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Persistence of Traditionally Marginalized Doctoral Students in Counselor Education: A Grounded Theory Study

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Persistence of Traditionally Marginalized Doctoral Students in Counselor Education: A Grounded Theory Study

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Sharon Leah Bruner
August 2017

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the social justice warriors of the past, the present, and the future. To those strong women who paved the way for me to enter and complete a doctoral program. This dissertation honors the very real sacrifices you made so that others coming behind you might have opportunities you never had. You share in the importance of this document just as much as I do as I stand at the end of a path paved by your sacrifice.

To those who are fighting to persist in this moment, may this dissertation serve as a light that gives you strength and helps remind you of the resiliency and creativity you hold within yourself. To the educators, peers, family, friends, and so many others who are using their voices to fight for a better world, never give up.

To Dr. Barrio Minton, who walked into my life a mere two years ago, at a time when I was questioning so much. I don't think I could ever honor you enough for the difference you have made in my life, personally and professionally. Thank you for accepting me, fighting for me, and being a safe space for me throughout this program. For giving me opportunities to demonstrate my potential and for recognizing my strengths when it felt like no one else did. You saw me so clearly at a time in my journey when I felt invisible and I have no doubt this dissertation would have never happened without you.

To the future, namely Levi, Kaleb, Hunter, and Emmalynn. I hope this work and my continued voice in your lives helps you to grow into the kind of warriors whose stories are contained within this dissertation. Who love deeply, forgive quickly, and fight for what is right, no matter what. May this document serve as an example of having the courage to believe in yourself and to chase your dreams.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative constructivist grounded theory study was to develop a theory regarding persistence of traditionally marginalized doctoral students in CACREP accredited counselor education programs. This study addressed two research questions: *How do marginalized students persist through doctoral counselor education programs?* and *What factors influence persistence of marginalized students in doctoral counselor education programs?*

This study included participants that identified as women, people of color, or LGBTQ who had successfully defended a dissertation proposal or were less than one year post graduation. Data was collected via three focus groups and two individual interviews with 10 participants. The researcher used a constructivist grounded theory analysis combined with a critical perspective to explore the experiences of these participants and develop themes. Findings suggest that traditionally marginalized students experience multiple forms of marginalization and oppression within their programs. Participants were confronted with experiences that caused them to question themselves. Navigating these experiences required developing their identities in the context of their programs and identifying their motivation to pursue doctoral studies. Participants sought to develop strategic ways of advocating for themselves and other individuals within their programs. Culture and support systems were important factors in persistence for these participants. Based on these findings, implications for counselor educators and recommendations for future research were provided.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the last 15 years, the American Counseling Association has endorsed a wide range

of multicultural and advocacy counseling competencies, including specialty standards related to

counseling LGBQIQA individuals, transgender clients, and multiracial clients in addition to a set

of multicultural career counseling competencies (Burnes et al., 2009; Harper et al., 2013; Kenney

et al., 2015; Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2003b; National Career Development

Association, 2009). Most recently, ACA endorsed a new set of *Multicultural and Social Justice*

Counseling Competencies (MCSJCC; Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCollough,

2015) which include attention to attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and action within the

domains of counselor self-awareness, client worldview, counseling relationship, and counseling

and advocacy interventions (Ratts et al., 2015). Together, these competencies, Council for

Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) Standards (2016),

and the ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) highlight the centrality of multicultural awareness,

knowledge, and skills within counseling and counselor education.

CACREP Standards (2016) require counselor education programs to engage in

"systematic efforts to attract, enroll, and retain a diverse group of students and to create and

support an inclusive learning community" (p. 4). In addition, one of CACREP's core standard

areas requires that students are prepared in components of social and cultural diversity including

theories of multicultural counseling, the impact of cultural beliefs, and strategies for eliminating

cultural barriers. Similarly, the ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) includes multiple references to the

importance of multicultural competence for counselors and students within counseling programs.

The *Code of Ethics* includes references to multicultural training within multiple sections

pertaining to students, supervisors, clinicians, and teachers. Specifically, F.2.b requires that

"supervisors are aware of and address the role of multiculturalism/diversity in the supervisory relationships" and section F.7.c includes a requirement that "counselor educators infuse material related to multiculturalism/diversity into all courses and workshops for the development of professional counselors (ACA, 2014, pp. 13–14). The code also includes a requirement for programs to "actively attempt to recruit and retain a diverse student body" similar to the requirement found within the CACREP standards. (ACA, 2014, p. 15). It is clear from professional codes and standards from these two major organizations within counseling that diversity is an important consideration for the ethical practice of counseling.

These standards and competencies provide a foundation for the inclusion of formal and informal multicultural competence training within counselor education programs. To prepare counselors to appropriately integrate the MCSJCC, it is it is necessary for counselor education faculty members to understand the experiences of diverse students within counselor education programs and engage with students in ways that are reflective of the competencies we expect students to use when working with clients. Initially, enrollment of diverse students is an important consideration of multicultural competence within counselor education programs.

According to CACREP vital statistics reports, enrollment of students from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups has increased within counselor education. Students identifying as Hispanic and Asian enrolled in counselor education programs at higher rates in 2015 than they did in 2012 (CACREP, 2012, 2015). Specifically, enrollment of Asian American students increased from 1.96% to 2.09%, and enrollment of Hispanic/Latino/Spanish American students increased from 7.23% to 8.39%. Although students who identify as Black are enrolling at slightly lower rates, they continue to be the most represented racial group (other than White) within counselor education, comprising 18.63% of students enrolled in counselor education

programs in 2015 compared with 13.3% of the general population (CACREP, 2015b; United States Census Bureau, 2015). Meanwhile, Asian and Hispanic students are represented within counselor education programs at much lower levels than they are in the general population. The United States Census Bureau estimated that Asians are generally represented at a rate of 5.6% within the general population. Hispanic/Latino individuals account for 17.6% of the general population and only 8.39% within counseling programs. These numbers reflect enrollment across graduate programs which includes both master's and doctoral students. CACREP reports do not include information on representation of other groups traditionally marginalized based on sociocultural descriptors.

Individuals who hold doctoral degrees in counselor education frequently occupy leadership positions within community agencies and secondary schools. In addition, these individuals often hold faculty positions within master's and doctoral level counselor education programs. There is a need for increase representation of diversity within leadership and faculty in the counseling profession (CACREP, 2015). Successful navigation of the doctoral program is an essential part of increasing representation at these levels and, thus, diversity within counselor education.

Attrition and Persistence

The journey to the doctoral degree is often a long and difficult road for many students. Estimates of outcomes at the doctoral level suggest that only one-half of students who enter doctoral programs will ultimately earn the degree (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Lovitts, 2001). Generally, non-white students and women complete doctoral degrees at rates even lower than the average (Snell, Zhang, Bell, & Redd, 2008). Despite the prevalence of student attrition in a wide range of graduate programs, especially within certain populations, there is a paucity of

research in this area generally and as it relates to counselor education, specifically.

Many early researchers in attrition primarily focused on student shortcomings that led to attrition without addressing institutional factors. More recently, research and theory development in enrollment within higher education focused on other reasons students choose to leave their institutions (Bean, 1980; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975). These studies place the emphasis on interactions between students and institutions and place primary emphasis on institutional factors rather than student shortcomings. Therefore, attrition within undergraduate education is currently understood as a complex interaction between personal characteristics and institutional factors. Student goals, motivation, and academic ability interact with institutional goals and climate to influence attrition decisions. Even so, there is disagreement about the validity of current attrition theories for historically underrepresented populations at the undergraduate level (Bancroft, 2013; Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997). Unfortunately, none of these theories were developed with specific attention to doctoral students' experiences of attrition, and many of the factors may not accurately address the uniqueness of doctoral studies.

More recently, a number of researchers have explored experiences of doctoral students that may influence experiences of attrition (Ehrenberg, Jakubson, Groen, So, & Price, 2007; Golde, 2005; Proctor & Truscott, 2012; Van de Schoot, Yerkes, Mouw, & Sonneveld, 2013). The majority of research on attrition of doctoral students exists outside of the counselor education literature, however some researchers have explored attrition within counselor education (Burkholder, 2012; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Willis & Carmichael, 2011). These studies have revealed some themes related to doctoral attrition including the importance of faculty relationships, peer relationships, clear expectations, and financial support.

Attrition of doctoral students is costly to institutions, individuals, and society as a whole (Lovitts, 2001; Smallwood, 2004; Willis & Carmichael, 2011). Institutions invest significant finances in doctoral students and risk losing not only their financial investment, but also recognition based on future accomplishments of doctoral students when these students drop out. For students, the emotional impact of attrition is significant and can last for many years (Willis & Carmichael, 2011). The financial, emotional, and intellectual cost of attrition at the doctoral level is arguably the highest among degree levels. Marginalization experiences may further complicate traditionally marginalized students' persistence and contribute to higher levels of attrition within these populations.

Historically, women, LGBTQ individuals, and racial/ethnic minorities have experienced underrepresentation within higher education generally, and doctoral programs specifically (CACREP, 2015b; Snell et al., 2008). These students report experiences of marginalization that impact their satisfaction with their doctoral programs. Women may encounter societal expectations, endorsed by faculty, family, and friends, that conflict with their desire to be successful within their doctoral programs (Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013; Gardner, 2008; Maher, Ford, & Thompson, 2004; Morales, 2008). Women, especially those who are married with children, frequently report struggling to balance multiple roles while completing the doctorate (Kurtz-Costes, Andrews Helmke, & Ülkü-Steiner, 2006). LGBTQ individuals may experience campus cultures that are at least unwelcoming and at most physically dangerous for them (Rankin, 2003). Racial and ethnic minorities frequently encounter overt and covert racism in the form of microaggressions within doctoral programs (Beamon, 2014; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Taylor & Antony, 2000).

Counselor education programs are far from immune from experiences reported in the general higher education literature. Researchers have identified concerns with program climates within counselor education for historically underrepresented groups and high levels of attrition among doctoral students (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield, Owens, & Witherspoon, 2011; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Snell et al., 2008). Many students within counselor education programs report marginalization experiences similar to those found within students outside of counselor education.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the high levels and cost of attrition, research in the area of doctoral level attrition is much more limited than literature at other degree levels. Although multiple theories related to attrition and retention exist within undergraduate literature (e.g., Bean, 1980; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975), theories within graduate literature are lacking. More importantly, although some theories have been adjusted to account for experiences of historically underrepresented students, no theories have been specifically developed using the experiences of marginalized students. Almost all of the studies regarding student attrition focus on the reasons why students choose to drop out of their programs.

The counseling profession is unique within helping professions in part because of the focus on wellness as a means of helping. Wellness is defined as "the maximizing of human potential through positive life-style choices" (Myers, 1991, p. 183). Counselors generally approach client issues from a strengths-based perspective rather than from an illness-oriented medical model. Despite this approach to clients, the profession has not adopted the same approach to research regarding student outcomes, particularly for marginalized students.

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The counseling profession has called for intentionality in supporting diverse students (e.g., ACA 2014; CACREP 2016), but the research reveals little about processes that impact persistence among these students. Rather, researchers continue to focus on what is wrong with doctoral programs and what needs to be changed in order to better accommodate students. There is a need for research that remains consistent to a holistic, strength-based paradigm within student outcomes. Specifically, there is a need for studies that address persistence of marginalized students from a perspective that encourages development of strengths and building on wellness within doctoral counseling programs.

Purpose of the Study

Most studies focused on marginalized students have been exploratory qualitative studies designed to better understand the experiences of attrition and marginalization as separate constructs. This grounded theory study will examine the persistence process for doctoral level students within counselor education who have experienced marginalization based on gender, sexual/gender identity, and/or racial/ethnic identity. Using a grounded theory framework, this study will explore ways in which students persist through their doctoral programs despite experiences of marginalization. This study will ultimately lead to the development of theory regarding marginalized student persistence within counselor education programs. The primary research questions
 guiding this study are:

1. How do marginalized students persist through doctoral counselor education programs?

2. What factors influence persistence of marginalized students in doctoral counselor education programs?

Significance of the Study

Leaders within the counseling program have historically called for inclusivity, celebration of social and cultural diversity and support for diverse students. This led to an increase in attention to multicultural competency training and self-awareness along with an, intentional infusion of multicultural training across the curriculum. Although efforts to better address diversity within counseling programs in meaningful we do not know whether these efforts accurately reflect the needs of traditionally marginalized students.

Better understanding the processes that influence persistence for traditionally marginalized students may provide a new perspective within the literature and allow counselor educators to build on strengths to support these students. Constructing a grounded theory of persistence could help counselor education programs better address diversity within counseling programs and, ultimately, within the profession. Increasing diversity within the counselor education programs and leadership across the counseling profession through support of doctoral students who are likely to fill those positions is one avenue through which the counseling profession can further realize its commitment to embracing social and cultural diversity.

Definitions of Terms

There are multiple terms that are frequently used when discussing marginalization and attrition within higher education. The following definitions serve to provide an understanding of these terms as used within the current study.

Within this study, the author uses the terms *attrition* and *dropout* to describe students who voluntarily leave their programs of study. Tinto (1975) emphasized the importance of delineating students who leave programs involuntarily from those who leave voluntarily when researching attrition.

In contrast to attrition, *persistence* describes students who remain in their programs and ultimately obtain the doctoral degree. Although most researchers study attrition as a construct and thus, this term is frequently used within the research, the focus of this study will be on persistence.

The acronym *LGBTQ* stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer and is a commonly accepted phrase for identifying individuals who report a broad spectrum of gender and sexual identities.

The terms *Black* and *African American* are frequently used interchangeably within multicultural literature. When reviewing literature, I use these terms consistent with the researchers of each study.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) generally defined *marginalization* as "persistent inequality and adversity resulting from discrimination, social stigma, and stereotypes" (NDI, n.d.).

There are groups of people who have historically experienced marginalization at high rates. Within this study, I will refer to these groups as *traditionally marginalized populations.* Within some studies I review, these groups may also be referred to as *historically underrepresented.*

The term *Counselor Education and Supervision Doctoral Programs* within this study refers to Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs that are accredited by CACREP, the national accrediting body for counseling. These programs may encompass a number of specialty areas, but are primarily focused on training counselors in the areas of teaching, supervision, counseling, research, and leadership.

Delimitations

The researcher will delimit this study by focusing on three specific groups of doctoral

students who experience marginalization based on a sociocultural descriptor. Specifically, this

researcher will focus on persistence of individuals who identify as women, LGBT, and/people of

color. Although other students may experience marginalization, this study will specifically on

the populations above. Most noticeably, men are frequently underrepresented within counselor

education programs and will be included in the study based on other sociocultural descriptors.

Although men enter and graduate from doctoral programs at rates lower than women, they also

experience attrition at a lower rate. Thus for the purposes of this study, the experience of women

seems more salient as they are more likely to fail to persist through doctoral programs.

In addition to delimiting the study based on cultural groups, I will delimit the study based

on current enrollment status. Within this study, I will focus on students who experienced

marginalization and who are either currently successfully enrolled in a CACREP-accredited

doctoral level counselor education program and who have successfully defended a dissertation

proposal. In addition, this study will include individuals who currently hold a doctoral degree in

Counselor Education and Supervision from a CACREP accredited program who graduated

within the last 12 months. Students who have dropped out or have plans to drop out of their

programs will be excluded from the study.

Organization of the Study

In Chapter 2, I will review major theories of attrition that provide a foundation for studies

of attrition experiences in graduate students. In addition, I will review the literature regarding

students' experiences of attrition and marginalization in graduate programs. I will include

attention to the unique experiences of historically underrepresented populations and students in

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counselor education in this review. Chapter 3 includes an overview of grounded theory

methodology and the grounded theory procedures utilized within this study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Earning an undergraduate degree has long been viewed as an important step to increasing opportunities for young people. Individuals who only earn a high school diploma experience unemployment at twice the rate of individuals who hold an undergraduate degree (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as educational attainment increases, unemployment levels decrease and median earnings increase. Trends in employment and educational requirements have increased the need for students to continue beyond the undergraduate degree to earn more advanced degrees in their given fields. In many fields, a graduate degree is now necessary in order to meet the requirements for licensure and employment. According to the Bureau of Labor projections, employment requiring a master's degree is expected to increase by 14 percent and those requiring a doctoral degree will increase by over 12 percent by the year 2024 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). These changes are higher than changes projected at any other educational level.

Despite the value of graduate education for many, student attrition is a critical issue in higher education. Attrition rates at the graduate level are hard to determine; however, multiple studies suggest that attrition rates hover around 50% (Lovitts, 2001; Snell et al., 2008). The PhD Project researchers found a general 57% completion rate, but noted that six or seven-year completion rates were primarily below 50%, and ten-year completion rates were less than 50% for some fields (Snell et al., 2008). In general, social science and humanities majors tend to experience higher levels of attrition than harder sciences like engineering and math. Even though more than half of doctoral students eventually complete their degrees, they often do so with significant delay. This indicates that there are issues with both attrition and forward progress within doctoral level graduate programs.

In Fall 2015, graduate programs within the United States enrolled over 1.78 million students (Allum, Feaster, & Okahana, 2014). In total, 506,927 of these students were enrolling for the first time. If only one-half of these students complete their programs, over 250,000 of first time enrollees from Fall 2015 will experience the negative consequences of dropping out of a graduate program. Approximately 22.5% of these new students were from traditionally marginalized racial/ethnic groups that experience attrition at higher rates (Snell et al., 2008). These groups are enrolling in graduate programs at levels lower than white students and are also experiencing attrition at higher levels. Similarly, although women are enrolling in and graduating from doctoral programs at rates higher than males; they also experience attrition, and the negative consequences of attrition, at higher rates than their male counterparts (Allum et al., 2014; Snell et al., 2008).

Institutions invest significant resources in doctoral students through the provision of tuition waivers, graduate assistantships, and other resources. Thus, attrition at the doctoral level is especially costly for higher education institutions, including those that may over-enroll doctoral students in order to compensate for high attrition rates (Smallwood, 2004). One researcher suggested that savings at Notre Dame alone could add up to over one million dollars a year if attrition rates decreased by only 10% (Smallwood, 2004). These numbers do not include the cost of faculty time and other institutional resources that are depleted as a result of high attrition rates.

In addition to financial costs institutions incur as a result of attrition, students also feel the cost of attrition. Willis and Carmichael (2011) noted the high cost of late stage attrition for doctoral students who have made significant sacrifices to pursue doctoral studies. Feelings of shame, isolation, and withdrawal are frequently experienced by students during attrition from a

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doctoral program (Willis & Carmichael, 2011). Some students report longstanding emotional consequences persisting for 25 years after their experience of attrition. The cost of attrition is also felt through increased financial commitment without the related income increase that would come with degree completion (Lovitts, 2001). Finally, society loses out on contributions these scholars could make to their respective fields if they had been able to successfully complete their programs (Lovitts, 2001).

Given the high cost of doctoral level attrition, the lack of research on this phenomenon is alarming. A review of the literature indicates significant attention to the importance of increasing retention within undergraduate higher education settings. Despite the significant number of students who are impacted by attrition at the doctoral level, particularly within traditionally marginalized populations, there is limited, primarily exploratory, research on attrition at the doctoral level. Even less attention is given to understanding why students take significantly longer than expected to complete their program of study at the doctoral level (Snell et al., 2008).

Some scholars have attempted to suggest reasons why research is limited in this area. Lovitts (2001) found that, unlike undergraduate programs where most students who enter are likely to have the ability to complete, doctoral programs may not have the same expectations of students. Specifically, doctoral programs may admit students based on previous achievement in academic settings with much different expectations and may not have a basis from which to determine whether students can be successful in doctoral studies. This may lead some institutions, programs, and faculty members to believe that doctoral attrition is not an institutional problem, but rather indicates that students were not prepared for the rigors of doctoral studies and should have dropped out. In all, a lack of attention to high levels of non-

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completion in doctoral programs has led scholars to refer to attrition within doctoral programs as an "invisible problem" (Lovitts, 2001).

Higher education institutions have made efforts to increase the persistence of students at risk for dropping out and attempted to develop academic supports for these students (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008). In an effort to increase diversity, programs to support underrepresented students' persistence through their studies have increased. Most of these attempts primarily focus on undergraduate students and, likewise, the majority of the research on persistence and attrition exists within the literature on undergraduate students with limited literature on graduate students, especially within counselor education. In order to direct this process of supporting students, multiple theories of attrition have arisen from the literature.

In this chapter, I begin with describing the primary theories of attrition with special attention to the issues these theories present when discussing attrition of traditionally marginalized students. Next, I review studies that address the experiences of underrepresented students and factors that may contribute to high levels of attrition within graduate level education. Finally, the chapter concludes with a review of studies regarding attrition and graduate students' experiences within counselor education. Throughout all sections, I attend to considerations for traditionally marginalized students and relationship to attrition in doctoral programs.

Theories of Attrition and Retention

The 1965 Higher Education Act focused attention on improving postsecondary education through provision of additional resources to colleges and universities, scholarships, and low-interest loans. Since its inception, the Higher Education Act has continually increased funding for low-income and racially diverse students, required reporting of statistics related to enrollment

and retention, and led to increased accountability for colleges to support and retain students. This process has also resulted in increased attention to processes through which students enroll and persist through postsecondary education programs. With the increased focus on postsecondary education at the national level, scholars began researching and developing theories regarding student dropout and attrition that shifted focus from student characteristics to interactions between students and institutions (Aljohani, 2016).

Using this framework, multiple scholars have developed models of attrition to describe processes of persistence and attrition in postsecondary education. Although they are sometimes cited within graduate level attrition literature, these models primarily focus on processes of retention and attrition in undergraduate institutions. In this section, I review three attrition models frequently found within the literature: Spady's dropout process model, Tinto's institutional dropout departure model, and Bean's casual model of student retention.

Spady's Dropout Process Model

Spady's (1970) dropout process model was one of the first efforts at explaining the attrition process of undergraduate students. Spady developed his model of dropout based on an understanding of the prior work of Durkheim. Spady attempted to adjust Durkheim's understanding regarding why individuals might cut off social connection through suicide to students' process of cutting off connection to institutions through dropout. Spady's model connected to Durkheim's original model through understanding of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and relational connectedness as factors that impact attrition decisions for students in higher education. Building on this understanding, Spady (1970) suggested that student grades, intellectual development, normative congruence, friendship support, and social integration impacted dropout. Spady suggested that each of the first four variables influence students' social

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integration which, in turn, influences satisfaction and institutional commitment. Ultimately, institutional commitment and satisfaction impact students' decisions regarding dropout (Spady, 1970).

Spady (1971) used a sample of 683 first year students to test his original theory regarding undergraduate dropout, later adjusting his theory to better reflect the experiences of undergraduate students. Spady combined family support and friendship support under a single factor he called structural relations. This revision led to a better understanding of differences between men and women when studying dropout. Spady (1971) found that men were highly influenced by formal indicators of success in higher education, such as grade performance. Women, on the other hand, were more highly influenced by institutional commitment and were less likely to focus on grade performance when making decisions about dropout. Thus, men were more likely to remain at an institution despite a lack of satisfaction and women were likely to dropout when satisfaction was low. As students matriculated through their programs, both sexes were increasingly focused on formal academic performance, suggesting that this was the primary factor for student attrition (Spady, 1971). Later studies have challenged the centrality of social and academic integration within the retention process (Murtaugh, Burns, & Schuster, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979).

In all, Spady provided the first sociologically organized theory of retention and laid the foundation for future theorists to expand on his ideas. Although Spady focused primarily on student experiences within the college setting, future theorists (e.g., Tinto, 1975) attempted to connect student characteristics and expectations with academic and social integration to develop a longitudinal understanding of dropout.

Tinto's Institutional Departure Model

Tinto (1975) developed the institutional departure model in the 1970's as a longitudinal model that built on the work of Spady while also retaining much of the core foundation of Spady's theory. Tinto initially aligned his theory to an understanding of Durkheim's suicide model and later built on this through an inclusion of principles of tribal affiliation in social anthropology (Tinto, 1975, 1993).

One major contribution of Tinto's early in work on attrition was his focus on accounting for reasons students drop out of college. Tinto distinguished voluntary and involuntary attrition and suggested that the type of attrition is important when attempting to understand attrition. Tinto acknowledged that some students are dismissed from programs due to academic issues, some students permanently drop out from programs, and other students are lost in estimates of attrition. Students who temporarily dropout or transfer to other programs are frequently included within estimates of attrition, perhaps leading to inaccurate conclusions about the numbers of students dropping out of programs and their reasons for dropping out (Tinto, 1975).

Tinto (1975) focused on three major considerations when addressing attrition. First, Tinto suggested that students leave institutions due to difficulty with academic work required at the postsecondary level. Tinto suggested that both personal preparedness and family background may influence students' academic expectations and awareness of the rigor required in college. In addition, some students may struggle with the amount of self-direction required to be academically successful in their undergraduate programs.

Second, Tinto (1975) stated that disconnects between students' career goals and academic courses may contribute to attrition. Tinto believed that students may struggle to see how completing academic coursework will further their career goals, especially in the beginning of

their programs. This may impact students differently based on their level of goal commitment throughout the educational process.

Finally, Tinto (1975) suggested that an inability to integrate into the social and academic community of the institution may contribute to attrition. Tinto suggested that students integrate academically through completion of formal academic requirements and intellectual development. Specifically, students' intellectual development may lead them to identify further with the intellectual climate of the university, or may lead them to depart from it. Students integrate socially through increased social interaction, friendship support, and identification with a subculture within the higher education institution. Additionally, integration with faculty within the academic institution influences academic integration, social integration, and institutional commitment within college students. Tinto suggested that these factors interact with each other at various degrees over the college educational process to influence dropout decisions.

Shortly after developing his theory, Tinto acknowledged the limitations of his and other theories of attrition and suggested that researchers focus on better addressing the experiences of attrition for diverse student groups (Tinto, 1982). Tinto went on to revise his theory in an attempt to better address diverse populations. Tinto's revised theory drew from social anthropology theories to suggest that individuals may struggle to adapt to institutions of higher education when they fail to separate from their previous groups and adopt rules of a new group (Tinto, 1993).

Despite revisions to his theory, some researchers continue to criticize Tinto's theory for a lack of emphasis on cultural considerations for students who may identify strongly with groups not well represented within their educational settings (Bancroft, 2013). Other researchers have identified issues with the applicability of Tinto's theory to students from traditionally

marginalized groups and have found particular concerns among African American and Native American students (Braxton et al., 1997). Particularly within more collectivist cultures, students frequently place significant value in family connections even after leaving for college (Guiffrida, 2005; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). Tinto's focus on acculturation within a college setting as a key component for success may fail to address the intricacies of these students' experiences.

In addition to questions about multicultural appropriateness, other researchers have questioned the validity of Tinto's theory on the basis that several propositions made by Tinto are not supported within studies that incorporate multiple institutions (Braxton et al., 1997). Finally, Tinto's theory was criticized for a lack of attention to factors external to the institution and the process through which those factors influence attrition (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992). In all, research draws into question the internal consistency of Tinto's theory and questions whether it is culturally sensitive and applicable to a broad number of students at risk for dropout (Braxton et al., 1997).

Bean's Casual Model of Student Retention

In contrast to Spady and Tinto, Bean (1980) suggested that Durkheim's model was an inappropriate foundation for attrition studies and could not accurately capture the issue of dropout. As a result, Bean developed a causal model of student retention based on his understanding of turnover in employment. Bean's (1980) model was based on previous work by Price (1977) in employee turnover because he believed that students leave institutions for similar reasons that employees leave jobs. Bean believed that grades would have a similar impact in the university setting that income had in the employment setting.

Using a sample of high achieving undergraduate students, Bean (1982) identified 10 variables that could be considered predictors of student dropout. According to Bean, "intent to

leave; practical value; certainty of choice; loyalty; grades; courses; educational goals; major and job certainty; opportunity to transfer; and family approval of the institution" were important variables in predicting attrition (Bean, 1982, p. 292). Bean found that intent to leave, or students' beliefs about whether they will stay at the institution, was the primary indicator of dropout. Bean suggested that other environmental and attitudinal factors impacted intent to leave for college students, including loyalty, practical value, major certainty, and educational goals. Similar to Spady (1971), Bean found that the impact of each factor varied based on student level of confidence and gender. Men and women placed emphasis on different factors when considering dropout decisions and thus may be impacted by different retention efforts (Bean, 1982). For example, although GPA was a significant factor in attrition for men, it was not a significant factor for women. Based on these findings, Bean (1980) suggested that programs targeting retention of men should likely focus on supporting a high GPA, but such a program would likely not have as significant impact for women because women do not typically drop out because of academic issues.

Using his first model as a basis, Bean developed a conceptual model of dropout syndrome (Bean, 1985). Bean connected academic, socio-psychological, and environmental factors to dropout syndrome through socialization and selection factors. In this way, Bean (1985) retained the complex multifactor approach to understanding retention and added two significant considerations. Bean was the first to incorporate extraneous factors within students' environments as contributors to dropout. Bean suggested that academic factors such as prior academic performance and academic integration influence grades which then influence dropout. In the same way, goals, degree utility, faculty contact, and social life influence institutional fit. Institutional commitment was primarily influenced by finances, opportunity to transfer, and

friends outside of the institution. Bean used many of the same variables previously discussed by Tinto, but changed how those variables interacted with each other within his model. For example, Bean suggested that grades were influenced by academic integration whereas Tinto previously suggested that grades created academic integration. Finally, Bean built on previous theories by simplifying variables and adding environmental factors.

Bean's inclusion of environmental variables contributed significantly to attrition research. Tinto's later iterations of his theory included attention to these variables, but only after Bean introduced them in his model (Bean, 1980; Tinto, 1993). In addition, Bean's theory has been found applicable to students from a broad range of backgrounds (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Rovai, 2003). Despite this important contribution, questions remain about the validity of Bean's model as a standalone model of student attrition (Cabrera et al., 1992). Cabrera et al. (1992) found that Bean's model was a better predictor of students' intent to persist and actual persistence than Tinto's model; however, Tinto's model accurately accounted for more variables. In all, Cabrera et al. (1992) suggested that combining the two models accounted for the most variance in factors related to persistence. Although these models are not specific to graduate students, research on graduate students suggests that many factors found within undergraduate attrition theories also impact the attrition process for graduate students. Despite a lack of theory, there is some research regarding the experiences of marginalized graduate students related to attrition.

Attrition and Marginalized Graduate Students

Graduate students share many experiences that impact their persistence in graduate programs. In this section, I review research that provides an understanding of common factors that influence doctoral student attrition. Although doctoral students are of primary interest within this literature review, it is common for researchers to combine master's and doctoral

students and study them as graduate students. For that reason, I will review literature regarding attrition of graduate students in addition to research with doctoral students.

Institutional and Programmatic Influences on Attrition

Institutional factors contribute to the experiences of marginalized students and may have a significant impact on their attrition. Within this section, I will attend to factors influencing persistence primarily related to institutional and program practices within graduate programs.

Institutional support systems. Support systems play an important role in success for traditionally marginalized students and are frequently problematic within the doctoral student (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011; Gardner, 2008; Golde, 2005; Shealey, 2009; Snyder & Bunkers, 1994). Support systems help to keep students connected to their cultural identities despite the push to compromise cultural identity to fit in at institutions. Underrepresented students spend significant energy seeking out support systems at their institutions and often find that these supports come from outside their own departments (Gardner, 2008). Student organizations, community initiatives, and other social groups often provide spaces where underrepresented students can connect with others like themselves (Felder, Stevenson, & Gasman, 2014). For Native American students, social support can help to decrease feelings of isolation related to leaving their homes (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008).

Faculty-student relationships. Tinto (1993) emphasized the importance of integrating into academic communities and developing relationships in order to persist through programs. Two types of integration have been discussed within the literature: academic integration and social integration. One means of social integration for many graduate students is through relationships with faculty and advisors. The student-faculty relationship can be a significant factor in the attrition decisions of graduate students (Golde, 2000; Proctor & Truscott, 2012).

Multiple studies have addressed the needs of students related to faculty relationships and issues that exist for students (Felder, 2010; Patton & Harper, 2003; Snyder & Bunkers, 1994).

There is evidence that faculty members are unaware of the importance students place on the relationships they form within their departments (Gardner, 2009). Although many faculty members emphasize the role of students in attrition, students frequently report that departmental and relationship issues contribute to their persistence decisions (Gardner, 2009).

Clear expectations. Several researchers have identified disconnects between student expectations and the reality of graduate studies (Golde, 2005). For many students in studies regarding attrition, the establishment of clear expectations regarding graduate studies, or lack thereof, significantly impacted attrition. Clear expectations became a problem for students in multiple areas and at various points during their matriculation process (Ehrenberg et al., 2007). Although faculty members may assume students understand the nature of graduate studies before they apply, research suggests that students frequently lack clarity about differences in expectations between undergraduate and graduate studies (Lovitts, 2001).

Using a qualitative methodology, Golde (2005) interviewed doctoral students from two sciences and two humanities departments and used a cross-case analysis to develop themes across the departments regarding attrition. In this study, many students reported not realizing they were not suited for their profession until they began their doctoral programs. This often took place through a recognition that program goals and objectives were not cohesive with student goals (Golde, 2005). In some cases, more accurate description of expectations during the admissions process or more intentional investigation of expectations from students may have prevented students from enrolling in programs where a mismatch existed (Golde, 2005).

As students neared the end of their programs, the lack of connection with faculty mentioned above seems to further highlight issues with clarity (Golde, 2000). Lack of communication from advisors or other faculty members during the later stages of doctoral programs may leave students without a clear path to success and ultimately lead some students to drop out of their programs (Golde, 2000; Van de Schoot et al., 2013).

Students emphasized the importance of clear expectations throughout the program, but especially during the dissertation process (Ehrenberg et al., 2007; Morales, 2008). Specifically, students reported needing a clear understanding of the process through which they could complete their dissertations. Students may feel they are not prepared for the process of completing the dissertation during their programs and rely heavily on advisors to guide them through the process (Gardner, 2010). Thus, when advisor relationships are lacking, students may feel as if they have no path to completion (Golde, 2000). Interruptions in the dissertation process can frequently delay student completion and at times can lead to attrition from doctoral programs (Van de Schoot et al., 2013; Willis & Carmichael, 2011).

In one quantitative study on the impact of funding for students completing their dissertations, researchers found that programs where students were encouraged to complete their dissertations in a timely manner had significantly lower attrition rates than programs where students were expected to perfect their dissertations prior to graduation (Ehrenberg et al., 2007). Specifically, when advisors were primarily focused on quality without attention to time commitment, students were more likely to get frustrated with the process and drop out (Ehrenberg et al., 2007). This may be in part due to a disconnect between student and faculty expectations of the dissertation outcome. In addition to lacking clear expectations, students also report lacking financial support that will help them be successful in their programs.

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Financial support. Graduate studies are expensive and often require full time commitment from students, leaving little time for outside work. For many students, lack of financial resources may be a significant determinant of persistence. Students may be unaware of funding sources to support their education and likewise lack resources from their homes (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). In addition, many students may have attended secondary schools where financial resources were limited and thus academic preparation was compromised. Kurtz-Costes et al. (2006) found that financial concerns caused stress for many doctoral students. Students worried about their ability to support themselves and their families while completing their education and also worried about their potential for future earnings (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006). In a study of African American students at an Ivy League University, several students reported struggling financially and needing to take out loans in addition to completing assistantships in order to make ends meet (Gasman, Hirschfeld, & Vultaggio, 2008). Despite evidence that some students may experience more financial need than others, many students reported frustration that students who did not need financial aid received fellowships and other significant assistance. African American students also reported a lack of awareness about how to manage financial aid resulting in overusing costly resources such as student loans (Gasman et al., 2008).

Multiple researchers have suggested that lack of awareness regarding academic culture related to financial resources can negatively impact involvement and persistence in doctoral programs (Gasman et al., 2008). Felder et al. (2014) found that African American doctoral students were often advised toward Ed.D. degrees rather than Ph.D. degrees which come with greater opportunity for financial aid. For some students, spousal income and potential for high future earnings alleviated stress related to finances (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006). Ampaw and

Jaeger (2012) found that students who received research assistantships were significantly more likely to persist, while other financial aid had little impact. This suggests that type of financial aid may influence overall experience and thus, persistence within graduate programs.

Literature regarding graduate students across multiple disciplines suggests that providing students with clear expectations and guidance is an important part of admitting and retaining successful graduate students. In addition, financial and faculty support can help ease the stress associated with doctoral programs and provide students with a path to success.

Underrepresented Student Experiences

Although general research on attrition at the graduate level is limited, research on experiences of traditionally marginalized students in graduate education is even more limited. The majority of research in this area addresses the experiences of ethnically and racially diverse students; research on students underrepresented or marginalized based on another sociocultural descriptors remains limited. Although this review of the experiences of students attempts to cover a diverse group of marginalized students, the limited scope of research limits this discussion. In this section, I will describe the experiences of groups of marginalized students within higher education with attention to how those experiences may relate to attrition.

Barriers to completion of higher education programs by underrepresented students are well documented within higher education literature. Researchers have shown that students from traditionally marginalized groups may experience marginalization, lack social connection within their programs, and face more obstacles than their peers when attempting to complete degrees (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012; Carter et al., 2013; Dua, 2007; Gardner, 2008; Guiffrida et al., 2006; Johnson et al., 2009; Lynch, 2008; Maher et al., 2004; Morales, 2008; Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haiyasoso, 2014; Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). Socially transitioning to new college

environments while also adjusting to academic expectations is important and can be stressful for many students (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Tinto, 1993). In addition to managing the pressure to adjust academically, underrepresented students often experience discrimination that further complicates transitions and impacts their attrition experiences (Carter et al., 2013; Gasman et al., 2008; Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2003a; Taylor & Antony, 2000).

In a qualitative study of doctoral student socialization within the highest and lowest completing disciplines at one institution, Gardner (2008) sought to better understand how the social experiences of students impacted their overall satisfaction. She identified five groups of students including "women, students of color, older students, students with children and part-time students" who all felt their experience didn't "fit the mold" (Gardner, 2008, p. 130). These students reported feeling different from their peers and frequently discussed interactions that impacted their experiences negatively. Each of these groups of students felt marginalized in some way during their doctoral experience, and these interactions negatively affected their program, in some cases leading them to contemplate dropping out of their programs. In this section, I review literature regarding women's experiences, LGBTQ experiences, and person of color experiences. For each area, I review literature regarding graduate education and doctoral education specifically.

Women. Within Gardner's study, female doctoral students were never directly asked about the role of gender in their experiences, but they frequently mentioned how their gender impacted them (Gardner, 2008). These students described the impact of sexism and male domination on their experiences of graduate school. Some students even described their campuses as "anti-feminine" (Gardner, 2008, p. 131).

Female doctoral students report experiencing a sense of tension or a need to choose between being an academic and achieving family related goals (Carter, et al., 2013; Morales, 2008). In a qualitative study of academic resilience using high achieving female students of color from multiple disciplines, Morales (2008) found that 84% of female participants reported some pressure in balancing work and familial life while only 15% of men reported similar experiences. Although ultimately internalized, this pressure frequently stemmed comments from males in the lives of female students. For example, Morales's participants reported hearing statements like "you do your homework after you finish cleaning the house" and "you need to spend more time fixing your makeup rather than studying them books" (Morales, 2008, p. 203). For students with children, this tension also included a struggle managing time between children and studies (Gardner, 2008). Similarly, Maher et al. (2004) surveyed 160 early women finishers and late women finishers within doctoral programs at Stanford University to investigate their perceptions of what impacted the time it took them to receive their degree. A common theme within the experiences of late finishing women was the impact of child-care and other family responsibilities on time to degree.

In addition to concerns about abilities to manage household and academics, females reported feeling pressure not to appear "too smart" (Morales, 2008). Women reported struggling with their identity as students because family members directly or indirectly suggested that women should be primarily identified as mothers and wives and should avoid an overly academic presentation (Morales, 2008).

In addition to internal struggles, women may experience treatment within programs that limits their accomplishments and contributes to increased stress. Some researchers noted an increase in the number of years it takes women to complete doctoral degrees (Hoffer et al.,

2001). Multiple researchers have suggested that factors outside achievement potential may impact women's experiences within doctoral programs and, ultimately, their graduation outcomes (Ehrenberg & Mavros, 1995; Maher et al., 2004). Ampaw and Jaeger (2012) used a longitudinal explanatory research design to study of 2,068 doctoral students to study the impact of persistence factors across the three stages of doctoral studies. They found that women may "have less access to research assistantships, may be more likely to attend part-time during the transition stage, or may be enrolling in colleges with lower completion rates" (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012, p. 656). These factors were each noted to increase time to degree for doctoral students.

Funding issues experienced by women may have a significant impact on the time it takes them to complete a doctoral degree (Maher et al., 2004). Women who finished late in their programs frequently cited concerns about lack of stability in funding from both university and non-university sources. In a qualitative study of 30 student mothers from various academic fields, multiple doctoral student mothers reported that lack of financial stability was especially concerning when their income was used to support their families (Lynch, 2008). These mothers highlighted the aspects of assistantship and fellowship programs that are designed for single or childless students, including the amount given through stipends and provision of healthcare coverage only to the student. These individuals frequently sought employment outside of the university system in order to meet the financial demands of raising a family, further delaying progress through their programs. Finally, some students reported that moving to part-time status after the birth of their children precluded them from receiving funding, in many cases even when they resumed full-time status (Lynch, 2008). These issues with inconsistent funding might contribute to the disproportionate number of women who rely on their own personal incomes while completing doctoral programs (Hoffer et al., 2001).

In addition to doctoral student mothers being influenced by issues with funding, some

students struggle to make decisions about what projects they have time for while also dedicating

time to family life (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006). Some women reported being treated differently

from their male peers with newborns and sometimes losing opportunities due to perceptions

about family commitments (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006). Kurtz-Costes et al. (2006) interviewed

students within gender-balanced and male-dominated programs and found that students

frequently perceived female faculty members as making compromises related to family that they

were not willing to make. Thus, female students reported struggling to relate with female faculty

members in addition to their male faculty members (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006). Although

women have made progress in representation within doctoral programs, they remain more

frequently impacted by high levels of attrition (Hoffer et al., 2001). In summary, institutional

financial structures, societal pressures, and familial responsibility may all disproportionately

impact the attrition process of women within doctoral programs.

Racial and Ethnic Minorities. The majority of the literature regarding the experiences

of traditionally marginalized students is found within research on racial and ethnic minorities.

Although research exists regarding student attrition across racial and ethnic groups, most

literature in this area focuses on students who identify as African American or Black. In this

section, I review literature related to the marginalization experiences of racial and ethnic

minorities within general graduate research.   In particular, I focus on questioned competence,

isolation, stereotyping, support systems, role models, and lack of accessibility.

Questioned competence. African American students frequently report a feeling of

pressure when interacting with faculty and students in the classroom. In a study of chemistry

and history students at two research institutions, students who had worked hard to earn respect in

their given fields reported feeling they were taking steps back when they entered academia (Gardner, 2008). Specifically, the students reported feeling like they were starting over in asserting their competence (Gardner, 2008). In a study of graduate teaching assistants within an elementary education program at a state university, researchers found that a similar dynamic existed between teaching assistants and students wherein students questioned the expertise and teaching strategies of non-white teaching assistants more than those of other instructors (Gomez, Khurshid, Freitag, & Lachuk, 2011).

Underrepresented students may also experience microaggressions from faculty and fellow students in the form of surprise at their level of intelligence. In one study of black male athletes, a student described the reactions of faculty to him by saying, "it's like all they could see was a big, Black, so I must be dumb" (Beamon, 2014, p. 128). In another study of four African American female doctoral students, participants discussed feeling a need to prove themselves and their intelligence to their instructors (Williams, Brewley, Reed, White, & Davis-Haley, 2005). In another study of 12 African American students, 10 students reported feeling pressure to prove their academic abilities and a sense of suspicion about why they were admitted into their programs (Taylor & Antony, 2000). In a study of Native American students who were underprepared due to issues with academic preparation on Indian reservations, Guillory and Wolverton (2008) described students worrying about talking in classes because they did not want to appear dumb or stupid in front of their classmates. While attempting to prove their intelligence to both peers and instructors was challenging, students from traditionally marginalized groups may find that the added stress of doing so in isolation may compound the impact of these experiences.

Isolation. Integration into social groups has been identified as an important part of adjustment to college and thus a factor that significantly impacts attrition (Bean, 1980; Tinto, 1988). Underrepresented students experience added stress when unable to establish meaningful connections with others like them within graduate programs (Gasman, Gerstl-Pepin, Anderson-Thompkins, Rasheed, & Hathaway, 2004; Johnson-Bailey, Thomas Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2009). This can be heightened for students who believe that their programs will be accepting of diversity and, upon arrival, find they are not (Vaccaro, 2012).

Although some minority students reported feeling like they stood out among their peers, other students experienced a sense of not being seen and feeling invisible (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009; C. Lewis et al., 2003a; Ovink & Veazey, 2011). In a qualitative study of African American doctoral students at a Predominantly White Institution, the most common theme was a sense of isolation on campus (Lewis et al., 2003a). This lack of social connection lead to feelings of loneliness, invisibility, and separation. For some students in this study, the sense of isolation they experienced was enough to make them consider dropping out of their programs (Lewis et al., 2003a). In one narrative study of 68 doctoral students who did not complete their doctoral programs, students reported that lack of connection with classmates was one reason they dropped out from their doctoral programs (Golde, 2000). Students frequently reported feeling like they did not belong or were not accepted within their institutions (Golde, 2000). This isolation was further compounded by a lack of support systems students were led to believe existed on their campuses by promotional material from the university and programs. In all, students from traditionally marginalized groups feel like they had to figure things out on their own without the support of faculty or peers (Lewis et al., 2003a).

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For African American students, supportive relationships with peers may help to decrease the influence of social isolation in other areas (Taylor & Antony, 2000). Eleven of 12 African American students in a study on stereotype threat discussed the importance of like-minded peers. Although peers may reside on other campuses, students reported maintaining meaningful relationships via email or through professional development opportunities that helped them develop a sense of support and solidarity (Taylor & Antony, 2000).

Stereotyping. Taylor and Antony (2000) interviewed 12 African American students regarding their experiences of stereotyping within a research-oriented education program. Students were frustrated by professors whose research agendas seemed to reinforce unhelpful stereotypes of African American students (Taylor & Antony, 2000). In a study of African American doctoral students in a school psychology program, one student reported avoiding some conversations with peers because she "didn't want to be the angry Black person" (Proctor & Truscott, 2012, p. 669). More recently, a sample of 11 African American students who completed their degrees and who experienced stereotyping from faculty members reported an added pressure to correct misconceptions (Felder et al., 2014). In each of the above studies, African American students reported a feeling of being stereotyped along with a belief that they must do something to dispel stereotypes regarding racial minority groups; in some cases, this pressure contributed to attrition from their programs of study (Felder et al., 2014; Proctor & Truscott, 2012; Taylor & Antony, 2000).

Although rarer in the scholarly literature, students also reported forms of overt racism within their institutions (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009). For example, one student reported being called a "niger", another reported a professor carrying a Confederate flag into a meeting, and still another reported hearing racist jokes made in her presence (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009). In

addition to problems with stereotyping, racial minority students also experience problems related to family and formal support systems.

Problems with support systems. In addition to standing out among their peers, students of color may also experience macroaggressions from family members related to changes brought about by their studies (Morales, 2008). One African American student described a conversation where her mother suggested that she "talk white" as a result of her schooling (Morales, 2008, p. 203). Guillory and Wolverton (2008) studied influences of persistence for Native American students and found that many reported struggling balancing the needs of family members with their own needs. These students' families relied on them for various forms of support, which created frustration when they attempted to integrate into more individualistic university setting (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). Similarly, a study of African American nursing students found that students struggled with family members who did not understand the time commitment required to successfully complete their education (Snyder & Bunkers, 1994). Within the same study, students reported that family members seemed to lack awareness about the importance of education for them. In contrast, within multiple studies, minority students still reported finding parental influence important to persistence and often cited their parents as one reason they continued their education (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Snyder & Bunkers, 1994).

Issues with role models. Within multiple studies of traditionally marginalized students, lack of role models was a common theme identified by participants (Dua, 2007; Gasman et al., 2008; Shealey, 2009; Taylor & Antony, 2000). For racial minorities, the presence of others who were able to overcome stereotypes and successfully navigate graduate studies can be important to success (Millett & Nettles, 2006; Taylor & Antony, 2000). Students may seek out minority peers or faculty members who they see as successful to serve as role models during their

graduate studies (Taylor & Antony, 2000). In a phenomenological study of racial minorities, African American students struggled to connect with White faculty members and found it easier to connect with faculty members of the same race (Felder & Barker, 2013). There are simply not enough minority faculty for all minority students to develop meaningful mentorship relationships with same race individuals, and some students must seek supportive relationships with other faculty members (Dua, 2007; Gasman et al., 2008).

Despite the importance attributed to role models, many students reported a need to develop intentional cross-cultural mentorship relationships due to a lack of nonwhite faculty (Shealey, 2009). Identifying academics outside the university who were able to serve as role models was important for some students who found same-race relationships to be especially salient to their success (Shealey, 2009). For some students, same-race mentors may help to develop a sense of professional identity within their career of choice (Kim-Prieto, Copeland, Hopson, Simmons, & Leibowitz, 2013). Still, many minority students experience a lack of meaningful mentorship of any kind to help them navigate their programs and future careers (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016).

Lack of accessibility. Multiple studies provided support for the importance of accessibility of faculty within graduate programs (Golde, 2000; Proctor & Truscott, 2012). Although doctoral students understand the busyness of faculty, they desire faculty members who are available to them both in class and outside of class. Even informal conversations can help to build connections between faculty and students, encourage participation in research, and support completion of the doctoral degree (Gasman et al., 2004). Accessibility is especially important for minority students because even when they experience positive interactions with faculty

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members, they often find these interactions to be an unfulfilling due to faculty being inaccessible at other important times (Felder, 2010; Felder & Barker, 2013).

Sexual minorities. Research on LGBT students is scarce within the higher education literature, and no widely recognized studies have specifically examined sexual minorities at the doctoral level or within counselor education. For that reason, this review of literature related to the experiences of individuals with non-dominant sexual and/or gender identities will focus on studies that describe experiences on college campuses and issues with campus climate. In addition, most of the literature regarding LGBT students primarily addresses marginalization based on sexual orientation with even less attention given to students marginalized based on gender identity. Finally, most of these studies include only undergraduate participants and do not give attention to the unique experiences of LGBT graduate students.

Research is clear that LGBT individuals are likely to encounter marginalization and negative experiences on college campuses (Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, & Robinson-Keilig, 2004; Evans & Broido, 2002; Garber, 2002; Sanlo, 2004; Vaccaro, 2012). Rankin (2003) conducted a study of 1669 self-identified LGBT students on 14 campuses and found that 36% of students reported experiencing some type of harassment and 20% reported fearing for the physical safety on campus. Furthermore, 51% of students reported that they attempted to hide their sexual or gender identity on campus due to a fear of discrimination or harassment. Over 70% of faculty, students, administrators, and staff thought their college campuses had a culture of homophobia (Rankin, 2003). Despite these alarming statistics, there is some evidence that student attitudes toward LGBT individuals becomes more supportive as students advance through their undergraduate studies (Schott-Ceccacci, Holland, & Matthews, 2009).

In a recent study of campus climate, Yost and Gilmore (2011) surveyed 274 employees and 562 students at a small liberal arts college. In this study, students reported less overtly homophobic behaviors, but one-half of LGBT students still reported verbal harassment and 10% of students reported being "subject to physical threats or attacks as a result of being perceived as LGBTQ" (Yost & Gilmore, 2011, p. 1349). In addition, almost all LGBTQ students thought the campus needed to improve the climate for LGBTQ students. One student referred to the campus climate as one of "tolerant apathy" (Yost & Gilmore, 2011 p. 1343). Although specific studies have not made a connection between the experiences of these students and their attrition, it would seem that LBGT students may experience a difficulty socially integrating into the campus due to experiences of discrimination, harassment, and a lack of role models similar to the other underrepresented groups outlined above.

In an ethnographic study of 46 LGBT faculty, staff and students who identified as LGBT, Vaccaro (2012) reported on the experiences of six graduate students separately from undergraduate students, faculty, and staff. The graduate students in this study reported frustration regarding the homogeny of their faculty (Vaccaro, 2012). Students who were able to identify an LGBT faculty member within their departments generally reported more positive experiences in their programs. LGBT graduate students reported a lack of clarity regarding their professors' beliefs about LGBT students and, as a result, were hesitant to talk about their experiences in class. In addition, these students reported surprise at the lack of openness for LGBT students on these campuses and noted how their experiences seemed to contradict the ways programs marketed themselves (Vaccaro, 2012).

Persistence Experiences

A common theme within each of the studies above is a focus on decisions that cause students to leave programs of study. Across disciplines, researchers have identified similar causes for student attrition. To date, these studies have yielded limited results in terms of reducing attrition rates of graduate students. In this section, I will review one program that was specifically developed to encourage persistence that has been effective at addressing two major themes in attrition: financial support and clarity in expectations.

As mentioned above, students report that finances play a strong role in their decisions, especially early in their programs (Ehrenberg et al., 2007). Providing students with financial incentives may help to alleviate a significant stress and encourage persistence through doctoral studies. Programs developed specifically to incentivize on-time matriculation might reduce both stress and time to degree for doctoral students (Van de Schoot et al., 2013). The Graduate Education Initiative (GEI) was specifically designed to encourage timely completion of dissertation in the humanities and social sciences, a factor that frequently contributes to delay for doctoral students (Van de Schoot et al., 2013). The GEI provided programs with funding that allowed them to reward students who were successfully matriculating through the program at an expected rate.

Following the intervention, Van de Schoot et al. (2013) found that students were more frequently introduced to dissertation through some type of seminar, were more frequently expected to engage in continued work during summer, were more clear about departmental- and course-specific requirements, and were more frequently encouraged to make continual progress toward dissertation completion as a result of GEI funding (Ehrenberg et al., 2007). In addition to providing financial support, the GEI program addressed clarity of expectation, another critical

consideration related to attrition and persistence.

Increased clarity about program and dissertation requirements, which students experienced from programs because of GEI funding, has been associated with lower attrition rates in multiple studies (Ehrenberg et al., 2007; Morales, 2008; Van de Schoot et al., 2013; Willis & Carmichael, 2011). Comprehensive orientation processes for doctoral programs are cited as an important component of clarifying program and department expectations (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012; Henfield et al., 2011, 2013; Lovitts, 2001). As mentioned above, increased clarity regarding expectations can lead to decreased attrition at the doctoral level. Students who engage in well-planned orientation programs are more socially connected to their programs and their peers and, thus, are more likely to persist through their programs (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012; Lewis et al., 2003a; Lovitts, 2001). Orientation programs may also help students to recognize the array of options available to them after completing a doctoral degree rather than assuming the only purpose of a doctoral degree is to move into a faculty position (Brazziel & Brazziel, 2001). Comprehensive orientations developed due to GEI funding helped to address these issues and therefore support persistence in these graduate students.

Throughout this major section, I have reviewed research studies that helped to clarify the experiences of students from traditionally marginalized groups in graduate education: women, students of color, and LGBT students. In addition, I reviewed one graduate level program that addressed two themes found within the experiences of graduate students. So far, this literature review has focused exclusively on general theories of attrition and research related to graduate student attrition and persistence across disciplines. To better address the experiences of counselor education students, it is necessary to also explore the research in this area. In the next section, I will review research on the experiences of graduate-level counselor education students

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with special attention to the experiences of traditionally marginalized students in counselor education.

Counselor Education Students

Despite upward trends in enrollment of some marginalized groups within counselor education, traditionally marginalized students remain underrepresented within the profession, and the experiences of these students indicate some concerns about institutional climate and policies. Underrepresented students in counselor education appear to face struggles related to their status as minority students (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2011; Henfield, Woo, & Washington, 2013; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Rutter, Estrada, Ferguson, & Diggs, 2008). Despite the scarcity of research regarding attrition within counselor education, the existing body of literature provides a foundation for understanding the experiences of traditionally marginalized students in counselor education. In this section, I will describe themes found within the counselor education literature on attrition and traditionally marginalized groups including ambiguous expectations, unmet expectations, political culture, lack of openness, and mentorship concerns.

Counselor Education Doctoral Student Attrition

Several salient studies within counselor education describe experiences of attrition for graduate students. Before reviewing studies specific to traditionally marginalized students in counselor education, I will review studies that outline issues in general. Although these students in these studies did not necessarily identify with a marginalized population, these studies provide important context for understanding institutional and programmatic factors that may contribute to attrition within counselor education.

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Ambiguous expectations. Similar to graduate students within other disciplines reviewed above, several researchers identified concerns among doctoral students related to their understanding of the expectations within their counselor education programs (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2013; Hughes & Kleist, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009; Willis & Carmichael, 2011). In a qualitative inquiry study, Hughes and Kleist (2005) studied the first semester experiences of four counselor education doctoral students and found results that paralleled experiences of doctoral students outside of counselor education. Within this study, students reported struggling with the ambiguity of beginning a doctoral program and questioning their abilities. At the same time, these students reported feeling a sense of pride regarding being admitted into a doctoral program and a belief that they had met other challenges and thus would also be able to meet this challenge (Hughes & Kleist, 2005). Hughes and Kleist concluded that early in their doctoral studies students are primarily focused on adjusting to the culture of doctoral studies and can benefit from formative feedback about their adjustment. Specifically, students in this study could adjust to program expectations more fully once they were able to understand what it meant to "act like a doctoral student" (Hughes & Kleist, 2005, p. 104). Beginning counselor education students reported of a mix of emotions as they entered doctoral studies and sought clarity to help ease their anxiety, but this need for clarity continues as students adjust to new demands associated with different aspects of their programs (Protivnak & Foss, 2009; Willis & Carmichael, 2011).

At every stage, students desired support and clarity, but this was especially important during dissertation when students frequently reported a decrease in peer support (Hughes & Kleist, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). In a qualitative study of 141 counselor education doctoral students, Protivnak and Foss (2009) found that many participants utilized peer support

to help clarify their success within their programs and were significantly impacted when that peer support became less available during the dissertation process. Unique to counselor education, these students reflected on the importance of cohort models in helping them to connect with peers while also identifying those who were further along and might be able to clarify expectations (Protivnak & Foss, 2009).

In a grounded theory study of six counselor education students who dropped out of their programs during the dissertation phase, Willis and Carmichael (2011) found that lack of clarity about expectations contributed to late stage attrition. With one exception, a common theme for counselor education students in this study that was not explicitly reported in studies of general graduate students was a sense of powerlessness. One student stated, "It was like I was there by myself, it's sink or swim, and this fella had the power and I didn't…I asked for help and it just didn't' materialize" (Willis & Carmichael, 2011, p. 197). For this student, even intentional seeking of clarity was met with continued ambiguity which ultimately led to her dropping out of the program. Five students in this study referenced some sense of powerlessness to gain clarity and move through the program. For some students, this sense of clarity was further diminished due to frequent changes while they were in the program (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005).

Unmet expectations. Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) conducted a qualitative study of 33 doctoral students in counselor education programs accredited by CACREP. Using analytic induction, the researchers sought to understand the reasons students chose to persist or drop out from their programs. Within this study, students frequently considered dropping out from their programs when they had expectations that were not met by the program or program faculty members. Some students reporting being clear regarding their expectations and feeling frustrated when faculty did not inform them up front about disconnects between their

expectations and programs goals. In addition, students reported frustration with frequent

changes in program requirements and faculty turnover that impacted the level of clarity within

the program. Some students reported feeling like they entered a program with one set of goals

and, due to changes during their study, were left with a vastly different program that no longer

met their expectations (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). It is important to note that the above studies

provide a meaningful contribution to the discussion on attrition within this study, but lack

specific focus on traditionally marginalized students. Additional studies within counselor

education have investigated the experiences of traditionally marginalized students.

Political culture. Protivnak and Foss (2009) conducted a qualitative study of 141

doctoral level counselor education and supervision students. In this study, the authors sought to

better understand the positive and negative experiences of students in counseling education

program and intentionally sought a large sample of students to increase the possibility that

students might be honest without fear of being identified. This study was not specific to

underrepresented populations, but still revealed themes regarding openness in counselor

education programs. Department culture was a common theme that impacted experiences for

some students; although some students reported a positive climate of collaboration, others

reported programs where they felt they were constantly in competition with other students. For

some students, "academic political savvy" was not natural and thus they felt unable to navigate

the "political landmines" sometimes found within counselor education programs (Protivnak &

Foss, 2009, pp. 245–246). These students struggled to be open within their programs due to a

fear of accidentally stepping on one of these political landmines.

In response to this anxiety, some participants reported feeling like they had to

compromise their personal values and beliefs to remain successful in their programs (Baker &

Moore, 2015; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Specifically, one student stated that he had "prostituted my authenticity, integrity, and typical forthright temperament" to fit within department culture (Protivnak & Foss, 2009, p. 246). Some students also reported fearing repercussions of speaking up when they sensed faculty opposition to a personally held value. These experiences may be even more significant for students from underrepresented populations (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2013).

Traditionally Marginalized Students

Although counselor education programs have increasingly matriculated diverse students into their programs (CACREP, 2015), there is little information regarding progress in retention of these students. There is evidence that traditionally marginalized students continue to experience marginalization within counselor education programs. With the intentional focus on diversity within counselor education programs, one might expect an increased level of openness for diverse perspectives; however, research suggests that counselor education students may experience a lack of openness within their programs.

Lack of openness to diversity. Baker and Moore (2015) used narrative and critical race methodologies to study the experiences of 19 full-time counselor education doctoral students from traditionally marginalized populations. Baker and Moore (2015) found that students frequently felt a need to hide or underemphasize their cultural identities while interacting within the program (Baker & Moore, 2015). Students reported being fearful of disagreeing with professors' perspectives and feeling like they had to "keep at bay" their own beliefs and cultural expression (Baker & Moore, 2015, p. 72). In a phenomenological study of 11 African American doctoral students, researchers found that it was common for students to feel like they had to defend their perspectives (Henfield et al., 2013). In addition, students felt that they were not

allowed to have opinions about topics related to diversity or that their opinions were not taken seriously (Henfield et al., 2013). In each of these studies, counseling students spoke to a general department culture that minimized and questioned their contributions to the educational environments.

In another study, students reported feeling that, beginning during orientation, faculty members showed preference for white students' opinions and thoughts while students or color were left feeling like their opinions were not valued. These faculty members appeared to lack understanding of the culture of the students, and some students reported feeling that their faculty members were not comfortable being around them (Henfield et al., 2013). Other students perceived favoritism and shutting down of ideas different from their own by faculty members as a lack of cultural openness and awareness on behalf of the faculty (Protivnak & Foss, 2009).

Similarly, students in Baker & Moore's (2015) study communicated a shutting down of discussion related to diversity in their programs (Baker & Moore, 2015). In addition, students reported watching faculty members to see how they interacted with students rather than simply relying on what they said about cultural diversity. Students in this study reported that faculty members might talk about being culturally aware, but they did not always demonstrate those values in their interactions with other faculty members and students (Baker & Moore, 2015). For example, one student reported that faculty members frequently suggested that she talk to her peers about issues within the program despite a lack of respect of culture and familiarity between students (Henfield et al., 2013).

Mentorship concerns. In addition to department culture, the lack of mentorship or advisement frequently mentioned within general graduate attrition literature was a common theme within counselor education. Students reported that their faculty members were often busy

and lacked the time to engage them on a personal level, something they felt they needed (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). In a phenomenological study of five counselor education doctoral students of color, students reported that mentorship and faculty relationships would be an important part of being successful within their counselor education doctoral programs (Zeligman, Prescod, & Greene, 2015).

Not only did underrepresented students report that it was important to have mentors, but they sought mentors who were able to understand the unique struggles they might face in their studies (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2011, 2013; Protivnak & Foss, 2009; Zeligman et al., 2015). Some students even reported deciding where to apply based on the representation of faculty who shared some sociocultural descriptor with them (Zeligman et al., 2015). Zeligman et al. (2015) found that students perceived faculty members who shared a descriptor with them as able to better prepare them for things they might experience in their programs in ways that other faculty members were not. This search for common experience was also a theme for doctoral student mothers who found faculty members who were also mothers to be more supportive of them (Trepal et al., 2014).

This lack of mentorship, while especially salient within literature on racial minorities is also applicable to other students. In a study of six students who dropped out of counselor education doctoral programs, students reported lack of time or caring from faculty as a significant reason for their attrition (Burkholder, 2012). For other students, lack of connection with faculty members led them to change programs in attempts to find a place where they were able to develop meaningful relationships that helped them complete their degrees (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). On the other hand, genuine caring and guidance from faculty on a personal and

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academic levels helped students to navigate difficult times during their doctoral programs (Protivnak & Foss, 2009).

In lieu of faculty relationships to help guide them through the program, many students reported turning to more advanced students or friends to help them navigate through their studies (Henfield et al., 2011; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). This causes unique difficulty for students who may lack meaningful and trusting social connection with their peers (Henfield et al., 2013). Specifically, these students may not be able to identify more advanced students whom they trust to provide guidance (Henfield et al., 2013).

Other students found support systems within professional organizations, family, friends, or sometimes within themselves (Henfield et al., 2011; Zeligman et al., 2015). One student talked about the importance of maintaining meaningful connection with his community and friends (Henfield et al., 2011). Students found the ability to code switch as an important skill needed to make it in counselor education programs (Henfield et al., 2011). In describing his experience of code switching one student stated, "I am able to switch between Taylor the doc student at a PWI and Taylor the guy who knows where he is from and who is in touch with his circle of friends and community as a whole" (Henfield et al., 2011, p. 236).

In addition to reporting the importance of strong peer relationships, students reflected on impact when those relationships became less strong. Specifically, students in dissertation often experience disconnection from peers and faculty and are especially vulnerable to feeling overwhelmed and unsupported (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). For some students, recognition of potential places of support on campus was a significant support even if they never utilized those resources (Henfield et al., 2011). Still other students reported that support systems sometimes became sources of stress (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Family members might not always

understand the significant time and energy commitment associated with pursuing doctoral studies (Zeligman et al., 2015). At the same time, counselor education students may experience guilt for taking time for studies when other pressing issues arise in their personal lives.

In three different studies of counselor education students, participants reported needing to work twice as hard as peers who were not members of underrepresented groups (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2011; Zeligman et al., 2015). Students perceived that they needed to be better than their peers in order to be seen as equal and, even then, they may not get the same opportunities as their peers (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2011; Zeligman et al., 2015). Baker and Moore reported that students recalled appreciating same-race mentors because those faculty members informed them about potential challenges they might experience. In some cases, these faculty members warned students that they would have to be better than their peers in order to be seen as equal before they experienced it for themselves.

Students who were just beginning their programs felt pressure driven by previous experiences of microaggressions and discrimination in educational settings (Henfield et al., 2013; Zeligman et al., 2015). For some students, the need to protect themselves may begin even before they experience macroaggressions within counselor education programs. For other students, there was a lack of guidance to reach their specific research and career goals, especially when those goals tended to involve researching underrepresented groups (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2013). In some programs, students reported overtly discriminating actions such as favoritism in the form of research opportunities or award recognitions. In other programs, microaggressions came primarily through deemphasizing the voices of underrepresented students or frequently challenging and questioning their contributions (Henfield et al., 2011; Protivnak &

Foss, 2009). Some students even reported frustration that students they perceived as incompetent were allowed to continue despite significant issues (Protivnak & Foss, 2009).

Within counselor education, researchers have identified similar struggles with balance reported by women in their doctoral programs. Students report making familial compromises such as delaying marriage or having children in order to accommodate the time and energy needed to complete doctoral studies (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Other students reported feeling like they frequently compromised one or more important roles in order to be successful (Trepal et al., 2014). Finally, students reported feeling that cultural values related to gender roles in parenting were frequently seen within counselor education. Specifically, female students sensed that fathers within their programs did not have the same expectations placed on them by society, the faculty, or other students that mothers did (Trepal et al., 2014).

Researchers have identified numerous barriers to successful completion of the doctorate for traditionally marginalized students within counselor education. Many of these barriers mirror those found within research on general graduate students. Specifically, these students report issues with program climate, relationships, and expectations that impact their experience within their doctoral programs. The literature within counselor education lacks attention to persistence and includes minimal attention to the attrition of doctoral students.

Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature regarding the experiences of traditionally marginalized graduate students. I have given specific attention to literature regarding doctoral students, when available. This literature suggests that traditionally marginalized students experience barriers that may impact their ability to successfully complete doctoral studies. These barriers exist within institutions and society as a whole and impact women, racial/ethnic

minorities, and gender/sexual minorities specifically and may contribute to higher levels of attrition within these populations. Although we have some idea about why students may choose to leave their programs, we know little about why and how they choose to stay and persist through their programs. Answering this question would add to the current body of literature regarding attrition and persistence of doctoral students in counselor education. In Chapter Three, I present methodology for a proposed study regarding persistence of traditionally marginlized doctoral students in counselor education.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Barriers to achievement within doctoral programs have been well documented, especially for marginalized populations. Some researchers have sought to better understand reasons why students choose to leave their programs of study. Despite the wellness focus of the counseling profession, no researchers have sought to understand how marginalized students persist through their programs even in the face of barriers. In this study, I used grounded theory methodology combined with a critical lens to explore experiences of marginalized students and develop a theory regarding the process by which they persist through doctoral level counselor education programs.

This chapter begins with an overview of qualitative methodology as an overarching framework and grounded theory as a specific methodology. I give specific attention to constructivist grounded theory (CGT) as a branch of grounded theory methodology that is well-suited to understanding how marginalized doctoral counselor education students persist through their programs and the processes that impact their persistence. Finally, I describe my use of CGT methodology for examining the persistence experiences of marginalized students in counselor education including participants, recruitment, data collection procedures, and data analysis. I end the chapter with focused attention to indicators of rigor and my positionality within the research.

Grounded Theory Methodology

Qualitative methodology allows researchers to use rich data to explore phenomena. Through in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, qualitative researchers can provide a variety of insights into people's lives. Grounded theory allows for intentional, in-depth

exploration of participants' experiences and the processes that guide and impact their experiences to construct theory (Glaser, 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Traditional grounded theorists seek to enter the study of phenomena with little previous knowledge. In contrast to the typical research strategy, traditional grounded theorists would first conduct research and then review the literature related to the phenomenon. As Charmaz (2014) noted, researchers rarely enter data collection without previous knowledge. Charmaz emphasized the use of "sensitizing concepts" that develop from exploration of the literature review when beginning grounded theory study. Sensitizing concepts provide some place to begin a grounded theory study and may inform an interview guide, but are open enough to allow new data to emerge. Grounded theory researchers are careful to avoid categorizing data based on previously developed ideas, but may use those ideas as a place to begin exploring the phenomenon.

A primary feature of CGT as proposed by Charmaz (2014) is the importance of context and researcher reflexivity as components of data collection and analysis. Although some of the later founders of grounded theory acknowledged that researchers will always bring some bias into their research, Glaser (1978) originally suggested that researchers must enter as blank slates and remain as such throughout the research process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In contrast, constructivist grounded theorists emphasize researcher reflexivity and acknowledge the construction of theory as a collaborative process impacted by shared experiences of researchers and participants (Charmaz, 2014). CGT thus requires researcher reflexivity in understanding their own roles in the co-construction of meaning.

Grounded theory in general, and CGT specifically, contain methodological guidelines for the process of sampling, data collection, and data analysis. The next section will provide an

overview of the approach to qualitative research used within grounded theory with attention to specific considerations within CGT.

Grounded Theory Sampling

Grounded theorists are interested in developing theories regarding specific populations and generally rely on purposive sampling to identify and recruit participants (Charmaz, 2014). Purposive sampling allows for intentionality in selecting participants that contribute rich data to the goals of the study. In addition, grounded theorists rely on theoretical sampling to develop depth and meaning in data collection and analysis. Theoretical sampling involves intentional and concurrent collection and analysis of data with increasing depth of interviewing to explore emerging themes. Theoretical sampling encourages persistent observation and provides one form of developing credibility within grounded theory studies.

Grounded Theory Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection and analysis within grounded theory are significantly different from other qualitative methodologies. Many other qualitative methodologies require collection of data followed by analysis. In contrast, grounded theory researchers concurrently conduct data collection and data analysis. This allows data collected at the beginning of a research project to inform the process of future data collection. Further, this increases the researcher's ability to develop themes from rich data, rather than predeveloped hypotheses, another essential part of grounded theory research.

Glasser (1998) rejected the use of strict protocols for data collection, especially within interviews. Charmaz (2014) noted the benefits of open-ended interview guides which allow for flexibility, but may help researchers to stay focused when exploring participant experiences. In addition, Charmaz noted that open-ended interview guides help researchers to avoid narrowing

the exploration of experience. As grounded theory data collection continues, researchers

reevaluate interviews guide and begin to refine and develop interview questions. This process

allows for increased depth in understanding and continued development of depth in theory

generation throughout data collection and analysis.

Coding is the primary process through which grounded theory researchers analyze data

and develop theory. Constant comparative analysis is a process of data analysis that begins with

comparing data with data and continues throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Researchers use open line-by-line coding for "breaking down, examining, comparing, and

conceptualizing data" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 61). Connecting these categories together and

binding them through a shared narrative is the final step in the coding process. Through

connecting experiences across data, constant comparative analysis allows the researcher to

develop a theory about the phenomenon that is grounded in data.

A Critical Perspective

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical perspective that illuminated continued racial

oppression within systems that were instituted following major civil rights victories in the 60's

and 70's (Ladson-Billings, 1998; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Critical race theorists highlight the

damage a society does when it ignores the identities that keep certain individuals marginalized

(Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Theorists argue that approaches such as a "colorblindness" serve

only to mask racism rather than acknowledge and work against it (Bernal, 2002; Malagon,

Huber, & Velez, 2009; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical theories

have arisen in multiple areas within multicultural literature including LatCrit theory and Critical

Race Theory. Frequently found within education literature, critical theories provide a framework

for understanding the experiences of marginalized groups. In addition, CRT can be used as a foundation for researching the experiences of marginalized groups.

Two components of CRT provide an important framework for this dissertation study. First, critical race theory challenges the dominant narrative of colorblindness and meritocracy within current systems (Malagon et al., 2009). Malagon, Huber and Velez emphasized the importance of challenging deficit-focused research that continues to reinforce the negative and often inaccurate ideologies that surround people of color and other marginalized groups. Approaches such as meritocracy and colorblindness to inequality reduce the complexity of marginalized experiences and lead to quick fixes that further marginalize the experiences of diverse groups (Malagon et al., 2009; Mkandawire-Valhmu & Stevens, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). For example, someone who holds a belief in meritocracy may recognize that low-income schools are not as good as other schools in their area and advocate for improvements in those schools. Meritocracy would suggest that with enough hard work every child in that school could then achieve equally to other individuals, but this approach ignores the disparity in nutrition, social capital, and numerous other factors that also influence students' experiences. In contrast, CRT embraces the complexity of oppression and marginalization. CRT provides an important avenue for exploring the complexities of student experiences persisting through their doctoral programs.

The theory of meritocracy within critical race theory provides important considerations when approaching research with marginalized groups. Specifically, it highlights the importance of considering the persistence of students within the context of their experiences. While persistence in a CE doctoral program is the focus of this study, it is important to recognize that marginalization and thus persistence for traditionally marginalized students neither begins nor

ends in the university setting. Additionally, critical race theorists emphasize that oppression

cannot be limited only to "acts of individual prejudice that can be eradicated" (Parker & Lynn,

2002, p. 9). Instead, racism and oppression are understood as systemic processes deeply

engrained in society that often impact the experiences of marginalized groups in covert ways that

are frequently overlooked by the dominant group (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker &

Lynn, 2002). Marginalization within educational settings is part of an overall experience for

traditionally marginalized students and should be considered with attention to the complicated

and systemic nature of oppression.

Second, when approaching research from a CRT framework, the researcher attempts to

challenge dominant ideologies through seeking out authentic experiences from marginalized

groups (Malagon et al., 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race theorists value the

experiential knowledge that comes from living with oppression and recognize that this

knowledge is "legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching

about racial subordination (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26)." Counterstorytelling within CRT

often reveals stories regarding the marginalized experience that dominant groups are primarily

unaware of or do not have to confront frequently (Bernal, 2002). CRT theorists focus on

centering the stories of people of color, rather than testing their experiences against currently

established theories. These counterstories form the basis for the development of theories that

often challenge the dominant narrative regarding experiences of oppression.

Grounded theory methodology focuses on building new theory without significant

influence from previously generated ideas. Similarly, CRT provides a meaningful way of

conceptualizing the experiences of marginalized individuals within grounded theory

methodology. Together, grounded theory methodology with a CRT frame allow for the

illumination of new theory that challenges the notion of meritocracy and arises primarily from the experiences of marginalized populations.

Data Reporting

Traditional grounded theory requires the researcher to remain an observer of data and to present results from an analytical frame (Charmaz, 2014). In contrast, CGT allows the researcher to present the analytical theory in combination with telling the story of the participants. CGT encourages the recognition of authors who have contributed to the construction of meaning and theory. When reporting data, constructivist grounded theorists attempt to speak in participants' terms while also giving voice to potentially unspoken aspects of participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2014).

Rigor in Grounded Theory

Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggested three criteria for rigor within qualitative studies. Credibility, auditability, and fittingness provide means for establishing rigor within grounded theory. Credibility refers to the degree to which the results represent an accurate picture of the data collected during the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Many qualitative studies demonstrate credibility through member checking processes. For grounded theory, credibility primarily comes through attention to concurrent data collection and analysis (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). In addition, the process of constant comparative analysis naturally creates credibility through constantly comparing conclusions against data.

Auditability refers to a need for clarification in the methodological decisions that are made during a study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Within grounded theory, auditability is generally accomplished through the memoing process which describes decisions made by the researcher and details the reasons for those decisions (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003).

Fittingness within qualitative research refers to the applicability and meaningfulness of the study for its audience in addition to applicability to individuals outside of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Within grounded theory, fittingness is addressed through a clear description of the sample and context of the data (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). This demonstrates diversity within the study that contributes to applicability within complex situations.

Reflexivity is unique to the constructivist branch of grounded theory research and provides an additional means of developing rigor (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist theorists recognize the co-creation of meaning through the research process as researcher and participant interact with one another. Positionality statements combined with intentional memoing allow researchers to engage in reflexivity related to their roles in the research and provide additional rigor to the study.

Research Questions

The basic research question in any grounded theory study is "What is happening here?" (Glaser, 1978, p. 57) This question emphasizes the importance of the social and psychological processes that grounded theory explores. Within the context of the overarching question above, the research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do marginalized students persist through counselor education doctoral programs?

2. What processes influence the persistence of marginalized students in counselor education doctoral programs?

Methodology

To answer the research questions above, I utilized CGT principles and procedures in the recruitment of participants, data collection, and data analysis. I will outline the specific CGT

procedures I used in this section. This section will specifically outline participants that were included in the study and processes used for recruitment, data collection, and analysis.

Sampling

In Chapter Two, I provided an overview of experiences of marginalized students based on different sociocultural descriptors. This review revealed significant shared experiences between these groups. Grounded theory encourages the use of purposive sampling to compare experiences and develop a meaningful theory that includes multiple perspectives. Using a diverse sample of marginalized students allows for comparison of participant data to identify common experiences of persistence for marginalized students. Specifically, it allowed me to better develop a theory on persistence of marginalized students in general rather than only on persistence of students based on a specific descriptor.

To answer the research questions identified, it was necessary to obtain a sample of participants who identified as members of one or more marginalized sociocultural groups and who recently completed or were nearing completion of counselor education doctoral programs. Consistent with a grounded theory framework, I used purposive sampling to identify individuals who had experienced marginalization because of sociocultural descriptor(s) with which they identify. For this study, I included participants who identified as LGBT, a person of color, and/or female. Although some participants belonged to multiple marginalized groups, participants only needed to identify with one group to be included in the study.

Research suggests that late stage attrition in doctoral programs is frequent and thus it was important to seek out the participants who are most likely to persist through their doctoral programs (Willis & Carmichael, 2011). The persistence factor was sought by selecting participants who had successfully defended a dissertation proposal or who had graduated from a

counselor education doctorate program within the last year. One participant was included in this study who had successfully completed comprehensive exams, but had not yet successfully defended her dissertation. By choosing participants who were close to finishing their degrees, I hoped to recruit participants who could best speak to persistence experiences. Research also suggests that faculty members view attrition, and thus possibly persistence, differently from students (Gardner, 2009). By selecting individuals who had recently graduated from a doctoral program, I hoped to minimize the impact of faculty environments while also allowing for proximity to the experience of persistence.

In a study of sampling practices within qualitative research, Guetterman (2015) found that studies included anywhere from 6-134 participants to reach saturation, while Mason (2010) found a range from 4-87 with an average of 32 participants. Still others suggested samples of 20-30 participants for grounded theory research (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). In general, each of the above researchers acknowledged a difficulty in identifying appropriate sample sizes.

Multiple studies within counselor education include samples of 10-12 participants to reach saturation (Fetherson, 2011; Parker et al., 2014; Tillman, Dinsmore, Hof, & Chasek, 2013). Mason (2010) noted that skilled interviewers may require fewer participants to reach saturation. In addition, Charmaz (2014) noted the importance of making claims consistent with one's sample; Charmaz suggested that small sample sizes are appropriate if the researcher only makes claims that are supported by saturation within the data. It is possible that one reason studies in counseling may frequently use fewer participants is the nature of the counseling profession which includes an emphasis on self-awareness and the ability to identify and describe processes. Participants in this study were doctoral-level counselor education students or graduates who had significant experience examining processes and describing those both verbally and in writing.

Based on the considerations above, I sought a sample of 10-12 participants to include in focus group data collection.

Participants

Ultimately, I obtained a sample of 10 participants. I used pseudonyms throughout data analysis, but will present participant data here separately to protect the identity of participants. Given the limited number of CACREP-accredited doctoral programs and limited number of graduates from these programs, presenting participant data holistically by individual participant creates risk that participants could be identified based on their combination of identities. When collecting demographics, participants were asked to self-identify their gender identity, ethnicity, sexual identity, marital status, program, ACES region, and current progress in program. To protect participant identities, I will not report university association in this description of participants.

The final sample included 10 students recruited from CACREP-accredited doctoral counselor education programs. This study included seven cisgender females and three cisgender males ranging in age from 27 to 36. Participants in this study identified as African American (n = 2), White (n = 4), Asian (n = 2), Middle Eastern (n = 1), and Eurasian-biracial (n = 1). Six participants identified as heterosexual and one participant identified within each of the following descriptors; gay, lesbian, queer, and bisexual. Three participants were married, three were in committed relationships, and the remaining four were single. All but two participants identified within the Southern Region of ACES. One additional participant was in the Western Region and another was in the North Atlantic region. Two participants had graduated from their programs at the time of the interviews, seven had successfully completed the dissertation proposals, and one participant was nearing completion of her dissertation proposal. Participants were employed as

professional counselors, adjunct faculty members, research assistants, graduate assistants, core faculty members, and self-employed.

Procedures

Prior to identification of participants and engagement in the study, I sought IRB approval to ensure ethical standards were upheld. In this section, I will outline the procedures I used in this study including recruitment of participants, collection of data, and analysis of data.

Recruitment

Recruitment of participants within grounded theory studies requires the identification of individuals who can bring depth to an experience. For this study, recruitment of participants required intentionality regarding the vulnerability of marginalized students and the impact of power and privilege within the role of researcher. Due to the sensitive nature of the experiences of marginalized students, I sought study participants through nomination by faculty members who were familiar with their experiences, level of openness, and potential willingness to participate. By seeking out participants faculty members believed could provide depth, I hoped to decrease the number of participants needed to reach saturation. In addition, participants were sought using two different listservs within the counseling profession. CESNET is a listserv for counselor education faculty and students and DIVERSEGRADS is a listserv for graduate students interested in diversity issues.

The CACREP website contains a listing of accredited doctoral-level counselor education and supervision programs, including an individual to contact within the program. Initially, I sent a letter via email to CACREP liaisons within all accredited doctoral programs with a request that they forward that information to all students who had graduated in the last year or who had successfully completed a dissertation proposal. Multiple schools responded saying that they

would forward to all students, only forward to past students, or were not able to forward at all based on their IRB procedures. One week after sending the initial request, I posted on the CESNET and DIVERSEGRADS listservs requesting participants. Two additional announcements were sent at one week and two weeks later. I also sent a request to the leadership of three divisions of the American Counseling Association: Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development, Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling, and Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling requesting that they forward the request to potential participants. Finally, I sent an email was sent to faculty members within my program requesting their assistance in identifying potential participants. I also used snowball sampling by offering study participants the opportunity to recommend individuals they knew that qualified for the study.

Within the request for participants, I provided a link to a Qualtrics survey where participants could be screened and request to be contacted for participation in the study (see Appendix A). This survey included questions to verify that students intended to persist or had persisted through their programs. In addition, this survey asked students to identify with one or more traditionally marginalized group for inclusion in the study.

After screening potential participants through the survey mentioned above, I contacted each participant via email with a letter outlining the purpose of the study and requirements for participation. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent statement. After obtaining informed consent, I provided participants with a link through which they could complete a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B). Finally, some participants completed a doodle poll to identify available times, while other participants were directly contacted via email to

schedule a focus group time. After scheduling a time, I individually invited participants to a

meeting via a Zoom videoconference link.

Auditor/Peer Debriefer

Prior to beginning data collection and analysis, I asked a peer debreifer/auditor to join in

this research study. This individual held identities different from me and had clinical experience

and training to provide feedback regarding data collection, analysis, and positionality. I selected

this individual in part because of his varied identities in addition to my belief that he would be

honest and direct in challenging me throughout the study. This individual sat in all the focus

groups and primarily served as a process observer, although he did occasionally ask clarifying

questions during the groups. Prior to and following every focus group, we compared our

experiences and memoed about the experience. We met after data collection and after

preliminary analysis to discuss and clarify emerging themes. Finally, this individual served as an

auditor who independently coded two focus groups and one individual interview.

Data Collection

In-depth interviewing is the most frequently used method for collecting data in qualitative

research. Charmaz (2014) acknowledged the value of additional methods including the use of

focus groups for grounded theory studies. Researchers have suggested that focus groups can be

especially meaningful for marginalized populations because they provide a space for validation

and support in addition to data collection (Mkandawire-Valhmu & Stevens, 2010). Finally, in

this study, where I, a white woman, sought participant disclosure regarding sensitive subjects, I

hoped that focus groups would provide a way of reducing my power and increasing participant

openness to dialogue.

Prior to conducting this study, I conducted a pilot focus group with four individuals from within my current doctoral program. I sought feedback from these peers and incorporated that feedback into the final interview guide that was used during this study. The feedback was primarily positive, but included a suggestion that clarification of the study at the beginning of the focus groups and additional context for the variety of marginalizing experiences might be helpful for participants. Based on that feedback, I included a discussion regarding the purpose of the study and a brief discussion of marginalization at the beginning of each focus group and individual interview.

For this study, I conducted three focus groups which ranged in length from 110 minutes to 120 minutes. The initial focus group was scheduled with three individuals, however one individual had a clinical crisis at the start of the meeting and was unable to attend. The second focus group initially included three participants, but one individual cancelled prior to the focus group, so only two individuals participated. The final focus group was scheduled to include five individuals; however, one individual did not attend. Following those three focus groups, I reached out to two individuals who participated in individual interviews which ranged in length from 55 to 62 minutes. One additional interview was conducted, however that participant was deemed ineligible due to not meeting the requirement regarding progress toward dissertation and the data was not included in the study. Focus groups and individual interviews were conducted via Zoom videoconferencing service. I requested that participants join via camera if they were able and all but one participant joined the conference with cameras on. One participant in the first focus group joined via telephone.

Throughout focus groups, I used an interview guide to provide a framework for exploration of participants' experiences (see Appendix C). Consistent with a CGT approach, this

interview guide served as a loose frame and allowed for openness in further exploration of experiences participants identified as especially salient to the research questions (Charmaz, 2014).

After conducting focus groups and analyzing data obtained from the focus groups, I sought two additional interviews with participants to provide additional insight into categories within the initial analysis. Beginning with focus groups allowed me to quickly collect a substantial amount of data to analyze and begin developing a theory. Focus groups allowed me to collect multiple perspectives for coding even in the first round of data analysis. Additional individual interviews obtained using theoretical sampling provided an opportunity to close gaps that were identified within the analysis of the initial data.

Data Analysis

As previously mentioned, data collection and analysis are concurrent within grounded theory studies. Data for this study were collected over a period of five weeks. I transcribed verbatim and analyzed each interview immediately after conducting the focus group. As additional data was collected, I compared new data with the already analyzed data. Coding within grounded theory involves initial coding followed by focused coding (Charmaz, 2014).

Throughout the coding process, I used an online based software, *Dedoose*, to organize my data, code, and memo. During the initial coding process, I engaged a line by line coding process that "simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and account for each piece of data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 43). Line by line coding within CGT allows the researcher to break data into more usable pieces of data that can be compared. During this coding process, I sought to develop an understanding of the meanings behind the statements in addition to using participants' own words to define experiences, a process unique to CGT. I coded each focus group and interview

individually, incorporating codes from previous analysis and adding additional codes as needed. Throughout this process, I consistently revisited previous analysis to further clarify codes.

Within grounded theory, initial coding begins to develop the story of the participants using short descriptive phrases (Charmaz, 2014). These phrases attempt to capture the social and psychological processes that the participant is discussing (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). After completing the initial coding, my focus shifted to an attempt to understand how the codes compared to each other. Finding areas of commonality and difference within the codes through constant comparison begins to allow categories to naturally emerge from the data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

As data collection and analysis proceeded specific codes emerged as most useful and descriptive of the meaning of participant experiences. These codes became focused codes and provide analytic insights into the data that could be tested against future data. To develop focused codes, Charmaz (2014) recommended asking the following questions:

1. What do you find when you compare the initial codes with data?

2. In which ways might your initial codes reveal patterns?

3. Which of these codes best account for the data?

4. Have you raised these codes to focused codes?

5. What do your comparisons between codes indicate?

6. Do your focused codes reveal gaps in the data (p. 140-141)?

These questions can help to identify focused codes, compare codes with new data, and identify areas where additional data may help clarify theory. While asking these questions of the data I adjusted codes and categories consistent with emerging themes. Ultimately, I connected these codes to each other to describe the process of persistence for these participants. I met with

my auditor after coding the first three focus groups an again after all initial coding was complete. I was working through focused coding and felt it would be helpful to have some additional input. At that point, we met to adjust emerging codes. After all coding was complete, the auditor completed his own coding process with two focus groups and one individual interview and then wrote memos regarding how his codes connected to the previous codes. This resulted in some changes in the wording of codes and clarification of codes for some participants.

After completing the data collection and analysis process, I provided participants with a written copy of the final analysis results via UT Vault, a HIPAA and FERPA compliance communication system used to communicate at the beginning of the study. Participants had the opportunity to respond via email with comments regarding the accuracy of the results and their response to the results. Although no participants chose to respond, the existence of this process helped me to remain consistent to participant meanings and descriptions and encourage me to continually evaluate the accuracy of my analysis.

Rigor Indicators

Credibility, auditability, fittingness, and reflexivity have all been mentioned as indicators of rigor within qualitative research and grounded theory research (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Hall & Callery, 2001). Below, I will outline the processes that ensured rigor within this particular study.

Credibility. Ensuring credibility within grounded theory requires researchers to demonstrate a connection between the data and results of the study. Within this study, the constant comparative analysis process involved intentionally checking conclusions against the data. The process of conducting focus groups provided initial data, and individual interviews provided a means of checking initial conclusions from the focus group data. In this way,

participants could confirm the credibility of previous conclusions or suggest alternate meanings to be included in the findings.

Member checking at the end of the study also provided a means of adjusting credibility. Within grounded theory, the results may not directly describe individual participants' experiences, but the theory that results should resonate with participants' experiences as a whole.

Auditability. In addition to coding using constant comparative analysis, I engaged a memoing process throughout data collection and data analysis. Memo writing provided "an interactive space for conversing with yourself about your data, codes, ideas, and hunches" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 72). Memoing allowed me to intentionally make note of potential analytic insights as they occurred to me and describe and understand my decisions during the coding process; ultimately, memoing assisted with development conceptual categories. This was especially important for me due to the extended timeframe for data collection in this study. Memoing helped me to remember reasons for assigning certain codes and helped me to develop continuity in the data analysis process. Engaging a memoing process also encouraged comparison of data with analytic ideas developed during the interaction. In this way, I was able to check my own reactions and potential insights intentionally against the data collected. In addition, my peer debriefer also participated in a memoing process during and after focus groups and while coding the data.

Fittingness. Fittingness in general refers to the ability to apply results from a study to similar individuals outside of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Fittingness within this study was addressed through attention to description of the participants who are included within the study. In addition, context is important to determining fittingness. For this study, I collected demographic and context information at the beginning of the study. This information combined

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with contextual information collected during focus groups provides the best means of ensuring fittingness within this grounded theory study.

Positionality. In addition to memoing, intentional reflexivity has been suggested as a means of increasing rigor within grounded theory studies (Hall & Callery, 2001). As a part of this study, a fellow doctoral student served as an auditor and peer debriefer. I shared my positionality statement with this individual prior to beginning data collection and we discussed specific ways my positionality might impact data collection and analysis. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I solicited feedback regarding positionality and adherence to the principles of the study. The positionality statement I shared with my peer debriefer/auditor is included below.

For the purposes of this study, I am a white female counselor education doctoral candidate at a major university in the southeast who has experienced attrition from a doctoral program. Prior to entering my current doctoral program, I attended a doctoral program in educational leadership for a little over a year. I earned an A in all of my classes, passed my qualifying exams with a perfect score, and I was not academically at risk. Ultimately, I dropped out of the program between a fall and spring semester without anyone ever really asking questions. In fact, as recently as three months ago I was still receiving emails from that university.

I dropped out of that program primarily because of experiences of marginalization, lack of connection, and unmet expectations. I had two professors who regularly made comments demeaning the intelligence and social position of women. One professor suggested that women did not belong in academia and regularly valued the voices of my male peers much more than those of the females. Another faculty member regularly made comments that demeaned women

and relegated them to social positions less than men. In addition to those issues, I experienced little contact or support from faculty and I had to put very little effort into achieving within that program. I had, and at times still have, mixed feelings about dropping out of that program. On one hand, it was the first time that I ever "failed" in an educational context, but I knew that this program was not healthy and that I would not truly value a degree I put little effort into earning.

Within the next year, I applied and was accepted to my current doctoral program. During the first year in my current program, I experienced significant disconnect with faculty, but I felt very connected to the other students. Even so, I frequently questioned whether I was a good fit and whether I could be a counselor educator. Again, I was a high achiever academically, but I was still frustrated with my place in the program. At the beginning of my second year in the program, I was able to develop a meaningful mentoring relationship with one faculty member that helped me to take risks in developing relationships with other faculty members.

Ultimately for me, connection with faculty and students was the most meaningful difference between persistence and attrition. I bring this experience with me into this research making it especially important that I am able to see beyond my own experiences to understand how persistence might be influenced by different things for other people. Based on my experience, I am likely to assume that relationship is an important factor for all doctoral students when considering issues of persistence and attrition. Additionally, I bring a belief that persistence is not always the best answer to challenges. While I want to focus on persistence, I can sense a resistance within myself to those who continue in programs despite experiencing some of the same things I did in my previous program. A recognition of my own experience with the topic allows me to engage a reflexive process through which I can set aside my own

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preconceived ideas about persistence and the processes surrounding the construct and be open to what the data may reveal.

In addition to having experience with attrition, I also have experiences related to diversity that impact my position within the research. I grew up in a very homogenous community and attended a small university with little exposure to diversity. I have very little connection to any ethnic heritage in part due to my adoption at an early age and issues surrounding my family of origin. For many years, this equated to a cultural colorblindness on my part and a resentment of others who did identify strongly with a specific ethnic or racial group. I did not really begin to understand my own culture and my role in systemic issues related to marginalization until I started graduate school.

As I have grown in experience, I have seen first-hand the lack of equality and depth of systemic and institutional discrimination that exists within current systems. I was especially struck by the number of young black adolescents that I worked with during my time in non-profit agencies. Although I was able to empathize with the experiences of these youth, there were times that I just did not get it. My whiteness and my privilege showed up in those relationships despite the best of intentions. I believe those young people would have benefited from a therapeutic relationship with someone who looked more like them and were able to connect with their experiences of marginalization without a need for explanation. This ultimately led me to wonder what it might take for the counseling profession to increase its diversity. We know that role models are important, and I think one key to increasing diversity at the student and counselor level is by increasing diversity at the faculty level. This belief, in addition to a recognition of a gap, brought me to the current study.

As I think about my role in facilitating this process through research, I think it is important for me to be honest with myself and the reader about my motivations for this work. Critical theorists emphasize the damage that a "white liberal savior" complex can have on work with marginalized populations (Hayes & Juárez, 2009). Specifically, actual meanings and experiences as portrayed by participants and can become "whitewashed" by my own interpretations of them and can become more about my role as a "good white person." Some of the processes mentioned above, especially memoing, can assist with minimizing this, but it is imperative that I also remain open to feedback in this area and willing to consistently examine my own position within the research.

I grew up in a religiously conservative household and attended conservative faith communities throughout my childhood. Today, I continue to spend a considerable portion of my life within religiously conservative circles. These communities tend to have strong beliefs about the appropriateness of the LGBT "lifestyle" and I grew up frequently being told how wrong and sinful those who identified as LGBT were. Although those statements do not reflect my personal values, beliefs, and experiences, I live with the reality and weight of those statements that were repeated for many of my formative years. The tension that I frequently experience as I seek to live out my own personal values and beliefs in this area is significant and will likely impact me as I engage discussions of marginalization with those who identify with the LGBT community. As I move forward, I think it is important to be honest with myself when reactions that come from internalized messages that were engrained in me for the first 23 years of my life get in the way of approaching the data from a place that values diverse perspectives and allows for differing viewpoints. In discomfort, it is easy for me to retreat to one extreme or the other and the most meaningful thing I can do for my participants in this research is to continue valuing

voices that may conflict with my own experience in this area, while also seeking perspectives that

may challenge those voices.

I naturally carry beliefs about the world that are colored by my experience in the world

as a white woman. Although these beliefs are not inherently right or wrong, they must allow

space for experiences and data that challenge those beliefs. Coming back to my positionality

within the research and engaging reflexively is important at each step in the process of CGT

work and allows me to own my role in constructing meaning while also placing the participants'

meaning at the forefront of the research.

Summary

I began this chapter by summarizing grounded theory methodology within qualitative

research. I continued by describing the use of grounded theory methodology to research the

persistence of marginalized students within counselor education doctoral programs. I concluded

the chapter by describing my own experiences and stating my own positionality with respect to

this research.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this chapter, I present the findings from my analysis of three focus groups and three individual interviews. The purpose of this project was to develop an emerging theory that explains the persistence process of traditionally marginalized doctoral students within counselor education programs. In this study, I used grounded theory methodology to analyze data from ten participants who identified with at least one traditionally marginalized group and who had completed or were nearing completion of their doctoral programs. This analysis resulted in five overarching themes that represent the most salient experiences of participants. These five overarching constructs are *Developing Awareness, Developing Identity, Identifying Motivation, Strategic Advocacy, and Strategic Support* (see Figure 4.1.*).* In addition, to these overarching constructs, sub-constructs help to clarify the experiences of participants. In this chapter, I present the results of this study organized based on these constructs and sub-constructs. As I present these constructs, I intentionally move between using pseudonyms assigned to participants and anonymously referring to participants to protect the identities of these participants within the small field of counselor education.

Figure 4.1. shows the model of student persistence described within the next two chapters. This visual representation of persistence includes the constructs and sub-constructs discussed within the next two chapters.

Authenticity
Desiring Visibility
Connecting Experience
Owning Privilege

Formal/Informal Support
Systems
Identifying Allies
Shared Experiences
Practical Support

Developing Confidence
Reconciling Consequences
Managing Energy
Delivering Strategically

Developing
Identity
(Who Am I?)

Developing
Awareness

Strategic
Support

Culture

Advocating
Strategically
(What Am I Going
To Do?)

Incoming Beliefs
Explicit Marginalization
Implicit Marginalization
Continuous Experiencing

Identifying
Motivation
(Why Am I Here?)

Carrying the Torch
Changing the Field
Identifying Outlets

Figure 4.1. Strategic Persistence Model

Developing Awareness

The first construct relates to how participants came to realize the marginalization that exists within doctoral level counselor education programs. In general, participants reported that a combination of their incoming beliefs and continuous experiences of marginalization impacted their experiences within and persistence through their programs. This construct includes four sub-constructs that further detail how participants came to recognize marginalization: *incoming beliefs, explicit marginalization, implicit marginalization and continuous experiencing.*

Incoming Beliefs

When beginning to explore their marginalization experiences, all participants described incoming beliefs that were generally disrupted early in their doctoral programs. All but one participant (Samantha) reported that they entered their programs with relatively positive beliefs about multicultural awareness and competency within the program. Some participants reflected their desire to enter the field because of the emphasis on multicultural competency. Others did not overtly enter the field based on this expectation, but realized the centrality of marginalization when they found themselves advocating for competence and against oppression in ways they did not expect when they began their programs.

Jessica reported a basic expectation that *"multiculturalism is fused throughout the curriculum"* and that this would create a safer environment for her as a person with a marginalized identity. When talking about marginalization, Brittany said *"I was so naïve about it, I think partially because of my age at the time"* reflecting a belief that marginalization wouldn't be frequent within her program. Ashley said, *"so my first yeah, I was like, this is great, we are going to talk about all this great stuff"* and spoke about her belief that her doctoral program would provide a safe place to process issues of diversity and social justice. Michael's

reflection seemed to resonate with many of the incoming beliefs of these participants when he said, *"I didn't know if I was…during my master's program, if I was just ignorant or I didn't see the full picture, but I had this beautiful picture of what counselor education was and the way that the faculty members projected themselves."* When talking about her faculty and fellow students, Sarah perhaps stated the underlying issue most succinctly when she said, "*I expected more from them.*"

Although most individuals reported a belief that their programs would honor diversity, one individual reported choosing counselor education because she believed it would provide a break from the marginalization experiences she had experienced in a prior field. Taylor stated, *"part of why I chose the field was because I knew there would be more acceptance and be more open."* In contrast, Samantha reported an expectation that she would need to tread carefully within her program and was surprised to find that she could be more open.

Generally, participants reported an underlying assumption that their program would provide a safe place for them to be who they were and process issues related to multiculturalism and diversity. This is important because it provides context for how participants would later process their experiences of marginalization and the emotional impact of those experiences. The next construct, *explicit marginalization* describes the types of issues participants confronted early in their doctoral programs.

Explicit Marginalization

Early in their programs, all participants reported at least one experience that significantly departed from their incoming beliefs. Generally, the first experience of marginalization occurred in the interview, orientation, or first course in their programs. While every participant could identify explicit experiences of marginalization and tell stories of oppression at the hands of

faculty members and other students, many were most impacted by the overall culture and environment within their programs. For many participants, these experiences would significantly impact their relationships with other students and their overall experience within their programs, and thus, contributed to their persistence process. In this section, I will describe experiences of explicit marginalization including tokenization, stereotyping, sexual harassment, being overlooked for opportunities, public humiliation, and stealing of ideas.

Tokenization. When speaking about her experience in tokenization, one participant reported that she "*felt like I was supposed to be this expert in, not only being Hispanic, but being a Hispanic female*" while another recalled an experience where he was asked to provide expert advice about working with Asian-Americans based on his identity. One queer participant recalled that people *"asked me, okay, well it's like 'you're a queer person. Why don't you tell us your experience?'"* and often expected him to speak on behalf of all queer people. Another participant recalled an experience where a male professor asked him to align with a belief that endorsed sexist stereotypes among a group of females because he was the only other male in the room. In each of these experiences, participants' identities were highlighted in public spaces, and they were placed in positions to educate fellow students and faculty regarding their identities or experience of microaggressions.

Questioning admittance. In addition to experiences of tokenization, participants frequently struggled with the reasons for their acceptance and appointment to positions within their programs. Four students specifically recalled feeling as if one contributor to their acceptance was their ability to provide diversity to their program. Brittany recalled faculty members mentioning what she brought to the program in terms of diversity as one of her strengths, which reinforced her marginalized identity as a reason for her acceptance rather than

her significant qualifications. At times, this caused students to question their abilities and wonder if that was the only reason they were accepted, despite evidence to the contrary. Jessica recalled:

> *For me, I started experiencing self-doubt about my own skills and wondered is something wrong about my writing? Am I inadequate? Was, was I (laughter) selected to balance the program, even though I'm capable and I have lots of credentials. It's just ... and like right now. I have this nervous laughter because for me it was something like uncomfortable to talk about.*

 Another participant recalled,

> *I knew in the back of my head that I was the token minority diversity person, like the token international, so I always had that in the back of my head, but it's never been something that stood out to me or that I thought too much of before I started the program. Most minority students who are internationals probably, including myself, would feel like "Well, the program accepted me because I was a person of color." That's just, like, again, invalidation not so much based on any form of accuracy or reality.*

Brittany remembered feeling like she was a token minority when she said, *"Sometimes I got that feeling. Specifically, from certain comments that I received about my diversity. About what I represent for diversity within the program that I received from program coordinators, or faculty members, but it never persisted for me."* For each of these participants, the question was never their ability to academically succeed, but self-doubt arose because of questions about why they were admitted into their programs.

In contrast to the experience of self-doubt, multiple participants recalled feeling that their programs benefited from their accomplishments despite overt oppression. One participant recalled feeling that his program *"pimped me out"* based on his identity, numerous accolades,

and contributions within the field of counselor education. Consistent with the concept of interest convergence, this program seemed to support racial justice work as it helped to raise its own notoriety rather than simply for the benefit of this individual. The program benefited from this participant's diversity and accomplishments but reciprocated very little in terms of financial or other support. Another student recalled receiving a prominent position within a counseling organization based on her diverse identity, but recalled that she ended up doing the grunt work under a white individual who took the credit. In these situations, students recalled feeling simultaneously honored and frustrated as specific parts of their identities were seemingly valued, but they, personally, were not.

Overt oppression. Finally, many participants recalled experiences of overt racism, sexism, and homophobia early in their programs. One participant recalled a time a faculty member assumed she held a Muslim faith because she is an Arab American and associated her with outspoken individuals on her campus who were yelling at others walking by them. Sarah recalled an experience early in her program where male students were talking about the physical attributes of teachers in a demeaning way. As the conversation morphed into discussing which one of their previous teachers they would want to have a sexual relationship with, she recalled speaking up about the implications of the conversation and quickly being dismissed by her peers. Sarah also recalled instances of explicit sexual harassment that went unchecked, although it was well-known within her program and the profession. Ashley reported similar issues that were mishandled within her department.

Four different participants recalled experiences where program faculty members questioned whether students should have to work with LGBT clients if they were not comfortable doing so. Taylor recalled an instance in her program where students were talking

about individuals they might not be comfortable working with. In that conversation, she was shocked to hear students talking about their discomfort working with LGBT individuals alongside their discomfort with sexual predators. She recalled, *"those two words were just too close together in a sentence."*

Stereotyping. Some participants also recalled experiences of stereotyping within their programs. An African American participant recalled, *"I decided to take both the quantitative and qualitative classes and it was assumptions from my peers that I would probably not do well with stats."* That same participant recalled faculty members suggesting that she should "*work on her diction*" and *"giving advice on my beauty regimen."* Another participant recalled a professor making assumptions about her religious faith based on her ethnicity. Finally, one participant recalled a faculty member insinuating that she was not as intelligent as her peers because she grew up in the southern region of the United States.

These experiences of explicit marginalization were frequent and impactful for participants. Participants described these experiences frequently with feelings of anger as they simultaneously talked about their expectations of programs and the early experiences that shook those expectations. For many participants, program culture and climate simultaneously allowed for overt oppression and created an unsafe environment that was even more impactful and difficult to navigate.

Implicit Marginalization

While all participants could identify specific instances and stories of explicit marginalization, they also talked about problems with overall culture and environment within their programs. Participants struggled to talk about less visible and more implicit forms of marginalization, but they seemed to find them even more distressing than the identifiable

situations discussed above. It is hard to nail down these experiences of participants even when writing about them because they primarily center around a feeling that the environment was *"toxic"* or *"unsafe"* for them. When talking about his program Jacob said, *"within this particular context and system. Um, so I mean, it is racist, it is sexist, it is heterosexist and genderist. I mean, it's all kind of things, um, happening here. And I just ... it's just so, uh, mind boggling to me."* This seemed to reflect the experiences of other students who reported a culture of oppression in their programs and struggled to talk about it.

Multiple participants talked about feeling devalued and a sense of obscurity based on their identities. Samantha talked about being surprised by assumptions faculty made about her while suggesting it was about more than a combination of experiences.

> *I don't think that I have one particular experience that happened, and I was just, like, upset by it. I think that when I first started the program ... I think there was just a lot of assumptions of things that I'd be interested in or things that I would've experienced, and it actually came more from faculty, which kind of surprised me.*

Both Ashley and Brittany struggled with the things that were not talked about in their programs. When talking about program culture, Ashley said that much of her frustration was *"really surrounding what's not said, the way that certain groups are talked about."* When thinking about the way that cultural groups were addressed within her program Brittany recalled, *"Yeah. I think that was the most blatant form of marginalization as we would define marginalization; I was excluded because of my status."* She spoke about situations where individuals who held her identity were not even a topic of discussion within her program.

Beyond implicit issues within programs, some participants also spoke about community and institutional issues that further marginalized them. Again, participants described a lack of

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sensitivity to the diverse experiences of individuals rather than specific instances. Taylor talked about the lack of awareness around materials present at a local clinic when she asked, *"Why do we have Focus on the Family magazines in this lobby, and we don't have anything about LGBT families? Nothing. Why?"* She recalled being told that other media was not present because it might offend people. Another participant, who identified as LGBT, recalled always being assigned clients who identified as LGBT. She recalled sometimes refusing clients and insisting that others should also learn to work with LGBT clients in her program. The assumption that she would be the best, and often only, person to work with this population reflected a lack of awareness and attention to diversity and multiculturalism.

One participant recalled an assumption that he was a rich student because he was an international student and a lack of knowledge about the types of issues that he faced. Another international student recalled an event regarding funding changes in her program. The changes were instituted at a level far above her program, but she was significantly impacted and was frustrated by the lack of concern her faculty showed. She recalled,

> *The part that bothered me the most was that no one wanted to talk about it. My chair…tried to be as supportive as one can be, but he didn't really understand the nuances of it. Didn't seem to want to understand the nuances of it. Never really asked…I think it just made everyone uncomfortable.*

Ashley and Jacob both mentioned a lack of multicultural awareness in their peers and recalled feeling like much of the lack of safety was centered around the competence level of students that were admitted into their programs. Similarly, other participants mentioned the issues with peer knowledge. Jessica recalled another student who offered her mentoring after suggesting that she might struggle to write in the program. This assumption was made prior to

her peer even seeing her writing. Both international students mentioned the lack of awareness from both faculty and students about the unique struggles of international students.

This lack of understanding and multicultural awareness when combined with overt oppression was a part of the culture in these programs that created an environment participants described as unsafe and at times toxic. Participants discussed faculty and peers as a part of these issues in their programs, but seemed to experience more issues with faculty.

Faculty reputation and attitude. When talking about the faculty in her program, Ashley recalled being frustrated with *"the way certain power dynamics play."* Similarly, participants generally reported frustration with power dynamics that existed within their programs. Specifically, participants observed that some faculty members were "*untouchable*" despite egregious violations, and some students appeared to hold favor with the faculty despite limited evidence of competence. Michael recalled a faculty member who had a significant influence in his program, but did not seem to embody the principles the program valued. He recalled,

> *I'm glad that this person really doesn't have too much of an influence in my day-to-day*
>
> *life. At the same time, it does make me angry, though, that this person is so highly*
>
> *regarded, despite going against many of the values that we have in our field.*

Sarah recalled a professor who frequently made comments about her body and made her uncomfortable with the way he looked at her. Similarly, she said,

> *particularly one male faculty member, who is kind of like the ... I want to use the word*
>
> *"patriarch," but not in very endearing way. I don't know if you can use that word un-*
>
> *endearingly, but ...Of the faculty, this individual is the highest-ranking professor within*

my program, and I didn't hear anything about him. Nobody had told me anything about him.

Sarah would later recall wishing that someone would have warned her about this faculty member or done something to stop his behavior. In contrast, Taylor recalled a faculty member warning her about another faculty member within her program:

My faculty member mentor had already butted heads with this other former faculty member, so I was kind of warned ahead of time, like, "That's not safe. That person is not safe for you, and be really careful. Careful what you say and do around that person because he is powerful in the field and on this campus, and be mindful where you align yourself."

Jacob recalled a fear of speaking out when he encountered an issue with a faculty member and said,

there was a part of me that didn't, um, was so afraid because that person I knew was also very political, um, and has done ... has had a history of doing things to doc students, placing barriers in their way, um, making sure that they don't finish, making it so much harder for them to finish the program.

This sense that there might be some retaliation from faculty members was echoed by other participants who recalled being afraid to speak out.

Although not all participants overtly spoke about their fear, there was a sense that some faculty members were dangerous and that participants had to be very careful in how they addressed the issues. Although most participants recalled experiences where faculty behavior did not change, Ashley remembered an impactful experience where a professor heard her frustration and changed behavior based on her feedback. She recalled,

And she just took it all, took responsibility for it. And so, you know, when I think of what helps me persist, it's moments like that that give me hope, that, that there is ... People will take responsibility and, and they're going to fuck up, but when it comes down to it, they're going to make it right.

Even as they spoke about junior faculty members who warned them or wishing that they had been warned, participants acknowledged the precarious position of junior faculty members with whom they were close. Although the lack of changes caused frustration and anger for participants and frequently led them to wrestle with when they would have a voice to make changes, they also remembered the importance of small steps faculty members took for them as mentioned above. These small acts helped participants to see power dynamics at play and often solidified their resolve to persist through their programs and one day hold the power to make real change for others. While this dynamic is addressed more fully later in this chapter, it is important to note here that faculty members had a significant impact on these participants in both negative and positive ways.

Emotional responses. Participants generally reported shock, confusion and frustration when confronted with issues within their programs. These participants came to their doctoral programs expecting a level of multicultural competence and were repeatedly shocked by the environments in which they found themselves. While participants recognized the importance of advocacy within the profession, they were generally surprised at the type of advocacy needed in their programs. Taylor recalled, *"I came into the field to help others and hold space for others and empower others, and I think I didn't expect, going into a doc program, to need to advocate for the things I found myself advocating for."*

Michael also recalled,

coming into a doc program, it was a wake-up call as to what really goes on within

counselor ed and things within the program but outside of the program. Stories that you

hear at conferences about "Faculty members at this program did this," and it's like,

"Okay. There's a lot of advocacy that needs to happen right in our own field, too."

As they experienced marginalization in their programs, several participants discussed experiencing competing reactions and expending effort to find balance when reacting. While they realized the value of raising awareness about their experiences, they struggled with the way they were forced into advocacy roles within their programs. Sarah stated "*I was blown away by this. That these individuals who come from counseling backgrounds, I was having the conversation with.*" When describing his experiences, Jacob struggled to even talk about his reaction and recalled:

And I think that sometimes it's almost as if ... it's like they're so disengaged from the

topic and almost to a point where they're ... It's as if they, they don't really know it

anymore. Um, and I, I sometimes sit there thinking, okay, well, here's, here's the issues

like sometimes it's almost like, oh, my God, my eyes are like getting bigger. Just when it

happens, it's like, oh, like the cringe worthy experience. Um, because it's almost as if

they, they don't care and it's almost as though they've become complacent in that ... in

that way.

One participant recalled experiencing both stereotyping and tokenization in a single experience and described his varied reactions to this experience when he said,

The professor turned to me when she was wanting to know more about Buddhism. I'm

Chinese but I'm not a Buddhist. Maybe she made an assumption there. So, after the class

... When she turned to me and asked me, "What do you think?" I had a few reactions. The

first one is, "Okay, why me?" Because I'm not a Buddhist so obviously, she has some

assumptions about what my religion is. Then my second reaction was, "Okay, I might not

know a lot about Buddhism, but in Malaysia there were a lot of Buddhists, so I do know

some things that I can share." So, it's kind of like some mixed emotions. One on hand, it's

like I'm being put in a spotlight even when I'm not a Buddhist. On the other hand, I find

that it is an opportunity for me to share what I know because I feel like I do know more

than maybe some of the people in the class. So, it's like a mixture of emotion.

Jessica talked about feeling conflicted regarding how to react and said, *"I've read about*

this, I've heard about this, but now I'm starting to experience this and not necessarily knowing

how to…. understand it." At the center of these mixed reactions was an urge to educate others

mixed with a frustration that they had to expend energy educating both faculty and peers in

addition to completing their doctoral programs. Ashley captured the statements of multiple

participants when she said, *"at the end of the day, it's energy that's being spent that other*

students aren't having to spend. So it is still a disservice." Brittany, who identified as an

introvert, recalled the significant amount of energy her work took alongside a belief that it was

her responsibility to continue. She said, *"I'll continue to do it until somebody else says 'Hey, let*

me take this on.' Then I'll just pass it on and go hide under a rock in New Zealand." Ultimately,

while educating and raising consciousness levels was generally a subject that was talked about

with passion by these participants, they also recognized the need to engage those activities as an

additional layer of marginalization.

Continuous Experiencing

Although participants reported initial confusion and shock, their emotional reactions

shifted as they continued to experience marginalization. Thus, the continuous nature of the

marginalization was a meaningful factor in participants' experiences. Participants used words like "*constant*" and "*pervasive*" to describe the ever-present nature of oppression and marginalization within their programs. Although individual experiences were impactful for these participants, it was the consistency of experiences that prompted action. These participants reported engaging with the marginalization in a personal sense in part because they could not get away from it. Ashley said, *"it got to the point where rage just…it became too much for me. I would every single day, I would come into class thinking what will it be today."* Sarah recalled,

> *It was constant experiences. For example, no matter how well I did on anything: a poster, a presentation, getting an award, doing this, doing that, the compliment was always "You're gonna be such a great mom." I don't have children. They're not in my future. Every time. Every time. I just kicked ass on this clinical demonstration: "God, you're gonna be such a great mom." Every time. It was having my breasts stared at every day, having this particular faculty member asking ... staring at my breasts. It's all of this. It's having to defend women and their right to not have to identify as a woman if they don't want to. It's gender equality and the fact that it doesn't exist, and that I have to prove it every day because nobody believes it in my cohort.*

Even as she spoke, a sense of building frustration permeated the conversation as other participants recalled the exhaustion they felt as they continuously experienced marginalization. Samantha also recalled the buildup of experiences that resulted in her beginning to speak out when she said, *"I feel like I just naturally am an external processor. So, I just finally came to a point where I was…things would happen and I'm like, "This is how I feel about this.'"* Generally, initial shock and confusion turned to anger and frustration that prompted participants to begin developing their confidence and questioning the things that were happening around

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them and the people who were perpetrating marginalization, rather than themselves. Sarah overtly described this flip when she said,

> *I had just come to the brim of the cup that was holding everything that I had ... when I realized that nobody else should have to go through this. It sucks. This position sucks. Every day is a challenge. And I don't want anybody else to have to do that, so I just came to the point where I was able to flip that lens to self to others, with regards to this and in regard to my experiences. And stubbornness, a little bit of that too, I think.*

The beliefs these participants held when entering their programs combined with continuous experiences of marginalization to create significant emotional distress and ultimately questioning for these participants. This questioning led to two overarching questions that participants had to answer to persist through their programs: Why am I here? and Who am I? The next two constructs, *Identifying Motivation* and *Developing Identity* describe the process through which participants answered these two questions.

Identifying Motivation

When experiencing marginalization within their programs, students frequently reported experiencing self-doubt and questioning their decisions to enter and persist through their programs. Participants generally reported this self-doubt did not include doubt about their academic ability to complete their programs. In fact, every participant reported feeling fully capable of the academic work required in their programs. Rather, these individuals struggled with whether their programs were worth the emotional toll it took to persist.

Identifying motivation was an important part of persisting through their programs for each of these participants. When talking about their motivation for persisting through their programs, participants described three distinct motivations for pursuing a degree: sub-constructs

carrying the torch, changing the field, and identifying outlets. These sub-constructs are the three primary motivations participants identified that helped them persist.

Carrying the Torch

The first construct, *carrying the torch* refers to participants' descriptions of ways in which they served as examples for those who were following behind them and, at times, for those who were in the program with them. One part of carrying the torch was simply their role in lowering the statistics of people who drop out of their doctoral programs. By being one less person, these participants believed they could change the narrative for those who come after them into counselor education. Several participants recalled knowing that they *"didn't want to be another statistic"* of a person who *"couldn't do it."* One participant recalled looking around and seeing that only two people in the program with her had successfully persisted. She remembered, *"All I kept thinking about was I didn't want to be another (laughter) another black girl to drop out."* Similarly, Ashley recalled, *"So, at the very least, I'm not going to be in the stat- ... statistic that I don't graduate. Here is another one who couldn't handle it."* Providing this picture of a person who made it through was part of what these participants believed helped them to persist through their programs.

In addition to wanting to influence statistics, participants also talked about setting examples others could see. They wanted students who came after them to see someone that looked like them making it through the program and to serve as a light that proves it is possible to make it. Jessica recalled wanting to show others that they were not alone in their programs when she said part of her role was, *"holding the torch for the ones that were coming right behind me. So it's like…I'm not going to push you over the finish line, but instead, you know what, we can be side by side. I can cheer you on."* Jacob took it a step further and talked about his belief

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that he had a responsibility to make it through his program and to show those behind him that they could make it. When talking about a difficult time in her life that challenged her persistence, Jessica recalled thinking, *"I've got to not only do this for me but I'm like I have to do it for them."* This was a sentiment generally held by all participants and reflected in their recognition of the lack of diversity and their desire to light a path for those coming behind them.

Another part of providing a way forward for those coming behind them was in the changes they made in their programs while they were a part of them. These contributions were varied, but frequently included developing support groups, challenging policies, and raising consciousness levels within their programs and the field. When thinking about what helped her persist, Jessica recalled, *"I have a purpose, and that a lot of the things I do are things that I'm not going to benefit from. But my hope is that people coming in will benefit from that, particularly students with marginalized identities."* Another participant recalled trying to make changes at a local clinic that might make it safer for both students and potential clients.

Finally, multiple participants talked about the importance of showing their family or others the value of their degrees and their persistence. Samantha recalled,

> *they don't really understand what I'm doing. They know I'm gonna get a degree at the end, but they're like, "All this other stuff ... What the heck, what do you spend so much time on?" So I started, and then after that it's like, "I need to show them what this is, why this is important to me."*

Others similarly recalled confusion from family members about their process in the doctoral program. Despite the lack of understanding, participants talked about continuing because they wanted to show their family that It was possible and to be an example. This was an especially common dynamic among first generation college students in the study.

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Changing the Field

The second construct, *changing the field* referred to the desire to make a difference for other students in the future. One of the reasons these participants talked about wanting to become faculty members was because they would be able to be something different for their students than what they experienced from their faculty. For others, they wanted to be there for their future students like mentors were present for them in their programs.

In addition to their desire to be supportive faculty members for traditionally marginalized students, several participants talked about their ability to raise consciousness levels regarding the state of counselor education and the kinds of marginalization and oppression that traditionally marginalized students experience. As mentioned previously, several students talked about their desire to have faculty members protect them, stand up for them, or warn them about other faculty members when they did not. These participants then talked about wanting to be that person for someone who is coming behind them. These participants felt a responsibility to make a difference because they recognized that they were part of something bigger and they had the potential to make a difference in important ways for their communities. Jacob spoke about his desire to make a difference and his recognition that he is a part of something bigger when he said, *"I'm not just me, um, that I'm me as a part of the system. And if I don't do something to change it, then who will? Um, and that I need to do something."* He also said, *"I have a chance to make a different kind of change here. Um, and I have a chance to hopefully work with other people to make this place a little bit more transformative, um, and hopefully change the way that we see the system."* Jacob focused his attention on making systemic changes that might influence the environment for future students.

For some participants, part of their motivation was to become what a mentor had been for them in their program. Sarah, for example, recalled thinking, *"You can get through this and make a difference for somebody else or do what my chair's doing now and support any other individual who might be experiencing oppression. You'll be able to help that person also progress through their degree completion."* Similarly, Sarah talked about the importance of continuing so that her voice would be heard when she said,

> *To put it very plainly, I almost continue out of spite because I'm like, "You will not dictate my path. You will not dictate my success, and when I do have that position of power where I can speak ... Maybe it won't be until after another six years of this with the tenure process, but there will come a time where I will be able to really speak with my voice and give space for others to speak their voice, and you're not gonna dictate that."*

Samantha said,

> *I'm like I want to keep going because I feel like I need to be there. I need to, maybe, eventually be a voice for someone and make those changes, whether it's mental health or counseling in general, whether it's being a clinician or being a faculty member.*

Although participants recognized that it may be years before they would be able to make a difference in the climate of counselor education programs, knowing they might eventually have a voice that might change the narrative for those behind them was an important part of who they wanted to be and what pushed them forward. Michael recalled a particularly painful experience in his program where less privileged voices were shut down by privileged voices in the room. He remembered,

> *It was in that moment, exactly, where I was like, okay, breathe. I don't have to let this impact me. I don't have to take it personally. That's his own stuff, and I am going to strive*

to be a faculty member who is different. Who does not just value inclusivity but practices

inclusivity in everything that I do and every decision that I make.

This idea of being different helped participants to navigate painful experiences; many of them also learned how they wanted to be when confronted with similar situations.

When talking about her persistence, Brittany recalled the importance of increasing the visibility of marginalized populations. She recalled,

I persisted because I wanted that work in the academic setting. I wanted it to be talked

about in technical setting. In the educational setting. I knew that I needed to be one of the

few who do talk about it.

To her, it was important to be a part of making sure that issues of diversity and social justice were a core component of counselor education.

Multiple other participants talked about how their current work was meaningful in raising awareness and identified ways they might seek to raise awareness later in their work. This motivated many students to make it through the arduous task of writing a dissertation. Michael recalled the fear he had when approaching his dissertation work and the changes that happened once he began to hear stories and recognized the importance of those stories being heard. He said,

Once I was into the research and doing the interviews and hearing some beautiful,

inspirational stories, that was enough to almost completely silence my fears because the

fears didn't matter anymore, just because the stories that I was hearing through my study

were so powerful and inspirational and enlightening.

In all, part of changing the field was providing an avenue through which the voices of marginalized students were visible and heard by others in the field.

When talking about the issues she saw with lack of multicultural knowledge in peers, Sarah mentioned the importance of educating in the moment, but also said *"you become that educator and that researcher that can then make those impacts moving forward."* This sense that small changes now might result in larger changes for future students was the underlying message in many participants' statements. Jacob recalled part of his motivation when he said,

> *that somebody who is in my shoes is not going to face these same, uh, same experiences. Um, and that's what I hold onto. Um, I hold onto that belief that somehow my hope ... my hope is going to, um, that we're going to be able to change this someday and that people don't have to face the same things that I did.*

Samantha spoke about the importance of focusing on learning and making a difference even during negative experiences in her program. She said,

> *you have to be open to learning from those negative experiences, too, and not everybody is. You take these difficult and dejecting experiences, and there's something that you can pull out of that to make you better, so that you can support another individual.*

Participants focused on learning from the bad and building on the good in their programs while keeping their focus on the future and their potential to make changes.

Even in this area, there seemed to be a sense of pressure for these individuals to fill yet another role. While they were generally optimistic about the changes they could make for others through their presence, there remained a sense that this was yet another role they were taking on in addition to the already exhausting role of new professor. For some, there was an underlying sense that this wasn't the way they would most want to advocate or make a difference, but it was the path in front of them and they would not shy away from it. This can be seen when Brittany said,

If I choose not to do it and they choose not to do it, then who will do it? You know? It's

part of our responsibility as educators and as advocates. That's really, again, why I kept

on going. The work needed to be done. I'm not one to shy away from responsibility, even

if I don't want that responsibility. It just needed to be done.

Sarah summarized the thoughts of participants in her focus group when she said, *"Even if it*

means we have to go a different path than we thought we would, we're gonna get there because

it's up to us and what we get to offer to the next generation." There was a sense that the roles

they were taking often weren't their first choice or the path they planned, but they were

nevertheless committed to the road ahead and to finding ways to change the field not only for

themselves, but mostly for others.

Identifying Outlets

Finally, students mentioned finding outlets within their programs in which they felt they

could make a difference even while in their programs. As previously discussed, for some

students, dissertations served as a way they could process their experiences and make a

difference for others by telling their stories. For others, writing articles for publication and

papers for classes allowed them to raise consciousness and talk about the things that were

important to them that they were sometimes not able to talk about in their programs. For others,

hard work lead to leadership positions, awards, or other accomplishments and became a way of

bringing awareness to their identities and intersectionality.

Brittany recalled using coursework and writing to "*say something*" in her program.

When talking about her desire to see changes happen and how she used her voice she said,

I think the way it manifested for me is that all of my work, all of my academic and my

research was about me saying something, but I was never one to verbalize it or to ... I'm

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not one to do the Facebook posts, I'm not one to shove these conversations, or even have

these conversations with everybody. The way that I perceive my own need to

communicate and to process and to verbalize and to advocate is through my own

research and my own work.

Jacob recalled thinking,

This is some crap and I'm going to write about it. (Laughing) So, um, whatever platform

that means. So I mean, and that's kind of one of those ways that we challenge, right. Um,

because I don't want it to just be this simple academic exercise that I just ... oh, yeah, I'm

just going to write about it.

Michael recalled,

For me, it was once I actually started doing research. The research, ironically…It's a

direct correlation to some of what my own personal experiences, and so, in some sense, it

was almost a way of …coming to peace with what will never be something that I can

have, but maybe I can help others in their lives have that.

Ashley similarly talked about her work as a means of saying something about the things she saw

going on in her program. For these participants, one means of persisting was through finding

ways to say something even during their programs. At times, participants worried about what

this might do to them. Brittany recalled wondering if she might be "*pigeonholed*" into a certain

type of work because those were the things she was processing and talking about in her writing.

Others experienced negative reactions similarly, but found experiences of finding outlets were

cathartic and meaningful experiences for them despite reactions from others.

Developing Identity

As participants began wrestling with the reality of marginalization within their programs, they encountered situations that required them to answer the question "Who Am I?" Although participants had a strong sense of self when entering their programs, many of them began to question themselves after repeated instances of marginalization and oppression. This construct captures the process through which participants solidified their sense of self in the context of oppression within their programs. Included within this construct are the sub-constructs, *Authenticity, Desiring Visibility, Owning Privilege, and Recognizing Broader Experience.* Each of these sub-constructs describes a process through which participants began to know more about themselves and struggled with who they wanted to be in their programs in the context of their experiences of persistence through marginalization.

Authenticity

As participants talked about experiences within their programs, they frequently mentioned feeling like they had to balance being themselves and being who others expected them to be. At times, this struggle related directly to their identity such as when Ashley talked about the expectation that she be a "*model minority*." Other times, this experience related to how they would respond to marginalization. Individuals frequently struggled with whether they should be themselves, and several participants mentioned a struggle to balance authenticity, integrity and safety while also balancing the desire to persist through their programs.

Jessica recalled struggling when professors asked her to do things that were contradictory to what she believed was best for her. Early in her program, Jessica talked about following the recommendations of her faculty even when she knew they were not right for her. Later, when a professor recommended that she needed to change the way she talked and her beauty routine

Jessica chose to be true to herself rather than follow the professor's recommendation. She recalled struggling because she wanted to be cooperative and liked within her program, but recalled.

> *I need to do what is going to work best for me and what I am going to feel comfortable about since I believe in being genuine and I think if I ... You know, if I do try to adhere to my professors' recommendations, but if it's something like I totally disagree with being able to use my own judgment.*

For Jessica, and others, being authentic was an important part of her identity that she sacrificed early in her program; later in her program, an important part of persistence was taking back her voice and remaining true to who she was.

Hannah echoed Jessica's sentiments and recalled worrying about what others might think about her presentation during the interview process. She recalled wanting to make a good impression and wondering if she needed to change who she was to do that. Other participants similarly recalled making decisions that required them to choose between being authentic and being what others expected them to be. Hannah recalled needing to change who she was in different settings when she said, *"'Well, even just code switching. I mean, I wouldn't talk the same way I would talk with my people (laughter) family, friends, whoever they might be that I felt like I could talk in that institution in that setting."* Finding ways to be true to themselves even amidst these small sacrifices was an important part of the persistence process.

At times, participants recalled situations where they felt a need to protect others from their experiences. Brittany recalled an instance where she was deeply impacted by unfair policies within her institution, and felt like she couldn't be authentic in her anger and frustration. She said,

At the time I think I was, you know, in the counseling field you're always, at least for me, I wanted to make everybody around me comfortable. We didn't really have as much awareness of multicultural issues and validation of feeling and this need to make the dominant group feel comfortable for whatever reason, or not feel uncomfortable. I never pushed it. I never asked. I just went with the flow. Didn't want anyone to feel uncomfortable or to perceive me as weak or resentful or angry. Which I was.

At other times, this battle for authenticity was specifically related to advocacy roles participants found themselves confronting in their programs. Jacob recalled expectations that he wouldn't assert himself within his program and said,

I mean, it's like the reason why people just expect me to be nice and unassertive and to not do anything about it. And it's like they have attributed these stereotypes to me…they feel like I won't do anything about it, so they can just, just not do anything.

Participants struggled with whether to fit those stereotypes to survive their programs or to push back against oppression and remain authentic to the advocate part of themselves. Ashley recalled cultural pressure *to "be a good girl"* and stay quiet, but ultimately spoke out against the oppression in her program. Michael reflected the general statements of participants when he said,

it's a part of who I am to say what's on my mind and to advocate for people who don't have privilege. I know when that part of me is stifled and I have to be quiet, it feels like it's sacrificing a part of who I am.

In similar ways, each of these participants talked about advocacy as a part of what it meant to be authentic for them.

For Michael, the question of whether to be true to himself was driven by family conflict, but still influenced his persistence. He recalled questioning whether to pursue his passion through his dissertation studies and knowing that pursuing his passion would have consequences in his personal life. He debated, *"Do I follow my true passion of what I really want to do, despite the ramifications that I'll have from certain family members and bringing up stuff and fears inside of me that I've carried around for so long?"* Ultimately, Michael chose to pursue his passion and believed that was a primary contributor to his persistence through the dissertation process.

While remaining authentic was a part of persistence, it is important to note that authenticity did not come without consequences. Ashley recalled being labeled a troublemaker and often thought that her concerns were ignored because she chose to be true to who she was and act. She recalled,

> *you begin to get a reputation and I unfortunately believe that I have one, where you are easily dismissed as oh, she's just mad about everything. She's just never pleased. She always has something to complain about. She's just a whistleblower for no reason and wants to create problems. Um, and it's easier for faculty to dismiss you, um, and to kind of, um, bar you from particular opportunities.*

Another participant recalled being labelled "*mean*" and felt that her perspective was sometimes overlooked within her program in part because of her outspoken nature. Still another participant recalled being excluded from conversations because others believed she was too emotional to effectively engage multicultural conversations due to her expressions of anger when oppressive situations arose. Each of these participants talked about the importance of speaking out as a

reflection of their broader identity, but were quick to acknowledge that it was a complicated part of their persistence process.

Desiring Visibility

As participants struggled with who they were and who they wanted to be within their programs, all of them mentioned the importance of being seen. At times participants recalled wanting their marginalized identities to be recognized and valued within their programs. At other times, participants specific recalled important times that people could see them beyond their marginalized identities. As participants worked through developing their identity within their programs, being seen by others helped them to see themselves. Because participants frequently felt like their identities were obscured in their marginalization experiences, it was important to them that they had spaces where they were visible and where people could recognize and expose parts of them that even they themselves sometimes did not recognize.

Multiple participants talked about the sense of invisibility or obscurity that surrounded their experiences. Brittany said, *"there was this sense of invisibility for me and that was the most challenging; if I didn't bring it up, then nobody would know about it. Nobody would ask me about it. Nobody would even be concerned."* While talking about his experiences in his program, Matthew said, *"it's not really personal. They don't see me as really a person."* Similarly, Jacob described this sense of invisibility as "*dehumanizing*" and talked about the lack of attention to who he is in his program. At times, participants talked about this dynamic in tandem with their experience of one identity being under a microscope. One participant said, *"I don't want to be the Hispanic-bearing flag at all times. Let me just be a human for a little bit."* There was a sense that this pattern of invisibility was difficult for students, and they described a desire for the whole of their persons to be more visible in their programs. Participants generally

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described instances where they were "seen" as moments that lifted them up and contributed to their persistence.

When talking about being "seen" participants described interactions with faculty, peers, and family members. One participant talked about the importance of her wife's support and encouragement. She recalled that her wife was helpful by *"reminding me who I was and why that was important."* Taylor talked about the frequency of constructive critical feedback during doctoral programs and recalled the impact when faculty could see her positive qualities. She remembered, *"I just recall from three faculty members, in particular, they just had this beautiful way of telling me the things that I was doing well."* Ashley recalled an impactful experience in her program when she said,

> *A faculty member gave me the message, said to me that I was brave and I was a warrior. So I think that gives ... These are messages that I've never internalized, adjectives I would never give myself... to answer your question again, something that helps me persist, is when people see me for things that I don't see myself. And when they can give me a message that is counter to all of societal messages, would never ... I'm like literally a small person. I'm like skinny. Like no one would ever tell me that I was brave and a warrior, like ever.*

This experience was especially impactful for Ashley, because she had taken so much criticism for her strong voice in the face of oppression. She talked passionately about her advocacy efforts and described the pain of being labeled negatively in her program. Being seen for her was a powerful experience that contrasted many of her experiences and gave her hope.

Jacob also talked about his experience of invisibility and his desire to be seen in his program. Jacob primarily talked about this dynamic in the context of intersectionality. To him,

it was important that people saw him as more than a sum of his various identities. The "reductionist" approach that he found within his program served to obscure the complexity of who he is and contributed to a sense of invisibility. When talking about his experience of visibility, Jacob said,

> *I mean, these really critical incidents, or whether they are these small moments where people say some really positive, positive statements to us. I mean, does mean a lot. Um, I think that's like sometimes it's like, helping us to remember the value that we ... sometimes we do or we don't ... or at least in my case, I know sometimes I don't see myself.*

Jacob seemed to capture the sense that these moments were valuable primarily because the feedback they received once again helped these participants to see themselves. A sense of internalizing the oppression they felt was common in these conversations, and moments where someone else was able to help them remember who they were was an important part of their persistence.

Recognizing Broader Experience

Although participants frequently talked about the importance of being seen beyond their membership within a marginalized group, they also felt a desire to recognize their membership in those groups. Recognizing the broader context of oppression and their membership in a group that is impacted by systemic oppression helped these individuals to persist at times when they questioned who they were and what they were doing. At times, participants seemed hesitant to talk about their experiences, in part because they recognized that this experience is not one unique to them and their programs. It was important for participants to identify with a group beyond themselves and recognize their experiences within the broader experience of oppression.

Jacob talked about the importance of and understanding his victories within the context of broader victories for his community when he said, *"there's a piece of it that shows that this is also thinking about representation for the community. That sometimes that we need to have these, um, have these particular spaces to really show up for the community."* Ashley emphasized the importance of understanding that her experiences of marginalization and oppression did not begin and end with her program. She recalled embedding her work in a broader context when she said,

> *'But in general, you're also part of a bigger community of oppressed persons. And sort of what it means for us as a group to fight for liberation. And so it's, it's more than sort of, um, yes, it's about what we can do for our profession, but it's also for us as a group, how do we free ourselves. How do we liberate one another.*

Brittany recalled world events that occurred during her program and her hesitancy to allow herself to be impacted by them. She recalled the moment when she realized that her place in the broader context was important and that part of her persistence was allowing herself to identify with things that were happening to others who shared identities with her. She said,

> *For me to feel like I shouldn't be upset because I wasn't personally targeted, again, this is just a system of the larger society telling me that I can't be sad about something. Or that I can't be upset or happy about something. This is just a function of the broader society, not so much me personally. I think I started intentionally trying to validate my own feelings instead of having to rely on somebody else to do it for me.*

Michael recalled similar reactions to world events that impacted several students in his program. He remembered feeling dismissed and invalidated in his emotional reaction to a broader culture of oppression that was being validated on a national level. Even so, his identification with a

broader cultural group helped him to recover from this experience and understand his role in bringing about change. For these participants, recognizing their place in a broader culture helped them to continue finding meaning in showing up and to depersonalize oppression in crucial moments.

Owning Privilege

Every one of the participants in this study mentioned their own privilege at some point in the study. This came out at different times and in different ways, but participants could see that while they did have marginalized identities and were oppressed both within their programs and outside of them, they also walked with privilege that others around them did not. When connecting this dynamic with recognition of broader experience, participants reflected on how they used privilege in their lives. Two participants specifically mentioned times when they inadvertently marginalized another group. This balance of oppression and privilege illuminates the line that many of these individuals are trying to walk through their programs and that contributes to choices they make as they attempt.

In many situations, talk of privilege was a quick comment about the power their privilege afforded these individuals in situations of oppression. Michael connected his ability to walk away from an oppressive situation to his privilege and power when he said, *"I can honestly say that that stuck with me, but it hasn't, necessarily, carried it with me because I had the privilege and power to step away."* Taylor recalled the privilege connected with her ability to physically move away from the *"toxic environment"* in her program and to complete it from a distance. When talking about their privilege, some participants talked about their usual position of advocating for others rather than themselves. Embedded in these conversations was a sense that they had positions of power that others did not.

Similarly, issues of privilege and power were embedded in conversations around changing the field of counseling. Alongside conversations about misuse of power by faculty members were conversations about how these participants might use that power more appropriately in their own careers. In their own ways, all participants recognized a layer of privilege that comes along with their roles as doctoral students and faculty members.

For others, like Ashley, there was an overt conversation about the ways privilege helped them to persist. Ashley recalled,

for me, a lot of ... if we're going to talk about intersectionality, a lot of my persistence in the program is related to a lot of my privileged identities that I come in with, that kind of will buffer all of the barriers and oppression that I face at the same time.

Ashley talked about her class privilege and her ability to "*look white*" because of her mixed race. She specifically spoke about how her class privilege impacted her academic abilities and ultimately provided her with an outlet in her program. In addition, she recalled her academic abilities providing her with protection from retaliation. She recalled,

So at the end of the day, if I give you good work, there's nothing you can say to me. You can't ... you can't. You don't want to. You're not happy to let me pass with no revisions. But I did the work, some of it is related to my privileges and sort of my ability to write well.

Jacob talked about the privilege he held as a cisgender male with a supportive family. When thinking about the ways his privilege helped him persist, Jacob talked about the social capital that provided him with the ability to navigate systems within his life. He said, *"I ... and I feel like I'm ... that my privilege has also really given me the leverage. Um, the leverage to really kind of move and transcend through the system."*

Again, it is important to recognize that this privilege helps these students to navigate experiences of oppression that should not be a part of their experience. Ashley spoke most directly to walking this line between privilege and oppression when she said,

> *Yes. There is the part of I do feel like I need to work twice as hard and be twice as good for them to just leave me alone. So that is true. And at the same time, I think that my ability to do that and still have a little bit of energy left over, is related to really my class privilege and educational privilege, for sure.*

So, while these participants recognized privilege as a part of their experience and could identify ways they leveraged this privilege to persist through their programs in many ways their privilege provided a small step toward balancing the scales rather than an advantage for these participants. Even so, recognition of this privilege and intentional leveraging of the power associated with it was a part of persistence for these participants.

Strategic Advocacy

All participants wrestled with the questions "Who Am I?" and "Why Am I Here?" during their programs. Answering these questions helped them to develop confidence and resilience as they moved through their programs and began to ask themselves "What am I going to do?" Coded as *strategic advocacy*, this question defined many experiences, and became especially important once participants solidified reasons for completing their programs and who they wanted to be. This question was the center of significant wrestling for participants as they attempted to figure out what to do when confronted with marginalization and identified opportunities for advocacy in their programs. Some participants also experienced internal resistance as they wrestled with wanting to be an advocate and resenting the extra energy advocacy cost them.

As participants continued through their programs, they encountered frequent situations where they had to choose how to react to marginalization of themselves or others. *Strategic advocacy* describes how students made decisions about when they would speak out against the things happening around them and when they should not. Participants recalled making decisions based on their energy levels and constantly weighing potential consequences of their decisions. In addition, participants recalled being careful about the how they advocated for themselves and others. At times, participants also talked about learning from junior faculty members they witnessed navigating similar experiences. For these participants, knowing when and how to advocate for themselves and others was a time-consuming process that took a significant amount of energy and was important to their persistence. In this section, I address the sub-constructs, *developing confidence, reconciling consequences, managing energy, and delivering strategically.*

Developing Confidence

Developing confidence was a construct that seemed to connect participants' experiences of questioning themselves to participants questioning others, a key feature of strategic advocacy and, ultimately, persistence. Participants developed a sense that they were competent and had the ability to "*forge a path*" that might be different from what faculty members or other students expected from them. Participants noted internal confidence and drive as important factors that helped them let negative interactions and statements slide off rather than distracting them from their goals.

Some participants developed internal confidence when working through marginalizing experiences. Taylor recalled, "*so I just came to the point where I was able to flip that lens to self to others, with regards to this and in regard to my experiences. And stubbornness, a little bit of*

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that too, I think." Samantha recalled, *"'I'm thinking about my experience, and I feel like I just naturally am an external processor. So I just finally came to a point where I was things would happen and I'm like, nope."* Jessica recalled developing courage and confidence through her program that helped her to confront issues. She focused on learning to stand up for herself amid marginalizing experiences while also finding ways to work with individuals with whom who she had previous negative experiences.

Although many participants talked about a process of developing confidence in their programs, others attributed confidence and drive as qualities they brought into programs. Brittany recalled feeling confident in her academic abilities and refusing to give up. When asked about factors in her persistence she said*, "my own desire, my own motivation, and me not wanting to be a quitter."* Jessica said, "*more or less my own ... um, I would say my own desire to succeed and achieve."* Matthew recalled, *"I believe in myself, in my capabilities and in my skills to be able to complete my studies."* Sarah summarized the discussion in her focus group when she said, *"it sounds like a lot of the persistence of each person, each of us, has discussed is very intrinsic. It's part of who we are, and we're not gonna let somebody take that away from us."* Whether developed during the program, or an intrinsic part of their identities, internal confidence and grit was an important part of persistence. Participants spoke of *"pushing through it"* despite negative experiences in part because they believed in themselves and in their abilities.

Reconciling Consequences

Participants frequently talked about costs they knew their decisions would have for themselves and others around them. At times, participants needed to balance decisions that might allow them to persist, but might not seem like the best decision in the moment. At other times, participants recalled being choosing to be silent in order to persist, and feeling guilty or

inauthentic because of their inaction. Participants talked about processes through which they reconciled themselves with consequences of speaking up or being silent at different times in their programs.

The individuals in this study were acutely aware of the potential for retaliation when advocating within their programs. One potential consequence participants had to reconcile was the potential that advocacy might have a negative impact on their career, including their ability graduate and to get a job after graduation.

Michael recalled, *"When you're authentic and you advocate, if you advocate in a wrong way or say something wrong, it can come back and get you."* Similarly, Jacob recalled,

I felt really afraid to say anything, to make any waves, to make, um, to say anything too publicly, or to even say something to another faculty member, um, because what I was afraid what would happen is that I would say something to one faculty member, it would ... they would try to confront that person and then it would come back to me. And ultimately, I would be the one that would, um, would suffer for it.

Sarah talked about this struggle when she said,

Everybody was struggling to survive, and I still have that battle in my mind. How do I go about addressing this on a scale when this is a very small community? Counselor education is a very small community. Am I going to be hurting myself? Do I have to wait to get into a position and get tenure and wait all this time in order to actually speak to my experiences with this? I don't know what the answer is.

Michael echoed,

I said for two years, "I can't wait 'til I'm secure in a job, so I can respond to the craziness that's been that"' There's been so many things where I'm like, "Oh, I want to write

something, but, oh, I don't have a job yet. I'm just gonna be quiet." That's just a small

example, but it actually is true because there's so much ... It's so small that there's so

much judgment. I feel like you have to watch yourself.

Sarah recalled an internal battle about whether to address issues when she said,

I couldn't help but think that's where I'm at, making those decisions. I don't have a job.

I'm not there. How do I address something that I know to be wrong and incongruent in a

strategic way? I don't know. Do I sacrifice that for the sake of getting to that position and

just wait until I have that safety, or do I do something now? I don't know.

For each of these participants, questions arose about what consequences they were okay

with and when they might take a different approach or not speak up because they knew it would

place a significant roadblock in their paths. It is important to note that participants found

alternate ways to speak up when they needed to choose self-preservation and a direct route held

too drastic of consequences for them.

In addition to potential for retaliation, participants talked about personal consequences for

them, whether they chose to speak up or not. Ashley spoke about this struggle when she said,

And it becomes really frustrating and hurtful, as Jacob was saying, to have to sit in the

room and you really have to decide how do I want to be offended in this moment? Do I

want to be offended by allowing something to be said about me or others who I care

about? Or am I going to be quiet and that's going to be something that I'm going to have

to go home and not sleep well about.

Taylor recalled confronting a peer and getting *"feedback from a faculty member, who*

probably shouldn't have shared this, that I was mean. That I was the mean one because I

confronted something that I saw that was inappropriate and that was the word that was used,

that I was "mean." Sarah recalled that speaking out *"very much has colored how [she is] perceived in the cohort and in interactions."* More specifically, she shared, *"the way that I'm perceived by the gentlemen within my cohort is very much as the over-sensitive, 'careful what you say around her.'"*

Ultimately, participants had to find a way to deal with potential consequences regardless of whether they chose to speak. When attempting to reconcile her decisions, Sarah said, *"You can't teach if you don't have that position, right? So there is that."* This seemed to resonate with other participants as they recalled being okay with negative perceptions of them, but finding it important that they did not lose the ability to make a difference by getting a faculty position. For others, like Ashley, they made a choice not to go into counselor education and felt more freedom to push boundaries within their programs. Sarah specifically recalled,

> *I think I have a lot to offer and it's getting to the point that I'm not willing to sacrifice anymore and sort of be like a sacrificial lamb or like a punching bag. It's getting to the point that I'm not sure that I'm willing to continue in the field, even though I will graduate.*

Participants encountered personal and professional consequences for their speaking up in their programs. For them, recognizing the consequences and strategically making decisions was an important part of persistence. At times, participants encountered negative opinions of them and while they were hurtful, they perceived the causes as worth it. Other times, participants found ways to be okay with experiencing some guilt for putting their careers first and being less direct in their approaches to preserve their future careers. Regardless of the path they took, it was important for participants to find a way to be true to themselves amid potential compromises.

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Managing Energy

In addition to reconciling consequences, participants talked about making decisions based on the amount of physical, mental, and emotional energy they had available to them. This sub-construct also includes the emotional and social resources that helped to provide energy to these participants. At times, participants chose not to act because they could not spare the energy it would require. Part of persisting was making the decision to conserve energy for academic pursuits rather than addressing every experience of marginalization or oppression they experienced or witnessed. This frequently connected back to the experience of managing consequences as participants sought to conserve energy and still feel okay about their decisions.

At times, these decisions involved what activities to take part in and what activities might not be important for them. Matthew recalled processing with a faculty member and wondering, *"do I need to take on all these things or are there some things that I can forego and still be okay?"* Similarly, Taylor recalled,

> *I made my academic and clinical and ... Really all of the choices that I made for my program were choices that were meaningful to me. I made sure that I wasn't just checking a box. I mean, we all have to check boxes, but if I was gonna check a box, it was going to be because it was something that was important to me or something that I wanted to learn from, in particular.*

Jessica recalled deciding to discontinue her graduate assistantship due to institutional changes that made it no longer the best decision for her. Although this had consequences within her program, she recalled needing to spend her energy in more productive places, thus making the difficult decision. Early in his program when attempting to finish his master's degree and begin the doctoral program, Matthew recalled making the decision to spend more time on his

studies and spend less time developing relationships with peers. He recalled not having the energy to balance both attempting to bond with a cohort and taking extra classes. In his situation, delaying the building of significant relationships allowed him to conserve the energy he needed to complete the work. While their decisions were not always the popular ones, one component of managing energy was learning what tasks were worth their time and what tasks were detracting from their experiences. The intentionality with which participants learned to do this in their programs was an important part of their persistence process.

This managing of tasks was important, but participants spent considerably more time talking about the decisions they made based on their emotional energy. Participants frequently talked about the amount of advocacy that needs to happen and how much of that advocacy falls on their shoulders. At times, participants talked about exhaustion associated with this constant need for advocacy. Taylor recalled, *"I got tired of having those conversations, but it's because, exactly what you said, no one else is having them."* Sarah recalled, *"It seems like I've been the activist voice for my entire program because nobody else speaks out against these things that get said or done amongst students or faculty."* Ashley and Jacob both talked about feeling like they had to speak up because no one else would multiple times during their programs. Hannah likewise talked about feeling disconnected from others in her program and feeling like she frequently had to carry the burden of standing up for students on her own.

Participants generally talked about feeling like they had to constantly be "on" during their programs. At times, managing energy meant choosing when to engage in advocacy efforts and when to "sit out." Hannah recalled,

Yeah. Like I'm just going to sit this one out. I don't ... I don't have enough resources to

beta manage this. Um, and maybe part of it has been, sometimes I've known that I'm not

an emotional state to manage it. Um, so maybe it's self-preservation?

Samantha said, "*I wish there was an off button or certain shirts that you can wear to say you are*

having an off day." Hannah echoed this sentiment when she said, *"there is no off button, you are*

always on." Ashley similarly talked about wanting to have a time when she did not have to be

the educator. She said,

So you know, to have the attention off of me and the expectation off of me that I like

inform and educate the class, while they yell at me for it. Like that weird abusive

situation, like we want you to talk, but then we want to criticize you for everything you

say, but we need you to tell us, so that we, we can ... we can know what not to say and

trick everyone that we're competent. But we actually like are going to then treat you

terribly for it, like that kind of thing.

Sarah recalled, *"I'm going to say something because that's just part of who I am. And there was*

nobody else that was saying anything, also. Yeah, there was another female in my program, but

... nothing. Each of these participants talked about the exhaustion associated with frequently

being on and sought out moments when they could "sit out."

While "sitting out" helped participants to manage their energy and persist through their

programs, it also came at a cost. Michael recalled his struggle with when to speak when he said,

That resonates 'cause I said for two years, 'I can't wait 'til I'm secure in a job, so I can

respond to the craziness that's been that.' There's been so many things where I'm like,

'Oh, I want to write something, but, oh, I don't have a job yet. I'm just gonna be quiet.'

That's just a small example, but it actually is true because there's so much ... It's so small that there's so much judgment. I feel like you have to watch yourself.

As discussed in the previous section *reconciling consequences,* participants talked about the emotional toll that it took for them to do what they knew was best for themselves and what would allow them to persist. In the context of her continued advocacy experiences that drained her energy to the point that she wasn't sure she would make it, Taylor shared,

I just walked the other way. And sometimes, I wouldn't say I looked the other way, as far as if I saw someone who was being marginalized or discriminated against, but I definitely knew the people who were not friendly, and I did my best to avoid them. To the point of leaving the campus a year early. I avoided. I saved myself, I felt like, from the sinking ship. And as we sit and talk about advocacy, I feel ... There's part of me that feels embarrassed, like I wussed out, and then there's the other part of me that's like "And I have my degree, so ... There's sacrifice. I guess what I'm saying is I feel like I sacrificed. I worked really hard not to sacrifice any integrity, but I think along the way, my walking away, avoiding certain conversations, or even backing out of the environment, to me feels a little sacrificial to my integrity. And I am okay with that. I have to say I'm okay with that, at this point, because I believe that's what I had to do to survive and persist.

Sarah recalled a similar sense that she was sacrificing part of herself in order to persist when she said, *"But it's so incongruent with who I am as a person. I speak out when I see something or experience something that's not right and now where am I at?"*

Matthew took a different approach to managing his energy and talked about attempting to brush off situations of marginalization. For Matthew, spending energy on figuring out whether situations were oppressive detracted from his ability to focus on his studies.

I cannot let things to bother me as much. Maybe I would experience microaggression,

and it would simmer within me like, "Am I at fault? Is that person at fault?" But at the

end of the day, I'm ruminating on it constantly, it's taking away my focus on completing

the program. So there is this fine line between being aware of how people are treating me

and also not letting it bug me because I need to put my focus on my studies. So being a

little bit thick-skinned and resilient like it bounces off you, you don't let it get into your

skin, it's important.

Each participant had examples of times when they felt like they were quiet; most of those

instances were associated with guilt along with a recognition that, at times, advocating

strategically meant saving their voices for when they would be heard. Again, persistence meant

walking a line between having the energy to persist through their studies while also being "ok"

with themselves on a personal level.

Delivering Strategically

The sub-construct *delivering strategically* includes the carefulness of participants when

addressing marginalization. Participants recalled needing to be careful with both peers and

faculty members at times during their programs. Students sought to balance their desire to be

authentic while also not putting themselves at more risk in their programs. Although they

resented the need to do so, participants discussed feeling as if they had to avoid talking about

things the way they wanted to because of the need to be careful with the feelings of their faculty

or peers.

Strategic delivery took two different forms for participants at different times. On one

hand, participants talked about attempting to deliver information gently in hopes that they might

be heard. Ashley for example said, *"I come from an emotional place, thinking that maybe as a*

counselor, they can connect on that, so I don't sort of hurt their fragile, like academic ego."
Jessica recalled attempting to address a situation with a faculty member and finding it important
to consider *"psychosocial aspects"* of the faculty member's experiences and to be gentle in her
delivery. Brittany recalled at times "*not wanting to make them uncomfortable*" and only calmly
talking about her experiences. When discussed in this way, participants were attempting to
calmly and compassionately deliver feedback in hopes that doing so might help their message be
heard. Alternatively, other times participants were much more direct in their communication.

Participants talked about the importance of speaking boldly to be heard. Jacob, for
example mentioned the importance of boldness when talking about things that other people didn't
want to talk about. Jacob reframed himself as a troublemaker who would boldly disrupt the
system by calling attention to oppression. In contrast to her general demeanor of not wanting to
make others uncomfortable Brittany also recalled, *"'Even at some point was going out of my way
to make them feel a little bit uncomfortable because that was my constant state, so why should
they not feel a little bit of that?"* Samantha recalled processing her experiences out loud in a
bold way rather than attempting to protect others from her process. Multiple participants talked
about times when they "*boiled over*" and more directly addressed issues, primarily motivated by
their anger.

The overarching construct *strategic advocacy* included making decisions carefully with
attention to the consequences of advocacy, their energy levels, and type of delivery. Finding
balance in this area helped participants to feel like they were making a difference while also
protecting themselves. At times, this included speaking boldly and at other times, it required
participants to walk away from situations where they knew their voices would not be heard.
Taylor summarized this experience when she said,

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Instead of taking on every research topic or every difficult conversation with every faculty member that didn't agree with me, I just forged a path. I don't want to say that it was comfortable, 'cause it wasn't, but I forged a path where I felt like I fit. I could feel it in my gut, like "Yes. This feels right for me.

Ultimately, it was the ability to say "this feel right for me" that supported persistence for these students.

Strategic Support

As participants worked to answer *Who Am I?, Why Am I Here?, and What Am I going to Do?*, they recalled reaching to those around them for support. The final construct "Strategic Support" encompasses the people and systems that participants reached for to support them in their persistence. Participants described a process through which they intentionally surrounded themselves with individuals who could support their process. In addition, participants sometimes sought support from individuals who may not have been supportive of their identities, but could offer them something else that helped them persist through their programs. In this section, I describe the sub-constructs, *formal and informal support systems, identifying allies, shared experiences, and practical support.*

Formal and Informal Support Systems

Participants reported using both formal and informal support systems during their programs. At times, participants developed these systems when they were not already present within their programs or institutions. At other times, participants talked about the importance of accessing support systems that existed outside of their programs. These formal and informal support systems frequently involved peer groups that provided a space for processing their experiences. Other individuals talked about the importance of their family support systems. Still

others recalled relying on spiritual communities and personal spiritual practices. In each of these relationships, the important contribution of these individuals was that they helped the participants to remember who they were and why they were in their programs.

When talking about her support system, Taylor recalled that at times tough love was an important component of support within her cohort. She remembered,

> *And so it became really sibling-like, in that we stopped being afraid to say whatever. We just held each other with really high expectations but also with really open arms, and we just decided we weren't gonna lose anybody else, so whatever we had to do, whether it was baby-sit each other's kids or ... I don't even know. Buy the extra bottle of tequila that day, whatever it was. And we consistently met with each other outside of the school setting to keep each other tethered, to get through.*

Multiple participants recalled the importance of peers and friends that "checked in" with them. Brittany recalled the support of her peers and said,

> *I think I was lucky; the cohort that I was in was a very small, most of us were very tight knit, very supportive in that way. I got that response from at least one or two of my peers, where they would check in frequently. Where we would process things, talk about things. Never from faculty.*

Hannah recalled,

> *And then my friends who have been adopted as kin by me and by my folks, um, you know ... my best friend I consider my sister and so she would call just to check "are you okay? I got your text about such and such happening. How are you handling that? You know, people who know you just making sure you're okay and you still I think has been central for me.*

Samantha also noted the importance of a supportive cohort as a component of her persistence. These informal support systems didn't necessarily require significant amounts of time or energy; they were simply places where participants saw that someone cared and wanted to see how they were doing.

Hannah and Jessica both recalled their spirituality as an important part of their persistence. Jessica talked about more formal support from a religious community, while Hannah focused on personal spiritual practices. Hannah said,

> *I'd say to that my, um, my spiritual process has been part of this too. Um, and again it's kind of ... it's been consistent throughout but there's been times when it's been more, ah, prominent than not and that's kind of been one of my messages of trying to let certain things go and ground, center and refocus and know like, okay, (laughter) I'm in this for the long haul. There's a reason to this madness. I'm planning to do this for this reason. I have to get through this step next.*

Hannah went on to talk about the ways that her personal spiritual practice helped to group and center her. She felt more able to identify direction and make decisions when she was in touch with her higher power. Jessica also talked about her faith helping to center her and instill hope. She recalled, *"My faith, my belief in my higher power, that helped with centering and, um, centering, inspiring and instilling hope in me. And so that, my spirituality helped with building and fostering the resilience to remain in the program."* Jessica also noted that this was an area where she had to make compromises to persist. She recalled needing to miss certain religious meetings because she needed to go to class and remembered the challenge of navigating the guilt associated with drawing back from a religious community that provided her with a sense of purpose and meaning.

Jessica recalled the importance of research mentorship. She said,

After those early experiences, I was like you know what, if I'm going to submit stuff, I'm

going to submit on my own or you know with the person who is my major professor. Um,

I started participating in a formal research mentoring program and then an informal,

um, research mentoring program.

Hannah recalled the disappointment when she was unable to find a research mentor within her

program and the importance of reaching outside her program to develop research connections.

Multiple students talked about seeking out their own professional counseling to persist.

These relationships provided an additional safe place where they could process their experiences.

At times, counseling also provided a means of developing coping skills and processing some of

the major questions that came along with persisting through a doctoral program. Other

participants recalled the importance of support groups on campus or within their communities.

These groups provided a place where participants could share their experiences and feel more

understood without explanation.

Family and friends also served as informal support systems during doctoral programs.

Family members helped participants to remember their purpose and provided emotional support

as they navigated their programs. For most participants, the most impactful thing these

individuals did for them was simply listen. Sarah said,

For me, it was just my husband listening. He's very different than I am. I'm very

extroverted. He's very introverted, so I know it was not always easy for him to be able to

listen after he spent ten hours at work, and I'm coming home after 15 hours on campus,

and he still always listened and supported, even when it was challenging for him.

Taylor recalled the importance of *"listening. Being with me, sitting with me."* Samantha remembered*, "they just listen, and they try to see things in the way that I am and the way that I'm experiencing it."* Hannah recalled family members building her up by recognizing her accomplishments. Matthew recalled his partner helping to support him and providing a space where he could be himself. Brittany remembered that one part of her continued persistence was, *"I think family and just this not wanting to disappoint my family who had supported me financially and just emotionally for 10 years of education."*

Informal and formal support systems provided these students with a sense of belonging and care amid the doctoral studies. For many participants, the emotional support they got from these systems helped them to navigate the most difficult moments in their programs. Participants most emphasized the importance of listening and being heard as the most meaningful contribution of these formal and informal support systems.

Identifying Allies

When persisting through their programs, participants reported the importance of identifying allies within their programs. Participants primarily talked about faculty allies that could prepare them for experiences they might have in their programs and support them as they experienced marginalization.

Participants generally talked about the importance of having a chair who was supportive of them. This was important because it provided them with an ally within their committee and also because that person frequently served in a mentorship role for these participants. Sarah recalled,

> *My now-chair has also really given me space that I need when I need to process or I need*
> *to talk and really normalized a lot of my experiences and a lot of the way that I was*

holding things. Even my anger, she was very much "You are not the black sheep here. It's

okay."

Taylor and Michael both talked about the support of their chair as an important part of

normalizing their experience and helping them to navigate marginalization. Matthew recalled

the importance of a chair who listened to him when he said*, "We can go back and forth. So the*

thing I like about my major professor is that she really listens to me and that she will really

consider what I have to offer." He continued by discussing the ways that his chair stood up for

him and his work within his dissertation committee.

Participants talked about the importance of finding individuals who were willing to use

their voice to address issues within their programs. Ashley recalled moments when others used

their voices and gave her a break when she said,

> *"If somebody else can step up who is not as vulnerable, it should really be the faculty,*
>
> *but at the very least, you know, a different classmate that has helped me persist. It helps*
>
> *me literally just come back the next day or literally not leave campus early."*

Although Sarah did not experience others standing up, she recalled, "*I would have loved to have*

an ally, somebody else who can take their turn to use their voice. I would have loved that. "

Other times, participants talked about faculty members who served as allies by using their

voices to help and protect them. Jacob recalled an unfair situation in his program that he was

afraid to address. In this situation things didn't change until a faculty member stood up for him.

He recalled, *"it took until my, my, um, advisor finally called around and actually started talking*

to people and saying, what the hell is going on?" Jacob expressed significant gratitude for the

role this person had in changing his circumstances when he said *"I am so, um, so thankful and*

grateful and just really, I mean, just fortunate to have that person as an advocate in my life,

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because that person really fought for me." Other participants recalled situations where faculty

members fought for them. When she found herself in the middle of a conversation with male

peers who were endorsing rape culture, Sarah recalled,

> *It ended up having to be mediated by the faculty member, who was also male, but is very*
>
> *much ... A lot of his work is around intimate partner violence, so by no means was this*
>
> *particular faculty aiding in this miscommunication but very much trying to assist them in*
>
> *seeing that this is what's happening, so that was helpful to have that ally with me.*

Brittany recalled the importance of peer allies who helped her navigate her experience as

she was confronted with broader issues at the national level that impacted her experience. She

said,

> *It took validation from somebody else. I don't think anybody can offer that. I think it has*
>
> *to be a strong peer, someone supportive, strangers won't offer that. Faculty members*
>
> *won't offer that. I think that moment in particular was one where I realized you need*
>
> *peers, you need strong supportive people who understand you to help you get through*
>
> *whatever it is and on whatever scale it happens.*

For Brittany, allies helped her to recognize the impact of these events and allowed her space to

express her reactions. Normalizing her emotional experience helped her to recognize the impact

and to allow herself to seek support in other situations. Sarah also talked about other

normalizing her reaction when she said,

> *A lot of warmth and understanding. Support. Normalizing. This is not normal. This is not*
>
> *okay. This is not the way it is everywhere and trying to work with me on the activist side*
>
> *of "What can we do?" Being open to having those conversations and being supportive of*

that. Not asking me to choke on it and keep moving but "What can we do? Let's talk about

it." That, to me, has been incredibly helpful.

For both participants, an important part of identifying allies was finding individuals who allowed

space for processing experiences while also encouraging movement and action.

Multiple participants talked about ways in which others demonstrated advocacy within

their programs. Jacob recalled,

I mean, when I think about being a troublemaker, and what that really meant for me. The,

the reality was that I had somebody who was an associate professor, who modeled that,

and who was able to do it with, um, so boldly. And to say that, um, this is a way that I

need to change the system.

Similarly, Ashley recalled,

And it's interesting how when things like that, it's sort of the same people that tend to

speak up and make waves in the department. And so I believe it's the people who seek to

protect and advocate oppressed persons, whether it being experiencing racism within the

program, whether it be concerned that your classmates are doing harm, um, by being

culturally incompetent.

Seeing others stand up often helped these individuals to feel connected and decreased their sense

of aloneness.

The two international students in this study both emphasized the importance of having

allies who would help them navigate the unique challenges of obtaining a faculty position. One

international student recalled the help that his professor gave him in this area. He said,

I think her research interests and mine are similar in that sense. That's one part of it. The

other part of it is because I think her experience as an international student and now an

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international faculty, she provided me with a lot of support including how to navigate my

job search process, how to negotiate about what I need as an international faculty

member. So that is definitely one big part of it, this support that I gained from

international faculty members in my department. So a few professors I can definitely say

that they have provided me with a lot of guidance and also a lot of mentorship.

On the other side, another international student recalled wishing that her faculty had better

prepared her for the challenges. She recalled wishing someone had told her,

"Yes, we want diversity, but it's a little bit more difficult for international students." Just a

heads up. Like "This is what you might encounter. It's going to be a little bit more

difficult and you need to place yourself as strategically as possible in order to get where

you want to go" I think that would have made all the difference, if that was a

conversation that somebody had with me the first year. Instead of me thinking "Oh, this is

going to be so easy because all I've been hearing is that I'm diverse and everybody wants

diversity and diversity is great." If somebody had told me "Diversity is great, when

you're a US citizen, not so much when you're on a visa."

A part of identifying allies was also recognizing those individuals who might seem to be

offering support, but were not helpful to persistence. Brittany recalled wondering,

Are you saying this for me or are you saying this for you? Are you saying this because

you feel like you need to be saying this for whatever reason, or are you really wanting to

be supportive of me? If so, why aren't you framing it in a way that's supportive of me?

You know, versus you needing to alleviate your own conscience

when a faculty member appeared to be supportive, but actually dismissed her concerns. At times, participants recalled needing to distance themselves in relationships where support seemed to be focused on alleviating guilt rather than providing support.

While talking about allies, Michael made a point to recognize the risk that faculty members sometimes take when standing up for students. He recalled appreciating those who were willing to risk their careers for him and recognize, *"they say one wrong thing, they could have their whole tenure process be impacted. They're similar to us in the sense that they just have to go with the flow, and it's ...unfortunate."* As mentioned earlier, other participants echoed this feeling that some of their faculty seemed just as powerless as they were and yet chose to risk for them. Ultimately, finding individuals who were willing to use their voices to change unfair situations, share the load of advocacy, and provide support was an important part of persisting through doctoral programs.

Shared Experiences

In addition to faculty allies and support systems, participants also recalled the importance of finding other individuals who shared their experiences. These relationships provided a safe place for processing their experiences and a reminder that they were not alone and allowed them to share strategies for persisting. These shared experiences sometimes came in the form of relationships with other students and at other times were the result of research or other scholarly activities.

Different participants experienced this in different ways, but each of them talked about spaces where they were able to be themselves. Sarah recalled,

But really, when I think about it, those connections I made with people outside of my program, whether they were my friends outside of even this whole world, the whole

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counselor ed and academic world, but also individuals that I connected with in other

programs were very, very helpful in that it gave me space where I didn't have to be on. I

could be myself. I could connect in a way that was authentic for me, and they held me

accountable, too.

Jacob talked about his "squad" when he said,

I mean, we can ... we can be vulnerable and we can talk about it, we can talk about it

openly and authentically. And I think that that's what has been so valuable and I, I just

remembered that that's kind of like there are other people, um, who either sometimes are

going through what I'm going through, or sometimes have it far worse than I do. So, and

trying to lift each other up as a community, I think that that's so important to me and

that's what ... Because really, I would say has characterized that, that kind of not only

resilience narrative, but the persistence we keep talking about here.

This group gave him the sense that he was not alone and also helped him to place himself in the

broader culture. Ashley referred to these individuals as her "*tribe*" and talked about a professor

who shared a traditionally marginalized identity and was known for mentoring students of color.

She recalled,

Um, that faculty, of course, received a lot of ... they're reverse racist. They only, you

know, mentor students of color, and all these crazy things. So it wasn't like this wonderful

process. But this professor really modeled for me, sort of consistency and support for me.

Michael recalled a situation where he felt supported by others who shared his experience. He

shared,

I'll never forget a time that somebody was sharing the struggles, and it resonated with

everybody, and I can honestly say, I think six out of the nine of our cohort broke down

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into a deep sob. And we had a deep, ten-minute cohort sob-session, saying nothing but

hearing each other sobbing in relation to what we were going through at that moment in

time. And just knowing that, yes, this is so hard. This sucks so much, but I'm not alone,

and there's eight other people in this room with me who get it and who understand. That

just was so powerful for me. It's something I'll always remember.

This perhaps most clearly demonstrates the way these students talked about shared experiences. At times, there was no need for anyone to do anything to change the situation, it was enough just to know they were not alone.

Sarah recalled feeling very alone in her experience of genderism within her program until she was able to talk with a faculty mentor who shared her experience. She remembered,

It took me confiding in my faculty mentor, who is female, my experiences and for her to

be like, "You know what? I've experienced similar things, and I don't know that this is

new." But still, she didn't even know the grand scheme of things, 'cause nobody says

anything about this person. It's like everything is very hush-hush, very sheltered.

Everybody holds it, and nobody speaks up against it. And for 20 plus years this

individual's been here, and I'm like, "How in the world has this never been addressed?" I

don't understand it.

Although the outcome was not perfect, she went on to remember how important it was that someone else was able to identify and speak to the same issues she had experienced. For all of these participants, finding someone who shared their experiences provided a sort of instant connection.

Practical Support

Finally, participants also talked about the importance of very practical support in their programs. As mentioned earlier, navigating a doctoral program required significant energy and at times, participants recalled not having the energy to do anything else. Participants recalled the importance of individuals who helped them with even basic requirements such as cooking dinner. Other times, participants recalled partners or family members who helped proofread papers or manage other extracurricular roles.

Financial support was on practical way that these individuals felt supported within their programs. Ashley, Jacob, and Matthew all mentioned ways their family helped to financially support them in their programs. For each of these participants, financial support helped them to be able to focus more fully on their studies without worrying about being able to financially support themselves. Ashley recalled,

> *My mom helps to support me while I'm in this program. So that allows me so much emotional, psychological space, to like focus on work, to physically have the time to not be ... I'm not stressed out that I'm not going to be able to pay my rent, things like that. So that's a huge stressor of space that allows me to be productive in other ways, um, and gives me the time to write papers, present, go to conferences, um, it all just puts me ahead.*

Matthew talked about his family's willingness to pay for part of his education when they were able. He recalled being acutely aware of how meaningful that contribution was when they were no longer financially able to help him and he relied heavily on his institution to provide employment.

For other participants, practical support came in the form of carrying the load of a household together. Jessica recalled how integral her family's support was for her and said,

> *For example, um, my parents might help with meal preparation or you know like helping with some of the basic levels of care. You know like depending on how school was. And also with my husband, we kind of like flip flop on those traditional roles and so like my husband does a lot of the housework because we don't want to remain in that box. And so my husband would do the meal preparation. He would wash the clothes, do laundry ... He would do the laundry, even wash my vehicle (laughter) to make sure I stay alert and then also tries to make sure I go to bed on time and rest.*

Hannah talked about how meaningful her parents' help was when she was in the final stages of completing her dissertation. She said,

> *Um, my dad's a cook so he likes to cook anyway. If people appreciate it, it's better (laughter) but so when I was trying to crank through the last of the edits before I have submitted my pre-defense copy, um, I was basically up for three days and so they, you know, my mother just kept, she came and she was like, "should I just not turn on the television so I don't disturb your mental state?" And I was like, "yes, mother. That would be real helpful because I can't deal with noise." And she'd be like, "okay. I'll just read."*

Another participant recalled realizing that she did not have to stay on campus to finish her program. She recalled joining her partner in another town where she could share the burden of finishing the doctoral program. She said,

> *I fully believe that's how I finished is that I got out of what I felt like was a toxic environment. Once I was finished with my coursework, I just left and did all of the rest of it from home. And that is how I finished.*

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Jessica remembered that her parents *"would help with trying to remove any roadblocks, strain, or stressors."*

In addition to helping with everyday tasks around the house, some participants also mentioned the way individuals supported them in their work.

> *And so he'll check in throughout the day. I remember my husband bringing drafts of papers for me or, he would often go to, you know, like go to events with me and at one point I was like, "oh my god. I'm not trying to make my husband the errand boy." But it was more or less, he was like "all right, I made your copies for your APA poster presentation." You know, "went an made 25 copies of this handout for you. I've also (laughter) packed the favors for this. I've ordered the plaques you know for graduation celebration for you." But it was more or less like helping with taking the load off.*

Jessica similarly recalled her father supporting her in her program when he did

> *things that were helpful that other humans wouldn't do like you know, I don't know, use some sort of computer software to clean up a diagram for my dissertation just so that I didn't have to do it. Ah, so I could spend the time making edits to something else.*

Perhaps most impactful for these participants was the recognition that these individuals were helping just because they wanted to, often without specific knowledge about what they were going through. Jacob recalled, *"Like they, they, they don't ... My parents have no idea what, what a dissertation is about but they, they are very much, um, they know that it's important for me to finish the program."* Samantha joked that her parents do not understand why she is completing a doctoral degree, but still support her however they can. Taylor similarly joked that her parents still think she is a psychiatrist, but were nevertheless as supportive as they could be.

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The construct *Strategic Support* described the support systems participants used to navigate their doctoral programs. These support systems frequently assisted participants in navigating other constructs within the study. For example, allies helped participants to develop identity and navigate their own actions amid marginalization. At the same time, these allies helped to provide resources to rebuild energy that was frequently depleted through advocacy efforts. Persistence required participants to strategically reach for the supports they needed, while simultaneously ignoring those people and things that would require additional energy and sacrifice.

Summary of Results

Participants in this study recalled early experiences in their programs that included explicit and implicit marginalization. These continuous marginalization experiences took significant emotional toll on participants and drained the energy they needed to complete their doctoral programs. In response, participants frequently recalled wondering if it was worth it to continue in their programs. Although participants were confident in their abilities and grounded in their goals, they redeveloped and reevaluated their motivation in the context of their marginalization experiences. In addition to questioning whether their programs were worth it, participants recalled questioning themselves and their own identities in response to marginalization. Participants navigated a process of remaining true to their own identities while at times compromising to persist. Participants recalled wrestling with where this line was for them and eventually landing in a place that allowed them to persist. This process of developing identity helped participants to maintain motivation and complete their programs. At the same time, participants recalled needing others to come alongside them throughout their process.

Reaching for specific types of support at different times during their journey helped participants to maintain their energy while advocating for themselves and others.

This chapter described the results of my constructivist grounded theory analysis of three focus groups and three individual interviews with traditionally marginalized doctoral students and recent graduates. I provided an overview of the results organized based on five constructs, *Developing Awareness, Developing Identity, Identifying Motivation, Strategic Advocacy and Strategic Support*. I also described additional sub-constructs within each of these overarching constructs that further clarified the experiences of participants.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I discuss the final findings of this study as they relate to the original research questions and previous studies of attrition and persistence. Next, I identify and describe the limitations of this study. Finally, I discuss the implications this research study has for research and practice within counselor education programs.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to understand the persistence process of traditionally marginalized doctoral students in counselor education programs. Despite a substantial body of research regarding attrition in higher education, there is a lack of research regarding the persistence process for traditionally marginalized students. Even less research exists at the doctoral level, and there are only a few studies that address attrition in counselor education programs. In addition, most existing theories regarding persistence and attrition do not center the experiences of traditionally marginalized students.

Throughout this project, a critical perspective helped to center the stories of a marginalized population and counter deficit based approaches to their stories. Using critical theory as a foundation for this constructivist grounded theory emphasized the importance of participants' voices and centered experiences of participants while also telling stories of resilience. This study illuminated instances of whiteness as property and interest convergence consistent with a critical race theory frame. In addition, it helped to frame the discussion away from easy answers that might give rise to the myth of liberalism when approaching this topic. Connected with a recognition of the co-construction of meaning, a critical perspective helped me to consistently evaluate my positionality and my endorsement of the tenets of critical theory throughout data analysis and data collection. It also provided my peer debriefer a basis from

which to evaluate consistency within the data and within my approach to the data. In this section, I will discuss how key findings of this study relate to previous literature regarding persistence.

Oppressive and Marginalizing Culture

The first key finding in this study was consistent with previous studies on program culture within higher education. Participants reported significant issues of marginalization and oppression within doctoral programs; these experiences were perpetuated by both faculty members and peers. Participants discussed the need to work harder than their peers and identified instances of being overlooked by their faculty members. In addition, participants experienced early questions about their competence and instances of stereotyping and tokenization. They described a "toxic culture" and described instances of sexual harassment, bias, and racism within their programs. These findings are consistent with those identified by numerous other researchers and discussed at length in Chapter 2 (Beamon, 2014; Gardner, 2008; Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2009; Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2003; Taylor & Antony, 2000; Vaccaro, 2012; Williams, Brewley, Reed, White, & Davis-Haley, 2005).

Although experiences of marginalization were not the focus of this study, the experiences these participants endured provides context for the resiliency they demonstrated by persisting through their programs. This marginalization also began the process of questioning that helped to solidify participants' resolve. Participants described an early process in their programs where they came to realize the oppression that exists within counselor education programs and began to wrestle with how they would handle marginalization in this new context. In addition, these descriptions of oppression and marginalization contradict the very values on which the

counseling profession is built and illuminate a hidden side of doctoral level counselor education programs that has not been fully captured in the literature to date.

In addition to an overall culture of oppression and specific instances of marginalization, participants highlighted significant issues among the faculty of counselor education programs. Previous studies highlighted issues with power and political culture within counselor education programs (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Protivnak and Foss primarily described issues with competition between students and issues navigating political issues within programs. Similarly, participants in this study described some sense of needing political savvy to navigate their programs effectively. In addition, they discussed problems with the places where power is centered in counselor education programs.

The organization of higher education involves a hierarchical model that centers power with tenured faculty members. Researchers have identified a lack of power for contingent faculty and at times, junior faculty within academia (Boyd, Cintron, & Alexander-Snow, 2010; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Lester, 2013). For these participants, this centering of power at the top frequently led to misuse of power and perpetuation of oppression. The amount of power held by these individuals led participants to fear retaliation if they were to voice their concerns and likewise silenced the junior faculty members in whom participants confided. Students sensed a disconnect from tenured professors and yet they were the ones who frequently had the power to make a positive or negative difference for these individuals.

Part of persistence for these individuals was recognizing dynamics and finding ways to navigate them in a way that allowed them to have their voice heard and still protected them from retaliation. As with previous studies (e.g., Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield, Woo, & Washington, 2013), participants in this study identified fear regarding countering the values of

faculty members. This study extends those findings with participants also discussing their fear of addressing inappropriate behavior from faculty members within their programs. In addition, the findings of this study are consistent with previous studies that identified the creativity and resiliency traditionally marginalized populations use to navigate oppressive situations (Henfield, Owens, & Witherspoon, 2011; Mancini, 2011; Paglis, Green, & Bauer, 2006; Renn, 2010). Additional discussion of findings is organized based on the research questions that guided this study. The two primary questions asked in this study were:

1. How do traditionally marginalized students persist through doctoral counselor education programs?

2. What factors influence persistence of traditionally marginalized students in doctoral counselor education programs.

Research Question #1: How do traditionally marginalized students persist through doctoral counselor education programs?

The primary question that guided this study explored how traditionally marginalized student persist through their programs. Participant data provided insight on the primary questions that were involved in navigating doctoral programs and the importance of "landing" in each of these areas. The three questions participants +asked during their programs were "Who am I?," "Why am I here?," and "What am I going to do?" Overarching each of these areas was a need to find balance. In every area, there seemed to be a tightrope that participants had to walk; they persisted by learning to walk this tightrope.

Who am I? Participants discussed first questioning their belonging in a program early in their programs when they were faced with overt oppression and marginalization. To persist through their programs, participants initially focused on developing their own identities and

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deciding how they would present themselves within their programs. This included a process of recognizing their value within the field and redeveloping a sense of self amid oppression. Participants described a gap between understanding of themselves and acceptance within counselor education programs. Specifically, participants encountered early messages that served to dehumanize and devalue them and their identities.

Like findings from Morales (2008), females in this study reporting feeling pressure to fit into societal expectations regarding marriage and motherhood. Some participants sought to balance family life with completing their doctoral studies in ways their male peers did not. Other participants recalled expectations that they would marry and have children because they were females. Developing a sense of identity within their programs for these individuals frequently meant managing expectations of others while attempting to develop their professional identities. Previous studies have also addressed the need for students of color to underemphasize their cultural identities within counselor education programs (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2013).

Although previous studies have discussed student experiences of hiding within their programs (e.g. Rankin, 2003, Baker & Moore, 2015), this study extends the literature by describing processes through which participants learned to assert their cultural identities within their programs. Hughes and Kleist discussed the process through which students adjust to doctoral programs and learn to "act like a doctoral student" (p. 104). This process was further complicated for these participants due to issues with safety related to their cultural identities. Participants recalled a process of learning how much of themselves it was safe to expose within their programs. Although they acknowledged the importance of authenticity, they also felt a need to present a version of themselves that would be accepted by their faculty and peers.

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Figuring out how they would present themselves within their programs was a beginning task that allowed participants to develop a sense of belonging within their programs.

At the same time, participants sought experiences where they were truly "seen" by others within their programs. Participants valued times when people could see beyond the image they presented. Participants specifically recalled times where faculty members or peers could see strength within them they did not see within themselves. These experiences served to solidify their identities and remind them of who they were and how they fit within the broader culture. This is consistent with the role of mentors identified within previous literature (Dua, 2007; Gasman, Hirschfeld, & Vultaggio, 2008; Kim-Prieto, Copeland, Hopson, Simmons, & Leibowitz, 2013; Shealey, 2009).

Finally, participants recalled recognizing their own privilege as an important part of developing identity. Participants talked about a process through which they recognized their privilege and leveraged it to persist through their programs. Solidifying identities early in their programs provided participants with a foundation that helped them with finding balance in the next two pivotal areas. Landing in this area helped participants to be able to navigate oppression and marginalization in a way that was consistent with who they were. Although previous literature has explored research and professional identity development with doctoral programs, this study provided an understanding of the process through which students navigate development of their cultural identities uniquely within counselor education programs (Dollarhide, Gibson, & Moss, 2013; Lamar & Helm, 2017). Students in this study experienced the need to hide like those found within other studies, but uniquely found it important to find ways to be authentic and open within their programs. Perhaps a part of the emphasis on this

within this study lies in the personal and reflective nature of counselor education programs which frequently emphasize the need for openness and self-reflection.

Why am I here? Previous studies on attrition have addressed the importance of motivation to persist within higher education settings. Existing theories of attrition include student goals and motivation as primary dynamics in persistence (Bean, 1980; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975). Participants in this study entered their programs highly motivated, and most of them could clearly identify the goals they had when entering their programs. Students recognized that a doctoral degree was a way forward in their career path and opened doors that were meaningful for them. Whether their career goals included entering academia or obtaining higher level positions within clinical settings, these students were clear about their career motivation for pursuing doctoral studies. This seemed to be an important starting place both within the literature and within these students' experiences. For the students in this study, there was an additional level of developing motivation in response to the marginalization experiences they had in their programs. These students encountered experiences early in their programs and at various points throughout their programs that caused them to question their decisions to pursue doctoral study. In context of this questioning, students developed additional reasons for pursuing their degrees.

Participants identified three specific motivations that helped them to persist within their programs. Changing the field, carrying the torch, and identifying outlets all helped to answer the question, "Why am I here?" for the individuals. Participants recalled wanting to be an example for those who were following behind them and to help show that, although it is not easy, it is possible. Additionally, participants recalled wanting to enter positions of power that would give them a voice to make more sweeping changes in the field of counselor education. Finally,

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participants talked about identifying outlets that would help to illuminate the plight of marginalized populations as a motivation for completing their studies. Participants in this study recalled motivation as a factor of their ability to provide a positive influence for others in a way not previously captured within counselor education literature.

Participants clearly identified personal reasons for completing their doctoral programs, as discussed above, but an important part of their persistence was connecting their motivation to their experience of marginalization. This provided participants with a sense of purpose greater than themselves and helped to connect them to the broader fight for social equity.

What am I going to do? Once participants could maintain a strong sense of self amidst marginalizing experiences and discovered a new sense of purpose and motivation for finishing their studies, the question became how they would react to the marginalization they experienced in their programs. This process of persistence involved participants deciding how they were going to interact with the marginalization in their programs. A sense of powerlessness was a common feeling for students within literature on attrition (Willis & Carmichael, 2011). Like other studies, participants in this study frequently recalled feeling like they were reliant on others to provide guidance; at times, that guidance did not materialize.

For these students, strategic advocacy provided a means of exerting power in the places they were able while simultaneously conserving their energy and protecting themselves. Many of the experiences of these participants mirror situations described within the advocacy competencies of the counseling field (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2003). While those competencies primarily relate to changing systems and advocacy for and with others, these participants recalled engaging similar process related to their own experiences. These self-

advocacy moments were connected to a broader understanding of the role increasing their

position would play in changing the experience for those following them.

Research Question #2: What factors influence persistence of traditionally marginalized students in doctoral counselor education programs.

   Strategic support. Multiple researchers have emphasized the importance of mentors and support systems for traditionally marginalized students (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield, Owens, & Witherspoon, 2011; Henfield et al., 2013; Protivnak & Foss, 2009; Zeligman, Prescod, & Greene, 2015). Participants in this study also emphasized the importance of mentors and support from peers and family.

Consistent with findings within previous studies, participants identified practical ways family members supported them in addition to recognizing the impact of presence and listening from family and peers (Zeligman et al., 2015). In this study, participants added that family members frequently didn't understand the doctoral journey. Support in this area seemed to relate to a valuing of their personhood rather than a valuing of accomplishment. This was especially important in the context of their perceived invisibility within their programs.

   Significant attention has been given to the need for like mentors for traditionally marginalized students (Baker & Moore, 2015; Dua, 2007; Gasman, Hirschfeld, & Vultaggio, 2008; Kim-Prieto, Copeland, Hopson, Simmons, & Leibowitz, 2013; Shealey, 2009). Consistent with other findings, participants in this study emphasized the importance of faculty mentors who shared an important identity with them. In addition, previous literature has emphasized the value that students place on mentors who are able to warn them about potential pitfalls within their programs (Taylor & Antony, 2000). Somewhat unique to this study, participants specifically valued times when faculty members either used their voices to advocate when participants lacked

power or warned them about other faculty members within their programs. Participants did not

appreciate when others assumed they needed mentoring without personal knowledge or specific

experience. Additionally, participants recalled the importance of faculty members naming their

specific strengths, especially when they could see parts of them that they themselves did not

recognize. For example, one participant noted the importance of her faculty member identifying

her as courageous and noted that "no one would ever use that word" to describe her.

Finally, participants spoke about the importance of peer support in their programs.

Consistent with previous literature, participants valued spaces that allowed them to connect with

those who held similar cultural identities (Felder, Stevenson, & Gasman, 2014; Gardner, 2010).

In situations where these groups did not exist, these students reported developing formal support

groups for students like them. Additionally, participants discussed the importance of connecting

with peers who could support them in ways faculty members were not. Participants valued the

shared experience of navigating a doctoral program and the unique support of peers who could

hold space for their experiences in part because they too were engaged in a process of developing

persistence. Previous literature has primarily focused on the need to find groups who share

cultural identity, however participants in this study reported that their cohorts were often helpful

in holding them accountable and helping them persist (Felder et al., 2014; Gardner, 2010). This

is consistent with literature outside of counselor education, which suggests cohorts can be

sources of support for doctoral students (Horn, 2001; Maher, 2005; Unzueta, Moores-Abdool, &

Vazquez Donet, 2010).

For these participants, the topic of support frequently came up when discussing the ways

they navigated the major questions described in this study. For example, participants discussed

how support systems helped them to "see" themselves at times when they were questioning their

place in a program. These support systems provided support for navigating big questions that significantly impacted persistence. In addition, participants recalled strategically reaching for certain supports at different times in their programs.

Cultural Factors

In addition to support systems that helped participants answer key questions involved in successfully persisting through their studies, participants also discussed cultural identity as a factor that supported their persistence and assisted them when navigating these questions. This is consistent with findings of other researchers which suggest that cultural identity plays a role in motivation and commitment (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Trumbull & Rothstein-Fisch, 2011). The international students in this study refused to question their persistence, in part, because their persistence was tied to their ability to stay in the United States. Another student recalled that her culture valued "being a good girl," and she struggled to develop her voice early in her program. Other participants recalled the threat of disappointing their families in cultures where education and accomplishments were highly valued. Still others recalled wanting to persist in part because of sacrifices their family members made to help them earn a degree. One participant talked about the sacrifice her grandparents made immigrating to the United States for their children and grandchildren to be able to attend college and pursue their dreams.

Although most studies regarding student experiences focus on unique identities held by participants (e.g. Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Henfield, Owens & Witherspoon; 2011, Gasman, et al, 2008; Ginsberg, et al, 2003), findings in this study suggest that participants shared many experiences connected with their marginalization and persistence. Although the nature of marginalization differed among participants, and nuances within their persistence process existed, there was a significant amount of shared experience and process. This is consistent with

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increased attention to the role of intersectionality within participant identities and experiences and provides evidence that study of traditionally marginalized students may benefit from a reduction in fracturing based on specific cultural identities (Baker & Moore, 2015; Hernández & McDowell, 2010; McDowell & Hernández, 2010; Robinson-Wood, 2016).

Limitations

Grounded theory research requires meticulous attention to methodological process (Hussein, Hirst, Salyers, & Osuji, 2014). Attention to data analysis and collection methods within grounded theory can facilitate the creation of a meaningful theory. One common pitfall within grounded theory that can limit the resulting theory is a lack of attention to this process due to time or other constraints. This limitation within grounded theory can be reduced by intentional development of the research process before conducting the study. In this study, attention to methodological rigor was achieved through accountability from an auditor and consistent memoing during the research process.

There is some disagreement about whether generalizability should be a quality indicator within qualitative studies in general (Hussein et al., 2014). Grounded theory research allows for modification of theory following additional data collection that might create the ability to generalize to other populations. Others emphasize the importance of conceptual rather than descriptive results within grounded theory (Chametzky & College, 2013). By highlighting conceptual categories, grounded theory researchers can improve the generalizability of a study; however, generalizability remains a potential limitation due to the qualitative nature of the methodological approach. Within this study, I don't necessarily seek to generalize the participants experiences, but rather value the impact of experiential knowledge in framing a discussion of persistence.

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Although there is some basis for using small sample sizes within grounded theory research, the small sample used within this study may limit the fittingness of this study in other contexts; this limitation can be addressed by reporting results with attention to their context. In addition, sampling methods may have impacted the types of students included in the study. One recruitment method used within this study was faculty recommendation. This may have increased the number of participants who related to at least one faculty member in their program. Students who felt less connected from their faculty or the field may have been less likely to participate in this research study. In this study, I sought to include students with varying connection to faculty by seeking participants from multiple sources who provided rich and thick descriptions of their experiences.

To recruit participants for this study, two changes in methodology were made that may have impacted the results. First, one participant in the study had completed comprehensive exams and was currently completing the dissertation proposal, but had not yet successfully defended her proposal. Initially, all individuals were required to participate in a focus group prior to an individual interview. Throughout the participant recruitment process, multiple participants contacted the researcher and indicated they would like to participate, but were not comfortable with the focus group component of this research. After completing focus groups, the researcher contacted three individuals consistent with theoretical sampling methodology. These three individuals requested individual interviews, due to the vulnerable nature of the study content, and changes were made to accommodate their request.

In addition to the potential limitation of participants only participating in an individual interview, the nature of focus groups may have impacted the data and results of the study. Although efforts were made to balance the input of each member of the focus groups, there may

have been some voices that received more attention than others. Individual interviews may have helped to address this limitation by seeking out additional data in areas that appeared to lack depth. Ultimately, thick and rich descriptions were obtained and participants reported valuing the opportunity to share their experiences in each context.

Implications

Future Research

Multiple additional questions could be addressed in future research in this area. First, international students were included in this study, and their experiences seemed to carry unique challenges that might influence their persistence process. Other researchers have specifically explored challenges facing international students within counselor education and related programs (Mittal & Elizabeth, 2006; Ng & Smith, 2009; Smith & Ng, 2009; Woo, Jang, & Henfield, 2015). These students talked more specifically about their process of persistence into employment after the doctoral degree, rather than their persistence through their programs. Future studies might examine the experiences of international students as they attempt to enter academia after obtaining a doctoral degree as well as processes that best support their success.

This study revealed substantial issues with program climate within participants' counselor education programs. This was somewhat expected because the call for participants included a requirement that students had experienced marginalization within their programs. To continue a wellness-focused line of study, future research might address programs who have developed program climates that are safer for traditionally marginalized students. A study of students within these programs might help to clarify the persistence process of traditionally marginalized students (i.e., would the questions presented in this study still be a central part of persistence in a different program climate?). Intentional study of what programs are doing well

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in this area might help to reveal strategies for developing more affirmative programs across counselor education. As noted in the description of participants in Chapter 3, most of the participants for this study belonged to the Southern Region of ACES. Additional studies might explore whether students in other regions experience similar program climates.

Finally, multiple participants talked about other parts of their identities that impacted their experience in doctoral programs (i.e., first generation college students, nontraditional students, and students who didn't have a counseling-specific mental health background). Future studies might overtly include these participants with attention to how their experiences are similar or different from those in this study. Additional studies might also include students who primarily complete their degrees online.

Counselor Education Practice

Critical theory provided a basis for understanding the implications of this research. Critical theorists avoid providing a singular answer by which any one person or group might "fix" marginalization within counselor education programs. Rather, they seek to frame interventions within the institutional and systemic nature of oppression. Therefore, holding space for the voices of marginalized populations and centering their experiences provides a basis from which I present these implications.

Within this study, participants discussed the importance of holding faculty members accountable to the values of the counseling profession. Specifically, participants recognized the lack of power that they and junior faculty members often have within programs and emphasized the importance that tenured faculty members hold others accountable. Faculty members hold a significant amount of power to set the standard in advocacy and social justice within counselor

education programs; participants suggested that they often fell short in advocating for excellence in multicultural competence even within their own ranks.

Although significant literature has addressed the need for better pedagogy around multicultural competence, this study suggests that the issues may lie more with the individuals who are delivering the material than with the material itself (American Counseling Association, 2014; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), 2016). Senior faculty members were frequently the perpetrators of oppression for the participants in this study and there were not clear means by which students could bypass these individuals in reporting issues. This study suggests that counselor education programs could benefit from institutional and program-specific policies and practices that spread power between faculty members and provide clear means of addressing issues in ways that protect students from retaliation. Providing students with clear means of accessing individuals outside the program (e.g. Director of Graduate Studies) that might be able to assist them or policies that allow for anonymous reporting of issues might help to alleviate some of these concerns.

In addition to holding faculty members accountable for their behavior, participants frequently discussed the importance of selectivity when admitting students into counseling programs. CACREP (2016) Standards require that programs screen potential students for multicultural knowledge and skills prior to admittance. Still, participants were appalled at the dispositions and behaviors exhibited by some students accepted into programs; they reported that one complication to their persistence was the amount of time they spent educating their peers about basic components of multicultural knowledge and social justice. In addition, the lack of responsiveness to feedback and awareness of appropriate professional behaviors of some students further complicated the issues. Better processes for screening students might help to

reduce the number of students entering doctoral programs without the appropriate dispositions and multicultural competencies. Previous literature has suggested that students are often more aware of issues with peers than faculty early in their programs (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002, 2006). Inclusion of students in admissions processes and valuing of students voices throughout programs may help to reduce the dispositional issues within programs. In addition, more direct attention to multicultural competency in admission interviews and the incorporation of measures of multicultural competence in admission criteria might further increase standards in this area.

Although students reported being appalled at the types of students that were admitted, they also recognized the value of individuals within their cohorts and faculty members that could connect with their experiences. Students valued spaces where they could be themselves and frequently reported starting these groups when they were not available within their programs. Continued intentional incorporation of research and mentor groups that include individuals who hold similar identities might help to provide this support to traditionally marginalized students. Intentional community at conferences and other professional spaces were also recognized as an important part of developing identity and persisting.

In addition, students recalled some meaningful interactions with faculty members and moments when the faculty were responsive to the concerns of students. Intentional solicitation of feedback from traditionally marginalized students and inclusion of that feedback in strategic planning for the program may help to continue centering the experiences of traditionally marginalized students. Finally, students recalled meaningful relationships with mentors who advocated for them within their programs, departments, and institutions. Faculty members should note that their work in advocacy on behalf of traditionally marginalized students does not go unnoticed by students and is a meaningful and valuable part of their persistence. Faculty

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members who place themselves as allies for traditionally marginalized students are an important part of their persistence both through their programs and into faculty roles and thus contribute to the development of diversity within the counseling profession.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Screening Survey

Criteria 1:

Are you currently enrolled in a doctoral counselor education program?
Yes
No

If yes, have you successfully defended your dissertation proposal?
Yes
No

Is your program CACREP accredited?
Yes
No

Are you a graduate of a doctoral counselor education program?
Yes
No

If yes, did you graduate from your program within the last 12 months?
Yes
No

Criteria 2

Please indicate membership in one of three groups to be included in this study (check all that apply):

LGBT
Person of Color
Woman

Appendix B: Demographic Survey

Age:

Gender:

Ethnicity/Race:

Sexual Orientation:

Marital/Relationship Status:

Program Information
       Program Name:
       ACES Region:

Current Status/Year Graduated:

Current Employment:

Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Guide

Focus Group Interview Guide

Introductory Script
Hello, my name is Sherrie Bruner and I will be facilitating our time together today. I want to start by thanking each of you for taking the time to participate in this focus group meeting. I anticipate us spending 1-2 hours together today. I want to remind you that our time together today will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim as a part of this research study. Are there any questions or concerns about that or any other parts of the informed consent you received? Please know that you are free to withdraw from this focus group or the study at any time. In addition, if you have any questions as we proceed please feel free to ask those questions. I am going to begin our recording now.

Ground Rules
During our time, I will be asking you some questions about your experiences in your doctoral programs and I ask that you be as open as you can with your responses. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions, and it is important that we are able to hear and respect each other's diverse viewpoints during our time together.

In order to facilitate a smooth focus group, I would like to provide some ground rules.
1. Please respect the vulnerability and privacy of other participants by keeping the content discussed during this focus group confidential.
2. Please allow space for others to speak without interruption.
3. Please refrain from engaging in sidebars during the focus group.
4. You have the right to challenge, question, or disagree with other participants or myself. Please do so respectfully to encourage an open discussion.

Does everyone agree to the rules outlined? Are there any additional concerns or questions related to the informed consent or ground rules? If there are no other questions, let's begin.

Interview Questions

Can you tell me about an experience in your doctoral program that sticks out as especially impactful or memorable?

When you think about your doctoral experience, what challenges stick out the most to you?

       Tell me more about what led to the challenge…
       Tell me more about how you worked through the challenge
       What kinds of things did you say to yourself/did others say to you?

Was there ever a time in your program when you considered dropping out or not completing your program?

Can you tell me more about that experience?
What did you do?
Can you tell me about what happened before that?
Tell me more about what you were feeling/thinking.
How did other people react?

If you have never considered dropping out or not completing, what do you think has kept you from going there?

Tell me more about what helped you to stay in the program…

What thoughts/feelings did you have as you were navigating that experience?

Was there anything that happened that made it worse or made you question more?

Appendix D: Individual Interview Script and Guide

Introductory Script
Hello, my name is Sherrie Bruner and I will be interviewing you today. I want to start by thanking you for taking the time to participate in this interview. I anticipate us spending about an hour together today. I want to remind you that our time together will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim as a part of this research study. Are there any questions or concerns about that or any other parts of the informed consent you received? Please know that you are free to withdraw from this interview or the study at any time. In addition, if you have any questions as we proceed please feel free to ask those questions. I am going to begin our recording now.

Interview Questions

Can you tell me about an experience in your doctoral program that sticks out as especially impactful or memorable?

When you think about your doctoral experience, what challenges stick out the most to you?

       Tell me more about what led to the challenge…
       Tell me more about how you worked through the challenge
       What kinds of things did you say to yourself/did others say to you?

Was there ever a time in your program when you considered dropping out or not completing your program?
       Can you tell me more about that experience?
       What did you do?
       Can you tell me about what happened before that?
       Tell me more about what you were feeling/thinking.
       How did other people react?

If you have never considered dropping out or not completing, what do you think has kept you from going there?

Tell me more about what helped you to stay in the program…

          What thoughts/feelings did you have as you were navigating that experience?

Was there anything that happened that made it worse or made you question more?

Appendix E: Focus Group Informed Consent

Participant Informed Consent A Grounded Theory Study of Persistence within Marginalized Doctoral Students in Counselor Education

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study regarding persistence experiences of marginalized students in counselor education. I am completing this dissertation study as a part of my requirement as a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education program at the University of Tennessee.

The purpose of this study is to explore social and psychological processes that impact the persistence of students who identify with a traditionally marginalized population and have experienced marginalization within their programs. For the purposes of this study, individuals who identify as LGBT, women or racial/ethnic minorities will be included in the study. I am interested in better understanding how doctoral students experience and overcome barriers within their programs.

Participant Involvement

During this study, you will be asked to complete a demographic survey and participate in an audio recorded focus group via Zoom video conferencing software. The survey will take approximately fifteen minutes to complete and the focus group will last approximately 1-2 hours. During the focus group, I will ask you to share your experiences related to marginalization and persistence in your doctoral program. After completion of data analysis, I will provide you with a copy of the findings and ask you to respond to an email to ensure I have accurately represented your contribution to the study.

After the initial focus group, you may be asked to participate in an additional follow up interview that will last approximately 1 hour. I will send requests for follow-up interviews and member checks within six months of the focus group. Follow up interviews will be conducted using Zoom video conferencing software.

Potential Risks

Marginalization experiences can be sensitive to discuss, and stress may arise from discussing these experiences within a focus group setting. You should be aware that this study will involve discussing sensitive experiences and should participate only if you are ready to engage those

conversations within a group setting. You are encouraged to share only as much as you are comfortable with during the focus group and should know that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Given the nature of the focus group interaction, I cannot ensure other participants will maintain confidentiality of your contributions. Additionally, there is some risk of breach of confidentiality when collecting and storing identifiable information such as this consent form. These documents will be securely stored however; some risk still exists when storing identifiable information. As with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to additional risks not yet identified. If you have any questions or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, I will provide appropriate referrals for support.

Potential Benefits

By helping to develop a theory regarding persistence of marginalized students, your participation in this study may help to inform processes designed to support persistence and increase diversity within the counseling profession.

Costs & Payments

There is no cost to you as a participant. There is no monetary compensation offered for participation in this study.

Confidentiality

All information obtained about you in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by federal or state law. The results of this study will be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researcher will protect your identity in all results.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is voluntary and you can decline to participate with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and cease participation. However, after your data has been de-identified you may no longer be eligible to withdraw. I reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study if I believe the nature of the discussion is becoming harmful to you or other group members. You are not required to answer any questions or share any information if you are not comfortable, and you can choose to leave the video conference at any time.

Contact Information

If at any time you have questions about the study, the procedures, or you experience any problems related to the study, please contact the researchers listed below:

Primary Researcher: Sherrie Bruner, MA, LPC-MHSP, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Educational Psychology & Counseling; College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences; University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Email: sbruner1@vols.utk.edu Phone: (865) 684-0734

Faculty Advisor: Casey Barrio Minton, PhD, NCC, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Psychology & Counseling; College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences; University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Email: cbarrio@utk.edu. Phone: (865) 974-8382

If you have questions or concerns about your treatment in this research or your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Tennessee IRB Compliance Officer at 865-

974-7697 or utkirb@utk.edu.

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study

_____ _____ **Participant Name Printed Participant Signature**		___/___/___ **Date**
_____ _____ **Researcher Name Printed Researcher Signature**		___/___/___ **Date**

Appendix F: Individual Interview Informed Consent

Participant Informed Consent: A Grounded Theory Study of Persistence within Marginalized Doctoral Students in Counselor Education

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study regarding persistence experiences of marginalized students in counselor education. I am completing this dissertation study as a part of my requirement as a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education program at the University of Tennessee.

The purpose of this study is to explore social and psychological processes that impact the persistence of students who identify with a traditionally marginalized population and have experienced marginalization within their programs. For the purposes of this study, individuals who identify as LGBT, women or racial/ethnic minorities will be included in the study. I am interested in better understanding how doctoral students experience and overcome barriers within their programs.

Participant Involvement

During this study, you will be asked to complete a demographic survey and participate in an audio recorded interview via Zoom video conferencing software. The survey will take approximately fifteen minutes to complete and the interview will last approximately 1-1.5 hours. During the interview, I will ask you to share your experiences related to marginalization and persistence in your doctoral program. After completion of data analysis, I will provide you with a copy of the findings and ask you to respond to an email to ensure I have accurately represented your contribution to the study.

Potential Risks

Marginalization experiences can be sensitive to discuss, and stress may arise from discussing these experiences. You should be aware that this study will involve discussing sensitive experiences and should participate only if you are ready to engage those conversations with the researcher. You are encouraged to share only as much as you are comfortable with during the individual interview and should know that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Additionally, there is some risk of breach of confidentiality when collecting and storing identifiable information such as this consent form. These documents will be securely stored

however; some risk still exists when storing identifiable information. As with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to additional risks not yet identified. If you have any questions or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, I will provide appropriate referrals for support.

Potential Benefits

By helping to develop a theory regarding persistence of marginalized students, your participation in this study may help to inform processes designed to support persistence and increase diversity within the counseling profession.

Costs & Payments

There is no cost to you as a participant. There is no monetary compensation offered for participation in this study.

Confidentiality

All information obtained about you in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by federal or state law. The results of this study will be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researcher will protect your identity in all results.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is voluntary and you can decline to participate with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and cease participation. However, after your data has been de-identified you may no longer be eligible to withdraw. I reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study if I believe the nature of the discussion is becoming harmful to you or other group members. You are not required to answer any questions or share any information if you are not comfortable, and you can choose to leave the video conference at any time.

Contact Information

If at any time you have questions about the study, the procedures, or you experience any problems related to the study, please contact the researchers listed below:

Primary Researcher: Sherrie Bruner, MA, LPC-MHSP, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Educational Psychology & Counseling; College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences;

University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Email: sbruner1@vols.utk.edu Phone: (865) 684-0734

Faculty Advisor: Casey Barrio Minton, PhD, NCC, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Psychology & Counseling; College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences; University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Email: cbarrio@utk.edu. Phone: (865) 974-8382

If you have questions or concerns about your treatment in this research or your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Tennessee IRB Compliance Officer at 865-

974-7697 or utkirb@utk.edu.

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study

Participant Name Printed Participant Signature		___/___/___ **Date**
Researcher Name Printed Researcher Signature		___/___/___ **Date**

Appendix G: IRB Outcome Letter

January 26, 2017

Sharon Leah Bruner,
UTK - Coll of Education, Hlth, & Human - Educational Psychology & Counseling

Re: UTK IRB-17-03480-XP
Study Title: Persistence of Traditionally Marginalized Doctoral Students in Counselor Education: A Grounded Theory Study

Dear Sharon Leah Bruner:

The UTK Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed your application for the above referenced project. It determined that your application is eligible for expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1)categories (6) and (7). The IRB has reviewed these materials and determined that they do comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects.

Therefore, this letter constitutes full approval by the IRB of your application (version 1.1) as submitted, including Informed Consent (v1.1), Email to Participants (v1.1), Email to Faculty:org (v1.1), Forms and Scheduling Email (v1.1), Screening Form (1.1), and the Demographic Survey (v1.0). The listed forms have been dated and stamped IRB approved. Approval of this study will be valid from January 26, 2017 to January 25, 2018.

In the event that subjects are to be recruited using solicitation materials, such as brochures, posters, web-based advertisements, etc., these materials must receive prior approval of the IRB. Any revisions in the approved application must also be submitted to and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. In addition, you are responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subjects or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

Finally, re-approval of your project is required by the IRB in accord with the conditions specified above. You may not continue the research study beyond the time or other limits specified unless you obtain prior written approval of the IRB.

Sincerely,

Colleen P. Gilrane

Colleen P. Gilrane, Ph.D.
Chair

Institutional Review Board | Office of Research & Engagement
1534 White Avenue   Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
865-974-7697   865-974-7400 fax   irb.utk.edu

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VITA

Sherrie Bruner was born in Martinsville, Virginia on December 19, 1987. She earned a dual Bachelor of Science degree in Counseling and Bible from Johnson University and a Master of Arts Degree in Professional Counseling/Marriage and Family Therapy from Johnson University. Sherrie primary professional experience includes providing counseling services to adolescents and adults struggling with substance related issues and families involved in a custody episode. In addition, she has served as an adjunct faculty member at Johnson University for the past 5 years and has experience with teaching and supervising at both the masters and undergraduate level. She has co-authored multiple journal articles and book chapters and presented at local, state, regional, and national conferences. Sherrie will graduate with a Ph.D. in Counselor education and begin serving as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Counseling at Syracuse University in Syracuse, NY in August 2017.