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A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of Master's-Level Students of Color in Counseling

Programs

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■ This qualitative study investigated the training experiences of 12 students of color in Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs-accredited master's-level counseling programs using semi-structured phenomenological interviews. The 12 participants identified as Asian American (n = 2), Japanese American (n = 1), Chinese (n = 1), Black (n = 1), African American (n = 1), Latino and/or Hispanic (n = 3), and multiracial (n = 3). We used interpretive phenomenological analysis and identified three main themes: cultural marginalization, biculturalism, and safe or counter-hegemonic relationships. Training implications for counselor education programs are provided.

Keywords: students of color, biculturalism, training

More than two decades ago, leaders in the counseling profession identified the importance of a movement toward multicultural counseling (Walz, Gazda, & Shertzer, 1991). As a result, many scholars advocated for an increase in racial diversity in the field (Smith & Shin, 2008) and the creation of more space for students of color in counselor training programs (McDowell, 2004). The American Counseling Association (ACA) *Code of Ethics* (ACA, 2014) asserts that educators have an ethical responsibility to recruit and retain a diverse student body. In addition, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016) *Standards* also require programs to make "continuous and systematic efforts to attract, enroll, and retain a diverse group of students and to create and support an inclusive learning community" (p.

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6). However, researchers identified themes of White dominance (Hipolito-Delgado, Estrada, & Garcia, 2017b) and Eurocentric bias (McDowell, 2004) in counselor training. Simple representation (i.e., having bodies of color in a building) should not be used or misinterpreted as an incorporation of diversity or culture shift (Schiele, 1994). Therefore, it is important to investigate how students of color experience their master's-level training programs across courses to assess progress.

Currently, most of the literature on the development of counseling students uses a homogeneous sample of predominantly European American students (e.g., Paladino, Barrio Minton, & Kern, 2011; Prosek & Hurt, 2014) even when looking at experiences within the multicultural counseling course (e.g., Castillo, 2007). Studies conducted on the experiences of students of color in counseling programs often focused exclusively on multicultural counseling courses (e.g., Seward, 2014; Seward & Guiffrida, 2012). Counselors expect discussions surrounding race to occur in this course; however, it is unclear if and how these conversations occur outside this course. McDowell (2004) reported results showing that multiculturalism in training served as a catch-all topic often added to the end of a class without actual integration across all material and discussion. To move from theory to practice, there is a need to understand the current experiences of students of color, which are largely understudied.

Eurocentricity and Counselor Training

Eurocentricity refers to the centering of White European culture and values by which additional cultures and values are pushed to the margins. Academics of color criticized the norming of Whiteness as highly problematic in higher education (Arday, 2018), and counselors reported experiencing racism within their higher education training (Constantine, 1999; McDowell, 2004). Constantine (1999) identified several themes related to counsel-

ors of color, including a lack of support from peers or instructors when racist comments were made and exhaustion at the responsibility of addressing the ignorance of others. Parker (1988) stated that as a Black counselor, "I graduated from a counseling program that prepared me to work with white middle-class values. In other words, my counseling preparation program was developed by and for white people and was characterized by white middle-class values and white cultural practices" (p. 93). Since then, those in the profession have attempted to improve the training of and services provided by professional counselors. For example, the ACA and the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) endorsed the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2015). At the same time, students of color have expressed mixed reviews of the progress made. Some students expressed positive evaluations regarding the use of creative techniques for processing culture-based dialogue, such as using photovoice (Paone, Malott, Pulliam, & Gao, 2018) or popular films (Villalba & Redmond, 2008), while others noted that course content came from the perspective of being a White counselor working with non-White clients (Seward, 2014). Seward (2014) found that students of color expressed satisfaction with the content and dissatisfaction with the depth.

Experiences of Students of Color

While the term "people of color" can imply that White people do not have color or ethnicities, which is inaccurate, the term also provides a platform for individuals with shared experiences to identify with one another in solidarity (Rastogi & Wieling, 2005). There is extensive dialogue around the inclusion of students of color, yet researchers found that the lack of diversity and admission requirements in counseling programs serve as barriers (Hipolito-Delgado, Estrada, & Garcia, 2017a). Once attending counseling programs, researchers identified an overall culture of Whiteness in the training of masters'-level counseling

students (Rothman, Malott, & Paone, 2012). Students of color often learn to function in two opposing socio-cultural environments: their primary culture and the dominant mainstream culture reflected in the education system (Darder, 2012). This process, referred to as "biculturalism," involves students being confronted with

> the realities that they must face as members of subordinate culture. More specifically, the process of biculturation incorporates the different ways in which bicultural human beings respond to cultural conflicts and the daily struggle with racism and other forms of cultural invasion. (Darder, 2012, p. 45)

Microaggressive stress (Sue, 2010) and traumatic stress due to pervasive experiences with racism (West-Olatunji & Varney, 2014) produce significant impacts on people of color. Over time, overt and covert encounters with prejudice can cause emotional and psychological outcomes (Carter, Lau, Johnson, & Kirkinis, 2017), such as depression, hypertension, and anxiety (Paradies et al., 2015; West-Olatunji & Varney, 2014).

In reviewing the current literature, we identified six studies focused on the training experiences of master's-level students of color. Two of the studies focused on the experiences of students of color in the multicultural counseling course (i.e., Seward, 2014; Seward & Guiffrida, 2012). One study investigated the experiences of mostly students of color, including White students, across courses in a marriage and family program (i.e., McDowell, 2004). The final three studies investigated the experiences of students of color across courses (i.e., Baker, Gaulke, & Smith, 2015; Haskins et al., 2013), with one investigating barriers and supports (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017b).

In all six studies, researchers identified themes of feeling isolated/disconnected or tokenized (Baker et al., 2014; Haskins et al., 2013; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017b; McDowell, 2004; Seward, 2014; Seward

& Guiffrida, 2012), citing experiencing such as racism, negative assumptions or differential treatment, and White privilege (McDowell, 2004). Researchers reported a lack of inclusion of Black counselor perspectives within coursework (Haskins et al., 2013), White dominance (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017b), and a lack of attention to race/racism (McDowell, 2004). Researchers found that differences in lived experiences and cultural understanding between students of color and White students contributed to a racialized climate (McDowell, 2004; Seward, 2014). Withdrawal was a common strategy for resisting racism either covertly or overtly through challenging (McDowell, 2004).

Seward and Guiffrida (2012) utilized grounded theory to explore classroom participation among master's-level students of color ($n = 20$) in a multicultural counseling course. Through group and individual interviews, students reported a need to censor their participation to ensure they represented their cultural group in a positive way. Students feared reinforcing negative stereotypes about their cultural groups, sharing information that could be held against them, or feeling different/isolated from their peers. Students also reported feeling a sense of responsibility to protect or advocate for marginalized groups (Seward & Guiffrida, 2012). Seward (2014) identified similar results when asking what was important to students of color in their multicultural training courses using a combination of individual interviews and focus groups. Students of color ($n = 20$) reported that it was important for instructors to understand the dynamics of privilege and oppression. When speaking out in class, students expressed an internal cost/benefit analysis, such as a fear of reinforcing stereotypes or speaking out to advocate. Students expressed feeling satisfied at being able to speak out as a member of their group and the need to withdraw from the learning process at times (Seward, 2014).

In Seward and Guiffrida (2012), students reported more willingness to share when they perceived

their environment to be safe and open and when their professors and peers demonstrated cultural sensitivity and openness to their experiences. In Haskins et al. (2013), Black students identified how beneficial it was to have support from their classmates of color and White peers. Seward (2014) identified helpful pedagogical strategies, including having guest speakers and student-led presentations. Researchers found that faculty support in general was an important factor for students of color (Haskins et al., 2013; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017b). Haskins et al. (2013) conducted a phenomenological study to investigate the experiences of Black master's-level counseling students ($n = 8$) at a predominantly White institution across courses using focus groups and identified a unique finding regarding differential support from faculty. Black students identified receiving different types of support from faculty of color and White faculty. They described receiving proactive support from faculty of color, meaning they presented support without the burden of a student needing to ask for it. With White faculty, participants reported that if they expressed a concern, they would then receive reactive support (Haskins et al., 2013).

Although previous studies identified some connected themes, there is not enough empirical research on the experiences of master's-level students of color in counseling programs to inform counselor educators on how to change pedagogical practices to best support them. Therefore, we intentionally kept the research question open so students could share their experiences in a variety of contexts within their training (i.e., classroom discussions, internship, supervision). The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the essence of the training experience for master's-level counseling students of color by asking, "What are the experiences of master's-level counseling students of color in their training programs?"

Method

We chose a qualitative design due to the exploratory nature of the study and to portray a "complex, holistic picture" (Creswell, 2007, p. 15). We used a phenomenological approach because the purpose is to understand the essence of a phenomenon through consciousness, which refers to comprehensive lived experiences (Giorgi, 1997; Moustakas, 1994). Several scholars have encouraged its use within counseling/psychology due to the focus on understanding a whole person or experience (Giorgi, 2012; Hays & Wood, 2011; Wertz, 2005). It also values positionality as a necessary part of the research process for readers to consider when critically reviewing results (Crotty, 1998).

Research Team Positionality

Subjectivity statements are vital to encourage readers to be informed and critical when reading the interpretation of results (Giorgi, 2010). The research team consisted of a multi-racial/ethnic team of two graduate counseling students and two counselor educators. The first author identifies as Chinese biracial, straight, ciswoman, and able-bodied. The first author grew up in an upper middle-class family in a predominantly White neighborhood. She acknowledges biracial and light-skinned privileges as a person of color, and she has experienced both positive and negative aspects of being a master's-level student of color, which have informed this study.

The additional authors include a Korean American woman counselor educator, a White queer transgender man counselor educator, a Blaxican heterosexual cisgender woman doctoral student, and a White queer counselor educator. Prior to data collection, the research team participated in a bracketing meeting. All members of the research team identify as social justice advocates and believe students of color have important perspectives that are often dismissed or silenced. Our memberships in various marginalized groups inform the way in which we understand and interpret the experiences of our participants. During the bracketing meeting, the authors identified and discussed the perceptions they held for the study. Some

of these initial perceptions on what students of color might experience included frustrations in the multi-cultural counseling course, personal cultural identity development, lack of access to professional opportunities, and experiences of discrimination.

Participants and Procedures

Upon receiving approval from the university institutional review board, we engaged in purposeful sampling. Criteria included the following: (a) graduating from a CACREP-accredited program, (b) being no more than two years post-graduation, and (c) identifying as a person of color. We intentionally recruited recent graduates to ensure that the participants completed the same required courses and to facilitate honest responses about their experiences when they were no longer embedded in the system. We chose the time frame of two years to allow for a large enough participant pool while considering accurate recall (Parker, 2014). We sent a recruitment message to listservs, universities, and social media groups and displayed flyers at professional conference events.

In all, 15 participants completed the demographic survey. Of these, 12 went on to complete the semi-structured individual interviews. These 12 participants identified as Asian American ($n = 2$), Japanese American ($n = 1$), Chinese ($n = 1$), Black ($n = 1$), African American ($n = 1$), Latino and/or Hispanic ($n = 3$), and multiracial ($n = 3$). Participants' sexual identities included bisexual ($n = 2$), lesbian ($n = 1$), and heterosexual ($n = 9$). Their ages ranged from 24 to 37, with a mean age of 27. The participants self-reported the following gender identities: cisgender male ($n = 1$), cisgender female ($n = 1$), or simply female ($n = 9$) and male ($n = 1$). The participants reported enrollment in the clinical mental health counseling ($n = 9$), school counseling ($n = 2$), and marriage and family counseling ($n = 1$) tracks. Regionally, the participants attended programs in the Mid-Atlantic ($n = 1$), Southeast ($n = 10$), and Pacific Northwest ($n = 1$) regions of the United States.

We also asked participants to report the number of professors of color in their departments. Most participants ($n = 6$) reported having one professor of color. Two participants reported no professors of color. One participant reported three faculty of color. One participant reported having five faculty of color, and one participant was unsure. All the participants in the study attended predominantly White institutions. This was not a requirement for participation, and we provided historically Black colleges and universities with recruitment messages.

Data Sources

We used phenomenological interviewing for data collection. The primary interview question for the semi-structured phenomenological interviews was "What were your experiences like as a student of color in your counselor preparation program?" If necessary, we used the following probing questions: "What were your experiences like as a student of color in regard to classroom discussions?" and "What were your experiences like as a student of color in regard to your practicum or internship experiences?"

Data Analysis

We followed the interpretive phenomenological analysis procedures outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). Three members of the research team engaged in independent line-by-line coding and identified emergent patterns for each participant and across participants. We met between interviews to dialogue extensively regarding coding, knowledge of the data and participants, and the meaning behind the data. Therefore, we met 12 times for each of the 12 interviews for an average of five hours per meeting to discuss and reach full consensus between all three coders. In addition to the 12 coding meetings, we held meetings to reach consensus on revised codebooks before reviewing the next interview transcript. Throughout the analysis process, we identified relationships between the themes and organized them into clusters.

We engaged in horizontalization of meaning units to avoid overlap and redundancy (Hays & Wood, 2011). We believed sufficiency was reached after the 10th participant and included two additional participant interviews to ensure that no new codes would need to be added. At this point, the research team identified a final codebook. Next, we began the recursive coding process, which entailed each member of the coding team using the final codebook to recode every interview and reach consensus again. A third-party auditor approved the themes and methodology.

Trustworthiness

For credibility, we used member checking (Hays & Wood, 2011), debriefing sessions, and peer scrutiny (Shenton, 2004). Member checking entailed sending the interview transcriptions to the participants for verification as well as the preliminary results. We engaged in debriefing after each interview to be aware of potential alternatives for future data collection or analysis and to evaluate the current procedures (Shenton, 2004). For example, we reviewed the interviewing style of the first author and provided feedback. Peer scrutiny involved seeking feedback through professional presentations and weekly research team meetings comprised of students and counselor educators. We would present updates on themes, the code books, examples of quotes, and the process. Furthermore, a colleague from the Africana Studies department, who is also a licensed marriage and family therapist, served as an expert consultant. He reviewed code books and themes as they evolved, compared them with the actual participant quotes, and assisted with the review and critique of the measurements used. For transferability, we kept an audit trail that documented the methodology used (i.e., length and time period of data collection). For dependability and confirmability, we used a third-party auditor to review all procedures used. We provided the auditor with the audit trail, raw data, coded data, code books, memo journal, and summaries of the debriefing meetings.

Results

We organized the results into three main themes representing the essence of the participants' experiences: (1) cultural marginalization, (2) biculturalism, and (3) safe and counter-hegemonic relationships. Within each theme, subthemes were based on the participants' narratives (see Table 1). We used pseudonyms to share quotes and did not provide

Table 1
The Experiences of Students of Color in Master's-Level Counseling Programs

Main Themes	Subthemes
Cultural marginalization	Culture of silence ($n = 11$)
	Institutional racism ($n = 10$)
	Discrimination ($n = 10$)
	Culturally irrelevant approaches ($n = 8$)
Biculturalism	Navigating stereotypes ($n = 10$)
	Feeling isolated ($n = 12$)
	Resilience and resistance ($n = 11$)
	Distinct clinical contributions ($n = 7$)
Safe and counter-hegemonic relationships	Connecting with others of color ($n = 6$)
	White ally support ($n = 4$)
	Being valued and affirmed ($n = 7$)
	Culturally relevant approaches ($n = 10$)

demographic information with pseudonyms to protect participant confidentiality.

Theme 1: Cultural Marginalization

Cultural marginalization refers to "the experiences of individuals living within two cultures, but integrated into neither of them" (Barber & Vega, 2011). Participants described scenarios in which their cultural identities and values were positioned as inferior, which often left them feeling like outsiders. We categorized their experiences into four subthemes: (1) culture of silence, (2) culturally irrelevant approaches, (3) institutional racism, and (4) discrimination.

Culture of silence. Of the participants, 11 described a *culture of silence* within their training programs. They reported that faculty failed to broach culture-focused topics. Rather, participants described a dynamic in which they would need to bring up issues of culture. When participants did bring up the topic, many reported that they were silenced by their peers, who would dismiss the importance of culture in class. Kiara shared a similar experience that occurred in supervision:

> I thought that my race had been an issue for one of my clients. My supervisor said that she brought it up to the client, and they denied it. She completely dismissed it after that. There was no processing of what I thought was going on, and I didn't like that. I mean it's my, me being Black is something that you see automatically when you look at me. I bring that with me to my session. It's not something that can be ignored.

Culturally irrelevant approaches. Eight participants reported an overall lack of discussion or depth related to race and diversity. They described a lack of integration of culturally relevant material and felt training was catered to the positionality of a White student being trained to be a White counselor. The Eurocentric training was either insufficient or irrelevant to students of color or to the clients of color they served. Marisa stated,

> It often became just a conversation about White guilt, um, like every Friday. It was so hard to sit in every time, because I think those conversations are really valuable, but I think that if all we did was talk about guilt and stuff, the experiences of the minorities in our class would kind of pushed under the rug, because we were using all of our resources and our time to talk about White guilt and trying to kind of, basically make the White males in the class feel better about themselves, and I don't think that's necessarily what the class should have been like.

Institutional racism. Institutional racism refers to the expression of racism through social and political institutions or systems. Of the participants, 10 reported examples of cultural marginalization through a lack of representation of other students of color. All the participants expressed an overall lack of diversity and said they were the only or one of a few students of color in their programs. They reported a lack of support to recruit and retain students and faculty of color. Ashley had a conversation with her program director and stated:

> I asked her about what our program was doing in efforts to increase our minority population in our program or maybe diversify it more. Her response was like, "We're not doing anything" [and] "We don't, you know, I'm not a college recruiter. That's not what I do." Um, so it was kind of like that feeling of being brushed off.

Discrimination. The ACA (2014) *Code of Ethics* defines discrimination as the differential treatment toward a person based on their membership in a group. Of the participants, 10 described experiences of this type of cultural marginalization that left them

feeling tokenized or called out by faculty to represent or speak for their racial group. One participant, Ling, noted being rejected from multiple internship sites in the community. She reported reaching out to the department chair but receiving a lack of assistance in return and noticing her lack of resources when pursuing an internship site compared to that of her classmates.

Theme 2: Biculturalism

Biculturalism refers to a process in which people of color learn to live and respond in both their primary culture as well as a mainstream culture (Darder, 2012). Biculturalism is a response pattern that "specifically addresses the different strategies of survival adopted by people of color in response to the dynamics of living in constant tension between conflicting cultural values and conditions of cultural subordination" (Darder, 2012, p. 45). The participants in the study shared their experiences of biculturalism in four subthemes: (1) navigating stereotypes, (2) feeling isolated, (3) resilience and resistance, and (4) distinct clinical contributions.

Navigating stereotypes. Of the participants, 10 discussed an acute awareness of how others perceived them. The participants discussed navigating stereotypes by working twice as hard to be seen as equal to their White peers. They discussed picking and choosing battles depending on potential repercussions from faculty or classmates as well as a sense of responsibility to represent their racial group or manage how others perceive them. Sophia shared:

> I would pick and choose very carefully what I would say in classes where this person was to not get any more backlash, as a way to protect, and I noticed it and I hated it. But at that time, it was the only way that I could really cope with what was happening and be comfortable enough to sit in a class like that and not go home and cry about it.

Sophia's process of picking and choosing battles was not limited to topics focused on race or her other marginalized identities. Rather, she identified going through this process regardless of the topic as a result of this classmate previously making a prejudiced comment about the marginalized group to which she belongs. Similarly, Kiara expressed:

> Carrying that concern always in the back of my head, you know, is my race a problem when I'm sitting across from someone who is Black or who is not Black, because I mean, you could still have someone not want to work with you because you're Black, so, you know just always having that in the back of my mind, and then in class.

Feeling isolated. As a part of their bicultural experiences, all 12 participants expressed feeling isolated or disconnected in their programs. They described recognizing that others did not see them as a whole person but only for their racial identities. The participants expressed feelings of isolation when their White colleagues expressed disinterest in diverse groups or when having dissimilar experiences from members of their own racial groups. Marisa described her isolation as follows: "I kind of felt like an outsider, um, especially the first year. Um, so I would say, yeah, just really challenging, I felt different, um, at times, and especially in the smaller classes."

Resilience and resistance. Counselor educators may use the term "resistant" to describe students as difficult or unwilling to engage. In this study, "resistance" is a powerful way in which students respond to their bicultural experiences. Of the participants, 11 reported having hidden discourse outside class to process, support, and legitimize one another. Kiara demonstrated resistance by refusing an invitation for membership in a counseling honor organization that she felt did not represent her or show an investment in her. The participants demonstrated resiliency through engagement in advocacy by resisting pressure from

others to speak for their whole group. Kanae discussed how she advocated for the needs of students of color:

> The more we met and actually engaged some of the professors in dialogue and ended up writing a letter to our department chair, and having a sit-down meeting with all of the department and the faculty and talking about what our experience had been like and what are the ways we thought the university could better address having counselors of color coming through this education program.

Distinct clinical contributions. Seven participants described clinical contributions as a result of their bicultural experiences. Mia provided bilingual counseling and discussed the lack of a model to rely on and a lack of supervision around this skill. She discussed strategies she put in place for herself to find support and provide effective services to her clients. Mia shared:

> The administrative assistant was Columbian, and she had been born there, raised there I think, so she was perfectly fluent in Spanish. We would talk in Spanish from time to time, and I was able to share some things like 'Oh my gosh I couldn't explain this' and 'How do you say this?' I would ask her, and she had an easier time translating things, so I think that was very helpful, and then with the counselors I think that it was just talking about my sessions and sharing with them how different it is to have family abroad or to just do counseling in Spanish when you talk English the whole day.

As bicultural counselors, the participants reported learning an awareness of not over-identifying with clients of the same racial group while using their shared identities as a bridge for connections even when their programs did not prepare them for this dynamic. In general, the participants discussed having increased empathy and strong feelings of connectedness with clients as well as a clear understanding of systems, institutional racism, and discrimination.

Theme 3: Safe and Counter-Hegemonic Relationships

The final theme included experiences of *safe and counter-hegemonic relationships* to describe comfort and trust in relationships. Brianna described this as "just feeling confident being able to speak out, being able to do different things." Counter-hegemony refers to intentional efforts to dismantle hegemonic control by opposing the status quo. The participants described these relationships as follows: (1) connecting with faculty, students, and colleagues of color, (2) White ally support, (3) being valued and affirmed, and (4) culturally relevant approaches.

Connecting with others of color. Participants with people of color in their programs discussed the importance of connection. Brianna shared,

> We helped each other out, we studied together, we reminded each other of our assignments, and we hung out quite a bit outside of class. We would always stay after class and kind of have little mini conversations about class on anything confusing or anything just you know what we did like what we didn't like.

Participants discussed connecting over language, for emotional support, and to feel less alone. Brianna described safe relationships with her classmates of color:

> Because I had my group of friends especially one that was African American and one that was biracial. She was half-Black. I guess I didn't feel it as much then, because it's like, ok I don't have a professor who's African American, but I do have these people who are in class

with me where we can relate or connect on that level, so it kind of helped to take the place of maybe not having an advisor or a professor. We all stuck together and kind of supported each other so that helped.

White ally support. Four participants identified experiencing support from White classmate and faculty allies. They reported that their White allies often had other marginalized identities. Brianna described her safe relationships with her White faculty advisor:

She was always willing to talk to me or answer emails. And she was very helpful and very nice. I would always go talk to her if I needed to. Even when I was ending the program and contemplating whether I should go into a doctoral program or not, she was very helpful and allowed to me to come talk to her and talk through some things.

Counter-hegemonic relationships took these experiences one step further. They involved a direct intention by the other person in the relationship to critique or dismantle hegemonic power by openly challenging the status quo and dominant beliefs as the source of legitimacy.

Being valued and affirmed. Seven participants expressed feeling valued and affirmed, especially when others saw their identifies as strengths. For example, Diamond submitted a creative piece of artwork for a class that represented the importance of speaking her truth. She explained, "It's powerful to validate your own experience even when others don't." The piece impacted Diamond's professor, and he asked for it to be displayed in the department. Diamond stated, "So that's in a plaque, that's on a frame and hung up…which is really important to me."

Culturally relevant approaches. Of the participants, 10 reported experiencing culturally relevant approaches, including programs integrating multicultural counseling material throughout the curriculum, faculty initiating critical conversations and challenging the class, and supervisors integrating the role and importance of students' cultural identities. Kevin shared:

Having a good supervisor relationship with one of the supervisors allowed me to feel freer to talk about my own cultural identities and the ways that culture impacted the process…. The faculty identified as both a Latina woman, so I think what really did shape the process was she identified the culture, and even confronted some of our students…. I know that some of her students would have clients that were Caucasian or the client was White, and so she confronted the student, and said, "Well what kind?" And she started giving examples like the client could be German, or Austrian, could be French…. Particularly in that context it also felt a little bit broader in trying to understand how culture plays a factor in the counseling process and in our training.

Discussion

The results of this study address the overall lack of voice from students of color in the literature and demonstrate how challenging the experiences of students of color are. Participants reported dynamics of cultural marginalization as well as the stress of managing themselves between two cultures. The results address a gap in the literature by identifying counter-hegemonic and culturally relevant experiences. Several of the results are consistent with previous literature. The theme of *cultural marginalization* is similar to the overall Eurocentric bias (Haskins et al., 2013; McDowell, 2004; Parker, 1998; Seward, 2014) and experiences with racism found by previous researchers (Constantine, 1999; McDowell, 2004). Using different terminology but a similar concept to the *biculturalism* main theme, previous scholars identified withdrawal as a method to resist marginalization

(McDowell, 2004). The participants identified the lack of attention to race and racism (McDowell, 2004) and a lack of depth or breadth of race-related and multicultural discussions (Seward, 2014) found in other studies. Isolation was the most commonly reported theme by the participants, supporting the finding of this theme by previous scholars (Baker et al., 2014; Haskins et al., 2013; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2017b; McDowell, 2004; Seward, 2014; Seward & Guiffrida, 2012). The study also supports results from researchers in social work (Vakalahi, Sermon, Richardson, Dillard, & Moncrief, 2014), sociology (Romero, 2017), and higher education (Harris & Linder, 2018). Researchers in these disciplines also found that students experienced racism (Romero, 2017), the burden of educating their White peers and navigating stereotypes (Harris & Linder, 2018), isolation, and exclusion (Vakalahi et al., 2014).

This study adds to the current literature by differentiating between open and accepting relationships (Seward, 2014) with counter-hegemonic relationships. *Safe and counter-hegemonic relationships* combines and differentiates between safety and counter-hegemony. hooks (1994) described this safety discrepancy in classrooms as follows: "Students of color may not feel at all 'safe' in what appears to be a neutral setting. It is the absence of a feeling of safety that often promotes prolonged silence or lack of student engagement" (p. 39). Rather, safety for students of color involved interactions in which faculty or supervisors directly discussed their identities as cultural beings. It often involved professors checking in with students after difficult dialogues and showing investment in the student as a whole person. We identified these types of interactions as safe relationships, and these should be expected as opposed to praised. A safe relationship does not actively perpetuate or fight against an oppressive system, but a counter-hegemonic relationship actively fights against the myth that legitimacy lies in mainstream beliefs and values.

The participants described culturally relevant pedagogy as counter-hegemonic by decentering White values and legitimizing the experiences, worldviews, and values of students of color. This is an important differentiation since the field continues to discuss "cultural competence" in counseling. This study adds to the existing literature by providing the context of the experiences, which is particularly evident in the *Biculturalism* theme. Biculturalism is a unique finding in this study that inherently recognizes that experiences are based on interactions and are dynamic in nature. Students of color do not feel isolated simply because they are a student of color; rather, isolation can be contextualized by their positionality as members of subordinate groups.

The *Biculturalism* theme adds to the literature on the recruitment and retention of students of color. The participants expressed a sense of disappointment when they initially joined their programs because they expected faculty and students to affirm cultural diversity. They expressed feelings of disillusionment when recognizing the lack of knowledge and awareness, especially when a program advertised itself as culturally competent. We encourage members of the dominant racial group in counseling programs to resist tailoring curricula to White students on the premise of equality versus equity. Counselor education programs should incorporate structured systems in which conversations about race are guaranteed to occur *across* courses by having faculty of color and guest speakers of color and by using textbooks or papers by authors of color. The CACREP (2016; 2009) *Standards* is the first step toward outlining programmatic responsibilities, but the everyday facilitation of these activities make them culturally relevant pedagogy.

Limitations and Future Research

All the participants attended predominantly White institutions. Therefore, it is unclear how students of color who attend institutions that are not predominantly White experience their training programs. In addition, the focus of the study singled out

the identity of race, which diminished intersectionality. Future research recommendations include examining bicultural experiences and the distinct clinical contributions that came from them. In addition, the culture of silence was the mechanism that perpetuated the experiences of oppression. Therefore, it would be valuable to better understand how the culture of silence functions in training programs and ways to penetrate it.

Implications for Teaching and Supervision

The experiences of students of color inform counselor education that it is not exempt from the racism and cultural marginalization in wider society. While many instructors and supervisors identify as social justice advocates or culturally competent, they must look critically at their training programs. It is important to recognize that limiting students of color also limits clinical contributions to the field. Students demonstrated unique clinical contributions as a part of their bicultural experiences in training programs. At the same time, participants described experiences of cultural marginalization. How can students of color impact the field with their unique insight, knowledge, and skills if they are dismissed or silenced?

Instructors and supervisors should refer to the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts et al., 2015) to reflect on their own self-awareness, the worldviews of their students/clients, the relationship between the counselor or client (or supervisor/instructor and student), and the use of advocacy interventions. The results of this study highlight the progress that has been made as well as the progress that has not been made. Students of color reported the need for connection, affirmation, and value surrounding the legitimacy of their lived experiences. They shared examples of receiving this from counselor educators and supervisors and how beneficial it was for their experience. This study contributes to the gap in the literature highlighting voices of color and supports previous results around the continued needs

to better support, value, and raise up students of color.

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