

Pathways of Black Male Full Professors in Counseling Education

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Abstract

Although research has been conducted on minoritized faculty members' experiences in counselor education, there is a paucity of research addressing the experiences of Black male faculty in pursuit of the full professorship. Given the minuscule number of Black male counselor educators who are full professors, the current study explored the lived experiences of Black male educators who achieved the rank of full professor. We conducted focus groups with eight participants using a narrative design. Participants responded to eight open-ended questions centered on advancement to full professor. Using the Saldana thematic analysis method, five salient themes emerged from participants: a) mentorship, b) isolation, c) understanding the system, d) getting organized, and e) imposter syndrome. The results of this study validated the experiences of Black male counselor educators and illuminated effective strategies for navigating the unfamiliar path to becoming a full professor.

Keywords: *Black males, counselor education, full professor*

The full professor rank is important because it (historically) represents substantial contributions to a particular academic field. Achieving the rank of full professor is also the gateway to other impactful work. Full professor status often opens the door to becoming a department chair, associate dean, or dean. However, the number of Black male counselor educators in counselor education has dwindled from the "full professor" table (Brooks & Steen, 2010; Johnson et al., 2007).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Black faculty comprise roughly six percent of all faculty in colleges and universities despite representing 13% of the national population in the U.S. (NCES, 2022). Eight percent of junior faculty are Black, five percent of assistant professors are Black women, and three percent are Black men. These numbers drop further as professorial ranks increase. Only four percent of full professors are Black, evenly split at two percent for Black women and men. The Education Trust found a similar result and reported that Black and Latinx faculty are more likely to be hired off the tenure track and remain underrepresented among tenure and tenure track faculty (Bitar et al., 2022). Counselor education programs are a microcosm of this phenomenon. In 2022, only four percent of nearly 3,309 full-time counselor education faculty identified as Black men (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2023). The underrepresentation of Black male faculty undermines counseling programs' vision, mission, and aspirations to recruit and retain diverse students and faculty. CACREP's (2015) vision for counseling programs aligns with the *ACA Code of Ethics* (American Counseling Association, 2014), challenging program faculty and administrators to engage in "continuous and systematic efforts to recruit, employ, and retain a diverse faculty to create and support an inclusive learning community" (CACREP, 2015).

The past two decades have reflected minimal growth in the number of Black full professors in the academy. Trower and Chait (2002) found that 94% of full professors in science and engineering are White, 90% are male, 91% of the full professors at research universities are White, and 75% are male. Additionally, 87% of the full-time faculty members in the U.S. are White; 64% are male; 5% of the full professors in the U.S. are Black, Hispanic, or Native American. Currently, only 4% of Black faculty rise to full professors, whereas overall, full professors comprise 25% of all faculty (Chambers & Freeman, 2020; Integrated et al. [IPEDS], 2017).

Addressing the sociopolitical factors of systemic racism, implicit bias, a lack of mentorship and support, tokenism, institutional climate, and pathway issues, requires comprehensive strategies that prioritize quality, inclusion, and systemic change within academic institutions (Brooks et al., 2023; Hannon et al., 2023; Haskins et al., 2013; Ivers et al., 2021). Many academic institutions have missions and values that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion. Achieving more excellent representation of Black men at the full professor level aligns with these goals. It ensures that universities fulfill their responsibilities to promote social responsibility and engage with diverse communities. Accomplishing change regarding Black men, however, may involve implementing transparent hiring and promotion processes, establishing mentorship, and supporting programs tailored to the needs of Black male faculty, fostering inclusive and anti-racist institutional cultures, and investing initiatives to address pathway issues and promote diversity at all levels of academia.

As such, the participants in this study are exceptional because they have attained the rank of full professor in counselor education as Black men, given the race and ethnic demographics among education faculty (Freeman & Chambers, 2021). They accomplished this feat by teaching, researching, and providing professional service to others and their surrounding communities, all while being Black (Dade et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2013; Lloyd-Jones, 2014; Ross & Edwards, 2016; Siegel et al., 2015; Wilder & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, our leading question in this study

was: What pathways were taken by Black males who have achieved the academic rank of full professor? We believe the data and responses to this question are essential for the following reasons:

1. The stories of Black males who have successfully achieved the rank of professor provide representation and role modeling. Black males who have reached the full professor level serve as important exemplars and sources of inspiration for counselor educators from similar backgrounds. By understanding their pathway, aspiring students can gain insight into the steps and strategies these successful individuals employ, which can guide the advancement of their career aspirations.
2. Addressing underrepresentation in many academic disciplines, including counselor education, can be achieved through this inquiry. Understanding these pathways can help shed light on the factors contributing to this underrepresentation. Discouraging disenfranchised can inform efforts to address systemic barriers and create more equitable opportunities for Black male students and aspiring assistant and associate professors.
3. Identifying success strategies has value. Knowledge and “know-how” regarding the pathways to full professorship can provide valuable information about the strategies, experiences, and networks that have been instrumental in the success of Black Male Counselor Educators. This information can help inform mentorship programs, career development initiatives, and institutional policies to support the professional advancement of Black Male Counselor Educators and other underrepresented groups.
4. Exploring the pathways of Black Male Counselor Educators to the academic rank of full professor can reveal informational and scholarly insights and research opportunities. Such research can contribute to developing evidence-based strategies and interventions supporting Black males’ career professions and success.

The results generated from this study can inspire future generations, inform institutional practices, and advance research, leading to more representation and inclusiveness. We expected to garner a sense of the relative importance of each pathway and provide information for those Black male faculty members contemplating pursuing the rank of full professor.

Review of Literature

Ascendance to the rank of full professor is tricky, as unlike in the case of tenure guidelines and promotion to associate ranks, institutional guidelines are less clear (Chait, 2002; Clark, 1987; Finnegan & Hyle, 2009; Hyle, 1999; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006), lack timetables (Clark, 1987; Finnegan & Hyle, 2009; Hyle, 1999) and require faculty to take agency of their promotion pathways both in terms of the schedule and their respective university as well as professional recognition of their expertise (Gardner & Blackstone, 2013, 2017; O’Meara & Campbell, 2011; O’Meara et al., 2008). There are possibly other factors influencing Black male Counselor education faculty career pathways at the level of full (Chou, 2015; Reich, 2014; UnCon School, 2013). Reviewing published research on this topic is challenging as these manuscripts are scarce. Most articles on this topic are conceptual and published opinions with no data analysis.

The most relevant study related to the current inquiry was conducted by Freeman and Chambers (2021). Seven Black female professors who earned the rank of full professor at Primary

White Institutions (PWIs) before age 45 were interviewed to provide recommendations to aspiring academics and validate Lewis' (2016) 12 Recommendations. Participants were purposefully sampled and invited using the CESNET and snowballed through the personal contacts directory. Those who agreed to participate were interviewed via Zoom. The interview questions focused on mentorship, overcoming barriers, lessons learned, and age. A content analysis was used with Lewis' recommendations as a framework. Twelve recommendations (or themes) were elucidated from the data, and the participants validated eleven of Lewis' tenets. However, this study broadly examined professors from all academic fields, only those at PWIs and those who were 45 or younger. Freeman and Chambers (2021) recommended additional work within disciplines to validate their work. While the current inquiry also investigates Black faculty, we focused on Black males in counselor education. Black males in Counselor Education require a specific, direct, focused inquest (Hannon et al., 2019).

In a related study investigating Black faculty members' lack of representation at full professor rank at HBCUs, Stephens and Wilson-Kennedy (2019) call for a different type of higher education leadership. Stephens and Wilson-Kennedy conducted a content analysis. They reviewed and analyzed the six HBCUs' data on the number of female and male professors at the assistant, associate, and full professor ranks. Their study showed that the low rates at which Black women are promoted to full professor might be linked to their heavy service and teaching commitments that do not align with their institutions' movement toward a more research-intensive structure. The solution to address these low numbers was infusing more transformative leaders. The researchers believed universities lack strategies and actions that transform gender inequities and reframe traditional decision-making to be more inclusive of Black women's faculty. The current study appreciates these efforts but recognizes a need to study Black males. Moreover, the current study's researchers focus on the options available to faculty members, not the overall institution or administration. Despite the challenges presented in the studies above, there is a recognition of the importance of addressing underrepresentation in academia, including the need to amplify Black voices and perspectives of Black scholars, including full professors.

Conceptual Framework

Dickens and Dickens' Career Development Model. We utilized the Dickens and Dickens Career Development Model as our theoretical framework. The model originated through an interest in Black professionals assuming the roles of managers in predominantly white-owned businesses. The model asserts that Black managers pass through four phases of development: the entry phase, adjusting phase, planned growth phase, and success phase (Dickens & Dickens, 1991). The model is closed-looped because it repeats itself. After an individual reaches the Success Phase, a new cycle begins with a significant job change or reassignment to another organization. Each time a cycle is completed, it will take longer to traverse it in subsequent job changes.

The 'entry phase' is characterized as an individual having a false sense of security and lacking direction. Cornileus (2013) asserted that individuals ignore racial issues and seek to be "a part of" a group during the entry phase. Next, the adjusting phase emphasizes testing the organizational environment and pushing aggressively while experiencing dissatisfaction and frustration. The 'adjusting phase' recognizes the low self-confidence and discomfort that Black or African Americans feel after recognizing inequalities in job opportunities and promotions (Cornileus, 2013). In the 'planned growth' phase, Black professionals learn to manage their frustrations and follow corporate norms. Career development and planning become more

intentional in this phase. Lastly, the ‘success phase’ is where Black professionals see progress, meet primary goals, set new appropriate goals, and develop high confidence. Verbal affirmations from their white counterparts are no longer necessary.

Cheatham’s (1990) Heuristic Model of Career Development. Smith (1983) recognized the importance of career maturity and the measurement instruments used to gauge career interests, choices, and progress in understanding Black or African Americans’ career behaviors. Further, career development was traditionally conceptualized through a Eurocentric lens, and researchers had taken limited steps to understand Black or African American people’s career development through an Afrocentric lens (Cheatham, 1990). Thus, Cheatham’s (1990) reason for developing a heuristic career development model was to understand the cultural values that Black people hold towards work and career development. Afrocentrism describes shared sociocultural history and racism and suggests that Black people internalize values, attitudes, and beliefs unique to their cultural heritage (Cornileus, 2013).

Cheatham’s (1990) model accounts for Black culture and provides a holistic lens for Blacks’ career development (Bingham & Ward, 2001; Cornileus, 2013). The model acknowledges that Black people have experienced oppression, racism, slavery, and inequalities through discrimination. Next, the model asserts that adaptations happen when the experiences are connected to cultural values and beliefs. Depending on the level of acculturation, the adventures can be positive or negative. Lastly, the Eurocentric social order directly affects career development, while the Afrocentric social order indirectly impacts career development. Nonetheless, Cheatham’s (1990) model has little scholarly research application and does not account for gender differences from the Afrocentric lens.

The current study is intended to incorporate the social justice lens into Dickens and Dickens’s (1991) career development theory and incorporate the gender perspective into Cheatham’s (1990) model to understand the career development of African American males in academia. Both models promote understanding about specific points in time when Black male counselor educators experience differential treatment along their path to full professorship. The models also offer a framework to provide detailed recommendations supporting Black male counselor educators’ achievement of full professorship. We examined the stories of Black males who have successfully achieved the rank of full professor. We hoped to provide directions to the pathways for male counselor educators who aspire to this academic rank with findings from this study.

Methods

We utilized narrative design as the research method because of the study’s exploratory nature. Our collective hermeneutical stance acknowledges the reality of any dynamic being relative. We construct knowledge by interpreting our meanings of texts, art, culture, social phenomena, and thinking (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hays & Singh, 2023). Thus, the strategy opposes those research strategies that stress objectivity and independence from interpretations in knowledge formation.

Recruitment and Data Collection Procedures

The population of interest was Black male faculty members who had reached the academic rank of full professor. Throughout the past twenty years, the prevalence of Black male counselor

educators has been minuscule, with full professors comprising less than a third of the total (Brooks & Steen, 2010; Hannon et al., 2019).

Participants were intentionally selected based on their ability to elucidate a specific phenomenon (Black male counselor educators who are full professors). Therefore, the purposeful sampling method was ideal for this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To maximize the efficiency of our efforts, we utilized snowballing, wherein participants identified other potential participants. After receiving institutional review board approval, participants were solicited, approached via email, and asked to participate in the study. The researchers used professional listservs and contacts to make initial solicitations and identifications. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend sampling until a point of saturation or redundancy is reached. For Black male full professor counselor educators, once the names of potential participants were repeated, the researchers considered the pool of availability satisfied.

Data were collected in three interactions: an open-ended questionnaire and two subsequent focus group meetings. First, participants received open-ended questions after they signed the informed consent. These questions were derived from the research literature on faculty advancement to full professorship and covered topics such as mentorship, peer support, individual professional development, institutional standards, institutional politics, as well as fit (Chambers & Freeman, 2020; Hays & Singh, 2023; Smith et al., 2014). We analyzed the responses to open-ended questions using thematic analysis, defined as the identification and interpretative patterns of meaning within qualitative data/text (Kelly, 2005). For a list of the open-ended questions prompts, please see Appendix A.

Second, we derived guiding interview questions for the first focus group based on our collected written responses. These questions were:

- What were the "unwritten" standards for pursuing a full professorship?
- Most respondents assumed different paths to the professorial; please describe your path in more detail.
- Tell us more about the support network to assist you in achieving full professorship. What support was missing?

We conducted the first focus group with three participants and coded the responses once it was complete. We then added follow-up and clarifying questions for the second group based on the initial coding of the first focus group responses. The second focus group also had three participants and highlighted questions on the personal struggle along the pathway toward full professorship:

- Give it what you know now about your process to becoming a full professor; what would you tell your younger and less experienced self about such aspirations?
- (Regarding imposter syndrome), Can you think back to those critical moments when someone interceded, or you decided that you would have been off the wagon if you did not make that decision, or someone did not intercede?
- Why do we keep failing at mentoring?
- Where does the conversation need to go?

The above guiding questions align with narrative as they created a literary form for making meaning of the experiences of participants' professional academic plight. The prompts also created

space for self-reflection and an opportunity to process their experiences fully without having to filter.

Positionality of the research team

Qualitative research requires investigators to document their researcher roles and relationship(s) to the study phenomenon to minimize researcher bias (Kline, 2008). We all collectively identified as (1) A member of a minority population, and (2) a graduate affiliated with or from a CACREP counselor education program.

Three researchers identified as African American, raised in the southern part of the United States, and one as Chinese American. Two researchers self-identified as male and two self-identified as female. Three researchers are associated with an HBCU; the fourth is from a PWI.

Our team recognized and discussed the impact of our collective historical, racial, and sociopolitical ideas and assumptions about the Black male counselor educators who are full professors. As a collective, we value diversity among counselor education faculty members. We also believe that there should be diversity of Black males throughout the academic ranks and higher education. We also discussed our expectations of the research findings. For one, mentorship plays a valuable role in Black male counselor educators' academic and professional development. For another, Black male counselor educators' presence is more from programs in which they enroll where faculty look like them. We realized that our collective beliefs about Black male counselor educators who are full professors are bound inclusively and unconditionally positively regarded.

Credibility of Findings

Reflexivity is essential because it encourages introspection, critical thinking, and growth at the individual and societal levels. It helps individuals navigate complexity and uncertainty by fostering a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them.

Because of the small number of potential participants and the apparent relatedness of the topic to the professional lives of the authors, as a group, the researchers agreed that reflection on our behaviors and biases was crucial. Two of the four researchers identify as Black male counselor educators. The first author is a full professor. Our team discussed our ideas and assumptions about Black male counselor educators who are full professors. We also discussed our expectations of the research outcomes. We realized that our collective beliefs about Black male counselor educators who are full professors have varied stories and opinions about how one can achieve the rank of full. Before collecting data and throughout the data collection and analysis, the researchers learned through our self-appraisal activities. The researchers believe our open discussions increased our individual and collective growth. We all responded to the questions and processed responses as a group. Lastly, we acknowledged our biases and their possible influences to maintain our rigor and objectivity. By openly stating these thoughts, we can help to maintain accountability and transparency.

Data Analysis

We used the Saldana thematic analysis method to gather information and understand experiences considering participants' sociocultural context (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009, Saldana, 2016). Each research team member read data approximately three times for

desensitization purposes. Next, we reviewed transcripts and highlighted words/phrases that appeared attractive (Pre-coding). Additional sentences matching these codes were also noted. After reviewing the text, all the data was collated into groups and identified by a code. These codes allowed us to condense the data's main points and shared meanings. We then reviewed the codes and identified patterns, which led to the generation of themes. An additional coding round was conducted, collapsing the first cycle into more salient themes (2nd cycle). We reviewed the final set of themes to ensure there were valuable and accurate representations of the data. The final list of themes was defined and named.

Participants

The study specifically included Black males who are full professors in counselor education. This demographic is significant because Black males are underrepresented in higher academic positions, especially in counseling and education fields. The authors would like to acknowledge that, customarily, qualitative reports often describe the participant characteristics. Such descriptions give readers information on the type of study participants to clarify to whom the study findings apply and shed light on the transferability of the findings and any possible limitations. This qualitative study had 8 participants out of a potential pool of 20. The authors felt using traditional (rich) participant descriptions would reveal the individual's identity. Therefore, the authors found it necessary to be more general to guard their identities and maintain anonymity, which was crucial to ensure safety and privacy. Also, we recognized that pseudonyms and participant profiles were often used to ensure the participant's anonymity. Similarly, due to the scant number of Black male counselor educators who are full professors, participant profiles and pseudonyms were omitted from the study.

The participants in our study were from a diverse range of academic institutions, including research-intensive universities and teaching-focused institutions. This variety in institutional types not only broadens the scope of our study but also provides a richer understanding of the participants' experiences in different educational environments, which could affect their professional experiences and challenges.

Most participants resided in the southeastern United States, with one living in the Midwest. This geographic detail is crucial for contextualizing the study's findings, as the experiences of Black male academics may vary significantly depending on regional cultural, social, and institutional dynamics. The Southeast, in particular, has a unique and profound history regarding race and education, which we have thoroughly explored to understand its influence on the participants' professional experiences.

Finally, the authors make a point to clarify that even though one of the investigators shares the demographic profile of the participants (i.e., being a Black male full professor counselor educator), they did not participate in the study. We hope this clarification addresses concerns about bias or subjectivity, underscoring the objectivity and credibility of the research process.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established through investigator triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hays & Singh, 2023), which involved multiple researchers investigating to assist with the accuracy and confirmability of the analysis. The first two authors' consensus building was a form of investigator triangulation. Additionally, the third author's role as an external auditor allowed

for cross-checks for accuracy and helped increase the likelihood of confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each participant also received an executive summary of the study's findings for review, feedback, and confirmation. Third, the first three authors' reflexive exercises (e.g., making journal entries during data collection and analysis) documented how the research process affected them and their inclinations about potential findings. Lastly, using representative quotes from participants provided a thick description (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2023), allowing readers to make their own decisions about our findings' transferability.

Findings

Four salient themes emerged from participants, including a) mentorship, b) understanding the system, d) getting organized, and e) imposter syndrome. The following section provides detailed accounts of the participants, outlining their experiences while pursuing Full Professorship. Participants' responses were converged to ensure equitable and rigorous research. Participant responses tell the story of these four salient themes and the importance of the findings of the lived experiences of Counselor Educators and Black males in academia.

Mentorship

The relationship in which an experienced and knowledgeable individual provides guidance, support, advice, and feedback to a less experienced person is known as mentorship. Mentorship occurs in academia, career development, and personal growth. The mentor typically shares insights to assist the mentee in navigating challenges, setting goals, making decisions, and achieving success in their endeavors. The relationship is often characterized by mutual respect, trust, and open communication with their mentor.

Participants overwhelmingly noted the instrumental role mentoring played in their path to becoming full professors. Mentorship is effective, particularly regarding professional progress and job satisfaction; mentoring programs are evolving to increase support with programming, including peer writing groups and mentoring networks (Cassese & Holman, 2018; Rockquemore, 2014). Consistent with our findings, studies indicated that mid-career mentorship decreases the likelihood of being stalled in rank and increases reports of job satisfaction compared with those faculty who receive no mentorship (Lunsford et al., 2018; Walensky et al., 2018). Two participants highlighted the importance of mentoring in their careers with one participant sharing:

I was with a circle of folks ... We were coming into the profession at the same time, so we saw each other, and we were ... able to connect that way kind of, so they see promise in me... taught me things that I could be able to change my narrative.

A second participant briefly added a perspective mentoring's importance; they stated, "It is about people seeing you do the work - if they see you do the work, they are attracted to that, and they attach to you."

Although participants benefitted from peer mentoring, some expressed the need for more structure around the mentoring process, especially with Black men. Structured peer mentoring could provide a framework for organizing and facilitating mentoring relationships, ensuring that mentees have the support, guidance, and resources they need to achieve goals effectively. The participant's quote below captured the essence of this sentiment when he said, "Everybody talks about you are going to be mentored. I have not seen an effective mentoring program for new faculty

yet. What I have seen is organic mentoring amongst White faculty”. Another participant echoed similar concerns and stated:

Some of us need to be provided mentorship and guidance. So much of the Academy is like an apprenticeship, you know. You will not learn to be an effective blacksmith by sitting in a class and then going on the job. You need that person to help you. There are many nuances to navigate, especially when you are a man of color.

Mentoring promotes a sense of belonging, empowerment, and accountability. Additionally, mentoring contributes to the developing of a supporting work community where knowledge is shared, collaboration is encouraged, and mentorship is valued. Ultimately, mentoring among Black male faculty members in higher education is vital in shaping the next generation of leaders, innovators, and full professors.

Understanding the System

Nuances in higher education involve a comprehensive awareness of administrative processes, campus resources, faculty/staff roles, and campus culture and social dynamics. Understanding the system can empower faculty to make informed decisions, access resources, advocate for their needs, and succeed professionally.

Participants unanimously underscored the significance of understanding the rules and standards, both written and unwritten, within the university. Freeman et al. (2020) reported that associate professors need more understanding concerning which criteria count in advancement to full. Aspiring professors acknowledged their need for clarity, like the standards for promotion from assistant to associate, guessing that measures might be intensified and require additional achievements (leadership, service, recognition). Thus, in advancement to full professor, compared to rise to associate professor, the attributes reported to be needed are more subjective, less known, less understood, and somewhat less under the candidate’s control concerning their achievements/attainments. One participant noted the importance of understanding the system to make informed decisions; they stated:

If I had somebody in my life who had said, look, do not, take that, or do not do this, negotiate this way, or do all these other things. I would have made different decisions. I would have understood the system to be able to make different decisions.

A second participant expressed the need to understand both the budget and data, “Whoever understands the budget and the data the most is the one who is in charge. The data is the key. Look at the data.”

Other participants also commented on the importance of understanding aspects of the system as a critical component of advancing to full professorship. For instance, a participant felt that promotion and tenure guidelines are intentionally vague to maintain the imbalance of power in the academy, “Well, the handbook and the guidelines across institutions are vague just to preserve those in power.” Relatedly, another participant described the inner struggle he experienced on his path to becoming a full professor.

Just doing your job. You are going to have many distractions, you know. I wanted to get more involved in a lot of the black issues. Okay, I did. However, I did not because I needed to keep my head down. I was concerned about losing my freaking job. That is how I felt.

A final comment from a participant helps accentuate the importance knowing the system. This participant expressed the need to understand the system to build the pipeline of professional leaders:

We must understand that it is not just about getting full Professor. Attaining a full Professor opens the door to being a department chair, associate dean, and dean. Until we saturate those roles, folks cannot make policy changes, which has been a big transition for me. Until we get people in those positions – department chairs, associate deans, deans, provosts, and presidents; I do not think we will be able to make the sustainable change. We have got to change policy.

Understanding the system in higher education equips faculty with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the administrative and social aspects of faculty life. Such know-how can help effectively, and ultimately contributing to a Black male faculty member's well-being.

Get Organized

To "get organized" means establishing a systematic approach to managing tasks, responsibilities, and resources in a structured and efficient manner. It involves creating systems and processes to streamline workflows, prioritize tasks, and maintain clarity and focus.

All participants expressed the need to continue ongoing efforts to galvanize Black males in counselor education. According to Meng and Wang (2018), faculty members can work up to 60 hours a week on average, with 10 hours across Saturdays and Sundays. Moreover, less than half of this time is spent teaching with other administrative tasks stacking up. Associate professors can get lost in lectures (preparation), office hours, administration meetings, grading, research, and attending professional events. Planning and getting organized so one can be a better time manager was stated throughout by the participants. One participant exemplified this statement when we said, "And if we had that level of organization and coming together and being on the same page. We could probably do so much more to help advance each other."

Other participants discussed various aspects of getting organized. As an example, a participant suggested an intentional time for Black male counselor educators to meet to engage in strategic planning efforts:

Do some type of a summit where we can all come together and put an agenda, you know, and all come together and provide some tactical, technical input and feedback because I think there is a strategy to getting full.

Relatedly, a participant spoke about the emotional benefit of space-sharing a physical space with Black males; he stated, "I am so happy to be around somebody who understands my experience that I just feel like I need to get stuff off my chest." Another participant supported the power of connecting with fellow Black males. He shared:

I need to be in a space to help support black people. I get around black folks and am excited to be around people I understand. Let us say you can look at epigenetic stress and examine if there is something biological or genetic for some demographics' inability to empathize with others.

Ultimately, getting organized fosters clarity, productivity, and balance, empowering individuals to make the most of their time and resources while pursuing their goals and fulfilling their potential.

Imposter Syndrome

Feelings of inadequacy and a persistent fear of being exposed as fraud despite evidence of one's accomplishments and competence are commonly due to imposter syndrome. Individuals experiencing imposter syndrome believe they do not deserve success and attribute it to luck or other external factors rather than their abilities or hard work.

We noted that most participants struggled with feelings of self-doubt and fear. Imposter syndrome is a near-universal source of anxiety for newly minted PhDs, newly appointed academics, and seasoned tenured faculty (Morton & Gil, 2019). It is the lurking, singing, throbbing feelings that a faculty member will be exposed for their intellectual and professional frauds that are being committed. As a result, Black faculty will attribute their success to others or say their accomplishments were due to luck and help from colleagues, failing to recognize their efforts. Young (2020) stated that the higher one climbs in one's academic career, the more susceptible one is to the imposter syndrome condition, making it more likely that higher education professionals think of themselves as imposters.

The participants offered a range of statements about feeling unsure about their ability to succeed in the academy and expressed feelings of self-doubt. Several statements are noted that reflect their concerns:

“I have always felt like an imposter, and it took me probably seven years....”

“I did not know if I could produce at that level.”

“I was not confident to do that, and it was too overwhelming.”

“I did not feel confident – now I can go anywhere and produce with anybody.”

In the context of Black men faculty members, imposter syndrome can manifest as a pervasive fear of being exposed as a fake, particularly in environments where they may face systemic barriers or stereotypes. Despite their achievements, Black men faculty may struggle with doubts about their abilities and qualifications, often attributing their success to luck or external factors rather than their merit. In regard to pursuing the full professor rank, imposter syndrome can lead to heightened anxiety, stress, and a reluctance to pursue new opportunities due to a fear of failure or being judged. However, acknowledging and addressing imposter syndrome can empower Black men to recognize their worth, embrace their accomplishments.

Discussion

Few Black male counselor educators are successfully obtaining tenure and promotion to the rank of associate professor, and even fewer are promoted to the rank of full professor. Black males are dwindling from their presence at the Counselor education "full professor" table; there is a reason for alarm. Are these ranks unobtainable? Are these opportunities still mysterious and only available to a fortunate few? If one aspires to achieve this status, are there hidden rules? Based on findings from the current study regarding Black counselor educators who have obtained the rank of full professor, there are a few interpretations of their experiences we offer. While we recognize the uniqueness of individual pathways, the following traits or actions that our participants demonstrated appear to be the key to identifying and remaining on a pathway to becoming a full professor.

Remarkable Levels of Focus

The participants in this study knew precisely their “why” and why they desired to become full professors. Costa (2016) stated that knowing your why can lead to happiness and greater fulfillment at work. To Costa’s point, we observed the participants’ awareness of their motivations for wanting to be in counselor education and achieve their goals. Participants spoke about “writing their goals” down and keeping them in a visible location. Writing and posting goals remind one of what they are working on and help improve their focus. Black male faculty members who achieved the full professor rank had their eyes set on work to which the rank of a full professor was a prerequisite, endowed chair, dean, provost, or vice-president. They realized that ascending to the rank of full was necessary to do more impactful work and assume a more rousing position. However, individuals may have reached this realization or epiphany at different career points.

The Black male seeking full professor status will have to deal with adversity via life circumstances, changing policies, work pressures and opportunities, and financial stress - to name a few. And while these points may seem relative to most faculty, being a Black male makes these aspects particularly challenging due to the compounded effects of systemic racism, institutional biases, and unequal access to resources. The intersection of race, education, and socio-economic status create a unique set of challenges, however, these dynamics present opportunities to demonstrate stamina, resilience, patience, and delayed gratification.

The pathway to the full professorship for Black males will require these ideal personal characteristics (like focus) to be demonstrated through compromised timelines, the ability to grasp complex concepts and wayward policies. Those who have successfully navigated the process understand the importance of completion. ‘Remarkable Levels of Focus’ aligns with the principles of the Dickens and Dickens (1991) Career Development Model. It vividly illustrates the importance of goal setting, proactiveness, and resilience in achieving career success, including reaching the rank of full professor.

The individuals in this study emphasized the importance of specific and concrete steps in achieving their goals. Black male full professors (based on this study) can stay on track and actively work towards their goals because of their high levels of focus, aligning with the principles of Dickens and Dickens (1991). Next, Black males with high levels of focus are self-directed and proactive. The participants in this study took the initiative and sought out opportunities. Again, the Dickens Model promotes an internal locus of motivation as a critical component of successful career development. Lastly, maintaining focus requires resilience, especially when faced with

challenges or setbacks. Achieving the full professor rank is bound to have knocks and lapses. The participants in this study reinforce Dickens' model by displaying persistence and soundness in their career growth and advancement.

Networking

Networking is making connections and building relationships that foster meaningful personal and professional relationships (Gibson et al., 2014). These connections can provide one with advice and contacts, which can lead to informed career decisions. These contacts will help one gain a national reputation, understand how to leverage resources, and provide feedback (Ibarra & Hunter, 2007). Nevertheless, it is also the aspect of being "informed" that was consistently expressed by the participants of this study. There appears to be several unwritten rules and hidden nuances that need to be unearthed to succeed in higher education in general and especially in achieving the rank of full professor. Not surprisingly, building a network is crucial for mastering those unwritten rules and nuances.

The participants of this study practiced networking to a level that aligns with Cheatham's Heuristic Model of Career Development (Cheatham, 1990). Similarly to Dickens, the participants explored potential paths by connecting with other Black Male full professors. However, differently from Dickens and Dickins (1991) and more in step with Cheatham (1990), these networking opportunities were (both directly and indirectly) used to determine if the Full Professor rank was a proper fit for them. Moreover, these networking interactions helped the participants to make a more confident and well-informed career decision, thus building relationships with potential mentors.

Black males who successfully navigate to the rank of full actively seek out resources. Black males who successfully attain the rank of full professor often engage in proactive strategies to secure resources essential for their professional growth and advancement. This process is not passive but involves a deliberate effort to cultivate networks and leverage social capital in academic and professional spaces. "Actively seeking out resources" underscores the importance of strategic resource acquisition, including mentorship, collaboration opportunities, access to funding, research partnerships, or leadership roles that facilitate career progression.

One of the critical avenues for obtaining these resources is through **deal making or partnering**. Participants in this study highlighted the significance of "getting out and meeting people" as a method of building professional collaborations and relationships. This phrase reflects the necessity of moving beyond one's immediate academic environment and engaging with broader professional communities. By attending conferences, workshops, seminars, and other professional gatherings, Black male faculty members position themselves in spaces where opportunities for collaboration, mentorship, and support arise organically. These settings often serve as conduits for accessing information about grants, publication opportunities, or leadership roles that may not be readily available through formal institutional channels.

Furthermore, interfacing enables Black male faculty to connect with peers, senior scholars, and administrators who can provide guidance on navigating the intricacies of academia. These connections can lead to informal mentorship relationships, which are crucial for understanding the unspoken rules of academic promotion and tenure. In these interactions, experienced colleagues may offer advice on research productivity, grant writing, or navigating institutional politics—factors that significantly influence one's ability to rise to the rank of full professor.

The reference to "a time when they were in a social arena" further illustrates the role of informal social contexts in career advancement. Opportunities often emerge in unexpected or non-traditional spaces, such as social events, dinners, or casual conversations. In these environments, individuals may encounter colleagues or leaders in the field who present new opportunities, such as invitations to collaborate on research projects, serve on editorial boards, or take part in high-profile committees. Such encounters emphasize the importance of visibility and social engagement in professional circles, as these interactions can open doors to resources that might not be accessible through formal institutional processes alone. In addition, the act of "someone approaching them with an opportunity" signifies that once Black males make themselves visible and active within academic and professional networks.

Black males who successfully navigate to the rank of full are open-minded and welcome mentorship from senior scholars regardless of gender and race. Role models, and mentors, are critical for assisting aspiring Black full professors in strategizing and providing feedback to focus their pursuits. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of Black male mentors in counseling, counselor education, higher education, or graduate or university settings (Brooms, 2018). Many Black mentors, particularly Black male mentors, speak of being overwhelmed due to the low number of available mentors. This study is being completed to address this phenomenon directly. Therefore, until a critical mass has been assembled, mentorship to Black males may have to come from someone ethnically, culturally, and racially different. It is well documented that "cross-race" and cross-cultural mentoring are laced with protective hesitation (Dolan, 2007; Mandapati, 2021; Thomas, 2001). According to the participants, these different race or gender guides were frequently the only people available.

Louis and Michel (2013) stated that anyone involved in cross-cultural mentoring would experience discomfort and occasionally arduousness; this is the case for the White mentors to the Black protégés (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Louis & Freeman, 2018). As a result, faculty of color usually have fewer opportunities for mentorship than their non-minority colleagues. Many faculties lack senior faculty members who can mentor junior faculty members of color and be open and honest with them (Quezada & Louque, 2004). The construction of an internal institutional support system that is more trained and self-reflective in detecting its behavior and attitudes as impediments to promotion and tenure were notably highlighted by research participants in this study.

Centering the collective experiences of Black male counselor educators who have achieved the rank of full professor was the hallmark of this study. Research findings serve as a "roadmap" for current Black male counselor educators in the pipeline. Our findings also provide a mechanism for chronicling participant's lived experiences in an effort to preserve the need for an equitable and inclusive environment.

Limitations

The use of Dickens and Dickens's (1991) career development theory in this study posed several limitations. The model primarily focuses on Black or African American professionals within a business or corporate career. Additionally, the model does not account for the culture of employment or systemic racism that often impacts the promotion and tenure of Black professionals in other career fields. Lastly, Dickens and Dickens's theory believes the stages are sequential and never skipped, allowing no room for career development to be influenced by unexpected experiences (Cornelius, 2013).

As early as 2002, the American Counseling Association (ACA) endorsed Social Justice and Advocacy professional competencies (Lewis et al., 2011). The 2005 ACA Code of Ethics and the 2009 CACREP standards include social justice. Dickens and Dickens's career development theory could be revisited and modified to consider how social justice and advocacy initiatives have impacted career development. A more appropriate view would focus on career development through a culturally relevant lens.

Recommendations

Black male counselor educators are encouraged to explore informal mentoring opportunities in and outside the department. Equally important is to remain open to mentors from different races. As reflected by the data generated from the current study, most participants were mentored by White faculty. Additionally, Black male counselor educators may benefit from a continued connection with the nearby Black community on and off campus. Forming and maintaining relationships within the Black community can serve as a source of "soul support" and prevent isolation. To pay it forward, Black male professors may consider taking a proactive approach to forming relationships with junior Black faculty to inform them of effective strategies to navigate the academic environment and offer a correct interpretation of the faculty handbook and promotion and tenure guidelines.

Counselor education programs are encouraged to provide clear expectations on the requirements for promotion and tenure during the hiring process and throughout reappointment and tenure. Equally important is the provision of a formal mentoring program within the department. Such a mentoring program may address some concerns around isolation and the need to understand written and unwritten promotion, reappointment, and tenure standards. Additionally, mentoring provides Black male faculty with direct guidance on navigating landmines within the department and the institution. For example, a mentor is positioned to share opportunities a new faculty member could say "no" to unreasonable service demands without stepping on toes within the department and administration.

The Association of Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) is the flagship organization that promotes diversity and inclusion in counseling. The organization engages in activities to build a pipeline of Black male counselors and counselor educators (AMCD, 2023). Although the organization continues to make a positive movement in supporting Black males in the profession, a need exists to provide more direct support to Black male counselor educators who are on the pathway to becoming full professors. A participant in the study noted that a "Summit" independent from major professional conferences should be held solely for Black counselor educators. The summit would offer a space for Black male faculty to "breathe," heal, and create a tactical strategy for success in the professoriate. Finally, a mentoring network connecting Black male faculty members across institutions and programs will support Black males in moving along the counseling and counselor education channel.

In addition to recognizing the need to develop support channels for Black male counselors and counselor educators, movements such as Black Males Educators Talk (BMEsTalk) provide the space to engage and cultivate as a Black male educator. Said space allows for topics such as being part of a network of Black male educators, discussing career advancement, and feeling alone in the department (BMEsTalk, 2021). Conversations about issues like the dearth of Black male counselors nationwide are made possible on platforms like the Atlanta Voice (Suggs, 2023). With more Black counselors entering leadership positions, the pipeline for support of Black counselor

educators continues as a need for dialogue and advocacy. In the twenty-first century, Black counselors or educators have held and continue to hold leadership positions within the American Counseling Association (ACA), Military and Government Counseling Association (MGCA), Association of Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD), and American Rehabilitation Counseling Association.

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Appendix A

The open-ended prompts were:

- Why is it important to have Black male representation within Counselor Education (tenure-earning full-time faculty)?
- Explain the importance of Black males achieving the rank of FULL professor. Why was it essential for you to achieve the FULL status?
- Explain the significance of Black male full professors having a presence in Counselor Education. Is there any detriment to Black males not achieving full professor (in CES)?
- How significant was mentorship in your process to FULL?
- Speak to the importance of your institutional standards in achieving FULL.
- What part (if any) did institutional politics play in your pursuit of FULL?
- Why are there not (more) Black male FULL professors?
- What advice do you have for Black male counselor educators considering/contemplating FULL?

Author Bios

Dr. Michael Brooks is a Professor of Counselor Education at North Carolina A&T State University, leading the only CACREP-accredited doctoral program at an HBCU. His program's graduates are transforming communities nationwide. With a BA from Morehouse College and a Ph.D. from the University of Central Florida, Dr. Brooks' research focuses on Black male success, counselor education, and recidivism. Over his 20-year career, he has published over 50 peer-reviewed papers and secured \$5 million in grants. Recognized for his impact, he received the 2023 ACA Presidential Citation and SACES Outstanding Teaching Award and was named an ACA Fellow.

Dr. Tyra Turner Whittaker currently serves as a Professor in the Department of Counselor Education and Family Studies at Liberty University. She has over 26 years of experience as a counselor educator and grant writer. She has experience preparing counselors, counselor educators, advanced researchers, and clinical supervisors to work effectively with diverse populations with an emphasis on rehabilitation counseling. Her research interests include multicultural counseling, spirituality, and mentoring. Dr. Whittaker has served on numerous professional boards including the Arkansas Board of Examiners in Counseling and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

Dr. Justin J. Adams joined the faculty at NCA&T in the Spring of 2020 and serves as Assistant Professor in counseling. Dr. Adams is a nationally certified counselor and has experience working in clinical and school settings. His research interests include recruitment and retention of minority students in counselor education, Hip-Hop/Rap Therapeutic interventions, Critical Race Theory, misdiagnosis of minority students in K-12 settings, and College Counseling of Black students. Dr. Adams is a member of several professional organizations including the American Counseling Association, Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, Association for Research and Assessment in Counseling, and Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development.

Dr. Yudan Chen, Associate Professor, and Senior Researcher in the NCAT College of Education, is a developmental psychologist well-trained in statistical analyses and data science. She has collaborated with multiple teams to conduct and publish research on a wide variety of topics, including injury prevention, education measurement, adolescent development, and mental health intervention. Dr. Chen's primary research interests revolve around adolescent and young adult health and social functioning. In collaboration with colleagues in education and developmental psychology, she has coordinated numerous non-experimental research studies involving either survey data collection or observational data collection.

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