part-time or non-tenure-track positions or at community colleges or non-research institutions (Mason, et al., 2012). Termed as "mommy-tracking" the participants in the study cited experiences of being told not to mention that they have or plan to have children when interviewing for faculty positions as it will hurt their chances of being hired for full-time faculty work (Mason, et al., 2013). The women that did take a faculty position and then a leave of absence to care for new children stated they experienced discrimination upon their return for taking time off to care for their children (Mason, et al., 2013).

Much has been written about this population of women regarding the joys and many challenges they face regarding their dual status as teacher and mother. However, until recently the experiences of mothers enrolled as doctoral students has been absent from the scholarly research (Trepal & Stinchfield, 2013). There is even less literature on African American women and the ways in which their racial identity intersects with their statuses of mother and doctoral student.

### **Combining the statuses of Mother and Doctoral Student**

A vast amount of literature exists on the challenges facing undergraduate student mothers but much less for student mothers at the graduate and doctoral level (Offerman, 2011) and the psychological stress that results from occupying multiple conflicting social roles such as student, family, and work roles (Ricco, Sabet, & Clough, 2009). A research study conducted by Maher, Ford, and Thompson (2004) suggests that women face an

extraordinary amount of challenges finishing their graduate degrees. Some of these challenges include giving birth during the program, ending a marriage, caring for ailing parents, or experiencing the death of a close family member (Maher, et al., 2004). Late-finishing women, as described in the Maher (2004) study, reported challenges balancing degree-related and family-related responsibilities, which also inhibit degree attainment. Mason, Goulden, and Frasch (2009) contend that having children is a factor associated with attrition for American female graduate students. Doctoral student mothers are constantly negotiating a commitment and obligation to children while trying to nurture their educational aspirations (Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haiyasoso, 2013). In the case of doctoral student mothers, the successful integration of two identities such as motherhood and school often remain in conflict (Trepal, et al.).

A review of the literature revealed one study that focuses on doctoral student mothers in general in counselor education, however, race or ethnicity was not explored (Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haiyososo, 2013). Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haiyososo (2013) examined the experiences of 10 doctoral student mothers in counselor education. Findings from their study revealed that the participants experienced guilt for not being fully present as either a mother or a doctoral student. Further, the women acknowledged experiencing guilt regarding the time and energy they spent away from the parenting role pursuing their academics. In addition, the women reported that they often received gendered messages within the university setting citing children as a barrier to degree completion further confirming their perceived gender roles in doctoral programs and the gendered aspects of the work environment in higher education. Although this research presented an interesting view of the experiences of doctoral student mothers in counselor

education, 80% of the participants were White and the study did not include any African American women. Consequently, there was no data illustrating the unique situation experienced by African American female doctoral students who are also mothers in the field (Trepal et al.). Due to the absence of research on African American doctoral student mothers, it is unknown whether race influences the experiences of doctoral student mothers in counselor education. Hence, the purpose of the current study is to address this void in the literature by exploring the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs through the lens of womanism to gain insight into their personal and professional lives. The research will help inform effective support mechanisms for African American mothers in counselor education programs struggling to balance motherhood, life, and, doctoral student status.

### **Work-Life Balance of Doctoral Student Mothers**

The career path for women who are mothers is unique as they attempt to balance their time and attention among their commitments (Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haiyasoso, 2013). Much of the literature on work-life balance and family issues in academia concerns faculty rather than graduate students (Simpson & Filer, 2011). The literature suggests that women in academia with children have a more difficult time than their male counterparts and childless peers maintaining their ideal career because of the difficulty of combining work and family activities (Spalter-Roth & VanVooren, 2012). Although work-life balance for doctoral students may seem the same as work-life balance for faculty, the experiences are different (Martinez, Ordu, Sala, & McFarlane, 2013; Simpson & Filer).

Doctoral students face additional work life challenges during their academic programs such as, financial stability, establishing a professional identity, and working full and part-time jobs while also attending school (Simpson & Filer in Pasque and Nicholson). Considering these additional challenges, trying to balance the high-stress and high workload demands of a doctoral student is a turbulent experience for all (Martinez, et al.). The reality is most graduate students occupy multiple roles and face many of the previously mentioned challenges (Offerman, 2011).

Kroska (2006) defines gender ideology as the attitudes pertaining to the appropriate roles, rights, and responsibilities of men and women in society. Traditionally, “appropriate” women’s roles are supported through patriarchal attitudes associated with patriarchal ideology, which views women as the homemakers and men as career driven breadwinners (Sultana & Noora, 2011). These traditional socially and culturally constructed gender norms and attitudes increase the negative experiences and challenges mothers face in their pursuit of a graduate degree (Gardner, 2009). As mothers are becoming more involved in non-traditional roles outside of the home, these pervasive attitudes stimulate more challenges in managing family, career, and graduate school (Sultana & Noor). Just as women have an ideal image of themselves as mothers, so too do they frame their status as a doctoral student around a self-perceived image (Lynch, 2008; Trepal, Stinchfield & Haiyasoso, 2013). Society often demands that students pursuing higher education, specifically at the doctoral level do so with a certain amount of rigor and determination (Lynch; Trepal, et al.). Because of the ways that ‘motherhood’ and ‘doctoral student’ are conceptualized in the dominant culture in the United States, each of these roles (mother and student) require total dedication and



commitment, creating an innate conflict for doctoral student mothers seeking balance and who strive to succeed in both (Lynch). However, the status of African American doctoral student mothers can be an even more isolating experience as they are not only fusing families and careers with doctoral work but also with their racial and maternal identity (Sealey-Ruiz, 2013).

The literature on work-life balance of African American doctoral student mothers is sparse, therefore, what follows is a synthesis of the research on the work-life experiences of graduate student mothers in general and the affect that race has on this balancing act specifically for African American women. A prior study on the attrition of doctoral student mothers found that the participants all had to take time away from their graduate studies in their quest to be ‘good mothers’ (Lynch, 2008). In fact, in the same study Lynch (2008) discovered that 73% of the 30 participants switched to temporary part-time status in their various doctoral programs after having children due to the challenges they faced trying to maintain work-life balance. Although the respondents agreed that the switch to part-time status offered them an array of personal benefits as it relates to motherhood, they felt that they suffered academically because of their decision. The participants further stated that the lack of resources available to students with children compound their ability to balance motherhood and academic life successfully (Lynch, 2008). In another study conducted by Haynes (2012), the female doctoral student participants revealed that they were in need of support to assist them in developing effective coping strategies and realistic goal setting in order to balance the multiple priorities they shared.

Like all doctoral student mothers, African American doctoral students that are mothers struggle with the challenge of trying to achieve a successful balance between academic work and family life. However, the intersections of gender and race experienced by African American women interact to create unique experiences and challenges for them as mothers and students (Perlow, 2013). As previously stated, the dominant cultural expectations of ‘doctoral student’ and ‘mother’ are in direct conflict with one another (Abdullah, 2012; Collins, 2000). Womanism asserts that combining race and gender intensifies the challenges of balancing motherhood and doctoral education (Collins, 2000; Perlow, 2013).

African American mothers in graduate education cite experiences of having to combat systems of interlocking oppressions while attempting to maintain a work-life balance (Collins; 2000; Perlow, 2013; Sealey-Ruiz, 2013). The systems of oppression (i.e. gender, race, and class) that often surround African American women exacerbate their struggle to maintain balance while trying to discredit negative stereotypes regarding “Black motherhood” (Collins, 2000; Perlow, 2013). These gender and racial challenges experienced by African American mothers in higher education necessitate the need for a conceptual framework that encompasses all aspects of their varying experiences in motherhood and education (Wilson & Washington, 2007). This review of the literature reflects the lack of relevant literature and scholarship regarding African American doctoral student mothers, thus, as portrayed in this chapter the experiences of African American women are often grouped with the collective experiences of male African American doctoral students (Hamlet, 2006). The disregard for explicit analysis of the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers mistakenly assumes that their

experiences in higher education are synonymous with African American males or White females (Hamlet, 2006). Therefore, examining and analyzing the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers through Womanist epistemology and methodology acknowledges their experiences as valid and worthy of scholarship (Hamlet, 2006).

### **African American Women and Doctoral Studies**

In 1921, Eva B. Dykes from Radcliffe College, Sadie T. Mossell Alexander from the University of Pennsylvania, and Georgiana R. Simpson from the University of Chicago were the first African-American women to earn doctorates (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2014). Although a radical achievement for any woman in 1921, this was an especially amazing feat for women of African descent. However, their progress was achieved a full 45 years after the first African American man and 48 years after the first White female earned their doctorates from American Universities (The Journal in Higher Education, 2014). These startling statistics not only reflect the gender and racial gap that existed in higher education almost 100 years ago but also the inequity that continues to saturate higher education today. For example, according to the National Science Foundation (NSF), in 2012, 23,562 women earned doctorate degrees (NSF, 2014). Out of this number 13,053, the majority of the women, identified as White. However, Black women only accounted for 1,492 of the earned doctorates (NSF). Although this is one of the largest cohorts of African American female doctorates in history, African American women received the fewest doctorates of any racial group other than women that self-identified as more than one race (NSF). These statistics denote the historical and current gender and racial challenges continuously faced by African American women as they progress toward a doctoral degree.

## **The Centrality of Race**

Most of what we know about the needs of African American female doctoral students stems from the literature on the experiences of African American doctoral students as a collective group (Henfield, Owens, & Witherspoon, 2010; Felder & Barker, 2013; Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012). African American students face unique challenges in navigating their doctoral programs compared to their White peers (Henfield, Owens, & Witherspoon, 2010; Felder & Barker, 2013). The findings of a 2010 phenomenological study of the experiences of African American doctoral students in counselor education programs suggests that African American students shoulder the additional burden of experiencing, addressing, and responding to race based interactions in their pursuit of a doctoral degree (Henfield et al.). Additional studies indicate this is especially true for African American's attending doctoral programs at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) as they acknowledge dealing with intense feelings of isolation, marginalization, and oppression as a numeric minority in the university setting (Milner, 2004; Patton, 2009; Shealey, 2009). In addition, the students in the Henfield et al. study reported the constant need to combat what they perceived as a sense of intellectual inferiority due to their race, yet adding another layer of uniquely race based stress to their doctoral education. Research on African American student persistence has found that racism, prejudice, and discrimination can negatively affect students' ability to negotiate the academic environment successfully (Felder & Barker).

The aforementioned statistics illustrate that African American females are indeed completing doctoral programs at higher rates; nevertheless, they do experience several challenges. All doctoral students share some of these challenges (Gardner, 2009).

However, some challenges, including isolation and discrimination, may be unique to African American female doctoral students (Bhat, Pillay, and Hudson, 2012). The experiences of African American female doctoral students in higher education, especially in counselor education, have not been well documented in the research literature (Bhat et al.). A review of the literature revealed one study that focused specifically on the experiences of African American female doctoral students in counselor education programs (Bhat et al.). Bhat, Pillay, and Hudson (2012) conducted a qualitative study of the experiences of 11 African American female doctoral students currently enrolled in counselor education or counseling psychology programs at PWIs. The goal of the study was for participants to describe their phenomenological experiences. Findings suggest that participants experienced isolation, poor interactions with professors and peers, and perceived race and gender based discrimination and prejudice. Several of the respondents cited their frustration over constantly having to prove their intellectual capabilities to their mostly male and predominantly White professors and classmates. Although the respondents cited gender discrimination, the results of the study suggest that race was a more salient factor than gender for the respondents, indicating that African American female doctoral students must combat the unique challenge of traversing doctoral education while fighting the dual oppressions of being Black and female (Bhat et al.).

### **Role of Gender**

Like their male counterparts, African American female doctoral students often encounter inequity, unfair treatment, misjudging, isolation, and marginality in their programs (Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012; Cosette, 2012; Henfield, Owens, &

Witherspoon, 2010). However, unlike their African American male counterparts African American female doctoral students must contend with gender stereotyping that contributes to their marginalization (Sealey-Ruiz, 2013). Gender contributes considerably to social inequalities (Maher, Ford, & Thompson, 2004). The persistent challenges women face in higher education hinder their achievement and advancement calling for more research on gender equity issues (Pasque & Nicholson, 2011). The growth of women receiving advanced degrees and positions as faculty, staff, and administration in higher education would lead many to believe that gender inequities no longer exist in academia (Pasque & Nicholson). However, the academic success of today's women continues to be plagued by patriarchal trends that create barriers of sexism and oppression in higher education (Pasque & Nicholson). For example, the White male dominated world of the academy. In 2011, 79% of all full-time faculty in higher education were White. However, 44% were White males and only 35% were White females (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013). Also in 2011, 84% of all full-time tenured professors were White with an astounding 60% documented as White males and only 25% as White females (NCES). Although these statistics are dismal for White females in the academy and those wishing to enter the academy, Black females lag even farther behind. The same 2011 survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that only 6% of the full-time faculty was Black and only 4% of the full-time tenured professors were Black. The NCES did not even bother to report the breakdown of African American females or African American males in these positions but reported their statistics collectively. These numbers are disconcerting given that the number of African American doctoral recipients has steadily

been increasing, but they reflect the racial inequity evident at Universities across the country (ASHE, 2011).

### **The Intersection of Race and Gender**

Although African American males and African American females share some similarities in their doctoral experiences, the intersection of gender and race combined with motherhood impact the experiences of African American female doctoral students differently. Unlike their White female counterparts, the race and gender of African American doctoral students intersect to create a unique set of challenges as they matriculate through their doctoral education (Collins). Intersectionality helps to shed light on the impact of the multiple challenges and oppressions facing African American doctoral student mothers. African American women are not susceptible to race-only or gender-only perspectives but have a distinct constellation of experiences due to their intersectionality of race and gender (Collins, 1998). Because race and gender both operate as defining constructs of identity status in Western society, African American women are constantly navigating both significant identities (Collins, 1998). Although race and gender appear to share equal status, most African American women identify race as a fundamental feature shaping the everyday experiences of African American women as a group (Collins, 1998). Collins (1998; 2001) suggests that although race and gender mutually construct one another and are intersecting categories, for African American women, institutionalized racism comprises such a significant aspect of the lived African American experience that it often overshadows sexism and other group-based oppressions. Each group assigns a different salience to race and gender, and while both White women and African American women experience sexism they experience and

“see” them differently (Collins, 1998). This intersectionality makes the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in higher education markedly different from their White female peers.

### **Mothering within the nexus of race and gender**

Social class, race, sexual orientation, and ability status influence mothers’ experiences (Medina & Magnuson, 2009). In addition, academic life can become much more complicated when you combine social and racial differences to the job of motherhood. Often, women of color that are both scholars and mothers find their educational progress obstructed by persistent racial and gender based prejudice and biases prevalent in the academe (Castaneda & Isgro, 2013). African American women confront both gender and race as social structure classifications in the United States (Collins, 1998). In the case of African American doctoral student mothers, race-gender intersections further complicate these issues and separate their racialized experiences from their White female counterparts (Collins, 2000). Collectively, women experience and must confront Western societies preoccupation with the family structure (Collins, 1998). Further, much of women’s subordination is organized around the “normative” traditional gendered views of the role of women (Perlow, 2013). Viewing motherhood among African American women through a dominant Eurocentric lens aids in reinforcing negative stereotypes perpetuating racial and ethnic disparities including the negative hegemonic images of African American mothers portrayed in society (Collins, 2000). However, viewing women, specifically mothers, through the nexus of both gender and race challenges traditional organization and allows for the positioning the experiences of



mothers within the hierarchies of race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and ability status (Collins, 1998).

The lack of research on the effects of race, class, and gender-specific experiences of motherhood in the African American community has limited our understanding of the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers (Foquier, 2011). In the little research that does exist on African American graduate students, the women state that the university setting propels feelings of stigmatization and isolation (Perlow, 2013).

Further, the women perceive graduate school as a system of oppression that further marginalizes African American women because it is laden with negative hegemonic images of African American motherhood that do not comply with the academy's White, middle-class conceptualization of motherhood (Foquier, 2011; Perlow, 2013). Collins (2000) asserts that in order to dispel these negative stereotypes, some African American women often internalize the patriarchal tradition of the Black woman as the matriarch or 'superwoman', which can have a detrimental effect on their physical and emotional well-being as well as their academic status. African American women are often told that they must be a 'superwoman' or 'supermom' to be a working mother (Hane, 1999).

Historically, the superwoman label has been reserved for working mothers who must be a superwoman to juggle family and work (Hane). The term 'superwoman' stems from the slavery era when the constraints placed upon African American women made portrayed them as the domineering matriarchs of the family full of strength and independence (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000). Today, however, the metaphor superwoman underscores the burdensome perception that African American doctoral student mothers should and must be able to do it all (Hane; hooks). Thereby, creating an unfair and often

unattainable status for these women that when they fail to accomplish can be detrimental to their academic and personal success (Collins, 2000; Hane).

African American doctoral student mothers are not immune to the hegemonic stereotypical representation of African American mothers as poor, single, and matriarchal figures (Harris-Perry, 2011). Sealey-Ruiz (2013) conducted a study with five African American undergraduate college re-entry mothers. In her case study, Sealey-Ruiz examines the ways in which the participants make meaning of their lives in regards to the intersections of race, education, and motherhood. In addition, the women expressed that although they are pursuing education they continue to combat negative stereotypes about African American mothers such as the mammy, the matriarch, and the welfare mother/welfare queen. Sealey-Ruiz found that the mothers in the study experienced fear of marginalization, racism, sexism, and negative stereotyping as psychological barriers to their academic success. Although the mothers in the aforementioned study were not doctoral students, the researcher contends that the findings may relate to other African American women that combine their status as mothers with their academic status.

The current study adds to our understanding of how African American women conceptualize their maternal identity and their scholar identity. Their stories describe the ways in which race, and gender can intersect and what this means in the world of higher education. The goal of this study is to understand the experiences of doctoral student mothers among African American women in a way that more closely reflects their daily lives.

### **Chapter Summary**

What can be gleaned from the little research that exists on African American doctoral student mothers is that some students have very positive experiences during their graduate studies, but many do not (Gay, 2004). Their issues of concern often arise at the point of entry into their doctoral program and persist throughout their tenure (Felder & Barker, 2013; Felder & Gasman, 2014). Although there is a void in the literature focusing on African American doctoral student mothers, issues regarding work-life balance, negative stereotypes, and patriarchal notions of motherhood saturate the literature as factors that affect the academic experiences of doctoral student mothers as well as African American doctoral students. A major goal of the current study is to fill the void in the literature by using womanism to explicate the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers and allow them to tell their stories as they experience them in daily life.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

A review of the literature yielded several studies that depict the experiences of doctoral students in counselor education programs (Henfield, Owens, & Witherspoon, 2009; Henfield, Woo, and Washington, 2012; Felder & Barker, 2013; Trepal, Stinchfield, and Haiyasoso, 2013). However, the literature lacks a thorough gender analyses explicating the lived experiences of doctoral student mother's in counselor education programs. Even more salient is the overwhelming silence of the voices of African American doctoral student mothers negotiating multiple identities/intersections. The literature is barren of studies focusing on the inwardness of the experiences shared by African American women as they combine the statuses of motherhood and student. Few researchers have examined the significance of this phenomenon, as perceived by African American mothers.

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs and specifically to explore how the intersection of race, gender, and motherhood impact their experiences. The goal of this inquiry was two-fold. The first goal was to fill a void in the research on female doctoral students navigating multiple identities. The second goal, and perhaps more personal to me, was to provide a platform for African American mothers to give both voice and meaning to their experiences as doctoral students. This chapter describes the study, research design, and methodology I used for my study. First, I will discuss the

philosophical rationale for a qualitative study and for choosing a phenomenology research design. An integral piece of the research design for this study is the theoretical framework of Womanism (Walker, 1984). Therefore, I explain to the reader how the lens of Womanist theory frames my understanding of the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers. Next, I focus on the research process for this study including, member recruitment, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, authenticity, and presentation of the findings. Finally, as the researcher in qualitative research is also the instrument and frames the findings of the research, it is imperative that I conclude the chapter by acknowledging my subjectivity and personal experiences as an African American doctoral student mother and the implications my realities with the phenomenon will have on the research process.

### **Rationale for Qualitative Research**

#### **Qualitative Research**

This study used qualitative methodology to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand how people interpret and make meaning of their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Just as social constructionism affirms that multiple realities exist for individuals, qualitative researchers stress that reality is socially constructed and that the interpretation people make of their experiences influences how they construct their worlds (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, Merriam).

Much like sociology and anthropology, qualitative inquiry focuses on the social and cultural contexts in which people live (Fisher & Embree, 2000). Qualitative researchers inquire about how participants understand and experience a particular

phenomenon within their social and cultural contexts (Fisher & Embree; Patton, 2002). This ever-present focus on the participants' worlds and the meaning of the participants' lives situated in the social and cultural context is increasingly being used to capture the lived experiences of individuals from marginalized backgrounds (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Gibson & Abrams, 2003). The qualitative approach places emphasis on the shared experience of the researcher and the participants (Denzin & Lincoln; Hays & Singh, 2012; Morrow, 2007). In contrast to the quantitative research approach, which utilizes questionnaires and statistical analysis, the relationship between researcher and participants in qualitative research is intimate and always at the forefront of the research study. Therefore, qualitative research can empower participants by giving them a platform to voice their stories, acknowledge their strengths and struggles, and focus on their needs (Denzin & Lincoln). The qualitative research approach was used in the study to give voice to and honor the interpretations of the life events and experiences that are most salient to African American doctoral student mothers. Because I share the status of African American doctoral student mother, qualitative research allowed me to position the relationship between myself and the participants at the forefront of the study, thereby, ensuring that the study focused solely on their stories, their voices, and their experiences, rather than the generalizability of the study.

### **Phenomenology**

*"We know not through our intellect but through our experience"* – Maurice Merleau-

Ponty, 1981

For the purposes of this study, I selected a phenomenological approach for data collection and analyses. The phenomenological approach to qualitative research seeks to

gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of the everyday experiences of African American doctoral student mothers (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology focuses on the essence of a shared experience as it is lived by the participants (Mearleau-Ponty, 1962; Patton, 2002). The goal of phenomenology is to elicit thick rich descriptions about what it is like to live a specific experience as an African American doctoral student mother (van Manen). Therefore, the goal of phenomenologists is to elucidate the meanings of experiences as we live them in our everyday lives (van Manen). Husserl (1970) terms our everyday existence the “lifeworld.” It is within our lifeworld that phenomena manifest themselves (Heidegger, 1998 [1927]).

Phenomenology, as a philosophy, asserts that you can only explore true meaning through participants voices (van Manen, 2007). Therefore, I used phenomenology to capture the voices of my participants as they gave meaning to their experiences. Furthermore, phenomenologists assume that within each phenomena there is an essence or essences shared by the individuals that experience it (Patton, 2002). In phenomenological research, the essence or essences are, “the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced” (Patton, 2002, p. 106). The essence of this phenomenological study was the essence of being an African American doctoral student mother. Because the phenomena under study was an experience shared exclusively by women, I felt that a more specific genre of phenomenology, such as feminist phenomenology, was necessary to fully understand and explicate the experiences of this gendered analysis.

**Feminist phenomenology.** The lens of gender frames and affects our reality as well as our actions (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002) and Crotty (2003) individuals constructed realities have implications for their lives and the ways in which they interact with others because of the historical, social, and cultural norms that shape people's lives. Feminism affirms that multiple realities exist and are situated in political, social, and cultural constructs (Grumet, 1998). Through the research paradigm of feminism, qualitative researchers seek to understand a specific phenomenon through multiple subjective lenses but also endeavor to generate social and political change (Merriam, 2008; Fisher & Embree, 2000; Grumet) in the gendered experience (Hays & Singh, 2012; Merriam; Fisher & Embree; Grumet). The purpose of feminist phenomenology is to change, liberate, and empower the individuals in a research study (Grumet). From a feminism perspective, researchers partly accomplish this feat through instilling a shared sense of power throughout the research process and intentionally establishing a sense of connection and equality between researcher and participants (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2006). As an African American doctoral student mother, I as the researcher share the phenomena with the participants. Therefore, having experienced my individual struggles, successes, and challenges as an African American doctoral student mother in a counselor education program it was especially important to me to incorporate a research paradigm that would empower the participants as well as myself.

According to Seidman, researchers should establish connection and equality from the onset of a research study. In order to accomplish a shared sense of power, connection, and equality in the current study, I built rapport from the beginning of the study by personally contacting and interviewing all the participants. Upon my



introduction to the participants, I shared my status as an African American doctoral student mother in an effort to establish connection and equality. Wilson and Washington (2007), assert that for the researcher to establish a trusting relationship with African American women, they must demonstrate early in the research process that he or she is not only interested in the research topic but also interested in the women as individuals as well as their community. I demonstrated my interest in the women and their communities by expressing my desire to create change in higher education through the research study and my commitment to mentoring and supporting other African American female doctoral students.

My goal in this study was to give voice to the experiences of African American mothers as they traversed the social, political, and cultural constructs of pursuing a doctorate degree. Therefore, engaging in a feminist paradigm allowed me, as the researcher, to reduce the distance between the often-polarizing experiences of motherhood and higher education (Grumet, 1998). Through a feminist lens, I examined how this lived phenomenon was individually manifested in the lives of the women and what, if any, impact gender and race had on their experiences.

The African American mothers in the current study share the unique life experience of being an African American woman. Phenomenology allowed me to gain access to the life world of African American doctoral student mothers and to illuminate the meaning of their individual experiences and their ways of knowing (Fisher & Embree, 2000). However, feminism challenges me to include methodology that affirms their experiences and empowers them throughout the research process by supporting consciousness raising and researcher reflexivity (Fisher & Embree; Patton, 2002; Wilson

& Washington, 2007). Feminism in phenomenology embodies a commitment to acknowledging and valuing the meaningful distinctions between the lived experiences of men and women (Fisher & Embree; Grumet, 1998). The researcher in Feminist phenomenology does more than generate knowledge for his or her own sake but commits to engaging in knowledge about women to create change and impact women's liberation and emancipation (Patton).

### **Theoretical Framework**

*“Womanist is to feminist, as purple is to lavender” –Alice Walker, 1984*

Feminism is the epistemology that directs how reality is constructed and understood in this study, Womanism functions as the conceptual framework through which identity is perceived and understood by African American women. The life world of African American women is shaped by the intricacy of their lives as both African American and women (Collins, 1990). Therefore, integrating the theoretical framework of Womanism with feminist phenomenology gave me the ability to do more than give voice to the experiences of African American women, it situated their lives and experiences at the center of analysis while granting the women full participation in the research process (Wilson & Washington, 2007). This access was granted by allowing the women the freedom to talk about their experiences in their own voices, through member checking, and by giving them the opportunity to provide additional information or feedback throughout the study.

As an African American doctoral student mother it was important for me to incorporate a theoretical framework that allowed me to be an active part of the research process by sharing my story and my experiences while illuminating those of the women

in the study. I felt a sense of duty to utilize a theory that uniquely positioned African American women, in particular African American mothers, at the forefront of the research. Through the lens of Womanist theory, I was able to center this research study on important issues and their influences on the lives and educational experiences of the African American doctoral student mothers that participated in the current study (Wilson & Washington, 2007). Using Womanism as a guide, I employed research methods that were congruent with African American women's ways of knowing and being in the world, thereby, creating a culturally congruent research approach (Collins, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 2005). Implementing a culturally congruent research approach inclusive of the African American women's ways of knowing means that this focus is central throughout each phase of the research process including the location of the interviews, data collection process, and data analysis process. Figure one depicts the congruency between the research tradition, research paradigm, and theoretical framework.

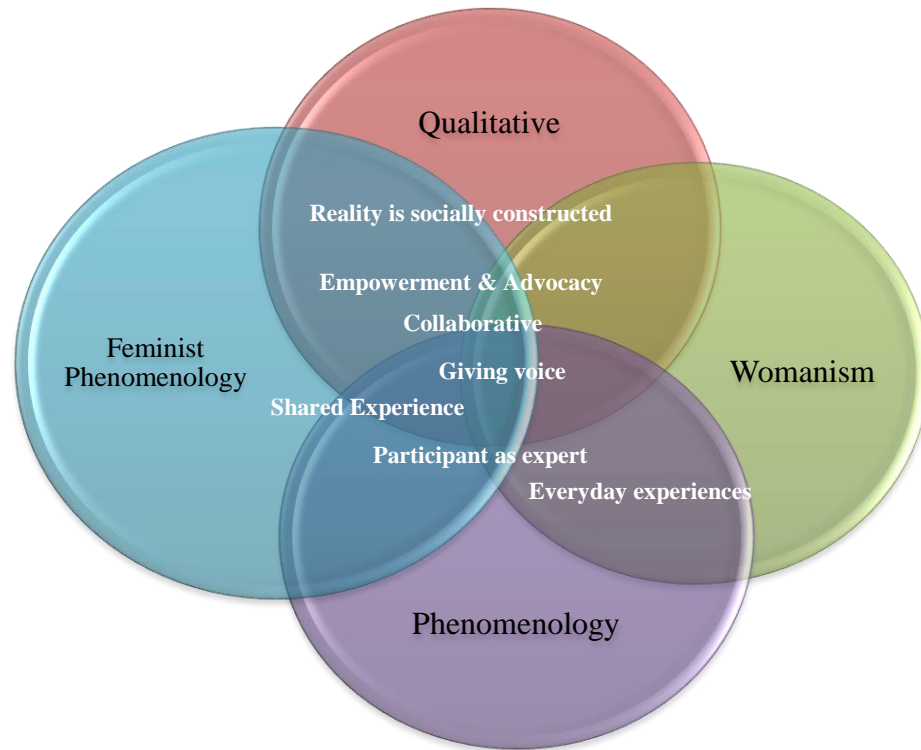


Figure 1: Diagram displaying the similarities between research tradition (Qualitative), research paradigm (phenomenology/feminist phenomenology), and theoretical framework (Womanism).

## Procedure

### Participant Sampling and Recruitment Techniques

I used both criterion sampling and snowball sampling to identify participants for this study (Patton, 2002). In criterion sampling the researcher explicitly identifies the attributes that are essential to the study and selects participants based on the very specific criteria (Merriam, 2009; Hays & Singh, 2012). Criterion sampling in qualitative inquiry reflects the purpose of the study and allows the researcher to select information-rich cases that yield insight and foster in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002;

Merriam). Because the current study focused specifically on the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education, criterion sampling created a small homogenous sample of participants to describe the phenomenon in depth (Patton). Using criterion sampling, I sought 8 to 12 African American doctoral student mothers attending Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) counselor education programs in the United States (U.S.). Snowball sampling was another approach I employed to locate information-rich participants. In the snowball approach, the researcher asks knowledgeable people to nominate potential participants for a study. Through snowball sampling, I identified potential participants and narrowed these individuals down to a small number of core cases (Patton). However, my goal for the study was not to secure a specific sample size, but to achieve thematic saturation (Morrow, 2007).

Participants for the study had to identify as Black or African American females and had to be mothers with at least one child currently living in their home between the ages of 0-18. In addition, the participants had to be actively pursuing doctoral degrees at (CACREP) institutions in the United States. In keeping with Womanism's ideal of establishing mutual trust and respect among the research participants and myself, I employed multiple strategies to recruit participants, including word-of-mouth, listservs, and emails. Wilson & Washington (2007) suggest that researchers wanting to recruit African American women should visit places in the African American community to recruit participants through word of mouth. Some of these venues are places of employment, churches, beauty salons, schools, and community functions. Through the snowball technique, I asked other counselor education doctoral students and faculty

members via word of mouth to nominate individuals that fit my study criteria. Further, I submitted a request for participants on the Counselor Education and Supervision Network Listserv (CESNET). Emails were sent to individuals that I knew might fit the established criteria. All electronic communication contained a description of the study, IRB approval, and my contact information (Appendix A). Finally, I recruited participants at the 2014 Southern Association for Counselor Educators (SACES) annual conference through a flyer approved by the University of Georgia IRB (Appendix B). Once the potential participants expressed an interest in participating in the study I personally contacted them by phone to clarify the intent of the study, determine their interest, and ensure they met participant criteria. I also detailed the steps of the research process including their role as co-researcher. Based on The University of Georgia, IRB, all interested participants received an official consent (Appendix C) to participate form and I reiterated that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw their consent at any time.

### **Institutional Review Board Process (IRB)**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a committee comprised of five members with the focus of protecting human subjects (Hays & Singh, 2012). As such, the IRB must review all potential research studies concerning human subjects. It is the responsibility of the IRB committee to assess prospective studies, such as this one, for potential risks and harm against the participants. Therefore, the IRB must approve this research studies before the data collection process. An IRB application was completed and submitted for approval by me upon receiving approval from the dissertation committee after a successful defense of the dissertation prospectus. Once I received

confirmation of the IRB approval to conduct the current study I provided the participants with an informed consent form. Informed consent is a voluntary agreement to participate in research (Patton, 2002). Obtaining consent for the current study involved informing the African American doctoral student mothers about their rights, the purpose of the study, the procedures to be undergone, and the potential risks and benefits of participation (Patton, 2002). Upon receipt of the informed consent, I began data collection.

### **Data Collection**

Extensive literature exists on the varying approaches of qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). In qualitative methodology the researcher is the main instrument of data collection, therefore, the researcher selects data collection strategies linked to their theoretical orientation (Merriam, 2009), nature and purpose of the study (Hays & Singh, 2012), relationship and status of the population, (Denzin & Lincoln; Hays & Singh) and their view of the problem under study (Creswell; Denzin & Lincoln; Merriam). According to Patton (2002) and Denzin & Lincoln (1998) most often qualitative researchers employ the data collection strategies of observation, interviewing (individual and focus groups), and document analysis. In an effort to accurately depict the multiple ways in which African American doctoral student mothers perceive their experience, I employed various data collection methods, including individual interviewing and photo elicitation. Both strategies link to womanism's focus of centering the research solely on the experiences of African American women as told by African American women (Phillips, 2006).

**Demographic Questionnaire.** The data collection process began by collecting the participant's demographic information through a questionnaire. For the purposes of this research study, the demographic questionnaire confirmed ethnicity, gender orientation, number of children, university location, type of graduate degree program, and other pertinent data related to the study (Appendix D). The demographic questionnaire allowed me to ensure that the participants matched the criteria for the study but also served as a way for the women to declare their status as African American women, mothers, and students.

After administering a demographic questionnaire, the next step in the data collection process was to conduct semi-structured individual interviews with each participant. At the start of the interview, I asked each participant to provide a pseudonym for identification purposes. They had the ability to choose their own pseudonym but all asked that I provide one for them. The purpose of the pseudonym was to protect the participant's anonymity and respect their confidentiality as outlined in the IRB. After the interview, the next step in the data collection was photo-elicitation.

**Semi-Structured Interviews.** The interview guide approach, or semi-structured interview, was the primary means of data collection in this research study. Qualitative, or depth interviews, give the researcher access to gain insight into the lived experiences, attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings of participants experiencing a particular phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). I conducted all the interviews to ensure that each participant in the research study experience the same general questions and topics (Patton, 2002). I selected this research approach because it provided a good opportunity to build rapport with the participants. According to Denzin & Lincoln (1998)



the ability to establish trust and rapport at the very beginning of a study ensures that participants are more willing to share all the nuances of their experiences as well as enables the researcher to connect their shared experience with the participants, thereby, establishing the participants role as a co-researcher (Kvale, 1996). .

Since the participants in this study are African American women, it was extremely important to me to use the semi-structured interview as a tool to deconstruct the power differential that often exists in researcher-participant relationships with individuals from marginalized groups (Seidman, 2006 ). The flexible approach and open-ended questions of the semi-structured interview permit exploration of spontaneous issues that may arise during the interview (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2009) and allows the interviewee to have control over the interview process. This concept of “shared power” follows the feminist research paradigm used throughout the study and is essential in working with women of color (Fisher & Embree, 2000; Grumet, 1998; Wilson & Washington, 2007). Specifically, I intentionally included the use of semi-structured interviews in the data collection process of this study to give the women space to tell their own stories rather than limit them based on a constrained series of questions (Ryan, et al.,). Although I developed initial questions for the interview protocol, the semi-structured interview method allowed the interviewer to probe and ask follow-up questions related to specific participant responses during the interview, thereby, enhancing the possibility for thicker, richer description of the phenomenon under investigation.

In addition to inclusion of the semi-structured interview, Seidman (2006) asserts that both participants and interviewers enter the interview relationship with our personal

experiences of social identities (i.e., race, gender, class, and ethnicity) and their intersection with issues of power, privilege, and oppression. Therefore, power negotiations are constant throughout the interview process and if the interviewer does not attend to her own experiences with power, as well as how issues of power influence the lives of the participants, the interview relationship can be ineffective and potentially harmful to the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Seidman). For the purposes of this study, I attended to my personal experiences with power through bracketing and reflexive journaling.

In the first phase of the study, I conducted one interview with each participant. The interviews last approximately 50-60 minutes each and consisted of approximately 10-12 open-ended questions. The interview questions were developed using the current literature on gender and education (Lynch, 2008; Stinchfield & Trepal, 2010, Trepal, 2012), gender roles and stereotyping, (Okimoto & Heilman, 2012; Sultana & Noor, 2011), African American students in counselor education programs, (Henfield, Owens, & Witherspoon, 2009; Henfield, Woo, and Washington, 2012), African American doctoral student experience (Felder & Barker, 2013), African American mothers (Parham-Payne, Dickerson, & Everette, 2013; Sealey-Ruiz, 2013), and doctoral student mothers in counselor education (Trepal, Stinchfield, and Haiyasoso, 2013). Due to the absence of literature on African American doctoral student mothers, I selected the specific literature to provide me the most depth and breadth in exploring motherhood, gender, race, and the doctoral experience.

The types of questions in the semi-structured interview protocol were behavior/experience, value, feeling, and probing questions (Hays & Singh, 2012)

(Appendix E). I selected these types of questions for two reasons. First, they gave the participants the opportunity to provide thicker and richer description about their experiences (Seidman, 2006). The second reason stems from Womanism (Wilson & Washington). Asking participants to reflect on their feelings, values, and behaviors allowed participants to develop their own voice and their own stories about the phenomenon in a way that acknowledged my interest in them and their experiences (Wilson & Washington). Other interview questions were included that encouraged participants to reflect on the experience of African American doctoral student mothers. For example, I asked the participants to share their reactions to the words, “African American doctoral student mother.” Interview questions such as this were designed to elicit thick description and explore the intersections of race and gender to incorporate the components of feminist phenomenology and womanism. The research team reviewed the protocol for clarity and understanding before it was administered to participants.

I was the sole interviewer for the research study. Therefore, I conducted all of the interviews. I met with each local participant in a private location established by both of us determined before the initial interview. According to Collins (2000) and Wilson & Washington (2007), choosing a safe and comfortable setting is an important aspect of the research design when conducting research with African American women. Specifically, the environment must be non-threatening and allow for personal expressiveness, safe display of emotions, and empathy where African American women can briefly breakaway from their personal challenges (Banks-Wallace, 2000; Wilson & Washington). These strategies are rooted in Womanist epistemology and affirm the African American female experience (Banks-Wallace; Wilson & Washington).

Therefore, I sought out a safe, warm, friendly, and inviting space that was private, which I hoped would encourage the participants to be more open and honest with their answers (Gibson & Abrams, 2003).

In order to accommodate participants that were unable to meet in person due to location or personal reasons, I conducted their interviews through Skype or over the telephone. A study conducted by Trier- Bieniek (2012) defines telephone interviews in qualitative research as “participant-centered” and proposes that telephone interviews are beneficial to qualitative methodology as they encourage participants to be more open and honest in their responses. The author contends that merging feminist methodology with the format of semi-structured telephone interviewing results in explication of richer data because people are familiar with ‘virtual’ communication and may be more willing to talk about traumatic experiences through virtual communication rather than face-to-face interviewing (Trier-Bieniek, 2012). Creswell (2014) also supports the use of internet interviewing in the event a face-to-face interview is not possible. Both in-person and telephone interviews were recorded on a digital recorder for accuracy and transcribed by the researcher. After each interview, I recorded any thoughts, biases, issues, and/or questions in a reflexivity journal. Because the researcher is the main instrument in qualitative research the reflexive journal and contact summary sheets are important pieces to ensure trustworthiness of the data (Hays & Singh, 2012). I also completed a contact summary sheet (Appendix F) immediately after completing each interview to note any discrepancies, salient thoughts, main themes, and general comments about the interviewee’s responses in comparison with the responses of other participants. In order to effectively terminate the interview process the participants were asked a final open-

ended question to provide closure to the session. The final interview question was: Are there any experiences, concerns, or thoughts that we have not discussed regarding your experiences as an African American doctoral student mother?

**Photo Elicitation.** In order to learn more about the intersections of doctoral student and mother for African American women, I asked the participants to take photographs of what they think is most helpful in understanding the phenomena of this research study. This data collection method is known as photo-elicitation and supplements the primary interview data. First named in 1957 by John Collier, photo-elicitation can be used as a tool to bring individuals into a new awareness of their social existence by inserting a photograph into a verbal research interview (Harper, 2002 ). Photography, as a supplemental data collection, can enhance phenomenological designs that seek to uncover the meaning of a phenomenon in the participant's lives by evoking deeper elements of human consciousness than words (Harper). In addition, Vagle (2013) asserts that photo-elicitation can provide in-depth glimpse into how the phenomenon is lived by each individual participant and the visual access gives researchers the opportunity to learn more about the phenomenon as the images connect participants to the experience (Harper). Further, when a photo is analyzed of a shared experience, the differences in interpretation of the experience are visible and can be defined, compared, and understood to be socially constructed by each participant adding a richness to the overall description of the phenomenon increasing validity and reliability (Harper).

Wilson and Washington (2007) assert that phenomenological researchers working African American women should include strategies and activities that celebrate them and encourage them to become involved in the research process. Visual methods, such as

photo elicitation encourage participant's engagement with the research process as well as provide the interviewer a means to access aspects of the participants lives that they would not be privy to without using photo elicitation (Pain, 2012). Studies citing photo elicitation as a data collection tool not only suggest that the method increases enrichment of data and improves quality and depth of the research, but the studies also support that the use of photo elicitation facilitates rapport building between participants and researchers as well as supports various theoretical frameworks (Meo, 2010; Pain). I contend that the theoretical framework of Womanist theory validates photo elicitation as an activity that allows active participation in the research study by the African American doctoral student mothers as well as facilitates a caring and nurturing environment (Pain). The process of photo elicitation, when incorporated with traditional interviewing, values participants experience in their own lives in their own voices, empowers participants, reduces the power differential between researcher and participant, establishes collaboration, and may effect change individually and/or systemically (Harper; Pain).

In the current study, I asked the African American doctoral student mothers to produce their own photographs depicting their experiences and discuss them in the interview. This allowed the women to voice their own experiences rather than me making biased interpretations of the images (Banks, 2001; Meo; & Pain). This strategy addressed the imbalance of power between myself and the participants by allowing the African American doctoral student mothers to guide this aspect of data collection process (Pain, Seidman). Castleden, Garvin, & Huu-ay-aht (2008) posit that engaging in photo elicitation successfully balances power between the participants and the researcher by creating ownership, establishing trust, building capacity, and reducing the influence that

my status as an African American doctoral student mother had, on the data collection process.

Womanist theory guides me as the researcher to seek active participation of the African American doctoral student mothers throughout the research process as much as possible so that they may gain valuable skills and knowledge to enhance their status as African American doctoral student mothers (Frohmann, 2005; Phillips, 2006; Wilson & Washington, 2007). A goal of Womanism is to elevate all forms of oppression from a social change perspective (Phillips, 2006). Therefore, it is my rationale that including photo elicitation in the research process will bring African American doctoral student mothers to a greater awareness of their status and their selves, which may empower them to effect change within themselves as well as their communities and counselor education programs.

Upon receiving initial consent and before each interview, I provided a written or emailed instruction sheet for the photo elicitation to each participant (Appendix G). The instructions included guiding questions about the focus of the study to ensure that participants understood the purpose of the study and the significance of the photos (Hays & Singh, 2012). The participants were asked to take one to three photos that reflected their lived experience of their identity as an African American doctoral student mother. The participants were told they could take the photographs with camera phones or digital cameras that the participants already owned or that I could provide them with a disposable camera. I asked the participants to title the photo-elicitation and provide me with a hard or digital copy prior to the interview. These photographs were discussed with participants during the semi-structured interview in order to learn more about their

perception and interpretation of what it means to be an African American doctoral student mother. First, I interviewed the participants using the semi-structured interview protocol. Second, I displayed the photograph(s) received from the individual participant and asked them to tell me about the photograph. Third, I asked the participants to share what the photograph represents for them. Fourth, I asked the participants what feelings came to mind for them while they were reflecting on the photograph(s). Finally, based on the participant's responses during the photo elicitation I continued to ask probing questions to ensure I was explicating the accurate themes from their description of the photograph. Figure 2 displays the steps that occurred in the interview process.



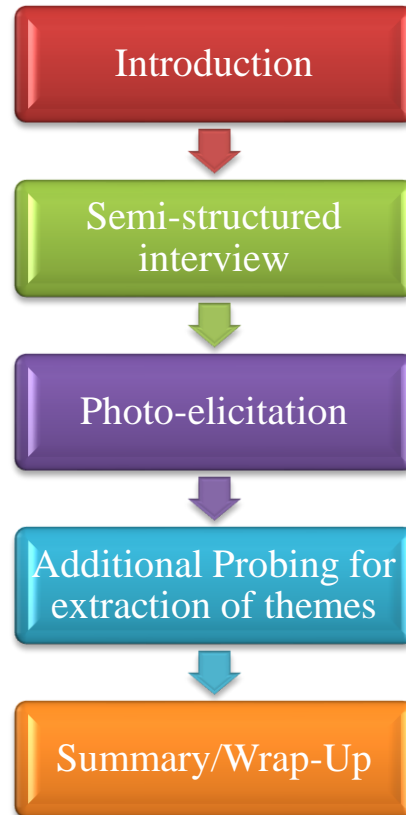


Figure 2: Sequential steps used in the semi-structured interview process with photo-elicitation

### Data analysis

**Concurrent Analysis.** I used concurrent analysis to analyze the data and guide me through this qualitative phenomenological research study. This approach involved me collecting data and analyzing it concurrently throughout the interview process (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, the data analysis process began after the first interview and continued until all the interviews were complete and all data collected (Johnsen & Christensen, 2012; Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008).

**Epoche.** The first step in phenomenological analysis is epoche. Epoche, a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment (Moustakas, 1994) is an essential process in phenomenological analysis. It is through epoche that the phenomenologist acknowledges

and suspends all prejudices, biases, judgments, and assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994). It is critical for the phenomenological researcher to view the phenomenon with fresh eyes so that they refrain from inserting their own perceptions into the stories of their participants (Patton, 2002). Others call this process bracketing. I started the data analysis process by bracketing my experiences as an African American doctoral student mother. Bracketing my lived experience with the phenomenon helped me to maintain focus throughout the study on the lives of the participants and their experiences. Because epoche is an ongoing analytical process rather than a single fixed event, I am bracketing throughout the research process in a reflexivity journal.

**Phenomenological data analysis.** Once I transcribed the interviews, I began Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological data analysis and immersed myself in the details of the data and searched for the essence and meanings in the responses of the participants that were relevant to the phenomenon being studied. First, the statements and meanings were coded by the research team. The coding process began with the process of horizontalization. In phenomenology, horizontalization is the first step in the coding process in which the research team uses the complete transcription of each participant to identify "nonrepetitive and nonoverlapping" statements (meaning units) in the transcripts (Moustakas, 1994). Next, we clustered the meaning units into themes. The next step was textural description, in which the research team began to refine the data to understand the meaning and depth of the essence of the experience from each participant. For the purposes of this study, I created a list that depicted the refining of the horizontalization of the data into a textural description of the essence of the phenomenon. Then I identified a

structural description including verbatim examples from the interview to identify relationships among the meanings. Each member of the research team coded the first transcription independently and then came together to reach an agreement on the codes a process termed consensus coding (Hays & Singh, 2012). After, the initial codes were agreed upon the research team coded each transcript independently and then I compiled a list of all the codes. The triangulation of multiple researchers during consensus coding increased trustworthiness of the data (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002; Hays & Singh, 2012). Next, I categorized these phrases and then formulated and clustered them into themes or meaning units that I found common among the participants' responses. The research team immersed themselves in the interview transcripts and searched for meaning units and themes, as well. Thereby, increasing intercoder, or interrater reliability (Patton, 2002). After the first transcript was coded, I created a codebook that contained definitions or descriptions of each code along with direct quotes and references to the photo-elicitation.

Unlike other methods of data analysis, the process of analyzing photo elicitation is somewhat of a collaborative endeavor between the researcher and participant (Jenkins, Woodward, & Winter, 2008). In photo elicitation, the participant is not only a data resource but also a resource of analysis (Jenkins, et al.). In analyzing the photo elicitation, abstract themes were identified from a process of reflection by the participants during the discussion of the photo-elicitation between the participant and the interviewer (Creswell, 2014; Jenkins, et al.). Instead of me attributing meaning to the photographs through my personal lens, the process of intense reflection and description allowed the participants to make meaning of their own photographs and offer opportunity for

explanation (Jenkins, et al.). Next, I reviewed the themes and the meaning units and wrote textured descriptions of the students' experiences. These descriptions included the specific language of the participants in the study. Finally, I synthesized the data into results that provided a description of the essence of the experiences of the African American doctoral student mothers (Banks, 2001; Meo, 2010; & Vagle, 2013).

### **Trustworthiness of the Data**

Creswell (2014) asserts that qualitative researchers employ various approaches to check for validity and accuracy of their findings. Qualitative researchers define this process by many different names; however, for the purposes of this study I use the term trustworthiness when discussing validity. I employed several strategies to maximize trustworthiness for the current study. The strategies I employed to assess the accuracy of findings were investigator triangulation, source triangulation, member checking, rich thick description, maintaining an audit trail, bracketing, and reflexivity.

**Member Checking.** Throughout the data analysis process, I employed the strategy of member checking (participant feedback) to verify the accuracy of my interpretations and descriptions of the members' personal experiences (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2007; Hays & Singh, 2012). The participants receive a hard or electronic copy of their transcribed interview for review and were asked to make corrections for accuracy if necessary on the actual transcript. Member checking was used throughout the interviews as well to ensure that I adequately reflected their lived experiences and did not frame them with my own assumptions. Finally, after the coding process the participants had the opportunity to review the identified codes and themes to add their voice to the findings through the process of member checking.

**Investigator Triangulation.** In order to obtain interpretive validity the strategies of investigator triangulation (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2007) and peer review were implemented to cross-check and corroborate the interpretation of the transcriptions to ensure the research participants' subjective experiences, thoughts, and viewpoints were authentically and accurately portrayed in the research results (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Hays & Singh; Merriam, 2007). The research team helped guide the data collection process as well as provided support in organizing and analyzing the data. Hays and Singh (2012) suggest identifying research team members that have an interest in the study, are knowledgeable and comfortable with the research process, and are willing to collaborate and meet for team meetings. My research team consisted of two doctoral student mothers. One is African American and the other is White. Both women were current doctoral students knowledgeable about the qualitative research approach and familiar with what is required of a research team member. I intentionally selected the members of the research team as they were invested in this research study and honored and valued the stories of the participants due to their shared status of doctoral student mothers. During the coding process, I intentionally utilized investigator triangulation, simultaneous data collection, rich thick description, and recursivity to confirm trustworthiness of the data. These steps also enhanced meaning, increase authenticity, and illuminated the voice of the participants in the findings.

**Source Triangulation.** Source triangulation refers to using multiple data collection methods to depict themes (Patton, 2002). I used the individual interviews as well as the photo elicitation as my two data sources. Examining the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs through

different data sources built coherent validation for the themes (Creswell, 2014). In this study, I congregated the data gleaned from the individual interviews with the data gathered from the photo elicitation to establish themes, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the study.

**Rich Thick Description.** Creswell (2014) suggests that qualitative researchers incorporate rich, thick description into the trustworthiness of their data. I used rich, thick description to describe and interpret the various aspects of the research process. Using a rich, thick description makes the findings richer and more realistic adding to the trustworthiness of the findings.

**audit trail.** I maintained an audit trail containing all documents of the research process in a locked file cabinet in my home. The purpose of the audit trail is to provide evidence, if necessary, of all data collection and analysis procedures (Patton, 2002). My audit trail contains all documents used and collected throughout the entire research process.

**bracketing.** In phenomenology it is necessary that the researcher understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the person experiencing it (Vagle, 2013). Therefore, in this study bracketing was essential for me to identify any assumptions, biases, values, beliefs, and experiences that may have affected my understanding of the phenomenon (Wilson & Washington, 2007; Vagle, 2013). Bracketing temporarily suspends the researcher's presuppositions about a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing did not eliminate my experiences nor my presuppositions about the phenomenon; however, bracketing allowed the participants' experiences to be brought into clear view (Vagle, 2013; van Manen, 1990). According to Wilson and Washington

(2007) African American researchers that share similar experiences as their participants may find bracketing more difficult.

*using the voices of African American doctoral student mothers to enhance my status.* I am an African American doctoral student mother. As a Black woman, wife, and working mother of two young children I have a personal relationship to the current study and my participants. In fact, it is because of my experiences with the phenomenon that I came upon this research topic. During my second year as a doctoral student, I had to make the decision to leave my children to write a paper that was due the following week. At the time, I felt stressed and full of anxiety and guilt over my decision. However, as I searched the literature to look for articles to validate my experiences I found nothing that mirrored my experience as a doctoral student mother. Since I could not find literature that offered strategies or commentary on my challenging position, I reached out to my family and friends. However, as I sought support from those around me I realized that no one could truly understand what I was going through except another mother in my position. Therefore, for the first time in two years I reached out to other mothers in my program and realized that I was not the only one feeling isolated by this experience. Although our stories were varied our experiences were similar and our need to be heard, empowered, valued, and validated rang loud. It was our need for acknowledgment and support that fueled my desire to conduct this study. I acknowledge that my shared experience with the phenomenon influenced the research process. However, Womanist theory posits that my status as an African American doctoral student mother is a strength in the research study as our shared status made it easier to establish and build rapport with the women who in turn were more open and honest in their responses (Phillips,

2006). Therefore, I illuminated my status as an African American doctoral student mother with my participants.

Seidman (2006) contends that qualitative interviewers and researchers bring their assumptions and experiences into the research process. My assumption was that African American mothers enrolled in counselor education doctoral programs experience conflicting feelings of anxiety, guilt, achievement, and self-fulfillment as they cope with managing their multiple identities of mothers and students. Further, I believed that gender identity intersects with racial/ethnic identity, which varies participant's lived experience and coping techniques.

In addition, I assumed that African American counselor education doctoral student mothers experience marginalization in their programs because of their race and because they are mothers. This dual identity is difficult for any woman to navigate; however, I believe that African American women have unique experiences unlike their White peers because of their race. Further, it is also my assumption that these women would be happy but also scared to share their stories because they have continue to be pushed out of the center and to the margins for so long. My assumptions were based in part on previous research and personal experience. However, I chosen this particular phenomenon to study because of these personal experiences. Therefore, given the open-ended nature of qualitative research, I had to be intentional to avoid researcher bias and ensure that I did not allow my personal views and observations to affect the interpretation of the data taking focus off of the African American doctoral student mothers that participated in my study.



**reflexivity.** Bracketing requires a researcher to be very reflective. According to Wilson and Washington (2007) African American researchers that share similar experiences as their participants may find bracketing more difficult. Therefore, they suggest the researcher maintain a strong reflexive approach throughout the research process (Gibson & Abrams, 2003; Wilson & Washington). Because I am African American and I share similar experiences with my participants, I kept a reflexivity journal to engage in self-reflection. Reflexivity was the main strategy I used to acknowledge and understand my personal experiences with the phenomenon. Through my reflexive journaling, I wrote about my personal experiences, feelings, assumptions, beliefs, and values. I also reflected on the research process at each step and the impact it had on my status as an African American doctoral student mother currently working on her doctorate in a counselor education program. Another strategy I used was to seek support by consulting with a more experienced investigator knowledgeable about conducting research with African American women.

### **Chapter Summary**

Phenomenology is a holistic approach that employs methods that seek a complete understanding of individual's experience with a phenomenon. The goal of phenomenology is not to validate or verify a theory but to understand the essence of the phenomenon as it is lived (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). As an extension of phenomenology, feminist phenomenology brings gender to the forefront of the research study by examining the participant's experience with the phenomenon from a gendered analysis. Feminist phenomenology acknowledges that gender frames our reality and our actions (Patton, 2002). The purpose of feminist phenomenology is to change, liberate, and

empower individuals in a research study (Grumet, 1998). The methodology implemented for this study is consistent with a theoretical epistemology based on Womanist theory, which assumes that the experiences of African American women should be examined holistically from a research approach that acknowledges the uniqueness and complexity of African American women's experiences (Banks-Wallace, 2000; Wilson & Washington, 2007). In this study, I used Womanist theory (Walker, 1984) as a guide to inform various aspects of my research design to ensure congruence with African American women's ways of knowing and being (Banks-Wallace). Further, for the purposes of this study, Womanist theory placed African American women at the center of analysis aiding in a more meaningful analysis and interpretation of the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers (Wilson & Washington). Throughout this chapter, I explicate how Womanism is idyllic for examining and giving voice to the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers.

Using Womanism as a lens, I collected interviews and photographs from eight African American woman that identified with the status of African American doctoral student mother. To identify the essence of their experiences and make meaning out of the data gathered, I explained how I employed phenomenology data analysis methods. The data that I collected and analyzed allowed me to respond to and answer the research question posed in this study. The research approach described in this chapter offers a more comprehensive approach to understanding and analyzing the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

*“I just think it’s important to value those experiences and to value the different aspects of that identity because they are a woman, they are a mother, and they are African American and sometimes those three identities have different challenges that come with them”*

*-Chloe, Participant and African American Doctoral Student Mother*

Womanism places African American women at the center of society and declares that they are the experts of their own experiences (Phillips 2006). Through this ideology, African American women are empowered to tell their own stories, in their own voices, thereby defining their own reality (Phillips). Using womanism as a methodology, this study employed feminist phenomenology to present the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs in their own voices. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs and specifically to explore how the intersection of race, gender, and motherhood impact their experiences. The following research question guided the qualitative exploration of this phenomenon: what are the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs? The interview questions produced a thick rich description of the participants’ experiences navigating their doctoral studies as a mother and an African American woman and identified various factors such as work life balance, age, and

number of kids, program support, race, gender, and resilience that influenced their experience.

This chapter presents the key findings obtained from eight semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The chapter begins with a brief description of the African American doctoral student mothers. Following the brief descriptions is Table 1, which gives general information including age, number of children, age(s) of children, and current year in doctoral program. Next, the findings are summarized across the eight participant interviews to highlight common emergent themes (Creswell, 2014). This thematic summary is divided into six themes: 1) An increase in personal pride, 2) A multitude of work-life balance challenges, 3) View motherhood as a priority, 4) Modeling new ways of being an African American mother, 5) Marginalization based on race, and 6) Perseverance through adaptation and resilience. Additionally, participant photographs are included in this section to further illustrate quotations and findings and support each theme in this study. The photographs were used to elicit thicker rich description of the phenomena from the perspective of the participants. However, the photographs do not supplement each quotation or finding because not all photographs related to the comments included. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the findings. The major findings will be presented in this chapter and discussed in chapter five.

This study included eight African American doctoral student mothers who at the time of their interviews were enrolled in CACREP counselor education programs across the South, North, and Midwestern U.S. Four out of eight of the participants were enrolled full-time in their programs and all of the women worked outside their home at

least part-time. In addition, two of the participants were single and six were married.

Following is a brief description of each participant:

Layla was a 29-year-old single parent with one son. She was in her 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the program during the time of the interview. Layla's doctoral program was located in the Midwest and she attended full-time while working part-time. She had hopes of becoming a full-time counselor educator after graduation.

Candice was a 35-year-old married mother of two young sons. At the time of the interview, she was in her 10<sup>th</sup> year of her doctoral program and was due to graduate that December. Candice's doctoral program was located in the Midwest and she attended full-time while working full-time outside of her program. She also had hopes of becoming a full-time counselor educator after graduation.

Angela was a very strong and proud married 40-year-old mother of three children. She was in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of her counselor education program during the time of the interview. Angela's program was located in the Southern U.S. and she attended part-time while working 60 plus hours a week outside of the home at three different jobs.

Maria was the oldest participant at 50 years old. She had been married for over 20 years and had one daughter. Maria was in her 4<sup>th</sup> year of the program and although she was in the process of preparing to take the comprehensive exams for the second time, she was persistent, proud, and dedicated to motherhood. Maria's program was located in the South and she attended part-time while she worked full-time outside the home.

Faith was the most spiritual of the participants. At 30 years old, she was married with one daughter and was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of her program. She was enrolled part-time in her program, which was located in the Southern U.S. Faith's spirituality, and connection

with a higher power manifested itself throughout the entire interview process. Faith hopes that a degree in counselor education will allow her to advance in her current profession.

Stephanie was a 33-year-old married mother of four children. Stephanie's situation was unique because although she had only given birth to one of the children and was stepmother to the other three, she considered them all her children as their "other mother." At the time of the interview, Stephanie was a 5<sup>th</sup> year student in her part-time doctoral program, which was located in the South. In addition to being a mother to four and a part-time doctoral student, Stephanie worked part-time outside of the home and hoped to become a counselor educator.

Chloe was a 31-year-old single mother of one young son. She was in her 2<sup>nd</sup> year of her doctoral program. Chloe's situation was unique in several ways. First, this was Chloe's second attempt at a doctoral degree in counselor education. She dropped out of her first program during her 3<sup>rd</sup> year due to the racial insensitivity and lack of diversity she experienced in her program. Second, Chloe was the only participant to attend an online CACREP doctoral program. Although the program is located in the Midwest, Chloe, who lived in the North, attended completely online with the exception of residencies. Lastly, I was most struck by Chloe's determination, resiliency, and persistence. Because of her negative experiences in her first doctoral program, Chloe's ultimate goal after graduation was to be a multi-culturally competent and social justice minded counselor educator.

Natalie was a fast-talking, proud, and confident 37-year-old woman with four children. Natalie was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of her doctoral program and attended full-time as

well as worked part-time. She had started her doctoral education at a different university than the one she was enrolled in at the time of the interview. According to Natalie, the first University she attended was not “family-friendly” and was not conducive to her mothering needs. The program was full-time and Natalie was the only parent and African American in the program. Both the doctoral program she was enrolled in during the time of the interview and the previous doctoral program she attended were located in the Northeastern U.S. Natalie hoped to become a counselor educator upon graduation.

Table 1

*Participants’ general information*

Pseudonym	Age	Marital Status	Year in Doctoral Program	Number of kids	Age of kids
Layla	29	Single	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1	4
Candice	35	Married	10 <sup>th</sup>	2	1,6
Angela	40	Married	1 <sup>st</sup>	3	18, 16, 13
Maria	50	Married	4 <sup>th</sup>	1	18
Faith	30	Married	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1	2 ½
Stephanie	33	Married	5 <sup>th</sup>	4	14, 13, 8, 1
Chloe	31	Single	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1	2
Natalie	37	Married	4 <sup>th</sup>	2	13, 11, 9, 5

### **Discussion of Themes**

The in-depth interviews on the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers describes both the individual and shared challenges, successes, and experiences these women faced throughout their doctoral programs . Additionally, participants' stories and perceptions shared about African American doctoral student mothers will allow the readers to conceptualize the impact, if any, that race, gender, and motherhood play in the doctoral experience. Six significant themes emerged from the interviews and photo elicitation data and are discussed below.

#### **An Increase in Personal Pride**

The first theme that emerged focused on an increase in personal pride. The participants identified personal pride as feelings of “self-worth”, “acceptance of self”, “security in being an African American woman”, “taking pleasure in their racial identity”, “internalized success”, “pride in self as a mother and doctoral student”, and “strength”. Womanism encourages personal pride and asserts that “Black” mothers are strong “Black” women that serve as the foundation of family and community and should value their strength and their struggle (Abdullah, 2012). Although their responses varied, an increase in feelings of personal pride was reflected in their responses about the multiple identities that they hold. They addressed personal pride in the areas of being an African American woman, mother, and doctoral student. All of the participants acknowledged that they were proud to be an African American woman. Angela shared how proud she was to be an African American woman:

I am very proud of who I am. I think I have overcome so many obstacles as a Black woman. I am very secure in who I am. I love being a Black woman and



that is one of the areas that I am constantly talking to my daughter about being who you are you were born this way and if people do not like it oh well. I mean you do not have to alter yourself to fit in with the status quo and to fit in with the crowds and you know our hair is natural, I do not bleach my skin, and I do not follow some of those trends that are out there to become what somebody else wants me to be. This is how I was born so I accept the skin that I am in but I love being a Black woman. I am very proud, very proud.

Maria echoed this perspective when she described what it meant to her to be an African American woman:

That is something interesting because really one of the most challenging things to me about being African American, first of all I love it, I love my skin color I love I like me so that is the really good news but I take issue with other people who do not like my skin color and who belittle that and who make us invisible.

Similarly, Natalie pronounced her pride in being an African American woman when she defined what being an African American woman meant to her, “Being an African American woman means it is being proud, being proud of my background, my heritage, and being thankful for my family and humble.”

Faith spoke at length about how proud she was to be an African American woman and an African American mother, “I do feel like I am superwoman I am the woman the pillar of my family. I am juggling career, motherhood, being a wife and so I think being an African American woman I am very proud to be an African American woman I am happy about who I am.” In addition to proclaiming her cultural pride in being an African American woman, Faith also declared pride in her status as an African American mother,

“...I feel proud of the fact that I am an African American mother.” Chloe also feels pride in being a mother and in the impact that her education is having on her son:

My son now values education because not only do I work in a school but he sees me come home and do my homework and the fact that he tries to imitate me by pulling out his little toy laptop saying I’m doing homework like mommy kind of makes me proud and even when I have to go away even though he gets upset and moody when I’m gone for conferences for weeks at a time he still calls it mommy going to school. So I think that being an African American mother and student kind of shows him the value that I place on education and so it’s kind of wearing off on him.

Two of the participants, Stephanie and Layla, were both proud to be African American women but they differed from the other participants in their description of an increase in personal pride. Stephanie and Layla described personal pride as the strength that African American women have displayed historically. Stephanie described being an African American woman as encompassing strength that has been passed down from a generation of strong African American mothers:

...When I think of an African American woman I think of strength and that is just what it is the strength to overcome any barrier whether it be based on race or based on gender because just having those two characteristics [those] two struggles that we have to deal with, sexism and racism, those are evident in society and they are evident in the academy and that is just what we deal with and I think that Black women overall just have an innate strength that helps us to deal with that. I do not know where it comes from it might come from our mothers.

Layla also attributed being an African American woman to being strong:

Being an African American woman it means that I am a strong woman who has overcome a lot historically and in my personal life today just based on myself so knowing that I can do whatever I put my mind to that I can achieve everything but there is also going to be some outside factors that interfere with that because I am an African American woman. So strength is there.

In addition to talking about pride in their racial heritage, many of the women expressed they felt pride about their identity and success as doctoral students. Maria shared her excitement in pursuing her Ph.D., “I think just to look at my mom I see how proud she is and she’s not an emotional woman, but I think she takes some pride in that and I love it and I want to do it for myself because it is something I can do so that excites me. Unlike the other participants, Stephanie depicted increased personal pride as internalized success through her photo elicitation. In her photograph titled, “the road travelled” (Figure 3) Stephanie depicts both challenges and success. Stephanie’s description of the photograph exudes pride:

The one with the road I titled it, “the road travelled” and I like that picture because it was not a straight road, it was a rocky road, there’s bumps, there’s tears and tatters, and for me that’s my experience just up and down, bumps and bruises but if you notice in the photograph even though the road is dilapidated it is moving up, it’s moving up in a direction in an upward direction and for me even though I’ve had a rough road at each point I’ve grown and the direction of going up that is symbolic because I’m moving to the top which is where I want to be and not just the ultimate top but success.



*Figure 3. Stephanie's Photo The Road Travelled*

Stephanie continues by describing the feeling of pride that she has as she reflects on the picture and road she has travelled:

Feelings of accomplishment even though I'm still moving forward and I haven't completed it I still feel like I have accomplished a lot. I've done a lot more than I would have ever imagined coming out of high school or even going into undergrad. So I feel a sense of accomplishment...

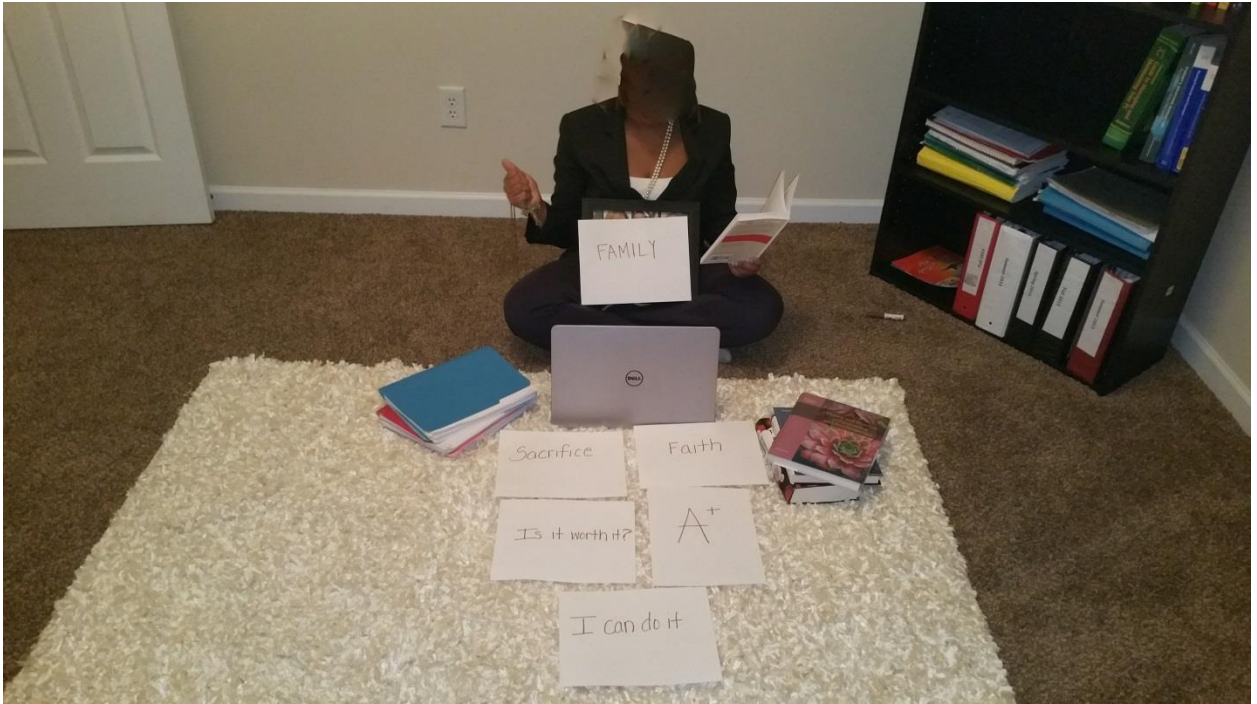
The women in this study exuded personal pride as they described being an African American woman, mother, and doctoral student. Alice Walker (1983) describes a womanist as a woman that appreciates women's strength, loves struggle, and loves herself.

### **A Multitude of Work Life Challenges**

Womanism posits that for African American mothers, intersectional identity includes motherhood, as the mothering process is an essential part of who we are (Abdullah, 2012). An overarching theme among the participants was the myriad of individual and shared challenges they faced balancing work and life while merging their roles of mother and doctoral student. One of the recurring views of the women in the

study was that the intersectionality of their identities of mother, doctoral student, and African American woman, increased the challenges they faced throughout their doctoral experiences. Some of the similar challenges experienced by the participants were “internal conflict”, “lack of support”, “negative impact of their counselor education doctoral program”, “lack of time for self”, “work life balance”, and “negative impact on children” all that intersect to increase feelings of “isolation”, “guilt”, and “regret” within the women. Faith openly discussed this intersectionality in the photograph she provided titled, “Wonder Woman” (Figure 4):

... like there's never like one identity there is an intersectionality of mother, doctoral student, and you know professional, and then there's me. I'm always playing those dual roles although I may be in school or in a classroom I'm always thinking about even if it is for 5 minutes, okay what is my child going to eat for dinner or making sure my husband's going to work with her on her letters or her shapes, or her colors. I'm at work I think about what are we going to wear to church on Sunday making sure that she has dresses that are clean like I'm always balancing those multiple responsibilities....I have to show that it's never just one identity. I am all three merging together being Black, being a woman, and being a mother it's like I'm all three and all three are always a part of me wherever I go.



*Figure 4. Faith's Picture: Wonder Woman*

Additionally, the participants noted this intersectionality enhances the “internal conflict” they battle on a regular basis. In her description of one of her photographs, Angela spoke of the difficulty and the constant struggle with role negotiation:

Being in this program and being a mother I feel like at times I have to choose between the two. Okay am I choosing this over my child or my children? I feel like it's a constant struggle and my children will cheer me on and tell me oh we will be fine. They're older children but they're still children and I don't want to make a decision and regret even more.

Faith shares in the constant struggle that accompanies occupying multiple roles:

My husband is supportive and he will tell me you know you can do this but then I sometimes feel guilty because I'm not always there because he picks up the slack when I'm not around. You know he's helping out with our daughter and there are

times I feel like I should be the one doing that and so I wonder, although he has never said that to me, I wonder how does he feel and so I tend to internalize these negative messages although they haven't been spoken.

Unlike the other participants, Layla and Chloe both felt that the challenges they faced as African American doctoral student mothers were exacerbated by their identity as single mothers. Chloe admitted that she fluctuates between feeling good because she is doing something positive to enhance her professional identity and feeling guilty for leaving her son to pursue her goal:

It's always hard knowing that I'm going someplace to do something for my career or for my program that's positive but knowing that I have to leave my son for a long period of time also and knowing that he knows that I'm gone but he can't quite comprehend why. So it's always, it's just it's bittersweet it's mixed emotions knowing that I'm doing something good and sometimes I'm having a good time because I don't have to change diapers or be a mommy when I'm there but still remembering that okay he probably has no clue what's going on and when I'm coming home.

An additional challenge incurred by the intersectionality is the task of work life balance of the African American doctoral student mothers. According to the women, attempting to balance the responsibilities of work and life were challenging. Layla acknowledged that as a single parent, time balance has a huge impact on her life and self-care:

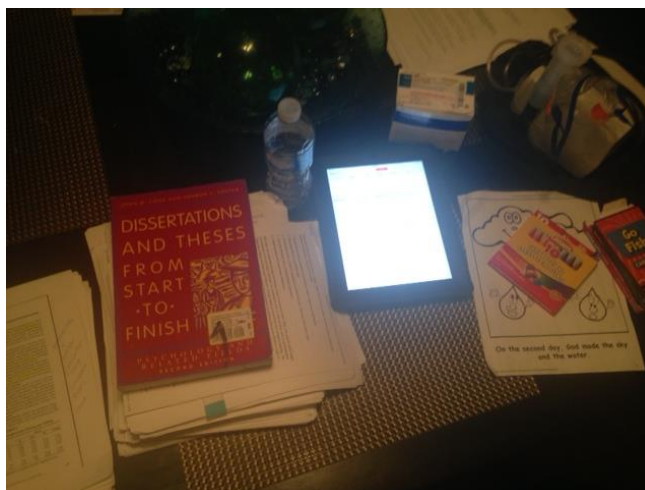
Time balance is horrible like I said it's just this year that I found it but I went through my whole academic years and I was a mess everything was in chaos my days and my nights all ran together. It was just kind of like went from year to

year nothing was just flowing before because I just didn't have that balance it was always something I had to do and I felt like all the time I don't want him to be impacted any more than he has to or his life to be impacted so I have not like stopped him like doing activities and everything like that but it's extra stuff for me to do so I'm tired, I'm a whole lot more tired, I don't sleep a lot or as much as I should at all just because there's no time for that so my self-care is probably not so good. My self-care is probably horrible really.

Layla provided a picture for the study (Figure 5) that depicts her inability to balance her time:

That's my dinner table and the reality of it is that's pretty much how it looks all the time but I think it's there is always stuff for us to do and having to balance his stuff and my stuff so I still need to take time to be able to play games with him, coloring, doing work with him and stuff that for him he still wants to do fun stuff like read books and do those things but still it's like I have all of these other things to do ...that's a representation of my day like every single day actually looks like that. I have all these things I have to do from reading to playing to taking care of his health matters all of those things.





*Figure 5. Layla's Photo: Responsibilities*

Layla's second picture, "second home" (Figure 6) represents the amount of time that she and her son spend in the car due to her lack of time balance. For Layla her car signifies how she merges her two roles of single mother and doctoral student:

Well I call that second home because I feel like that is really relevant because that is where we always pick up, drop off, go here, and do this I feel like we just spend so much time in the car like I hate being in the car. ... I feel like so many of my conversations with my son take place in the car so I feel like that's where we do most of our talking and then actually physically getting me to class and getting me to everything is done with the car. So we spend more time interacting in the car than we do at home because we have so much stuff to do and I have so many things to get to and do in terms of my doctoral studies. ...It's just not something that I was picturing my life to be like for me and my child for us to do that much moving around and I feel like we're doing most of that moving around because I'm a doctoral student. If I wasn't I don't think it would be as much.



*Figure 6. Layla's Photo: Second Home*

Although married, Faith shared the challenge of work life balance with Chloe and Layla.

However, Faith related her lack of work like balance to sacrifice:

It is hard because I am always sacrificing always putting other's needs before my own. Sacrificing my health sometimes, I'm sacrificing my personal time, I'm sacrificing you know just time I want to be with my family...So instead of going out with the girlfriends or going away for the weekend or whatever the case may be. Like me studying, me going to class, that's my personal time. That's how I justify it.

Natalie is another married participant that voiced her concerns balancing work and life:

So I have to work harder I have to give 200 percent I feel compared to my colleagues and I'm always struggling with my time just balance trying to balance. My husband is very supportive and my mom and dad have been very supportive, but you know we have four kids so it's a lot so they don't understand what I'm going through.

Natalie provided a picture of her sons' bedroom (Figure 7) to represent her neglect of home and family as well as her inability to provide close direction to them because of her lack of time.



*Figure 7. Natalie's Photo: Persevering against the odds*

The inability of the African American doctoral student mothers to find balance has a significant impact on their children which presents some challenges in their quest for a doctorate. The impact appears to vary based on the age of the children. Faith recognizes this impact in her 2 ½ year old daughter:

because she's young I don't think it necessarily impacts her in any way negatively, but then I do think sometimes it causes her to become more socially anxious because I've noticed at times if I've been gone too long or if I have had class like multiple days back to back and I haven't been able to be with her as

much she tends to cling on to me and so as a result when she goes to school she is a little upset or a little anxious because she doesn't know will mommy be here or is she going to be gone tonight or whatever the case may be.

Angela, who has three teenage children, symbolized the impact of her doctoral student status on her kids in her series of photographs, which she titled, "The Missing" (Figure 8):

So looking at the pictures, I said is this really how my life is? I have five desks and there is one missing and I didn't send a picture for that one and I'm saying if those five desks represent the people who are closest to me, my three children and my husband, and then I'm included in that five. That is our household. And if you look at those pictures there is one missing and I am wondering if that represents myself because I don't have time. I am only giving them a little piece of me...and I am missing.



*Figure 8. Angela's Photos- "The Missing"*

Angela's realization that she was often missing from her family was manifested through the photo elicitation process because, "it was the missing picture that brought that up for me...I said for all the photos it's the mother to many that's missing...how can I be a mother to many when it's like I'm absent to my own?" Angela presented me with four photographs of four different desks where she spends the majority of her time. However, her initial intention was to take five pictures, the fifth desk being her personal desk. In the end, her personal desk is the photo that was missing. The photo elicitation aspect of the interview process was intense for Angela and fueled a lot of emotion. Because her children are older Angela's comments about the impact of the doctoral process on her children was different than many of the other women:

It hurts my heart. I mean I talked to somebody about my oldest child he is graduating from high school and I said you know I feel like I dropped the ball. I

feel like I dropped the ball because I feel like I'm being selfish right now. It's his senior year and I thought I'd be so engaged we'd be doing this and this and this and here I am pursuing a doctorate and it's taking up so much of my time that I will never be able to get back with him and that bothers me that really really bothers me. I've dedicated weekends to doing schoolwork, my weekdays are packed to the max, so where do my children come in?

Angela's honest acknowledgement that she is at times missing in the lives of her children exemplifies the negative impact she believes pursuing a doctorate degree has on her children.

Many of the participants in the study indicated that on at least some level (i.e., personal, professional, and/or doctoral program) the lack of support they received from individuals surrounding them made their experiences much more challenging. Angela described the lack of support she received from her extended family:

Only my children, my husband, and my dad know that I am pursuing my doctorate. I chose not to tell my sisters. I have four sisters and they do not know I am pursuing this degree. You know sometimes you'd expect your closest family to be your cheerleaders but sometimes they are not.

Similarly, when asked about how others in her life have reacted to her being a mother and a doctoral student Maria admitted that although her daughter is extremely supportive of her and proud she received negativity from others in her inner circle:

It has not been a lot kudos let me just say that...it has not been they are happy for me or excited. I have a couple of people to admit jealousy. That surprised me. It

didn't break the relationship, it is not a deal breaker, but it kind of surprised me...that would be one of the more disappointing pieces to it.

Several of the participants spoke about the lack of program support (faculty and classmates) for African American doctoral student mothers. Although Faith felt that her specific experiences and challenges were supported by the women of color faculty members in her program others, including her classmates, were not as supportive:

I feel like specifically the women of color [faculty] have just been very supportive of my experiences and giving me that extra push and serving as my cheerleaders in getting me through this experience at times. In terms of my cohort, I feel as though I've had some classmates who have been understanding of my experiences but I don't know completely if they understand the sacrifice and the other extra elements, just my struggles and my challenges of even coming to class on a daily basis. One other person in my program is a mother and we have similar experiences so we are able to talk about these things but I think my other classmates don't quite get it unless I have talked to them about it.

Dealing with so many challenges on a daily basis can create various emotions to include loneliness, anxiety, guilt, and isolation. Specifically, Stephanie and Maria voiced their feelings of "isolation" and "guilt" created by all the challenges they have faced. Maria spoke about feeling "lonely" and "isolated":

...it can be lonely because your family doesn't understand it. It's a lot of isolation because no one's going to understand that your tired because you're working on a paper even though they proofread it no one's gonna really get it. It's not that they don't care it's that they don't understand that. You know even friendships it's

just very isolating...some of it was me isolating myself but for the most part the whole experience is isolating because you're the one with all the deadlines you know so and to feel like you need to share that I felt like I would have been imposing sometimes. You know this [degree] is not a necessary thing to someone else so they don't need to hear all that. Part of it was me isolating myself.

Another participant, Stephanie, expressed the extreme feelings of guilt she associated with her status:

Like I want to get this done so bad so I can feel normal again. I want to get back to my family because being their mother to me is priority so I don't feel like I'm living up to my best potential as a mother while I still have to get this done. What other challenges? Just not feeling I guess not feeling good enough as a mom because I can't give my time 100% or my attention 100%.

Maria, Faith, and Stephanie recounted the guilt they felt as an African American mother pursuing their doctorate degree. Womanism illustrates how the identity of motherhood complicates race and gender (Abdullah). This intersectionality in conjunction with the rigor of a counselor education doctoral program creates multiple challenges for African American doctoral student mothers as they negotiate between their mothering and personal responsibilities and doctoral student requirements. The participants in the current study voiced their experiences navigating the intersectionality of motherhood, race, and gender and how these specific identities intersect to create unique challenges for them as they attempted to achieve work life balance and success in pursuit of a doctorate degree in counselor education.



### **View Motherhood As A Priority**

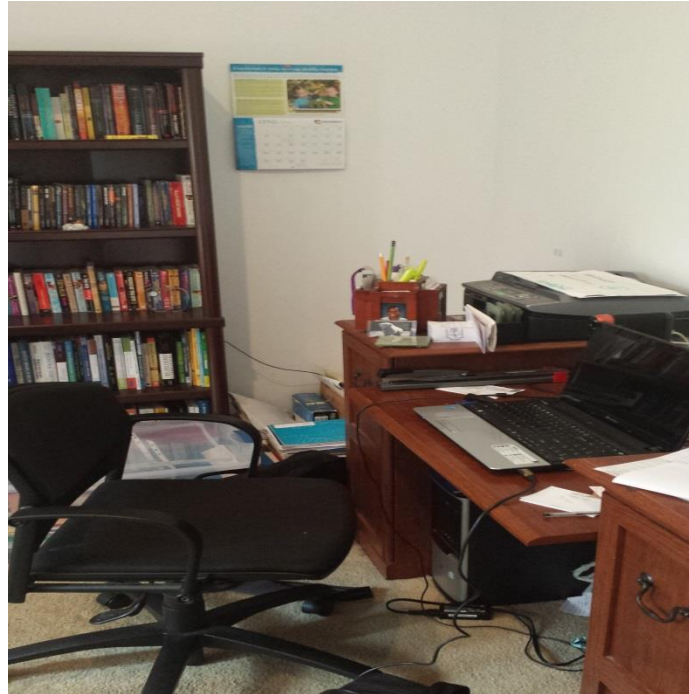
Regardless of the myriad of challenges faced by the African American doctoral student mothes, due to intersectionality, all eight of the women acknowledged their commitment to motherhood as their “first priority” and “most important responsibility.” Faith, articulates her feelings succinctly when she says, “[Motherhood] trumps everything.” Similarly, Candice states motherhood is more important than any other job she has ever had, “it is the hardest job I have ever had but it is the most important job I will ever have. Being a mother to me is everything my kids come first at this point over everything.” Although the other participants shared the sentiments of Candice and Faith, these feelings were especially evident in the stories of Angela, Natalie, Stephanie, and Layla. Angela spoke frankly about how placing motherhood as a priority has impacted her role as a doctoral student:

...what I said coming into this program is I will not find time for my children, I will have to find time for this program. So that is what I had to tell myself because my children were here before the program and they will be there after the program so whether or not I complete this program I have to think about the future of my children. That is my priority.

One of the participants provided a series of photographs that depicted her primary role as a mother. To represent her lived experience with motherhood, Natalie provided three photographs that she titled, “persevering against the odds.” To represent her primary role of mother Natalie took a photograph of her empty office chair (Figure 9) because,

It represents me being pulled away from my work to tend to my children or house. I start work then I have to stop to do something or I am being a supportive

parent (what I should be doing) and attending one of the kids' functions instead of getting work done (what I need to be doing).



*Figure 9. Natalie's Photo: Persevering Against the Odds*

Layla, a single parent of a four-year old son, voiced that because she maintains the role of mother and father she is always in the mothering role:

I am never not a mom so when I come home I cannot be a doctoral student I cannot be a clinician I cannot do all of those things but whether I am in the classroom teaching or whatever I am always a mom so if my phone rings my son is sick like that is not going to turn off. It does not go away so I will say that is how it has had the biggest impact there's nothing about my child that I can like throw away you know like leaving it at the door like that never happens you know as a doctoral student so I don't walk into the classroom and say I'm not a parent. ...I am a mom 24 hours a day. I am never not a mom.

Motherhood is a new role for Stephanie that she acquired her second year into her doctoral program. Stephanie is now a mother of one and stepmother to three which she admits has shifted her priorities:

I feel like all the responsibility that goes into being a mom like you really have to balance your studies, the time you spend with your kids, the time you spend with your mate, and it's always a balancing act for me. And my proposal probably could have been done months ago if I didn't have to balance my responsibilities with mothering. But because that is part of who I am now that's just as important to me as this degree. If my son is sick that's going to take precedence over me reading a journal article. That doesn't mean that I'm gonna give up on the process it just means it's going to take a little bit longer because I have priorities.

Stephanie also views her mothering role as a commitment to providing for them:

Well I can't give up now. I got to feed these kids. It's not just one, it's four they gotta go to college. Being a mother like you can't just stop and say I don't want to be a mother anymore. So that commitment to your children for me is the same commitment to this degree because one eventually is going to impact the other. Knowing that I have a child who is going to look up to me and look to me for advice I want to be able to be a role model for them.

The theory of womanism classifies Stephanie's mothering role with her three stepchildren as an "other mother." Although three out of the four children she is raising were not born to Stephanie she cares for them as if they are her own. They each have a birth mother but Stephanie is indeed their "other mother." For Stephanie, being an other mother has reinforced the role of motherhood as most central in her life.

In keeping with the ideology of womanism, some of the participants perceive their mothering role to extend outside of their children and to others in their doctoral programs and communities. The researcher captured this in her emic code, “mother to many.” Angela defined her outside mothering role as, “that support for everybody...I’m a constant support for not only my family but for other people I am a mother to many.”

Faith also feels that she plays the mothering role within her cohort:

I also see myself taking on that motherly role with my classmates, I’m nurturing, I’m supportive, I’m doing check-ins and you know just trying to give people words of encouragement to keep it moving and keep it pushing and I think being a mother I’ve always been a giving caring person but I think being a mother has made me more conscious of how I am with other people and always trying to help them out and I’ve noticed I’ve been doing that more in this program and offering that to my classmates.

It was evident across the interviews that although attaining a doctorate in counselor education was essential for all the participants motherhood was their priority. As Stephanie referenced in her description of her photograph titled, “Multipurposeful” (Figure 10) motherhood as priority means being purposeful in all facets of life:

I titled it multipurpose because you do things as a mother with purpose your gonna cook with a purpose because the children need to eat, you’re going to get that paper done with a purpose because it’s going to get you closer to the ultimate goal of getting this degree done. But it’s important to your family too. You’re going to write with purpose. You are going to love on that baby with purpose to

make him or her feel safe. So I think everything we do as mothers we do it with purpose.



*Figure 10. Stephanie's photo: Multipurposeful (©Kiraan, 2014)*

In addition, the theme of motherhood as a priority transcended the natural bond and relationship with the children to whom the women physically gave birth to stepchildren, community members, and classmates. Emerging from the proud voices of the African American doctoral student mothers was the essence that the role of mother was more meaningful to them than anything else, including a PhD in counselor education. Although the women perceive motherhood as their priority, all of them recognize the importance in attaining their doctorate for various reasons.

### **Modeling New Ways of Being an African American Mother**

Although motherhood is priority to the participants in this study each woman had a very intense desire to attain their PhD and passionately shared the significance a degree in counselor education held for them. The responses that encompass the theme “Modeling new ways of being an African American woman” can be categorized into several categories: 1) to serve as role models for other African American women, 2) first

in family to earn a doctorate degree, 3) to serve as an example to their children, 4) to disprove stereotypes often held about African American women in Western society, and 5) acquire privilege. Many of the participants stated many or all of the categories as being significant in their pursuit of a PhD. All of the participants stated that they would be the first in their families to hold a doctorate degree indicating the historical significance of African American women and the PhD. Womanist ideology empowers mothers to merge other identities with their mothering identity by passing on their beliefs and knowledge to their children (Abdullah, 2012). Faith's commitment to her doctoral studies is an example of womanist ideology. Faith, like the other participants was determined to get a PhD to serve as a role model:

For me it presents an opportunity to move up in my career it presents an opportunity to do something that no one else in my family has been able to do and so I just want to be a role model and set an example for my nieces, my own child, and any other AA woman who aspires to get their doctoral degree and so it's been challenging but for me it's like there's no other option like it wasn't an option of whether or not I was going to get it was just when was I going to take the time out to get it.

Faith goes on to explain the significance of getting a doctorate as an African American woman:

It means that I have proven to myself and people in the profession that I am a scholar, that I am an expert in my field, and just for me you know it's like an intrinsic value and motivation just to say that I have accomplished this particular goal and something that I've always wanted to work on for me it's about

establishing credibility and for people to take me serious and you know for an African American woman having these credentials will just show that hey people can take me serious and they are not going to be able to offer me less because I have proven myself.

Angela too hopes to become a role model for her peers and other African American students:

I feel that this degree is putting me at a different level it's putting me at a different level that I would be able to assist with policy changes to help other Black students, specifically African Americans, to help them to be able to accomplish goals and dreams in life. I want to be that person that they look up to and say she did it. This lady did it and we know the medical challenges, we know she was a mom, she was running all those companies, but she did it. She's a model and not just for it to be said that Angela did this but to serve as a model for others to follow.

Candice also shared that part of the significance to her of earning a doctorate is to serve as a role model for others as well as the meaning behind being the first person she knows with a doctorate:

I think that we don't have a lot of role models as Black females and so it was important to me that I made decisions so that we could have more role models, more positive role models, and I think it is our duty to kind of give back or at least to model behavior that is different from these stupid reality shows...that just having different examples for other females or males whoever. Children coming behind us and to let them know that you can do it. Because I didn't have that

myself, not Black at least, I don't know anybody that has a doctorate. I mean you know people in the field but no one personally close to me. I'm the first in my family to have one and I don't know it kind of drove me to always be the best I could be and this was it for me.

Stephanie echoed the significance of the doctoral degree for African Americans as she talked about the responsibility of role modeling as a means to uplift her culture:

...you know for Black people now things are so much better than they were but I guess internally I still feel that we're looked upon as being less than. Like I just feel like no matter how good it gets for Black people or minorities in general we are still going to be looked upon as less than when compared to White people. So I want to do what I'm doing to uplift my culture so I can show my kids this is possible so that they can do it and they can show their kids it's possible.

In addition to being role models, all the participants spoke about the meaning of obtaining a PhD in the lives of their children. However, Candice and Layla specifically spoke about being positive role models for their children:

I wanted them to know that no matter how long it may take you to meet a goal as long as you stay persistent and persevere you can accomplish anything you want to do and so that was this lesson that I'm teaching to my kids now but I wanted them to see when they grow up they'll see oh if my mom can do this then I can do anything...just being a good influence a good model for them was important to me and when graduation comes I'm excited for them to see me walk across the stage.



Similar to Candice, in her description of the significance of a doctorate degree in her life, Layla acknowledges the impact it will have on her son:

I feel like it will show him the importance of education. I mean how important education is and if there is anything he would like to do that he can do beyond regardless of anything that's placed in front of him any hills or blocks that might get in the way he can do it that's the major thing for me. I want him to know that he can do whatever like don't set the bar low set the bar as high as it can go so do that.

Additionally, Angela discussed how she hoped that her position as a role model will impact her children in the future, "I want to leave some type of legacy that my children will say well my momma was a strong Black woman. You know even in the face of adversity with all the hidden racism that still exists I still want them to say she didn't let that stop her." Layla, Candice, and Angela all felt that their status as doctoral students allowed them to serve as role models for other African American women as well as for their own children.

In addition to serving as a role model for her children and other African Americans, Angela spoke about the experience of acquiring privilege because of her doctoral status. Angela recognized that obtaining a doctorate degree assisted her with acquiring privilege often denied to African American women:

Black women we have not always had privilege and power so this is a way of me gaining more privilege and more power by obtaining this doctorate degree and it's not just within my own race but in other races as well. I look at it as if I were sitting beside a Caucasian woman whose pursuing her doctorate I want to be

taken I can't say equally, but I want us to have the same amount of equity in the conversation and you know Black women tend to ...always get the short end of the stick whether we are bringing something to the table it seems it is always greeted with doubt that this person can do that but I want people to know that when my name is attached to something you can expect to get what you ask for whether it's is at that level or above but it will not be below. So this degree means a lot to me.

Attaining a doctorate degree allowed each participant to model new ways of being an African American mother. An African American mother with a PhD serves as a role model for other African American mothers, African American women, and her own children. An African American mother with a PhD is often the first in her family to hold such a title, which accrues privilege that has historically been denied to marginalized groups. An African American mother with a PhD challenges negative stereotypes often held about African American mothers and especially African American single mothers. Each of the participants had their individual reasons for pursuing a doctorate degree in counselor education; however, regardless of their purpose the degree was symbolic for each woman in part because of their shared racial identity.

### **Marginalization Based on Race**

One theme that was perceived similarly by each of the eight women was the role of race in their experiences as African American doctoral student mothers. The theme "marginalization based on race" encompasses questioning competence, disproving stereotypes, external view of African American women, judgment, and the desire to be treated fairly. Although the role of race in each of their experiences was somewhat

different, each participant spoke candidly and fervently about these issues and the salience of race in motherhood, life, and the pursuit of a doctoral degree. Stephanie spoke about the impact of race for African American women attending a predominantly White institution (PWI):

I feel it impacts the experience because going in just attending a PWI you automatically go into an experience thinking that you're going to be outnumbered and so being a Black person or a Black female you know I have to really I try ten times as hard to show that I am worthy of this degree and I am worthy of being here being a minority and so like I stated even though out of what 5 or 6 faculty members only one was Black out of 5 or 6 women it was only one Black woman so you know that there's limited you have limited access to other minorities.

Similarly, Candice explained that as the only African American in her cohort she is often the voice of African American people in class discussions:

I would be the only one in a lot of my classes and so a lot of times if race or ethnicity were discussed it was ask Candice what she thinks as if I speak for all Black people. I have a caveat that yes I am answering these questions but I do not speak for all Black people. My experience is different than somebody's just because my skin is Black doesn't mean I have the experiences other people have.

Candice, a tenth year doctoral student, went on to explain how her race may have been a contributing factor in her time to degree completion. Candice described lack of program support and microaggressions as well as feelings of isolation as her experiences with marginalization:

This is my tenth year. I had to get an extension. I'm not necessarily proud of it but I'm not ashamed either I will finish so what does it matter so I worked full time the entire time and I don't know if that was economics, you know the economy, or if it was race related I don't know for me I just think a lot of folks in my cohort graduated before I did. They either had a teaching fellowship or graduate assistantship or something like that and seemed to fly through a lot faster than I did. I don't know if my race had anything to do with this...I feel like sometimes I was on an island by myself this is why I felt like it took my dissertation so long. I didn't have a lot of guidance. I don't know if this is attributed to my race. I don't think my advisors really did as much as they probably could you know so maybe that has something to do with it I don't know.

Natalie did not share Candice's feeling that her race impacted her time to degree completion however, like Candice and Stephanie, Natalie also spoke about how she always felt the need to work harder than her White colleagues in order to prove herself and compensate for society's views of African American women:

It just means always having to make sure that we strive to go above and beyond other races just because it's just the way it is you know? Always making sure we are going the extra mile I try to work harder than my colleagues because I want to make sure I get the things that I need as far as my education. It's heavy. Being an African American period is heavy I think in America, but especially an African American woman. Not only am I African American, so that's one oppression, but also a woman.

Chloe also discussed how she felt she had to work harder than her classmates to prove herself:

It means working extra hard to prove myself. That double standard of working twice as hard to get the same achievements as someone else. Constantly proving myself worthy whether it's academically or professionally. Overcoming barriers constantly I think life is just a series of barriers to overcome as an African American woman. And you're never quite sure if the woman part makes a difference. I don't know if it's the race or if it's the woman but just the two combined just comes with its own set of challenges.

Maria shared this sentiment about others questioning the competence and capabilities of African American doctoral students:

I found that to be one of the things as being the African American female in a doctoral program is that you need to know what you're talking about you need to claim what's yours, your style, your attitude, all that needs to be who you are and not coming from else...I honestly believe that you can have two PhD's next to each other and they want to see who is more credible well we're both credible why don't you start looking at whose available? Who are people going to receive more and of course my counterparts are going to be received more because of their color and so I don't want to have to be taken serious because my hair is straight you know what I mean? I want to be taken serious because I'm myself.

Unlike the married participants, two out of the three African American doctoral student mothers that identified as single parents expressed that for them race was salient in obtaining a PhD to help disprove stereotypes about African American women and

African American single mothers. As a single parent, Chloe felt that race has had a significant impact on her experiences as an African American doctoral student mother:

I think that there are stereotypes that come along with being an African American mother too and with being a single mother. I feel like I'm always trying to overcompensate for my status. Like there's always these negative stereotypes about African American mothers living off of the system or not being educated not being there for their children just negative stereotypes and so I feel like I'm always working overtime to make sure that my son is not part of that statistic that I'm not in that stereotype that comes along with African American mothers. Even though I know that like single motherhood is prominent I just strive really hard not to be a part of that stereotype and those statistics that come along with those stereotypes.

Layla, the other single mother in the study, echoed the feelings of Chloe:

So since I'm not married as an African American mother I know I walk in the door as a statistic, the single mom, and you know a lot of people they're counselors so hopefully everyone's, well most of them hopefully, are culturally sensitive but I know a lot of people like want to know like what's my situation with my child's father and everything but of course most people don't ask like we have these conversations where in a round-about way and they want to get to that to understand that and I know they view that and they see that so in a sense it's like I am that single Black mom that they stereotype me to be but then their like she's in this doctoral program she's doing this same thing I'm doing.

As an African American single mother, doctoral student, and clinician Layla stated that she is often viewed as the stereotypical African American “Wonder Woman,” however, the picture she provided of a Wonder Woman cup that she titled, “Empty Cup” (Figure 11) tells a different story:

The reason why I call it the empty cup is because I feel like people see that and it seems like it but really it doesn't really feel like I meet that most of the times like I know that I've done all these things and it seems great but it almost still feels like oh my gosh like I really didn't finish everything because there's so many more things that I still have to do. So I don't really always feel that. I told my boyfriend once that I almost wish that you wouldn't make that type of statement because I'm still like a regular person and I get super tired so when people say that then it makes it feel like I have to be 100 percent all the time...I almost have to walk out and be like oh yeah ya'll said it and I'm ready yeah I can do this type of thing which it kind of wears on you people want you to be that [wonder woman] but you're like I don't know if there's enough hours in the day to take on all of those things.



*Figure 11. Layla's Photo: Empty Cup*

Seven out of the eight participants felt marginalized by their experiences with race throughout their doctoral studies. However, Angela's experiences with race throughout her doctoral education were different from the other women in the study. Although Angela attended a PWI like the other women in the study, she did not share the feelings of Candice, Stephanie, and Natalie possibly due to her intentionality during the selection process. Angela spoke about the salience of race in her selection of a counselor education program:

I wanted to be in a program where other women looked like me so that in the event I had any concerns where would I go? Who would I speak with that could relate to race not just through research but through lived experiences.

Angela felt that the selection of her specific PhD program was the main reason she did not feel marginalized throughout her education.

The theme marginalization based on race references the individual and collective experiences of the eight AADSM's in this study as they sought to prove themselves and



disprove stereotypes held about African American mothers. Womanism recognizes the role of both race and gender in the lives of women of color as essential to their daily-lived experiences (DeBlaere & Bertsch, 2013). Likewise, the African American doctoral student mothers in the current study recanted their interactions with race as salient.

### **Perseverance Through Adaptation and Resilience**

Although the lived experiences of the African American doctoral student mothers in this study were fraught with challenges, perceived double standards, and sacrifice, all of the women have persevered against the odds and feel as if they have achieved success within their various doctoral programs. In keeping with womanist ideology, the African American doctoral student mothers were able to connect their Black womaness with the academy through adaptation and resilience (Phillips 2006). Maria submitted a photograph (Figure 12) for her interview that encapsulates the resiliency of the participants and their ability to adapt to their environment. Maria titled the photograph of a sand dollar “unbroken” to represent her doctoral journey. Like Maria, the sand dollar persevered through challenges, “made its way all the way up the beach on its own, and remained unbroken.” In her description of the photograph Maria said, “you never usually see this that close up. The condo is right at the beach so it was at the steps you know where you walk down it was there and I was like how did it get so far up...unbroken?”



*Figure 12. Maria's Photo: Unbroken*

Maria stated that she took this photograph while at the beach during her comprehensive exam process. Upon her return from the beach, Maria discovered that she had not passed two of her three comprehensive exam questions. However, she still felt that she had been successful in her doctoral studies and her resiliency to move on from a difficult situation and continue was going to help her reach her goal:

I had to let go of the outcome of the comps because I had so many things just happen and I had to let go of passing. I had to accept the fact that you know what this experience has been rough and the good news is I answered every question because I knew what I was talking about. I still want it. I will not be an ABD.”

Much like Maria, Chloe had experienced some major setbacks in her doctoral experience as well including perceived multicultural insensitivity and quitting her previous doctoral program after three and a half years. However, Chloe persevered and was extremely motivated and determined to finish her degree:

Yeah I was the only African American in that program it was not very inviting it was not very welcoming it was torture the entire time I was in that program. At

the time I thought that that's how a doctoral program was it was very traumatic and it just so happened that when I left the program I found out I was pregnant and I moved away. I hated counselor education for about a year based on my experience in that program. But being a school counselor and then having those negative experiences at the hands of other counselor educators kind of encouraged me to go back and do it again. So basically, this is my second doctoral program over again because my credits didn't transfer so I'm doing this all over again.

Like Chloe, Natalie too has proven her resiliency and ability to adapt to changing environments. After a very difficult year in her first PhD program Natalie also transferred to another counselor education doctoral program at a new university and is being successful in that program:

It was very different you know what I had to deal with as far as being an African American woman and being a mother and I'm commuting two hours. So I was commuting two hours from where I lived to go to school and that was a lot of strain on me you know it was a lot. I didn't realize it until I started having some health problems and I realized that I needed to cut something out of my life and that was the something. I decided I needed to transfer. ...I did notice some things that were impacted by race it kind of became obvious in the end as I was going to be leaving the program so it was tough it was tough because I hadn't found my place because of what I was dealing with.

Although Natalie found her place in her new program, she still had to find ways to adapt to her role as an African American doctoral student mother and persevere in spite of struggle:

I told myself you know once you get your PhD no one looks at your GPA or you grades if you got a B so I told myself I will let some things go so that I could like right now I'm at a game. I should be doing work but I'm at my son's game. I'm still talking to you doing this but I feel like to me this is using my time wisely. It's bad that I'm at my child's game probably not watching the game but I have so much I gotta do you know what I mean. So I try to combine things and do it both ways.

Several of the mothers responded that one of the factors that related to their persistence in the program was their internal motivation or internal persistence. For example, Stephanie described her determination during her pregnancy, "I mean I was in the hospital using the computer doing classwork in the hospital bed six months pregnant the baby like literally hanging out. Working. Like I was determined to and just get it done." Layla also was driven to succeed through what she defined as internal persistence:

I mean my internal motivation just based off my son that for me like I haven't worked full time since the last year of my master's program. I have not worked full time and so that's put me in a bad financial situation not the worst financial situation but it's not the best financial situation. So for me you know to get done is so significant because I need to get done like I just have to get done in a short amount of time. The time I've set aside of my life, which is three years, I need to do that in three years and that is just like no questions asked so that has given me the motivation like rain, hail, sleet, or snow I have to do this. So like for my proposing my dissertation, yeah I took five weeks straight and I just sat in the office and I just went through it because I set a date I am going to propose and

there was just nothing that was going to get in the way I didn't really sleep or sleep really good but I did it so that internal persistence.

All of the women spoke of their faith in God as a key factor in their persistence and ability to succeed. For many of the women, their spirituality was what grounded them and made them feel like they could proceed no matter what. Stephanie, Faith, and Candice spoke at length about their spirituality and relationship with God throughout their doctoral process. Stephanie provided a photograph which she titled, "Sacrifice" (Figure 13) to represent the spiritual connection within the doctoral process. In her photo elicitation part of the interview Stephanie reflected on the purpose God has in her life and her individual doctoral experience:

Because just like how there was a sacrifice made for us you know I wouldn't be here I don't think I would be here without my heavenly father and he made the ultimate sacrifice and this little degree for me even though it's hard it's nothing compared to what he's done for me and I just truly believe that I'm here because of him. I am at this point because of him and I have not given up because of him and even though like you remember you asked me how did you do that teaching all those classes and taking classes and driving two hours? Somebody was watching over me I think a higher power was watching over me and had my life already planned. So I don't take things for granted. I try to look at the big picture and if it happens it was supposed to happen if it didn't happen it was supposed to not happen.



*Figure 13. Stephanie's Photo: Sacrifice*

Much like Stephanie, Faith credited God with her strength and resolve to continue in her doctoral program despite the challenges. It is because of God she has remained unbroken:

I don't have the perfect formula but what I always take heed to is word of advice from my mother and she has always told me ever since I was a little girl God first, family second, job/school third. And I'm telling you that is my rationale for everything. When I realize that I have been away from my family too much or too long then I just stop it bothers me because I am a person that likes to complete my task and likes to get to a certain stopping point but then I go back and think about you know keep it in order and keep it in those priorities. One my faith and my God is going to give me the strength to get things done I want to spend time with my family because God has blessed me with these gifts and I don't want to abuse my bond that I have with them and he's going to give me the strength and the time to get this work done on these assignments. So there's no perfect formula but like I said I just get it done that's always been my motto. You know don't give up just get it done.

In her ten-year pursuit of a doctorate, Candice showed extreme resilience and perseverance, much of which she credited to faith in God and her internal motivation:

The number one factor for me is God so I'm my faith is in everything I cannot do anything without God I would not be where I am without God in my life praying often just asking for guidance. I remember at one point just getting on the floor I had left a meeting with my advisors and it felt like I would never finish like I was not supposed to be here, I could not write, I was not scholarly, why are you trying to write a dissertation? I know it wasn't nothing but the devil so I literally I came home and I laid out I prayed and cried and just asked God for guidance and support and the ability to make it past these things and I know it was nothing but God praying and staying in my Bible and remaining faithful...those are some of the things that allowed me to persevere. And you know I am not a quitter like I started this process I will finish it. I think my number one motivator you will call me doctor at the end of this process like I will not look back with all these student loans and say I didn't finish.

Stephanie, Faith, and Candice described their individual spiritual connection and credited faith as a major factor in their persistence and success. In contrast, the other five women in the study related their success to internal motivation and perseverance. Collectively, the participants cited resiliency and their ability to adapt to their multiple roles that fostered their persistence within their doctoral programs.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter shared descriptive accounts of the lived experiences of eight African American doctoral student mothers. This study was guided by a central research

question: What are the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs? The data collected provided significant statements that emerged from the individual semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation; from these statements, six recurring themes were identified. The first theme was an increase personal pride, which described the strength, pride, and accomplishment felt by the women as they pursued their degrees. The second theme was a multitude of challenges due to intersectionality because of the multiple challenges the participants faced because of their intersecting identities of African American woman, mother, and doctoral student. The third theme was view motherhood is priority as all participants identified motherhood as their primary and most important role. The fourth theme was modeling new ways of being an African American mother, which reflected the personal significance of a Ph.D. in counselor education to each participant. The fifth theme was marginalization based on race to depict the role of race in the lived experiences of the African American doctoral student mothers. The sixth and final theme was adaptation and resilience contributes to perseverance to depict the resilience and perseverance in all of the women as they faced a myriad of challenges throughout their doctoral experience. The participants' detailed descriptions of their experiences as African American doctoral student mothers shed light on areas of needed support and research for this population as they pursue higher education. In the chapter that follows the results will be combined and condensed to summarize the lived experiences of the African American doctoral student mothers in this study and discuss implications for counselor education programs and recommendations for future research with this population.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The findings presented in this study provide a greater understanding of the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers as they progress through their counselor education doctoral programs. Guided by womanism (Walker, 1984), this study was designed to answer the following research question: what are the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs? To answer this question, semi-structured interviews were conducted and photographs were collected and discussed in the interviews of eight women that identified as African American doctoral student mothers. To make meaning of the collected data, phenomenological data analysis was employed and the findings were represented in the participants' own voices through quotes and selected photographs. The quotes of the participants were clustered into six themes. In this chapter, conclusions are discussed based on how the findings in the study answer the research question and contribute to the literature. This chapter also offers implications for counselor education doctoral programs in terms of support, persistence, and degree completion of African American doctoral student mother's. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of African American mothers as doctoral students in counselor education programs and to explore how the intersection of race, gender, and motherhood affected their experiences throughout their doctoral program. This study used a feminist phenomenological approach to qualitative research to offer insight into the meaning and essence of a shared experience as it is lived by the participants (van Manen, 1990). Womanism (Walker, 1984), informed the development of the semi-structured interview questions and photo elicitation that provided opportunities for the women to share their perspectives of their personal experiences in their own voices. Utilizing the feminist phenomenology methodology through the lens of womanism allowed the participants to be the experts of their individual lived experiences with the phenomena.

### **Discussion of Research Findings**

By analyzing the findings through the lens of womanism, I am adding deeper understanding to African American mothers' stories and validating their experiences in higher education. The ideology of womanism helped to frame my analysis of the participant's daily experiences in their counselor education programs while giving them a platform to give both voice and meaning to their otherwise overlooked experiences. As a theoretical framework, womanism acknowledges the complex intersections of race, class, sexual, and gender oppression experienced by African American women. Using womanism allows me as the researcher to empower African American doctoral student mothers to define, articulate, and give meaning to their own experiences by placing them at the center of the research. Although the women share common identities and similar experiences with the same phenomena, it is important to note that African American

doctoral student mothers are not a monolithic group, which means that their experiences with the phenomena are varied and unique. However, this study's findings suggest that African American doctoral student mothers share core values in terms of motherhood, race, and degree significance.

Womanist ideology seeks out the voices of the unheard and the experiences of the neglected. The current study elicited the unheard voices of eight African American doctoral student mothers and explored their everyday experiences as African American women, doctoral students, and mothers. Through this exploration a number of themes emerged that describe their experiences and connection to womanism. Six themes emerged in this study and are discussed as they related to the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers. First, pursuing a doctorate degree increases the personal pride of African American doctoral student mothers. Second, African American doctoral student mothers experience a multitude of work life balance challenges complicated by the intersectionality of race, gender, and motherhood. Third, African American doctoral student mothers view motherhood as a priority. Fourth, African American doctoral student mothers model new ways of being an African American mother. Fifth, African American doctoral student mothers experience marginalization based on race. Finally, Adaptation and resilience are necessary to persist in a counselor education program and contribute to the perseverance of African American doctoral student mothers. When considered together, these themes provide a greater understanding of the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers as they matriculate through their counselor education doctoral programs and their connection to five of the characteristics of womanism: (a) antioppressionist, (b) communitarian, (c)

nonideological, (d) vernacular, and (e) spiritualized. The participants articulated their experiences within each of the five tenets of womanism. The themes “an increase in personal pride,” “new ways of being an African American mother,” and encompass antioppressionist viewpoints in that the women spoke about liberating themselves and other women through unconventional gender roles, self-love, and their shared concern of serving as role models for the African American community. In addition, these same themes encapsulate the communitarian concept of commonweal (collective well-being for all members in a community) as the participants continuously stated concern for other African American women. The nonideological concept of womanism was reflected in the participant’s description of their self-defined identity and acknowledgement of the intersections of race, gender, class, and motherhood on their “marginalized experiences based on race.” The womanist concept of vernacular focuses on everyday people and everyday life. The concept of vernacular emerged in the participant’s discussions of the “multitude of work life balance challenges” they experienced on a daily basis. Finally, most of the participants spoke about their connection to spirituality in their lives in the theme, “perseverance through adaptation and resilience.”

### **An Increase in Personal Pride**

All of the participants in this study indicated that they were proud to be African American women, African American mothers, and that their doctoral student status had increased their feelings of self-worth, acceptance of self, and internalized success. Pursuing their PhD instilled pride in their status as an African American mother and doctoral student. The literature does not support this finding, as there appears to be paucity of literature regarding African American doctoral student mothers and the

positive effects of pursuing a PhD. Although there is current literature related to the negative experiences of African American students in counselor education doctoral programs there is no documentation of African American doctoral student mothers' experiences in counselor education. However, there is abundant literature that explores the experiences of female graduate and doctoral students navigating multiple roles (Gay, 2004; Lynch, 2008; Maher, Ford, & Thompson, 2004; Ricco, Sabet, & Clough, 2009) as well as literature regarding the experiences of doctoral students in counselor education (Henfield, Woo, & Washington, 2012; Hughes & Kleist, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009; Trepal & Stinchfield, 2014). Consistent with the literature on the experiences of female doctoral students and counselor education doctoral students, the participants in this study felt empowered by their status as doctoral students and their ability to navigate multiple identities. The literature supports the concept that the addition of certain roles to the lives of busy women increases self-esteem and psychological well-being (Younes & Asay, 1998). Similarly, the women in this study reported feeling successful and proud to achieve their goals.

In addition to the pride the African American doctoral student mothers felt in regards to their doctoral status, all of the women acknowledged their pride in being an African American woman. Like many before them, the participants in this study appeared to have rejected the negative images of African American womanhood that saturate Western society and instead adapted strength, self-reliance, and fearlessness (Collins, 2000). Some participants were proud of their strength and the strength of African American women while others spoke of pride in the color of their skin, natural hair, and non-conformity to Western ideals. Still other participants acknowledged they

felt pride in the meaning they placed on being an African American mother. The increased feelings of pride the participants felt is in direct juxtaposition to literature that denotes Black women are plagued with feelings of discontent and self-hatred because they have internalized the negative images in society of Black women and Black mothers (Perlow 2013; Phillips 2006).

### **A Multitude of Work Life Balance Challenges**

The womanist ideology is grounded in the African American woman's marginalized status in relation to race, gender, and class (Sheared, 2006). The womanist perspective acknowledges that race, gender, and motherhood are intersecting lines of reality for African American doctoral student mothers that increase the multitude of challenges already faced by African American women in higher education. Prior studies indicated that both African American doctoral students and female doctoral students that identified as mothers experienced increased challenges due to the multiple identities they held (Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012; Henfield, Woo, & Washington, 2012 ). Their doctoral experiences were fraught with guilt (Trepal & Stinchfield, 2013), discrimination (Henfield, et al; Hughes & Kleist, 2005), time to degree completion (Maher, Ford, & Thompson, 2004), and lack of cultural understanding (Henfield, Owens, & Witherspoon, 2011). In addition to the factors outlined in the previous research studies, the African American doctoral student mothers in the current study recanted internal conflict, lack of program support, lack of family support, work life balance, regret, and the negative impact of their student status on their children as challenges they faced during their doctoral studies. An overarching statement among the women in this study was that the intersectionality of their identities of mother, doctoral student, and African American

female, increased the work life balance challenges they faced within their doctoral programs. It was the perception of all of the participants that this combination, or *triple oppression*, exacerbated the difficulty of managing their multiple roles and enhanced their feelings of guilt, isolation, and regret. One of the participants, Candice, admitted that she believed her lack of ability to navigate her multiple roles was one of the contributing factors to her extensive time to degree completion of ten years. Other participants felt the same and described how they believed the time they dedicated to their children and careers outside of the doctoral program influenced their degree progress and graduation. The participants that identified as single parents both described how their race, gender, and financial status intersected to create a unique set of challenges that differed from the married participants.

The African American doctoral student mothers in the current study consistently reported their counselor education doctoral programs were not structured to support African American doctoral student mothers. Although several participants acknowledged that specific faculty members were extremely understanding and supportive of their status and outside obligations to their families, many felt the overall program was dismissive of doctoral student mothers and did not directly consider the unique challenges they faced as parents. In addition, several of the participants also felt that their counselor education program, although social justice focused, did not recognize the additional challenges experienced by being the only African American female in a doctoral program or cohort. Furthermore, several participants stated that their class discussions, program requirements (i.e, research commitments, teaching commitments, and presenting at conferences), and clinical and supervision expectations failed to

consider the schedules and obligations of working mothers. These findings support prior criticisms that counselor education programs are not family-friendly or attentive to the needs of their African American students (Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012; Henfield, et. al 2011; Henfield et. al 2012). Trepal and Stinchfield (2014) noted similar responses in their research study on doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs.

Although their study did not include any African American participants, the study denoted participant perceptions of counselor education programs lacking support for doctoral mothers as well as lack of family-friendly culture (Trepal & Stinchfield). The African American doctoral student mothers in the current study support this viewpoint.

### **View Motherhood as Priority**

The current study was consistent with past research that found mothers enrolled in doctoral programs view mothering as their primary role and frame their doctoral studies around their children (Trepal & Stinchfield, 2014). Participants in the current study often found themselves having to choose between mothering responsibilities and doctoral student responsibilities. Because of their commitment to motherhood, collectively the participants stated that motherhood was their priority and their doctoral degree came second. This, in turn, caused missed opportunities and prolonged time to degree completion for all of the participants. Individually, the decision to place motherhood as priority has affected the participants differently. The individual interviews of the participants reflect the diversity in the impact of not placing their doctoral degree first. For example, for three out of the eight participants the choice to place motherhood as their primary role has increased their time to degree completion. Several of the other participants noted that because motherhood is their primary role it has motivated them to



finish faster and they are ahead of their cohort members in the dissertation process. Two of the married participants spoke of how they have neglected their responsibilities at home and at times even their spouses. In addition, all of the participants noted that because mothering is their primary responsibility they have missed teaching classes and presenting at out of town conferences, which may negatively affect their future career opportunities. Further, the participants that have made time to teach classes or present at conferences acknowledged the increased feelings of guilt and stress that are associated with being away from their children. Two of the participants were told by faculty that they should have been taking on more responsibility in the program instead of working and focusing on outside responsibilities, which exacerbated their feelings of guilt and frustration. All the participants' stories and experiences are unique but ultimately, as African American doctoral student mothers, they share the struggle to achieve a successful balance between academic life and family life.

### **Modeling New Ways of Being an African American Mother**

Although no published study has explicitly addressed the significance of attaining a doctorate degree for African American doctoral student mothers, research findings on African American doctoral students support the notion that for many African Americans a doctorate degree symbolizes success (Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012). Likewise, for the African American doctoral student mothers in this study a doctorate in counselor education holds meaningful significance including the acquisition of privilege usually withheld to African American women, a desire to be treated fairly and competently by their White peers, to serve as role models for other African American women and for [- their children, and to disprove stereotypes often held about African American women.

The participants in this study expressed the need to “leave a legacy” through their educational and professional contributions. The desire to be “a first,” “the best,” and a “role model” resonated through the interviews. A prior research study conducted by Bhat, Pillay, and Hudson (2012) on the experiences of African American female counseling doctoral students reported that the impetus to commence doctoral study for the participants in their study was often based on observations of family or community members who had succeeded in academia or other careers requiring higher education degrees. By contrast, the African American doctoral student mothers in this study all stated that a doctorate in counselor education was of particular significance to them as they will be the first in their families to earn a PhD.

Some of the participants expressed that a PhD in counselor education would allow them to further their career and provide a better life financially for their children. This was especially true for the two participants that identified as single mothers. These findings support previous research on doctoral student mothers in counselor education (Trepal & Stinchfield, 2014). For the participants in this study pursuing their doctorate allows them to model new ways of being an African American mother. By attaining their doctorate degrees they are serving as role models, uplifting their culture, and debunking stereotypes often held about African American women, mothers, and African American single mothers.

### **Marginalization Based on Race**

Previous research highlights that racial experiences are a significant aspect of academic success and persistence for specific racial and ethnic groups including African Americans (Bhat, et. al, 2012; Felder, Stevenson, & Gasman, 2014; Henfield, et. al, 2011;

Henfield, et. al, 2013). Specifically, the ways in which racial experiences influence doctoral student degree completion and success, interaction with faculty, acceptance by peers, and discrimination in and out of the classroom. Interview data from the current study suggest that the respondents experienced both race and gender based prejudice and discrimination. Gender based discrimination was reported by five participants, attributed in part due to their status as mothers and the lack of mothers in their doctoral programs. However, reported incidents of perceived racial discrimination from peers in their doctoral cohort and faculty in the classroom featured more prominently than gender as all eight of the women described incidents of racial discrimination. There is an abundance of literature that focuses on the racial discrimination perceived by African American students in their doctoral programs (Bhat, Pillay, Hudson, 2012; Felder, Stevenson, & Gasman, 2014; Gay, 2004). The perceptions of the AADSM's in this study support previous research.

Additionally, research describes that environmental factors such as campus climate, family support, role models, and mentors influence degree attainment for African American doctoral students (Felder, et. al; Henfield, et. al, 2013). These factors become even more salient for African American doctoral students attending PWI's as all of the participants illustrated in their interviews. As some of the participants recounted their encounters with race as the only African American student in their program or cohort, they described experiences of marginalization, microaggressions, isolation, questioning competence, and disproving stereotypes.

The extensive literature on African American students attending PWI's supports the viewpoints of the African American doctoral student mothers in this study. Although

there is currently not published literature on African American doctoral student mothers enrolled in counselor education programs, there is prior research on African American doctoral students in counselor education programs at PWI's (Bhat, et al., 2012; Henfield, et al., 2011; Henfield, et al., 2013). The prior studies detail African American doctoral students frustration over lack of support and direction from faculty members, their responses in the classroom being challenged by their White peers, the perceived feeling that they represent all of African American society, and their internal feelings that they have to prove themselves to be better than everyone else to compensate for their racial identity (Henfield, et al., 2013). The findings of the current research study support the results of earlier research that explore race and the African American doctoral student experience in counselor education (Hughes & Kleist, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Much of the prior literature references African American doctoral students experiencing marginalization based on their race. These experiences of marginalization exacerbate the challenges faced by African American doctoral students and specifically African American doctoral student mothers. Although the participants in the study recognized that their gender and their race increased the challenges they faced in higher education they all felt that they were marginalized more for being an African American than being a woman.

### **Perseverance through Adaptation and Resilience**

Although no published study has explicitly addressed the factors of persistence for African American doctoral student mothers, research findings support the notion that identifying factors that retain African American doctoral student mothers would be of benefit to counselor education doctoral programs (Bhat, et al., 2012; Trepal &

Stinchfield, 2013). Trepal and Stinchfield conducted a qualitative research study on the experiences of student mothers in counselor education programs. Additionally, Bhat, Pillay, and Hudson conducted qualitative research on supporting African American female doctoral students in counseling programs. These two studies revealed that the initial adjustment to doctoral programs posed a challenge to participants and that it was their innate ability to adapt to the demands, rigor, and climate of their PhD program that contributed to their persistence and overall success. The current study supports this contention, as participants consistently reported they persevered through challenges and setbacks they experienced during their matriculation through their doctoral programs.

Many participants realized during the interview that it was their “internal persistence and motivation” that helped them achieve success. Two of the participants displayed such resiliency when they transferred from one doctoral program to another after they were unable to adapt to the departmental climate of their initial doctoral programs. Another participant, Candice, illustrated resiliency as she persevered through ten years of doctoral studies in her counselor education program to reach her ultimate goal of graduation. These findings support prior literature that identifies adaptation and resilience as factors of persistence for African American women in counselor education programs (Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012).

### **Implications for Counselor Education Programs**

This study affirms that African American doctoral student mothers have distinct experiences as they matriculate through their counselor education doctoral programs. Specifically, the findings of this study indicate that the higher education system has ignored their unique status and specific needs. The participants in this study cited lack of

support, mentorship, flexibility, representation, and recognition as barriers to their persistence in counselor education doctoral programs. African American doctoral student mothers need advocates, inclusive pedagogy, resources, and support networks to help them successfully navigate their multiple intersecting identities of race, gender, and motherhood.

The findings of this study provide implications for counselor educator program administrators, faculty members, and staff. These implications for practice are centered on providing welcoming and supportive environments for African American doctoral student mothers. As is standard with qualitative research, these implications are not meant to be generalizable to all doctoral student mothers in all counselor education programs but rather to be transferrable (Creswell, 2014) to the unique needs of African American doctoral student mothers in various counselor education programs. These practical implications are offered to better assist administrators, faculty, and staff with providing supportive and conducive counselor education programs and pedagogy to include the specific needs of African American doctoral student mothers.

### **Counselor Educator Implications**

Several of the participants in this study noted that counselor education programs, including administration and faculty, need to become more attuned to the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers. There is little research about meeting the unique needs of doctoral student mothers, however, in the study by Trepal and Stinchfield (2013) doctoral student mothers reported experiences of negative departmental climate toward motherhood and children, lack of faculty and peer support, and the negative place of parenthood in a doctoral program. Participants in this study

cited similar experiences and needs. Therefore, one implication based on prior research and the findings of the current study is that in order for counselor education doctoral programs to enhance the positive perception of their departmental climate they need to communicate support to their African American doctoral student mothers and implement a family-friendly culture. A family-friendly culture may include flexible scheduling of classes to include working mom's schedules, decreasing negative consequences for bringing kids to class, and making accommodations for absences due to child related illnesses. Lynch (2008) discovered that lack of financial aid and child-care were the two most common issues faced by graduate student mothers in her study. Several of the participants in this study cited child-care and scheduling as major areas of concern that they have experienced as doctoral students navigating school and motherhood. Another way to combat the negative perceptions of counselor education departments and increase a family friendly culture is to decrease the negative consequences for bringing kids to class. Many of the participants mentioned the negative consequences they faced if they had to bring their kids to class. One participant did acknowledge that one of her professors, who happens to be a mother, allows students to bring their children to class if necessary which made her feel supported by at least one member of the faculty. Several participants also voiced concerned over their departments initial recommendation that doctoral students should not "get married, divorced, or pregnant" during their tenure as doctoral students. Statements such as these further marginalize African American doctoral student mothers and serve to enhance the negative perception of counselor education programs as being unfriendly to families and life changes. Another recommendation of a participant was to provide more use of technology to support the

needs of African American doctoral student mothers. Utilizing technology to record lectures may decrease the anxiety felt by mothers that may have to miss class due to lack of child-care or a sick child. Giving all students the ability to access recorded lectures or to Skype into class on a day they have to be out provides some flexibility for the women.

An additional implication that resonated in the discussion with these participants involves mentoring and support. Research suggests that good support systems and mentoring relationships provide both academic growth as well as interpersonal growth for African American female doctoral students (Ali & Coate, 2013; Grant, 2012; Grant & Simmons, 2008; Trepal & Stinchfield, 2013). Mentoring has been cited as a key component to the personal and professional success of African American women in doctoral programs (Ali & Coate, 2013; Grant & Simmons, 2008; Grant, 2012). Mentoring relationships may come from both faculty in the department as well as upper level doctoral students with a shared identity status. For the participants in this study, mentoring could serve as role modeling (professional and personal) and providing support. The participants felt that having a mentor to “check-in” with and that can provide encouragement as well as resources would be a great asset and a contributing factor of academic persistence. This finding is supported by the literature on African American women doctoral students and mentoring relationships (Grant & Simmons; Grant).

A resounding need voiced by participants in this study is the need for the addition of support networks. In particular, African American doctoral student mothers may need support systems that reinforce their goals, acknowledge their status, and creates a space for them to have their voices heard, express concerns, frustrations, and positive



experiences in an environment that typically marginalizes them. All eight of the participants in the current study shared the desire for support networks and mentoring as they acknowledged their gratitude for using the interview for this study as an opportunity to connect with someone that shares their status. The creation of these support networks or “safe spaces” would be an opportunity for African American doctoral student moms to have their voices heard and talk about issues that they so often do not speak about for fear of further marginalization and judgment. Further, support networks may serve as a conduit for practical resource sharing geared specifically towards working doctoral student mothers such as child care, time management, self-care, and work life balance (Ali & Coate, 2013; Hermann, Ziomek-Daigle, & Dockery, 2014). These support networks could be both physical and virtual to include students from various programs since some of the participants admitted to being the only African American doctoral student mother in their cohort or counselor education program.

### **Curriculum Implications**

A final implication resulting from the findings of this study are for counselor education programs to be intentional in developing and implementing pedagogy that places the daily life of African American doctoral student mothers at the center of history. The absence of literature and research focused on African American doctoral student mothers underscores the necessity of counselor education faculty and administration including this population in their teaching and research. In addition, to increase relevancy and significance of content Phillips (2006) encourages faculty in higher education to ensure content is significant and get to know the women and the “daily survival wisdom” the women have garnered to persist in their doctoral programs.

Many of the participants in this study felt silenced within their programs, cohorts, and personal lives in relation to their multiple identities. Centering counseling pedagogy on the lives of marginalized individuals gives voice to their experiences and acknowledges their status in higher education and society (Lyons, Bike, Ojeda, Johnson, Rosales, & Flores, 2013).

### **Social Justice Implications**

This study reinforces the need for social justice advocacy for African American doctoral student mothers. The participants provided more clarity on the lived experiences and specific needs of African American doctoral student mothers as they matriculated through counselor education doctoral programs. The participants, although successful, underscore the need for stronger advocates and equitable access to resources to compete with their male, White female, and non-parenting counterparts. Although the current study focuses solely on the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers, many of the implications discussed can serve to benefit all doctoral students in counselor education programs, thereby, creating more equitable access to higher education for marginalized populations.

### **Limitations of Study**

The limitations of this study involve the type of university the participants attended. Although the participants ranged in age, year in doctoral program, number and age of children, marital status, and geographic location, this study only recruited participants attending predominantly White universities which may limit in reflecting the scope of the experiences African American doctoral student mothers encounter as they matriculate through their doctoral programs. Although the participants' locations varied

geographically and spanned universities across the South, Midwest, East, and North, all eight of the participants attended PWI's. AADSM's attending counselor education programs at historically Black colleges and/or universities (HBCU's) may have different experiences than those at PWI's.

The nature of qualitative study limits its generalizability to other populations since it involves in depth understanding of a small number of individuals. This exploratory qualitative study was not meant to produce generalizable results. Rather, it was meant to provide voice and context to the daily-lived experiences of the eight African American doctoral student mothers who participated in this study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

To date no studies have been conducted on the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs. Trepal and Stinchfield (2013) have begun important research on doctoral student mothers in counselor education; however, their research did not include any African American participants. This study provided an exploratory look into the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs. A number of future research studies could build upon the findings of this study.

First, this study only examined the experience of African American doctoral student mothers that identified as heterosexual. Future studies could examine the effect of other intersections of identity on the experiences of doctoral student mothers such as sexual identity or disability status. Second, since only one participant in this study was raising children she did not physically give birth to, additional studies that look specifically at the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers raising

adopted children or children of other family members could be beneficial to add to the literature. Third, this research study did not specifically look at how institutional demographics contribute to the experiences of this population. The institutions that were represented in this study were geographically diverse; however, they were all PWI's. Therefore, future research could explore the experience of African American doctoral student mothers at HBCU's to investigate if any differences exist between the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers attending HBCU's and those attending PWI's. Fourth, this was a qualitative study of eight participants. Additional qualitative studies are necessary to learn more about the experience of this population. Furthermore, quantitative research would also be useful in studying if the experience of African American doctoral student mothers affect persistence and graduation rates in a large sample of participants.

Lastly, future research of African American doctoral mothers should continue to include the use of womanism as a theoretical framework to situate the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers at the center of the research study and include their participation throughout the entire research process. Womanism offers a powerful lens by which to view the unique experiences of this population. It provides an essential platform to give voice and meaning to the uniqueness of African American women. At its core womanism is a social change perspective based upon the everyday experiences of African American women. The theory seeks to eradicate inequalities, not just for African American women, but for all people.

### **Chapter Summary**

Exploring the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs uncovered a number of findings that contribute to the current literature. The themes highlight the challenges and successes that arise for many African American doctoral student mothers. The findings of this study reveal that counselor education programs can provide support to these women by creating a family friendly environment, considering the unique needs of working parents, facilitating support groups, and implementing mentoring programs. Additionally, the findings of this study provide a deeper understanding of the unique experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs. The limitations of this study along with the deficits in the literature indicate that future research is necessary to address the needs of African American doctoral student mothers. Hence, counselor education program coordinators, faculty, and administrators can use these findings to better serve and support these students through practice and research. In addition, other African American doctoral student mothers can use these findings to counter, validate, or compare to their individual experiences.

The theory of womanism posits that African American women have had to find ways to connect their academic world and their everyday world (Phillips 2006). The African American doctoral student mothers in this study have successfully permeated the once seemingly impermeable academy by reformulating their doctoral experiences to connect their academic identity with their identity as African American women, thereby making the two identities complementary rather than opposing (Phillips). Rather than give up one part of themselves, the African American doctoral student mothers in this

study have liberated themselves by harmonizing their multiple identities instead of sacrificing either self (Phillips).

### **Epilogue**

I am an African American doctoral student mother. As I conclude this dissertation I finally have time to reflect on what these five words have meant to me over the past three years. The journey to my PhD has been a long arduous one that I have often questioned. At the beginning of my doctoral education I was so unsure of myself and my status in the program. I was constantly plagued with doubt, guilt, and isolation and often asked myself why am I here? Why am I doing this to myself and my family? Who told me I could do this? However, as I type these last few words I realize how much I have grown as a result of my program and the dissertation process. Because of my experiences as an African American doctoral student mother in counselor education I have become a stronger and prouder mother and student. Even though it is often very difficult to balance work, motherhood, and my doctoral studies, I am doing it and I make it work. It is very hard, especially when I have to forego a softball or baseball game to be in class and there have been times where I have chosen my doctoral responsibilities over my mothering ones. It is the price I pay for fulfilling my dream. Interviewing the participants allowed me the opportunity to establish a network of African American doctoral student mothers. Although, I wish I had this support system from the beginning of my doctoral journey it has been amazing hearing each participant's perception of their individual experience and the motivation that keeps them pushing forward to earn their PhD. The women of my study have taught me that I need to own my status and speak loud for the unheard voices of all the African American doctoral student mothers.

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## APPENDIX A

## Recruitment Email

**Enhancing Our Status: The Experiences of African American Doctoral Student Mothers in Counselor Education Programs**

My name is Brandee Appling and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia. I am currently conducting a research project for my dissertation under the direction of Dr. Natoya Haskins and I would like to invite you to participate in my study. The study is titled Enhancing Our Status: The Experiences of African American Doctoral Student Mothers in Counselor Education and has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Georgia (Project Number: 00001482). I am studying African American women currently enrolled in CACREP accredited counselor education doctoral programs, who are raising children (ages 0-18) currently living in their home.

The purpose of the study is to better understand the lived experiences of African American women navigating motherhood and doctoral student status. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in an audio-taped interview that will last approximately 50-60 minutes and take 1-3 photographs that reflect your experiences as an African American doctoral student mother. The meeting will be held at a mutually agreed upon location. During the interview, we will discuss the photos you have taken and your everyday lived experiences navigating higher education as an African American woman, doctoral student, and mother.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation in the study will also remain confidential. While the results may be published, your identity will be protected. I am happy to answer any questions you may have about the study. You may contact me at [bappling@uga.edu](mailto:bappling@uga.edu).

***If you would like to participate, please send an e-mail to me as soon as possible.*** In the email please include your contact phone number and the best times to reach you. I will call you to further discuss the details of the study.

Sincerely,

Brandee Appling

Department of Counseling and Human Development Services

678-907-2826 – [bappling@uga.edu](mailto:bappling@uga.edu)

Principal Investigator: Dr. Natoya Haskins, Ph.D.

706-542-0839 – [nhaskins@uga.edu](mailto:nhaskins@uga.edu)

## APPENDIX B

## Recruitment Email

# CALLING ALL AFRICAN AMERICAN DOCTORAL STUDENT MOTHERS!

- ✓ Are you currently enrolled in a CACREP Accredited Counselor Education Program?
- ✓ Do you identify as African American?
- ✓ Do you identify as a mother?
- ✓ Are you currently raising at least one child between the ages of 0-18 that still resides in your home?

*If the answers to all these questions are yes, then please consider participating in this research study!*

## ABOUT THE STUDY...

- ❖ In this research study, we are studying African American women currently enrolled in CACREP counselor education doctoral programs that identify as mothers. The purpose of the study is to better understand the experiences of African American mothers as they pursue a doctoral degree.
- ❖ If you volunteer for the study, you will be asked to participate in an individual 50-60 minute audio-taped interview with the researcher and and take 1-3 photographs that most reflect your experiences navigating motherhood and higher education as an African American woman. A camera will be available if you do not wish to use your own.

**IF YOU WISH TO PARTICPATE PLEASE CALL OR  
EMAIL TO LEARN MORE.**

### CONTACT INFORMATION:

Brandee Appling- (678) 907-2826

bappling@uga.edu



## APPENDIX C

### Consent Form

#### **Researcher's Statement**

I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Natoya Haskins,  
Counseling and Human Development Services  
(706) 542-0839  
nhaskins@uga.edu

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of African American mothers as they engage in doctoral studies in CACREP counselor education programs. The researcher, Brandee Appling, hopes to learn about what it is like for African American women to experience motherhood and doctoral student status simultaneously. The researcher would like to use this information to educate counselor education practitioners of the needs and challenges of African American doctoral student mothers.

#### **Study Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to ...

- Meet individually with the researcher for one 50-60 minute interview. During this interview, the researcher will audio tape the conversations about your experiences as an African American doctoral student mother in a counselor education program.
- Take 1-3 photographs that reflect your experiences as an African American doctoral student mother and provide them to the researcher either in hard copy or electronically prior to the individual interview.
- Discuss your photograph(s) during the individual interview.
- Review your interview transcripts for accuracy or clarification; however, you may waive your opportunity to do so.
- Potentially respond to follow-up questions that may arise as the researcher conducts the study.
- Review a draft of the research findings and provide feedback; however, you may waive my opportunity to do so.
- Complete a demographic questionnaire that confirms your race/ethnicity, marital status, age, gender orientation, number of children, name and type of doctoral degree program, and job status.

- The total estimated duration of my participation in this study will range between one-and-a-half hours to two hours depending on length of interview, photographs, and any follow-up.

### **Risks and discomforts**

- The research is not expected to cause any physical harm or discomfort. The emotional risk may include discovering feelings related to your experiences of discrimination or other challenges/barriers you may have or are currently encountering as well as increased self-awareness. If you experience any discomfort, you may elect not to answer any question during the interview without having to explain why, and you can quit at any time. If you would like to seek further counseling, the researcher will refer you to other licensed counseling professionals through the University of Georgia's Counseling and Psychiatric Services (706-542-2273).

### **Benefits**

- There are no known benefits of this study for the participants; however, you will be able to reflect on your experiences as an African American mother in a counselor education doctoral program, which may result in feelings of empowerment and validation.
- The findings of this research may lead to counselor educators having a greater awareness and understanding of the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers and their challenges and successes.

### **Audio Recording**

An audio recording device will be used to record the individual interviews. The audio recording of the interview will be used to ensure accuracy of data collection. The researcher will use the audio recording to transcribe the interview. All audio recordings and transcriptions will be stored on a password-protected computer and will only be accessible by the researcher.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio recorded or not.

\_\_\_\_\_ I DO give permission to have my interview audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I DO NOT give permission to have my interview audio recorded.

### **Photographs**

The researcher is requesting photographs in which your likeness and/or image may be included. The researcher will discuss with you which of your photographs may be used in presentations or publications, and your permission will be recorded in the researcher's notes.

### **Privacy/Confidentiality**

No individually identifiable information about you, or provided by you during the research, will be shared with others without your permission, unless required by law.

You will be given the opportunity to create a pseudonym, or will be assigned one, for the purposes of data collection and corresponding research reports. The pseudonym code will be maintained in a password protected electronic document in the researcher's computer files and will be destroyed after the final report has been written. The recordings of the interviews, the pseudonym code, and any photographs that are not included in presentations/publications will be destroyed after the completion of data collection, or no later than May 20, 2015.

Because of the nature of Internet communication, confidentiality cannot be ensured when e-mail or other modes of Internet communication are used to provide photographs. For this reason, you have the option of communicating in this study completely through phone or face-to-face, and to provide photographs in hard copy. An exception to the privacy/confidentiality will occur in the event a participant borrows a camera and does not return it. In the even you borrow a camera and do not return it, I will identify you as a research participant in order to seek assistance in getting the camera back.

### **Taking part is voluntary**

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your grades and class standing will not be affected by your decision about participation. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

### **If you have questions**

The main researcher conducting this study is *Brandee Appling*, a *doctoral student* at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact *Dr. Natoya Haskins* at [nhaskins@uga.edu](mailto:nhaskins@uga.edu) or at (706) 542-0839. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

### **Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:**

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D

## Demographic Questionnaire

## PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender Identity: \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children: \_\_\_\_\_

Ages of children: \_\_\_\_\_

Doctoral degree program which you are currently enrolled: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of graduate institution where you are pursuing your graduate degree:

\_\_\_\_\_

What year are you in your program? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently employed: Y/N

If yes, what is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you work from home or outside of the home? \_\_\_\_\_

How many hours a week do you work? \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

### Semi-structured Interview Protocol

#### Introduction

Hi. My name is Brandee Appling and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counseling and Student Personnel Services P-16 program at the University of Georgia. I am conducting a research project on the experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs. Specifically, I want to know if and in what ways race and motherhood influence the doctoral experience for African American women. It is from my own experiences as an African American doctoral student mother in counselor education and the many stories shared with me by other African American doctoral student mothers that I am interested in studying how we individually and collectively make meaning out of combining our mothering and student experiences. In addition, my hope is that by sharing the stories of all the participants, counselor education programs will become aware of our unique experiences as African American women. Further, I want to give voice and meaning to your individual experience and enhance the significance of our challenges and successes in the research literature. I appreciate you meeting with me today to talk more about your everyday experiences navigating higher education as an African American mother and student. Before we begin the interview, I would like to remind you that the information you share during the interview will be kept confidential as explained in the consent form. I will not use your name or any other identifying information about you that might allow someone to figure out who you are. Feel free to skip any questions you do not want to answer and at any time you may end the interview. I anticipate that the interview will take approximately an hour. Though I will be asking you questions, if at any time you have questions throughout the interview, please feel free to ask. In addition, at the end of the interview we will discuss the photograph(s) that you took. At this point, do you have any questions for me before we begin?

RQ: What are the lived experiences of African American doctoral student mothers in counselor education programs?

1. Tell me a little about your family.
2. What does being a mother mean to you?
3. What does being an African American woman mean to you?
4. What does it mean to be an African American mother?
5. Why did you decide to pursue a doctorate degree in counselor education?

- a. What significance does attaining a doctoral degree in counselor education have in your life?
6. What have been some of your experiences thus far as an African American woman pursuing a doctoral degree in counselor education? Probe- Can you tell me about some specific experiences that come to mind?
  - a. How have others in your life reacted to you being a mother and a doctoral student?
  - b. What impact does being an African American doctoral student mother have on your children?
7. What impact does your race have on your experiences as a doctoral student in counselor education?
8. How has your role as a mother impacted your role as a doctoral student?
  - a. How do you merge the two roles?
9. What are the challenges you experience as an African American doctoral student mother?
10. What are the successes you experience as an African American doctoral student mother?
  - a. What are the factors that relate to your persistence throughout your doctoral education?
11. How do you balance work and life?
12. Given the experiences that you have shared about navigating your dual roles and multiple identities what suggestions would you give other African American mothers entering a counselor education doctoral degree program?
13. What are some suggestions you would give counselor education doctoral programs to support the needs of African American doctoral student mothers?
14. Are there any experiences, concerns, or thoughts that we have not discussed regarding your experiences as an African American doctoral student mother?

#### Photo Elicitation Interview Protocol

1. Please share what this/these photograph(s) represent for you?
2. What are you feeling as you reflect on this/these photograph(s)?
3. Please tell me why you selected (insert title) as the title for this/these photograph(s)?

Final Question: Though I have asked many questions of you, I want to give you the opportunity to share with me anything else that you would like to add. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Summary Statement: In the interview, I took note of several themes that were noticeable to me. These included (insert themes). Do you think I summarized these correctly? Are there any other things that stand out to you from the interview?

Wrap-Up: I want to thank you for sharing your experiences with me. I really appreciated your insight and time you spent with me today. If I have any follow-up questions later, may I contact you again?

## APPENDIX F

## Contact Summary Sheet

Interviewer: Brandee Appling

Interviewee:

Contact Date:

Today's Date:

1. What were the main issues or themes that stuck out for you in this contact?
2. What discrepancies, if any, did you note in the interviewee's responses?
3. Anything else that stuck out as salient, interesting, or important in this contact?
4. General comments about how this interviewee's responses compared with other interviewees:



## APPENDIX G

### Photo-elicitation Directions

Thank you for participating in my research project. To complete this portion of your participation, you will take 1-3 photographs of that reflect your lived experiences as an African American doctoral student mother using your own phone camera or digital camera or you may choose to have one provided to you. If you need a digital camera, we will meet at an arranged time for you to receive and return the camera to me. Please use the instructions provided below to assist you with this part of the research study.

You can take pictures of anything you feel is appropriate to meet the below instructions. However, because of confidentiality, you CANNOT take pictures of other people.

If you have a problem with the digital camera provided, please let me know as soon as possible. I will provide you with a new one.

#### Photograph Instructions

- Take 1-3 photographs to describe your experiences as an African American doctoral student mother.
- Title the photograph
- Provide me with a hard or digital copy prior to the interview

Once you have taken all of these photographs, e-mail the photographs to me directly. You also have the options of meeting me in person or mailing them directly to me. Please let me know if you would like to send your photos through any other medium than e-mail. If you use the digital camera provided from me, please keep it in a safe location and ensure a timely return.

If you have questions, please contact me at 678-907-2826 or [bappling@uga.edu](mailto:bappling@uga.edu).

## APPENDIX H

## Sample from Researchers Reflexive Journal

11-2014

Today I will complete my very first interview with an African American doctoral student mother. As I prepare for my interview I feel as if I need to reflect on my personal experiences so that I can bracket my assumptions and feelings ahead of time. As a wife and mother of two young children I have a personal relationship to the current study and my participants. I am an African American doctoral student mother in a counselor education program. Therefore, as a researcher the experiences and the feelings of the mothers have personal significance for me and so I carry several assumptions in my heart. It is my assumption that African American doctoral student mothers experience conflicting feelings of guilt and pride as well as a lot of isolation. I assume that they experience feelings of self-fulfillment as they cope with managing their multiple identities of mother, student, and African American woman. Further, I believe that gender identity intersects with racial/ethnic identity which varies participant's lived experience and coping techniques. Being an African American doctoral student in counselor education is hard work and I can attest to that. I know that people judge me and also look at me trying to figure out how (and why) I do what I do. I feel as though I have to be better than everyone else and I don't know if it is because I think people are judging me because of my race or because I am a mom. All I know is that I have to be perfect. I can't wait to hear what these other women say to see if they feel the same as I do.

12-2014

I have completed several interviews so far and I am so excited and feel very privileged and honored to hear these women's stories! It almost doesn't feel like research but advocacy work because so many of them have never talked about how they feel or their experiences as African American doctoral student mothers. I am truly giving voice to their experiences and in their minds this is so important and they are so grateful to have this opportunity. I know from all the thanks they give at the end of the interview. They needed this. I do wonder though how come in 2014 no one has told our story? How come we have not told our own story? Is it a social justice issue that no one thinks this is an important issue or that dealing with the challenges of womanhood and motherhood as an African American are not as important as other identities. I know that we are not the only mothers that feel pulled between our multiple identities. I know that we are not the only African American doctoral student mothers that feels anxiety, guilt, isolation, stress, and hesitation at taking this time away from my babies to pursue our dreams?