

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of Education

**CONFLICT STORIES IN MULTICULTURAL COUNSELOR EDUCATION:  
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY AMONG COUNSELORS-IN-TRAINING**

A Dissertation in

Counselor Education and Supervision

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2016

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## ABSTRACT

A multicultural counseling class brings both challenges and rewards for its instructors and students. In particular, research indicates that interpersonal and intercultural conflicts are present despite understanding the important perspectives that students might offer (Burton & Furr, 2014; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo & Rivera, 2009b; Sue, Rivera, Capodipulo, Lin & Torino, 2010). The focus of this study was to illuminate this perspective in order to understand the conflict experiences that occur in multicultural counseling classes with master's counseling students. The purpose of this research was to provide insight about the retellings, characteristics, and meanings of conflicts that students experience by using narrative analysis. King and Baxter Magolda's model for intercultural maturity (2005) and Mezirow's (1978) transformational learning theory provided a conceptual framework and influenced the data analysis.

Several findings emerged from this study. While each participant had uniquely distinct conflicts, qualitative analysis materialized thematic linkages across them. Three overarching domains surfaced in the horizontal analysis between stories: Class expectations, types of conflict experiences, and transformation. Conflict experiences were also categorized with three integral themes: intercultural, intracultural, and institutional. The final domain, transformation, articulated the residues of conflict experiences: the generation of new meanings.

Findings demonstrate the diverse and distinct quality of stories of master's level students who experience conflict in their multicultural counseling class as they navigate the complex tasks of professional identity development. Because not every student experiencing conflict articulated new meanings, further research may be needed about the factors of conflict experiences that foster transformation.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*The free bird leaps  
on the back of the wind  
and floats downstream  
till the current ends  
-Maya Angelou*

While this document bears a single name, there are countless others whom without the document would cease to exist and so must be named. First, my dissertation committee were invaluable for perspective, guidance, and support. Dr. Katie Kostohryz provided me with rallying, motivation, and encouragement to see me through this process in light of endless shifts and changes. Dr. Jason Gines encouraged me to see my research design through broader perspectives. Dr. JoLynn Carney helped me to grow as a counselor educator as well as a thoughtful researcher. Finally, Dr. Peggy Lorah provided an invaluable methodologist and guide who pushed me as a qualitative researcher in conducting a meaningful and valuable study. Without these educators, among others at Penn State, I could not have navigated the unexpected obstacles that emerged throughout my doctoral program. Moreover, gratitude must be expressed to important staff such as Chris Andrus, who provided the support that happens behind the scenes.

What would a doctoral program be without its cohort? I could not have imagined traversing the intensity of getting a PhD without knowing that the nine of you were experiencing with alongside me. I will carry all of the memories with me for a lifetime: struggle, laughter, and joy of Thursday nights. A distinct expression of gratitude to Naorah Lockhart, who likely doesn't realize the impact of her friendship; she has been not only a comrade in navigating the doctoral process, but a personal ally whose unwavering support and empathy gives me the strength to persist.

To those who exist outside of the institution: to my families, members of whom played significant roles in helping me discover myself in academia without losing sight of who I am. To my mother and father, Jean-Jacques and Susan, for their unwavering support for all of my endeavors throughout life, but most recently for their loving curiosity and willingness to learn about my interests: an act of support they'll never know the value of. To my brother, Erik, whose steadfast allegiance provided me with reprieve, humor, and the support to carry on. And to my loving and supportive in-laws, Howard and Sharon, whose home and kitchen frequently served as a respite away from it all.

Finally, I must devote a significant chunk of this acknowledgement to my partner, Benji. Benji was not simply supportive; he experienced it all alongside me. We took every step of this process in tandem despite being physically apart. Benji spent countless hours listening to me talk through steps of this project, remaining solid when I felt liquid, buoying me at my heaviest. He aligned my focus, made me laugh, and took me seriously. He will not recognize it because he is as humble as he is supportive, but I am a better researcher, counselor, educator, and person because of him.

To all of the individuals who were the wind at my back and my downstream current.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The facilitation of risk in order to complicate and problematize cultural knowledge lies at the heart of multicultural counselor education. Sometimes, engaging in discussions about the awareness of difference and diversity involves turbulent emotional exchanges (Burton & Furr, 2014; Sue et al., 2009). Lorde (1984) encourages us to engage in these dialogues despite the potential for: “I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood” (p. 40). For this study, I sought out counselors-in-training and utilized narrative methods so as to gain greater insight into their experiences of conflict in a multicultural counseling course. The primary focus of this narrative inquiry was to understand experiences of conflict as told by counselor trainees who have completed a multicultural counseling course.

The Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) developed in the early 1990s emphasized the tripartite integration of knowledge, awareness, and skill (Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992). These authors emphasized that in order to enhance their cultural awareness, students need to critically reflect on their experiences, identities, and assumptions (Sue et al., 1992). In particular, the *awareness* component of this triadic model is especially pertinent to the experience(s) of risk taking.

The development of these multifaceted objectives for the process of becoming a culturally competent counselor relied on the crucial capacity for awareness, defined as one who is “aware of their negative emotional reactions toward other racial and ethnic groups...[and] aware of their stereotypes” (p. 485). Becoming a counselor in a training program accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) means that one must develop an awareness of social and cultural diversity by “identifying and



eliminating barriers, prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression” (CACREP, 2016, p. 9). These goals outlined by the early MCC encourage students to challenge themselves, confront their biases, and develop an appreciation of dialogue that gets to the crux of controversial issues.

Teaching counselor trainees to attend to these personal and powerful issues relating to social identities, racism, inequality, and oppression requires rendering explicit what is often kept silent in social life. The importance of addressing these sensitive topics has become especially pertinent in recent decades, as increasing attention to cultural issues have ignited numerous social movements to address various forms of culturally-based oppressions. For counselors-in-training, classroom-based conversations about these issues can be difficult (Burton & Furr, 2014; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo & Rivera, 2009b; Sue, Rivera, Capodiulo, Lin & Torino, 2010). These authors acknowledged the complexity of teaching multicultural competence, and suggest that professors may not have the fluency for facilitating this complexity. Teaching multicultural competence requires students to meet learning goals that are more complex than memorizing theories and interventions. Multicultural competence is also tasked with providing opportunities for students to become culturally aware of themselves as it relates to counseling.

With this increasing necessity for multicultural competence in counseling, a comprehensive understanding of how to cultivate growth in this area has emerged. These needs have become infinitely more complex as a result of a growing focus on self-awareness, reflexivity, and critical reflection, all of which have increased the “affective demands” (Buckley & Foldy, 2010, p. 694) and resistances of students in relation to the material. Choudhouri (2009) maintained that it is vital for students to understand themselves as the tool for enhancing cultural literacy and competence.

A content analysis of multicultural course syllabi (Pieterse, Evans, Risner-Butner, Collins & Mason, 2009) found that more than half incorporate self-awareness and reflective exercises (such as keeping a personal journal), and 96% incorporated aspects of the tripartite model of multicultural competence (knowledge, awareness and skill) originally outlined by Sue et al (1992). As such, counselor educators tasked with the challenge of developing these learning experiences frequently bolster their assignments with high levels of personal reflexivity and exploration. This has increasingly become a standard learning component in multicultural counselor education (Buckley & Foldy, 2010; Pieterse et al., 2009; Yoon, Jérémie-Brink & Kordesh, 2014).

Counseling researchers have also acknowledged the path to cultural competence as complex and unending; wrought with discomfort, conflict and challenges (Burton & Furr, 2014, Reynolds, 2011; Sue et al, 2010). When asked to examine a personal prejudice, stereotyping behavior, or cultural bias counselor educators have indicated that the reactions from some students can be contentious and result in conflicts and disagreements in class (Burton & Furr, 2014; Choudhuri, 2009; Sue et al., 2010). Choudhuri (2009) described conflict as that which occurs due to the tensions that arise when cultural knowledge and experience confront each other, when the ability to interpret those experiences might not be available, and a “dance of misunderstanding” (p. 162) ensues. Burton and Furr (2014) used quantitative methods to deduce that counselor trainees handle classroom conflict in varying ways, some of which result in an unintentional escalation of tension. These authors maintain that more growth is needed in understanding the complexity of student perspectives on experiences of conflict in a multicultural counseling course. Despite understanding that conflict may be an unwitting

outcome along the path to multicultural competence, little is known about how counselors-in-training experience it.

An essential component of this understanding is the awareness of how conflicts, even well-intended ones, are experienced by students. If all that happens in a multicultural counseling course (conflict, harmony, disagreements, silence, understanding and misunderstanding) is grist for the mill, then a more thorough understanding of how each of these components are experienced is needed.

In order for counselor trainees to maintain respect and fairness to identity groups during moments of conflict, more information on how students experience conflict in multicultural counselor education is needed. This understanding is also crucial for counselor educators to make mindful choices in the response to conflict that arises in the multicultural counseling classroom. This study contributes to counselor education by exploring how counselor trainees experience and make meaning out of tension and conflict experienced in their multicultural counseling course.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Helping students develop into sensitive and multicultural competent counselors is a complex task for any counselor educator (Burton & Furr, 2014). What further contributes to this complication, however, is the increasingly intersectional diversity that both students and educators are bringing to counseling classrooms, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, national origin, immigration status, religious affiliation. As such, counselor educators who teach multicultural counseling are faced with increasing complexity and higher risks for conflict both among students and between student and instructor (Burton & Furr, 2014).

With the emphasis on personal growth and self-reflexivity as outlined in most counselor education curricula, many counselor educators suggest that students in multicultural education classes be asked to examine personal biases, prejudices, and confront stereotypes (Buckley & Foldy, 2010; Pieterse et al., 2009; Reynolds, 2011; Sue et al, 2010; Yoon et al., 2014). Despite this emphasis, Morissette and Gadbois' (2006) review of ethical counseling pedagogy highlighted the minimal research that explores the degree of conflict in the classroom alongside the requirements of personal exploration and intense self-examination. In addition, there is little known about students' experiences of conflict as they arise in multicultural counseling classrooms. Due to the emphasis on personal growth and simultaneous attenuation of conflict management in counselor education literature, a gap exists in understanding how conflict is experienced in the classroom and what students do with these experiences.

There is currently an uneven distribution of scholarship related to student conflict and difficult dialogues in multicultural counselor education. A review of the literature found an abundance of empirical and theoretical writings on the experience of faculty and counselor educators than that of their students, (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Burton & Furr, 2014; Fier & Ramsey, 2005; Sue et al, 2009) in addition to several discussions of pedagogical strategies for addressing student resistance, emotional demands, and conflict in multicultural counselor education (Abrams & Gibson, 2007; Buckley & Foldy, 2010; Gloria, Rieckmann & Rush, 2000). There is even less empirical research that accounts for this unique perspective in Counselor Education (Burton & Furr, 2014).

The field of education has focused some attention on the experiences of students learning about cultural and social issues. In these settings, educational scholars have used qualitative methods to find that learners face conflict (Martin, 2010; Tije, 2002), feelings of shame, anger,

or guilt (Zembylas, 2008) when learning about social and cultural issues such as oppression and privilege. Additionally educational scholars have utilized quantitative methods to find that students also experience emotional dysregulation (Ayoko & Konrad, 2012), and value challenges (Gloria et al, 2000) when confronting concepts surrounding issues of race and diversity.

Facilitating conflict presents a complex challenge, especially when students' representative cultural identities are thrown into the interactions. How educators or facilitators react and respond to challenging conflicts, and how these responses impact experiences of students may be particularly valuable to multicultural counselor educators.

In their textbook on facilitating difficult dialogues, Maxwell, Nagda, and Thompson (2011) explore the facilitation of intergroup dialogues of diverse social identities. These researchers found that the facilitators of intercultural exchanges felt their own cultural identities impact how they experienced intercultural dialogues (Maxwell et al., 2011). Understanding how both educators and learners experience intercultural dialogues and conflicts is especially relevant to better understanding the dynamic challenges of multicultural counseling education, however, the perspective of the learner is vastly underrepresented in the literature. Because the dearth of empirical literature in counselor education focuses on the experience of educators, an integral aspect of this study was to investigate the student perspective of intercultural conflict. This was done with the hopes to fill this perspective gap with the voices and stories of counselor trainees who have experienced conflict or difficult exchanges in their multicultural counseling course.

To meet this goal, I conducted a qualitative study using King and Baxter Magolda's (2005) theory of intercultural maturity and Mezirow's (1978, 2000, 2006) transformational learning theory to focus on participants' experiences of conflict as well as the meanings they generated. To situate the characteristics, experiences, and generative meanings that student's

express within a theoretical framework I utilized a research design in which components of these theoretical models shaped the research and focus of the analysis. The focus of the analysis included interpersonal, intrapersonal, and transformative domains to understand the student experiences of conflict in a multicultural counseling course. I used a two-phase narrative methodology and analysis to enable participants to tell their conflict stories. I strayed from using rigid definitions to define the identity of my participants without them, and preferred for their identities to be shaped by themselves.

However, due to the lack of research about conflict experiences in for master's level counseling students, I narrowed my sample to students who are currently enrolled in Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)-accredited programs who have experienced conflict. Doing so filled a perspective gap in research and provided insight about the student-perspective on conflicts and difficult dialogues in multicultural counseling classes.

Ultimately, this narrative inquiry presented a specific focus-conflict-with a narrow sample: graduate-level master's students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs, who have experienced conflict and have completed a courses in multicultural counseling. This approach cultivated a distinct set of variables that were explored and storied through the narratives of counselors-in-training.

### **Research Questions**

In order to fill this gap, two primary questions guide the momentum of this study. In this section, an explanation of how each component of this question address distinct aspects of the experiences and counseling students who experience conflict in their multicultural training course. These interview questions will aim at eliciting narratives about the characteristics of the

conflict, experiences related to the conflict, as well as if and how the conflict story led to any possible consequences of meaning-makings or transformations. Specific terms will be elaborated on in the *Definition of Terms* section of this chapter.

**Research Question 1:** How do counseling students experience, understand, and reflect upon conflict that occurs in a multicultural counseling course?

A primary focus of this question is to obtain understanding about the experiences of counseling students who experience conflict. The word conflict in this question is being used broadly to capture multiple perspectives of conflict, including difficult dialogues, tension, resistance, intra- and interpersonal conflict. To answer this question, I developed broad interview questions that elicited narratives about characteristics of, and experiences related to conflict. Conflict, for the intended purpose of this research question, will be understood as a state or event in which two or more individuals experience tension, difficulty, misunderstanding, or emotional frustration with one another, or, as a state or event in which an individual experiences tension, difficulty, or emotional frustration on their own.

**Research Question 2:** What impact do these conflict stories have on students?

The primary purpose of this question is to understand how the stories of conflict impacts students. This question was developed in light of research by Mezirow (1978, 2000, 2006) and Rowe (2002) that suggest that experiencing conflict, tension, or disequilibrium in a learning context generates new meanings. Findings from this question might help counseling programs develop constructive ways of addressing conflicts in multicultural courses, and find ways for educators to facilitate conflict in ways that enable students to grow and generate new meanings.

The open nature of this question will allow for a multitude of perspectives and subjective experiences to be explored. This question will also allow participants to reflect on their conflict

stories as they narrate it in order to explore any new meanings that came from revisiting the story and experience of conflict.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this narrative inquiry, as a method to discover and explore meaning, was to better understand the conflict stories of counselor trainees within the setting of a multicultural counseling course. This exploration set out to fill the two gaps in the literature: (a) to gain a better understanding of the student perspective of conflict in a multicultural counseling course, and (b) to utilize this perspective to provide insight so that counselor educators can navigate conflict when it occurs in a multicultural counseling course.

I also aimed to explore the individual meanings that counseling trainees prescribe to their stories of conflict in their multicultural counseling course. In order to achieve this goal, I sought out counselors in training whom self-identify as having experienced a conflict in their multicultural counseling course, and asked open-ended interview questions in order to facilitate narration of their conflict story.

Understanding how the participants experience their conflict and retell their conflict stories will ultimately serve one primary purpose: to understanding how counselor trainees experience and assign meaning after experiencing conflict in a multicultural counseling course. I wanted to create space as well for a secondary or unintended significance of learning more about how to best prepare counselor educators for conflict moments in the classroom, in order to ultimately better serve students' future client's needs.

The arguments presented at the conclusion of this study may be interpreted by quantitative researchers as having diminutive validity. It is important to distinguish that qualitative research utilizes a paradigm other than that of a positivist, traditionally objective



truth-seeking process. Rather, qualitative research attempt to embrace the subjectivity of social phenomena by examining experiences from various perspectives (Ponterotto, 2005). A narrative inquiry such as this does not necessarily seek out an accurate or essential truth among and between stories of participants. On the contrary, trustworthy arguments and conclusions drawn will emerge out of rich descriptions, detailed and thorough transcription, and rigorous qualitative analysis.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following operational definitions serve to both describe relevant terminology and locate the terminology within relevant theoretical frameworks and scholarly discourse. Narrative inquiry will be utilized in order to gain insight to the counseling student perspective of a conflict experience.

**Culture/cultural Identity.** Berger and Luckmann (1966) are often cited as pioneers of the social constructivist paradigm. They argue that evolving socio-cultural practices form and shape meaning. Because this study emerges from and utilizes a constructivist paradigm, the words culture and cultural identity steer away from rigid definitions. Rather, a fluid, multilayered, and intersectional framework will be deployed to understand culture more dynamically. Triandis (1972) also defined culture along these paradigms. This definition of culture includes socio-cultural experiences that are shared, resulting in shared or similarly integrated cognitive and emotional structures. Culture will be understood through a constructivist lens: one that understands it to be socially constructed, and informed by context. Cultural identity, therefore, will also be understood as intersectional, and socially constructed.

**Cultural Conflict.** For the purposes of this study, conflict will be understood in two possible ways: As a state or event in which two or more individuals experience tension,

difficulty, misunderstanding, or emotional frustration with one another, or, as a state or event in which an individual experiences tension, difficulty, or emotional frustration on their own. Either of these understandings of conflict results in a sense of emotional deregulation. These definitions of conflict are paradigmatically consistent with the conceptual frameworks supporting the research of this study, which are explored more in depth in the section entitled Conceptual Frameworks.

The definition of conflict throughout this study comes from key trends in communications research that examines conflicts that are rooted in intricate cultural differences: an incompatibility of values, worldviews, expectations, perspectives, or norms (Oetzel et al. 2007). By introducing a social-ecological framework for conflict that responds to the historical absence of culture in discussions about conflict, these scholars maintain conflict is cultural. This understanding of conflict corresponds to Bronfenbrenner's (1977) social ecological framework that divides various environmental influences into various system levels.

Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) suggested that an inattention to culture, cultural identity, or a general cultural incompetence can produce unintentional collisions between people. This definition assumes that conflict involves emotional frustration, and occurs when individuals from two (or more) cultural groups interact. In moments of communication or interaction, the cultural group membership affects conflict processes on two different levels: knowingly and unknowingly. Cultural membership differences can include deep and unconscious disparities in beliefs and values, as well as a mismatch of norms and expectations in communication styles (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). As such, conflict will be defined as those culturally-bound interactional tensions that arise when systems of knowledge confront each other (Choudhouri, 2009).

**Transformation.** Transformation is discussed on multiple fronts in various fields. For this study, I use transformation as it is conceptualized in Mezirow's Transformational Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978, 2000, 2006). Mezirow synthesized these efforts to develop a framework that outlines transformative learning as a negotiation of meaning makings that lead to shifted ways of thinking. Further, the examination of these influences led to his description of transformation as:

“The emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings (Mezirow, 1978 pg. 6).”

To better understand and contribute to the evolving body of research in multicultural pedagogy as it confronts issues of student conflict, difficult dialogues, and multicultural counselor education, it will be necessary to hear the accounts of conflict experienced by counselor trainees. This narrative inquiry utilizes key theoretical contributions from counselor education in addition to theories from higher education, learning, and psychology. An overview of these theories in as well as empirical contributions from counselor education will be offered in the following section.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Current Counselor Education research points to the dilemma of students experiencing conflict in multicultural counseling courses (Burton & Furr, 2014; Choudhouri, 2009; Sue et al., 2009). These scholars agree in that teaching multicultural counseling is wrought with challenges: conflict (Burton & Furr, 2014), microaggressions (Sue et al., 2009), and challenges to personal growth (Choudhouri, 2009). Collectively, these authors call for more research to understand the dynamics of multicultural counselor education, to better address the challenges to pedagogy as well as the movement within higher education to better equip students for intercultural encounters. Thus, to better grasp the distinctive history and literature surrounding this phenomenon, I conducted a review of the relevant empirical and conceptual research to frame this study. In addition, I identify two theoretical models that provide a conceptual framework for understanding conflict in learning environments then list here.

In this literature review, I first review the development and theoretical underpinnings that inform how counselor educators structure multicultural counseling. In this section, I first review provide the theoretical frameworks for the current educational and professional standards that guide multicultural curriculum and the development of multicultural competencies. An overview of these histories is particularly relevant as the credentialing guidelines and professional standards provide a more precise understanding of the necessity of multicultural competence in counselor education in the present. An examination of the history of multicultural counseling will also illuminate how the curricular standards that dictate necessary pedagogical and learning goals have emerged over time.

In addition to this historical framework, an overview of current empirical research related to conflict in multicultural education will be offered in order to provide rationale for a study such

as this. Because there is only a small amount of research within the field of counseling that explores this phenomena, the studies presented will also explore meaning making in conflict events and multicultural education in other disciplines. The purpose of this section is to discuss research that is pertinent to the understanding of conflict experienced by students in a multicultural counseling course. While there is a lack of research that speaks to this exact dilemma, the studies presented in this literature review include both qualitative and quantitative approaches that have either identified the phenomenon of conflict in multicultural counseling courses, or point to the challenge of teaching sensitive topics within multicultural counseling courses due to conflict. This overview of present research will to offer current conceptions and understandings of the student perspective of conflict experienced in multicultural counseling courses. Doing so will ground this narrative inquiry about conflict in multicultural counselor education with strong rational.

Finally, the literature review will also provide an overview and discussion of two theoretical models that provide a conceptual framework for this study. Both models, transformational learning (Mezirow, 1978, 1981, 2002, 2006) and King and Baxter Magolda's framework for intercultural maturity (2005) look to understand the developmental capacities for intercultural interactions, in addition to meaning making processes in learning. Specifically, I will describe the concepts within each of these models and describe how they relate to this study. These concepts include: (1) intercultural and (2) intracultural domains of intercultural maturity (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005), and (3) transformation (Mezirow, 1978, 2006).

## **Professional Standards**

Many counselors are directed by two large professional organizations: The American Counseling Association (ACA), the national organization for the counseling profession, and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), an accrediting body that maintains curricular standards for counselor education programs.

Counseling programs that are accredited by CACREP require coursework that addresses multicultural competencies of counselors and counselor educators alike. According to the 2016 CACREP Professional Identity Standards for Social and Cultural Diversity, professional counselors should understand “the impact of heritage, attitudes, beliefs, understandings, and acculturative experiences on an individual’s views of others” (CACREP Standards, 2016, p. 10).

In addition to this, counselors are required to understand “strategies for identifying and eliminating barriers, prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination” (p. 10). At the onset of developing multicultural counseling competencies, Arredondo (1999) argued that any cultural competencies developed should be guided by both ACA’s ethical standards and reflected in the development of CACREP programs. This overview of the professional standards that reflect attempts to provide guidance for multicultural competence will give context to the importance the counseling profession has placed on multicultural competency.

## **Multicultural Counseling**

The story of multicultural counseling and therapy began in the early 1980’s (Collins & Arthur, 2010; Sue, Bernier, Durran, Feinburg, Pederson, Smith and Vasquez-Nuttall, 1982) when professional literature began to develop competencies for counseling across cultures due to increasing attention to issues of diversity and a shift in thinking toward understanding

multicultural perspectives. Prior to the development of Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) however, cross-cultural counseling represented a broad view that provided aptitudes for mental health professionals engaging in a counseling relationship where the participants differed in perceived cultural background. While this definition might suggest that all counseling is cross-cultural, the early literature tends to emphasize race and ethnicity over other social identities (Speight, Myers, Chikako & Highlen, 1991).

Sue et al. (1982) attempted to define cross-cultural counseling/therapy as “any counseling relationship in which two or more participants differ with respect to cultural background, lifestyle, and values” (p. 47). The Sue et al. (1982) definition attempts to also answer the question: how can counselors work effectively with clients if they differ from each other? In doing so, Sue et al. (1992) received approval and support to simultaneously publish their article in two prominent professional counseling journals. In this work, the authors articulated the first actual foundations for the development of cross-cultural awareness. This acknowledged that much of the research in psychology only represented samples of white, upper-middle class college students done by white, upper-middle class researchers and psychologists (Sue, Sue & Sue 1975).

Decades have passed since Sue et al. (1982) and others published their foundational articles on developing cross-cultural counseling competencies. Publications such as these gradually led to the development of cultural competencies that over time were foundational to counselor education and practice. The call to develop a model for multicultural competence became a benchmark for the research and literature that followed, shaping much of the frameworks for multicultural competency that counselor’s currently utilize. This document served as a tool for counseling curriculum reform and training for helping professionals. Several

well-known authors (Sue, et al., 1992; Arredondo, 1999; Sue et. al., 1982) contributed to the development of cultural competencies that several professional organizations such as the Association for Multicultural Counseling, and eventually, the American Counseling Association adopted and endorsed.

These early competencies made several important points: (a) traditional counseling was failing to adequately consider culture in the counseling process; (b) little was understood about the worldviews of the culturally different; and (c) standards for counseling had been based on white, middleclass, western and Eurocentric norms (Sue, 2015). In addition, the competencies outlined a tripartite model of what makes a culturally skilled counselor: (a) an *awareness* of self and others in terms of cultural identity, (b) a *knowledge* of sociopolitical systems with respect to cultural groups, and a (c) *skills* set that allows for mindful generativity and articulation of culturally competent counseling (Sue et. al., 1982).

In 2014, the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) created a committee to revise and update the original Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC). In January of 2016 the updated competencies were published in the Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development after their endorsement by the AMCD. This new conceptual framework, known as the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) outlines updates and revisions that focus on key components: social justice, intersectionality, systemic oppression and the social ecological perspective of cultural identity (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler & McCullough, 2015). These revised competencies intend to provide those within the profession of counseling with guideposts for delivering relevant and current approaches to counseling, research, training, and supervision.



These competencies have been developed and honed over time to address questions that arose as a result of this original publication. CACREP standards have also infused language that directly connects to each component of this tripartite model.

**Awareness.** Awareness, as understood within the context of multicultural competencies first developed by Sue et al. (1982), includes an examination of the mindset of the counselor. It includes beliefs, attitudes, values, thoughts, reactions, biases and stereotypes of various cultural identities. Culturally competent counselors are able to assess and identify the processes by which their attitudes and beliefs might impact the potential trusting relationship between participants of counseling. The multifaceted task of developing something as abstract awareness comes with the increasing diversity of identities of both counselor trainees and counselor educators.

Additionally, facilitating multicultural competence in a way that allows students to develop awareness their implicit biases, cultural identities and personal histories, is a personal task that might look different for each student. Sue and Sue (2003) acknowledge the challenge of examining the self due to the emotional impact of attitudes, beliefs, and feelings associated with cultural difference. It can potentially serve as a threatening catalyst to identifying various difficult consequences including racism, implicit bias, sexism, able-ism, heterosexism, religious oppression, and so on. However, Sue argues one ought to adequately deal with these difficult potential examinations in order to be an effective and culturally competent counselor (Sue and Sue, 2003). As such, the awareness component of the tripartite model is especially relevant to the proposed study. This researcher seeks to explore conflict in a setting that encourages the examination of the self, potentially revealing the emotional impact of culturally-based attitudes—something that scholars and standards encourage as a valuable learning tool (Sue et al, 2009; Sue & Sue, 2003; Burton & Furr, 2014).

CACREP 2016 Standards have infused the component of awareness in the tripartite model of multicultural competence. The following professional identity standards outlined by CACREP apply to all entry-level and doctoral-level programs. Below are examples of CACREP standards that use language to address the awareness component of multicultural competence:

- Section 2.F.2: an understanding of “attitudes, beliefs, understandings, and acculturative experiences on an individual’s view of others,” the effects of “power, privilege...spiritual beliefs...[and] strategies for identifying and eliminating barriers, prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination” (CACREP 2016, pp 10).

**Knowledge.** The knowledge competence encompasses the understanding of various worldviews or cultural identities. It includes the ability to know and accept other cultural worldviews in a nonjudgmental manner. The culturally competent counselor will have acknowledged that they have not necessarily spent time living within the cultural context of their client, and possesses the ability to manifest empathic understandings of different worldviews (Sue & Sue, 2003). The counselor who is knowledgeable will have also gained practical knowledge concerning a client’s cultural background or identity—as it is offered by the client. Knowledge also relates to an understanding of multicultural counseling theories, definitions of terms, and understanding cultural phenomena such as forms oppression and impacts of privilege.

CACREP 2016 Standards have infused language that addresses the competency of knowledge. Below are examples of CACREP standards that use language to address the knowledge component of multicultural competence:

- Section 2.F.2: knowledge of “theories and models of multicultural counseling,

cultural identity development...and multicultural and pluralistic characteristics within and among diverse groups nationally and internationally” (CACREP 2016, p. 10).

- Section 5.D.2.k: knowledge of the “effects of discrimination...power, privilege, and oppression on clients’ life and career development” (CACREP 2016, p. 26).

**Skill.** According to Sue and Sue (2003), effective multicultural counseling makes use of culturally relevant skills, tools, interventions and techniques. The skill component of the tripartite model requires challenging the blind use of techniques to all situations and populations without consideration of cultural implications. Culturally competent counselors possess the skillset of selecting culturally sensitive and relevant counseling tools in order to best help clients. This component of cultural competence also emphasizes the ability for counselors to anticipate the impact of their helping style in addition to limitations in their skillset for unfamiliar cultural identities (Sue and Sue, 2003).

CAREP 2016 outlines many different standards for multicultural competency skills, including within each entry-level specialty areas. Examples are listed below:

- Section 5.A-G: possessing “ethical and culturally relevant strategies for facilitating groups...testing, selecting, administering and interpreting test results...supporting addiction and substance abuse prevention...career exploration...clinical mental health counseling...rehabilitation counseling...[and] marriage and family counseling” (CACREP 2016, pp 6-36).

The development of these Multicultural Counseling Competencies in the early 1990's has resulted in large strides in training culturally competent and skilled counselors (Sue et al., 1992). As a result, various teaching strategies have been utilized to augment clinical instruction and enhance multicultural counselor education beyond traditional methods, such as transformational learning (Henriksen, 2006; Mezirow, 1978), reflective learning (Tobin, Willow, Bastow & Ratkowski, 2009), and the integration of advanced technology (Walter & Thanasiu, 2011). These varied strategies are designed to keep counselor educators responsible for delivering competent and relevant training to meet both academic and professional standards of counselor education. One primary role of the counselor educator is to provide counselors-in-training the knowledge and ability to transfer multiculturally competent counseling skills from the classroom to various clinical settings.

Counselor Education scholars such as Burton and Furr (2014), Moodley (2004) and Choudhouri (2009) recognize the cumbersome and often complicated challenge of helping students develop into culturally competent counselors. These researchers have acknowledged the high risks for conflict between members of the classroom, especially with the emphasis on examining bias, stereotypes, and discussing sensitive topics such as cultural oppression or privilege. The success of counselor trainees is reliant on the skill of counselor educators—not only their knowledge of multicultural issues, but also the ability to resolve conflict if and when it arises the classroom.

### **Preexisting Empirical Research**

Despite a growing need, few empirical studies examine the dynamics of conflict in multicultural counselor education (Sue et al, 2009). In the last five years, there have been a number of empirical studies that focus on facilitating and managing conflict and difficult

dialogues in educational settings. These studies primarily focus on the experiences, perceptions, and skills of those who teach multicultural courses (Burton & Furr, 2014; Reynolds, 2011; Sue et al., 2009).

Burton and Furr (2014) examined the relationship between perceived sense of multicultural classroom conflict and the correlated use of conflict management interventions and techniques by classroom professors. The significant results of this study found that when difficult and conflictual discourse arose, the most effective strategies were those that addressed the relationship between faculty and students. These findings were also consistent with previous outcomes in studies exploring college classroom conflict management outside of counselor education (Burton & Furr, 2014). This study presented the array of intervention possibilities when dealing with conflict in the classroom, and suggested that multicultural counseling educators may be lacking in their repertoire of interventions that can be selected to respond to classroom conflict.

Sue et al. (2009a) explored the faculty perspective of perceptions and reactions to difficult dialogues on race. Using consensual qualitative research, these researchers explored the experiences of White faculty to difficult racial dialogues, which were characterized as intense emotions in both professors and their students that impeded on the ability to learn. The results of this exploration revealed that major obstacles exist in facilitating productive interventions, including fear of revealing personal bias, and an inability or inexperience in recognizing the dynamics of difficult dialogues or classroom conflict (Sue et al., 2009a). Sue et al (2009a) also found that in instances of conflict in the classroom, faculty appear to be largely uninformed and ill-equipped to help facilitate and navigate conflict as it occurs in the multicultural classroom.

In another study, Sue et al. (2009b) examined the experience of difficult dialogues among students of color in multicultural counseling courses. In this study, consensual qualitative research was used to identify three kinds of reactions to difficult dialogues: cognitive, behavioral, and emotional (Sue et al, 2009b). In addition, these researchers linked difficult dialogues on race to particular microaggressions that create “classroom climate[s] of invalidation, insult, and denigration [and result] in strong disruptive emotions” (p. 188). These classroom climates inadvertently deplete any remaining energy reserved for the learning process. These student participants reported several unhelpful approaches in moments of conflict that affect their ability to fully engage in the learning process in meaningful ways, including “taking a passive approach, dismissing the importance of the topic, becoming overly emotional, [or deferring to] students of color to be racial or ethnic experts” (p. 188). Recommendations from this work are consistent with the proposed study to explore conflict in the multicultural classroom more deeply from the perspective of counseling students (Sue et al, 2009b).

The findings of these studies are also consistent with that of Reynolds’ (2011) exploratory study on the perceptions and experiences of faculty who teach multicultural counseling courses. This researcher used both qualitative and quantitative questions to survey 169 faculty members who teach multicultural counseling courses. Reynolds acknowledges the unique challenges that exist in teaching these courses: the qualitative findings of these surveys found that negative student reactions to multicultural courses include: (a) intergroup tension and conflict, (b) clashes with personal values, and (c) feeling threatened or challenged by content (Reynolds, 2011). Examples of intergroup conflict include “tension between members of majority and minority groups, minority group student frequently expressing frustration over the

ignorance of majority group members,” and that “hostility appears to inevitably occur, either from group factions or the whole class toward instructor (Reynolds, 2011, p. 171)”.

A recent dissertation (Olson, 2013) explored the manifestations of student resistance in race-related discussions. Olson identified student resistance and analyzed it against in light of critical whiteness studies, finding that resistance behaviors resulted in certain coping skills that readily enforced white racial hegemony, such as (a) avoiding engagement in race-related discussions, (b) attacking the person talking about racism or white privilege, (c) becoming resigned and apathetic about racial injustice, and (d) escaping responsibility for racial injustice (Olson, 2013). Olson found that student resistance coping strategies are related to the same behaviors that give credence to “White superiority, nonwhite inferiority, and traditional American myths” (p. vi). An important conclusion of this study is that resisting or avoiding difficult dialogues obfuscates important learning outcomes (at best) and may function to perform violence against those students who experience oppressions and are members of minority groups (at worst), precluding multiculturally competent work with future clients.

As for the difficulties in teaching multicultural education, Abrams and Gibson (2007) posit that experiences of student resistance are commonplace and depend on various pedagogical strategies. For example, they suggest that learning about White privilege is experienced with greater conflict than learning about the effects of racism (Abrams & Gibson, 2007). This demonstrates that when social and cultural inequality can be internalized on a more personal level, interpersonal conflicts ensue.

Some scholars have integrated what little is known about conflict and difficult dialogues into counselor training. Toporek and Worthington (2014) have developed a structural model whereby difficult dialogues are incorporated throughout training as a means to promote better

practices in multicultural counselor education and social justice training. These authors suggest topics of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, social class, and other identity characteristics are often at the core of difficult dialogues, and so naturally should be infused into multicultural education.

One dissertation outside of counselor education is particularly relevant to the potential understanding of classroom conflict and transformational learning. Rowe (2002) used narrative inquiry to find that women who have experienced interpersonal conflict, that is, conflict between people, created opportunities for transformational learning. In this narrative inquiry, conflict transformation is heavily concerned with changes in one's meaning making structure or schema as a result of interpersonal conflict. These changes are seen as occurring in the affective or emotional domains, shift values and beliefs, empathy, and sense of community (Rowe, 2002). The results of this study Rowe (2002) might argue that transformational outcomes such as resilience, enhanced or deeper meanings, resulted from experiences of interpersonal conflict. The findings of this study were consistent with other literature that indicates interpersonal conflict leads to the personal growth and transformation.

Collectively, these studies acknowledge both prevalence of difficult dialogues and conflict in multicultural courses, and the possible outcomes of experiencing conflict. They emphasize the importance for educators to be well versed in recognizing and facilitating conflict skillfully. These studies collectively assert similar findings: that conflict occurs in multicultural counseling courses and there is little consensus on how to best navigate them. The increasing diversity within higher education and within counseling programs necessitates a thorough understanding of difficult dialogues and conflicts in the classroom. What is missing from the



literature are empirical studies exist that explore student experiences of conflict in multicultural counseling courses. The student perspective is largely absent in the literature.

In regard to transformational learning in counselor education, Dollarhide, Gibson and Moss (2010) developed a preliminary developmental theory of transformation in counselor professional identity. In this grounded theory study, Dollarhide et al. (2010) sought to develop a theoretical understanding of counselor identity development. Their sample consisted of 43 master's students over various points in their educational programs. The results of the study indicated three major developmental tasks to professional identity development: (1) defining counseling; (2) responsibility for professional growth; and (3) transformation to identity. The first task, defining counseling, outlined how students were understanding and describing the profession of counseling. The second task, responsibility for professional growth, outlined how students were framing whom or what is responsible for their development as a counselor. The final developmental task, transformation to identity, outlined how students perceived their professional identities in relation to the larger professional communities. The Dollarhide et al. (2010) study is also relevant to this narrative inquiry as in the last developmental task further indicates that transformative qualities occur when students began merging their personal and professional identities. Because this study emphasizes the impact of personal growth as it relates to multicultural competence for counselors-in-training, it provides a framework for understanding transformation as it relates to professional identity development.

Understanding all of the perspectives of conflict and difficult dialogues is paramount if we hope to achieve a civically engaged, socially active and equitably generation of counselors. Understanding how students are experiencing these important discussions will help tremendously

in framing and developing methods to best hand down learning experience that result in awareness and positive growth.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The two theories that create a conceptual framework which guide this study are Mezirow's Transformational Learning Theory (1978, 2000, 2006) and King and Baxter Magolda's Framework for Intercultural Maturity (2005, 2015). These frameworks identify similar themes that result in outcomes of personal growth, maturity, and meaning making. Additionally, these theoretical models explore multidimensional developmental approaches to meaning making in the face of conflict, resulting in transformative learning moments. The discussion of these approaches will have two components: the theories and frameworks conceptually and how these approaches relate to the research focus. Parallels exist within these frameworks that make them especially suitable for this narrative inquiry.

**Transformative Learning Theory.** Transformative Learning is a theoretical approach to change-based learning, meaning that learners face challenges that require critical reflection of deeply held assumptions (Mezirow & Taylor, 2010). It is grounded in paradigms that are characterized by the acknowledgement of epistemic assumptions that influence meaning and some kind of "truth", such as early behaviorism, constructivism, feminism, systems theories, and so on.

The influences on Mezirow's (1978) early writings on transformative learning include Freire's (1970) *conscientization*, Kuhns (1962) *paradigm*, and Habermas's (1971, 1984) *domains of learning* (Kitchenham, 2008). Mezirow first affixed the label of *transformation* in research on adult education, namely in his study of women returning to education after an extended time away (1978). In this qualitative research, he concluded that his respondents had experienced

“personal transformation” and went further to suggest 10 phases in which this transformation was experienced (Mezirow, 1978).

Table 1

*Mezirow’s (1978) Ten Phases of Transformative Learning*

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Phase 1	A disorienting dilemma
Phase 2	A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
Phase 3	A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
Phase 4	Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
Phase 5	Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
Phase 6	Planning of a course of action
Phase 7	Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
Phase 8	Provisional trying of new roles
Phase 9	Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
Phase 10	A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s perspective.

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Figure 1. Adapted from “The Evolution of John Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory” by A. Kitchenham, 2008, *Journal of Transformative Education*, 6, 2, pg. 105, Copyright (2008) by Sage Publications.

Kichenham (2008) provides an exhaustive outline of Mezirow’s Transformative Learning theory and its evolutions. In it, he summarizes its stages of development and revisions over 20 years. Transformational Learning has been critiqued, tested, evolved, and revised over decades in order to arrive at a succinct model for describing how adults learn (Cranton & King, 2003; Kichenham, 2006). Today, Mezirow’s Transformative Learning theory suggests that learners can transform their individual meanings via two integral components: critical reflection and reflective discourse of an identified dilemma. These two components provide a theoretical framing for experienced conflict in a multicultural counseling class.

***The dynamics of transformation.*** Mezirow (1978) urged the idea that learning requires an understanding of “how we are caught in our own history and are reliving it” (p. 101). In order to transform in learning, Mezirow advocated that attention must be paid to the cultural and

psychological assumptions that construct and influence our ways of being (Mezirow, 1978). Reflection is important component of this process, and is present at phases 3 (assessment of assumptions) and 4 (recognition) of Mezirow's 10-phase progression of transformational learning (Merriam, 2004). Once a learner experiences a "disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 7), it sets the reflective process in motion.

The dynamics of transformation first require a disruption in personal perspectives, a process Jerome Bruner calls "decentration," and is similar to Piaget's "disequilibrium," where new information does not fit cleanly into a preexisting schema (Mezirow, 1978, Taylor, 1997). After experiencing a disorienting dilemma, Mezirow (2000) suggests that the learner engages in self-examination that is accompanied by feelings of "fear, anger, guilt or shame" (p. 22). Brookfield (2000) also agreed that critical reflection be central to transformational learning, suggesting that learning can only be transformative if it questions or reorders any "hegemonic assumptions" (p. 126).

One component in more recent revisions of Transformational Learning that is particularly applicable to this study includes the constructivist assumptions added in 1991 by Mezirow (Kichenham, 2008). This expansion emphasized the importance of constructed meanings that are formulated by the individual in context. Here, meaning becomes significant to the learner through critical discourse with others.

***Transformational learning in counselor education.*** Transformational learning theory has been applied to other research in counselor education in a number of ways. Dollarhide, Gibson and Moss (2010) identified transformational learning to be a large component in professional counselor identity development. These grounded theory researchers contributed to the literature surrounding professional identity development by breaking down counselor identity

development along three main transformational themes: professional titling, skills and attitudes as a professional, and sense professional community (Dollarhide et al., 2010). These authors as well as other maintain that developing into a professional counselor combines integrated efforts of evaluating the self alongside the roles of professional counseling (Dollarhide, et al., 2010; Auxier, Hughes & Kline, 2003). Gibson et al. inferred that professional identity development is evaluation of the self as a component of counselor identity development and were able to identify transformational tasks of counselor trainees.

Transformational learning theory has been applied in the qualitative research of McDowell, Goessling, and Melendez (2012), which investigated the experiences of international study abroad programs against the impact of personal growth in multicultural competence development. The results of this study supported Mezirow's transformational learning theory, especially in the arena of multicultural growth and development. The personal transformations reported by participants in this study included: (a) a greater recognition of privilege, (b) enhanced sense of social responsibility, (c) improved ability to think contextually, and (c) and increased commitment and ability to work cross-culturally (McDowell et al., 2012). These authors conclude that Mezirow's (2006) ideas about transformational learning apply to the results of this study, namely the importance of experiencing "disorienting dilemmas" as a means to challenge biases and assumptions. The participants of this qualitative study also reported a struggle to make meaning of cultural differences, and experiencing strong emotions in transformational processes. One significant result of this study that is particularly relevant to this study is that those participants which experienced multicultural disequilibrium also reported a sense of shifted worldviews, attitudes, and values-consistent with both Mezirow's theories of transformation as well as the competency of awareness building in the Multicultural Counseling

Competencies. These authors suggested that more research be done in the understanding of when multicultural counselor education “goes wrong” and risks students turning off amidst conflict (McDowell et al., 2012, p. 377).

These examples of how transformational learning theory has been applied to counselor education are valuable to the conception of the present study for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, both rumination and meaning making are shared components in transformative learning, intercultural maturity, and narrative analysis. Rumination and meaning making is understood in transformational learning as an outcome to experiencing a stressful event, and is assumed in playing a key role in the development of personal growth. Mezirow also maintains that critical reflection is a necessary component to transformational learning (Mezirow, 1991). This is also relevant to the present study that attempts to understand experiences of counseling students with conflict stories, who are often expected to reflect upon their own experiences in order to enhance their learning.

Individuals who demonstrate transformational learning are characterized by those who transform after overcoming conflict, struggle, or adversity. Personal growth is a large component of this transformation, in addition establishing a more integrated sense of identity, self-reliance, deeper meanings, newer sense of self, and enhanced interpersonal relationships. The processes of meaning making in the light of adverse experiences is an integral component to both multicultural competence and transformational learning.

***Stress and Transformation.*** Research about transformative learning suggests a linkage between conflict and transformative change. Transformation is a dynamic process that requires complex examination across several domains. Conflict experiences have many characteristics in common with transformative learning. Transformational learning and conflict share the qualities

of (a) perceived lack of control, (b) unexpectedness (c) create lasting problems and (d) leave conflicting parties blaming themselves. In addition to these qualities, feelings of guilt, anger, fear, and anxiety are common. In a qualitative study on personal growth, transformation, and interpersonal conflict, Rowe (2002) sets up the argument that conflict experiences can violate the same structures of meaning as a conflict event. The results of this study upheld the intersection of conflict and transformational learning, further supporting Mezirow's (2006) argument that conflict and the rebuilding of meaning structures represents transformative change.

***Classroom Conflict.*** Burton and Furr (2014) suggest that Multicultural Counselor Education courses are a hotbed for conflict of many shapes and sizes: among students, between students and instructors, and with one's self. The complexity present when helping counseling students develop multicultural sensitivity and awareness is challenging, and when students are asked to examine personal bias or reflect on individual experiences, counselor educators indicate the reactions to be contentious, resentful, and defensive (Burton & Furr, 2014). These researchers aim to find ways to guide students through these conflicts with the hopes that transformation and personal growth meet them at the other end.

Specifically, I will be utilizing the components of transformational learning that may be particularly useful to understanding experiences of conflict, crisis, or stressful events that occur in a multicultural counselor education, including meaning making and transformation. These components include disorientation, disequilibrium and meaning making. The model of transformational learning outlined serves primarily as a heuristic framework that guides the second research question of this study. By using qualitative methods with counselors-in-training, I investigated transformation in light of conflict and found themes consistent with Mezirow's transformational learning theory, which I will discuss in the final chapter.

**Multidimensional Framework of Intercultural Maturity.** To address increasing cultural diversity on university campuses, there have been calls for higher education to better prepare its students to become well-versed and culturally competent learners. Researchers have explored educational practices, conditions, and learning environments that foster this for college-aged students. Despite of the increases of diversity outcomes espoused in the mission statements of colleges and university programs, evidence suggests that these outcomes are achieved at relatively low rates (Bikson & Law, 1994). This study is grounded in the promising theoretical contributions used in a line of research that contributes to the evolution and betterment of these diversity learning outcomes: King and Baxter Magolda's (2005) framework of intercultural maturity (Perez, Shim, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2015).

Counseling scholars have long proposed models to describe the pathway to multicultural competence. Landreman (2003) articulated that the theoretical development of multicultural competence has been heavily reliant on the assessment of attitudes as a single measure of competence. In a comprehensive review of the literature on intercultural competence (drawing from intercultural communication, counselor education, and developmental psychology), Landreman (2003) suggested that *intercultural consciousness* might be a more appropriate educational goal than *multicultural competence*. This reconceptualization illustrates a more interactive relationship between the understanding of the self (intrapersonal) in relation to others (interpersonal), in order to generate new reflections and meanings (cognition). In this approach, intercultural competence becomes a dynamic, multifaceted construct.

Landreman is not alone in suggesting that current conceptions of multicultural competence need linguistic retooling. Within the field of counseling, new reports on counselor education have called for models and learning outcomes that are more complex and multifaceted.



Using a more multifaceted approach to understand multicultural competence for counselors-in-training might allow a counselor educator to identify both the ability to integrate awareness, knowledge and skills (Sue et al., 1992) and to act in interculturally mature ways with others. Kind and Baxter Magolda have developed a multifaceted model that identifies trajectories and designations for intercultural maturity. King and Baxter Magolda (2005) argue the following:

The developmental ability that undergirds regarding another favorably is grounded in the same ability that undergirds one's ability to regard an interpersonal difference favorably. That is, the developmental capacity that allows a learner to understand that accept the general idea of difference from self without feeling threat to self enables a person to offer positive regard to others across many types of difference, such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual orientation and religion (2005, pg. 572-573).

The multidimensional developmental framework of intercultural maturity proposed by King and Baxter Magolda (2005) is largely influenced by the constructive developmental traditions of human development. This tradition upholds two foundations: that individuals construct or make meaning out of their experiences, and do so in increasing capacities over time (Perez et al., 2015). This framework was developed in response to increasing demands for learning institutions to create effective means to develop skills for cultural competence and limit multicultural tension on college campuses. How people come to understand and effectively interact amidst this tension became a primary interest and scholarly outcome for King and Baxter Magolda (2005). The framework of intercultural maturity describes how people (in particular, college students) become increasingly capable of intercultural awareness.

***Features of intercultural maturity.*** Developing intercultural maturity as a collegiate outcome requires the demonstration of cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal developments

related to intercultural skills. According to King and Baxter Magolda (2005, p. 574), intercultural maturity is the combination of the “complex understanding of cultural differences (cognitive dimension), capacity to accept and not feel threatened by cultural differences (intrapersonal dimension), and capacity to function interdependently with diverse others (interpersonal dimension).” Within these dimensions, three levels of development (initial, immediate, and mature) exist to describe the kind of maturity that is consistent with the desired collegiate outcomes of meaningful intercultural interactions.

In the cognitive dimension, a student in the initial level of development assumes that their knowledge is certain and claims new knowledge as either right or wrong. A student in this level might demonstrate the features of resistance, difficulty challenging assumptions and preexisting beliefs, and may view differing perspectives as wrong. As a student moves through increasing levels of maturity, they more readily accept uncertainty and multiple perspectives and take ownership of their assumptions and knowledge. Mature levels of development feature the ability to consciously shift behaviors and cognitions into an alternative worldview, and demonstrate empathic capacities for using multiple cultural lenses (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005).

In the intrapersonal dimension, a student in the initial level of development assumes a lack understanding one’s own values and worldviews. Further, the initial stages of development in this dimension feature a lack of knowledge of other cultures, and views difference in identities a threat to one’s own identity. As a student moves and matures through this dimension, they develop capacities to create a sense of self that openly engages with and challenges assumptions readily. An evolving sense of identity becomes a feature of intrapersonal development (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). This level is also characterized as being defined by others’ expectations

or definitions, or being threatened by a difference in cultural values or by members of different social groups.

In the interpersonal dimension, a student demonstrating the initial level of development might avoid developing relationships with those who seem culturally different. Additionally, a student in the initial stages of this dimension might not be aware of how social systems impact group norms and may not view social problems as systemic ones. As a student moves through the interpersonal dimension, they become more willing to interact with diverse groups of people without judgment. The capacity to engage in meaningful relationships, understand how social systems impact sense of identity and group norms are features of maturity in this dimension (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005).

In this multidimensional framework of developmental intercultural maturity various features of student intercultural reactions are offered. Those that are particularly relevant to this study are those that support the idea that tension and resistance to intercultural encounters. In initial and intermediate levels of development, students may demonstrate resistance, naïveté, lack of awareness, tension between external and internal definitions, and view difference as threat to identity (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005).

King and Baxter Magolda suggest that the resistance and tension often felt from multicultural educators by students result in an overreliance on simplistic understandings of social categories, resulting in a sense of self and others that is limited and rigid. Mature levels of intercultural maturity on the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions are characterized by a sense of self and others being open to being their views questioned but are no longer threatened by this process. What ensues are conflict experiences resulting in meaning making capacities. These descriptions are consistent with to the Mezirow's (1978, 2006) "disorienting dilemma"

and Bruner's "decentration" described earlier in the section entitled *Transformational Learning Theory*.

***Self-authorship.*** King and Baxter Magolda (2005) also use components of Kegan's (1994) model of lifespan development to contextualize how college students organize, make meaning, and develop as a result of their experiences. Through this, Baxter Magolda observes that for college-aged participants, the development of intercultural maturity occurs over time and involves tasks that reflect the final capacity of self-authorship. In particular, the term self-authorship is used to describe the way that one organizes meaning in life. Self-authorship becomes a vehicle by which adults can make meaning by drawing on various dimensions of experiences. For college students dealing with intercultural maturity, self-authorship is the capacity by which students are able to stand apart from their intercultural experiences in order to reflect and make meaning of them. Because the present study explores the stories of conflict in counseling students' intercultural learning, this framework serves to be particularly relevant.

Counselor training draws upon the integration of knowledge, awareness and skill (Sue et al., 1982). Specifically, the awareness component of this tripartite model that is endorsed by counselor educators is consistent with King and Baxter Magolda's recommendations for intercultural maturity. King and Baxter Magolda (2005) argue that the outcome of intercultural maturity will be better achieved when individual transformation occurs and unfolds with time and experience.

The relevance of these theories give a conceptual framework to ground the present narrative inquiry in numerous ways. First, the primary data source for these frameworks and the subsequent studies that have informed and evolved the framework have been interview-based. King and Baxter Magolda (2005) as well as previous qualitative studies done by Baxter Magolda

(1992, 2001) have found that student reflections vary across levels of intercultural maturity. By interviewing the same students throughout their collegiate experience, Baxter Magolda (1992, 2001) identified examples that illustrate the ways students reflect and make meaning out of their diversity experiences. These authors suggest that desired changes in student intercultural skills require not only increased knowledge, but also individual transformation and enhanced maturity.

The component of self-authorship is also particularly relevant to this narrative inquiry, as the process of narrative research serves as a mechanism for participants to reflect on their experiences by becoming authors of their story. Because this framework emphasizes individual critical self-reflection, transformative learning experiences, and does so utilizing a constructive developmental approach it becomes a theoretical foundation for guiding a narrative inquiry that seeks to explore conflict in intercultural learning. The results of these conflicts, according to both the Multidimensional Framework of Intercultural Maturity, and Transformative Learning also have similarities: meaning making, schema changes, and narrative development.

These two frameworks also integrate in specific ways in order to particularly inform this study. A parallel can be drawn in comparing the experiences that lead to intercultural maturity and those that result in transformative learning, especially when learners experience conflict, fear, anger, or shame outlined by Mezirow (1978, 2000, 2006). Namely, the Multidimensional Framework for Intercultural Maturity (2005) can be utilized to more accurately understand how students' intercultural maturity levels might impact their capability to experience transformation as outlined by Mezirow. While both models acknowledge that conflict and tension can be present, Transformational Learning Theory (1978, 2006) might not fully account for the interpersonal qualities that might be necessary in order for transformation and meaning making to occur in light of conflict. If transformation is understood as a shift or change in thinking by

Mezirow, using the Framework of Intercultural Maturity may also contribute to assessing students for readiness for this change or shift in thinking.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

While these frameworks and preexisting literature heuristically contribute to the understanding of conflict from counselor trainee's perspectives, no apriori theory is being assumed as a direct linkage to the outcomes or experiences of conflict in a multicultural counseling course. This researcher will seek out the narratives of students who have experienced conflict to serve this purpose utilizing transformational learning theory and the framework for intercultural maturity as a conceptual framework. Using narrative methods will help gain valuable insight about the meaning making processes assigned to the conflict stories of counselor trainees in a multicultural counseling course.

The historical frameworks and empirical research about multicultural counseling and learning were discussed and outlined in the literature review. Within these areas of research, there are scant studies that ask direct questions about the student experiences of conflict resulting from multicultural coursework. Linkages were drawn between the necessity of building counselor self awareness in the are of multicultural competence (Sue and Sue, 2003), the emphasis on self-reflexivity as a pedagogical tool for enhancing counselor awareness (Tobin, Willow, Bastow & Ratkowski, 2009), and the risk of being challenged and experiencing conflict as a result of this reflexivity (Burton & Furr, 2014; Choudhouri, 2009). Further, this literature explored theoretical frameworks that connect experience of student conflict to Transformational Learning Theories (Mezirow, 2000) and the Framework for Intercultural Maturity. Connections between these two models include the concepts of meaning making, personal growth, and transformation.

The empirical studies outlined both an overview of preexisting research that address issues such as conflict in multicultural classrooms, conflict and transformation, and the necessity for enhancing multicultural pedagogy. Collectively, this literature review provided a rationale for the present study as well as reasoning behind choosing narrative inquiry as a methodology.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Researcher Lens

Exploring the rationale and reasoning for choosing narrative inquiry first requires a positioning of myself as a researcher. As a researcher, learner, and counselor I align my theoretical orientation with postmodern approaches and constructivist paradigms. These paradigms influence the perspectives by which I develop qualitative research questions and designs. Glesne (2011) suggested that qualitative researchers assume a naïveté in exploring others' stories and experiences. I adhere to the understanding that in order to be a useful qualitative researcher, casting myself as a learner-researcher allows for participants fullest stories to emerge. Avoiding interpretation, maintaining awareness of self in relation to others, and critically examining my assumptions are all key components to this approach to research.

I acknowledge that my experiences, values, and feelings readily inform my worldview. Historically, I have been interested in how social context, experiences and stories come to shape realities and constructions of the self and others. Moon (2011) argued that the establishment of one's self-understanding is inextricably dependent on the recognition and acknowledgement of experience and others. With this in mind, I maintain that the most generative components of research endeavors result from collaborations between participants and researchers, and as such, the interpretations about lived experiences are also co-constructed. This relational approach to understanding lies at the core of my approach to research and to life.

**Postmodernism.** Postmodernism is a broad intellectual movement that has spanned nearly 40 years and across various fields of study including philosophy, art, history, science, and psychology. These fields are far too heterogeneous to form a unified school of thought, though they collectively evoke a constellation of values, procedures, and attitudes that are called



postmodern (Hassan, 1987). One result of this heterogeneity also includes little agreement on a succinct definition of postmodernism partly because it is an attempt to make sense out of what is going on in the present—and this can only be seen in hindsight (Powell, 1998). One way of understanding postmodernism is to compare it against modernism (Hassan, 1987). Modernist approaches maintain that ideas are built on and from one another in order to distill an essential truth, while postmodernism assumes a critical stance that problematizes the concepts and assumptions that constitute ways of thinking and understanding. Advocates of postmodernism critique traditional ways of thinking about truth and the self, and instead argue for the dislodging, deconstruction, and decentering universal and essential systems of meaning (Hansen, 2015; Powell, 1998). In research applications, postmodernism emphasizes contextual constructions of meaning and recognizes validity through multiple perspectives. I also apply constructivist approaches to uncover the multiple, relational, and evolving truths of the self and others in social contexts.

**Constructivism.** Constructivism is a broad postmodern theoretical approach that also suggests knowledge to be a generative process that results from the confluence of experience and meaning making. It also suggests that reality is only understood contextually and is developed relationally. A resulting development of constructivist paradigms is the notion that truth is a social, historical, political, and culturally constructed processes that are always already evolving. Narrative constructivism suggests that people's life stories are created in this process (Holstein & Gubrium, 2013).

Postmodern paradigms such as constructivism are often presented as a basis for narrative inquiry because of the joint emphasis of examining subjectivity and the influence of culture and

identity on the human condition (Mitchell & Egudo, 2003). These positions have informed my choice to develop qualitative questions in regard to how counselor trainees experience conflict.

### **Research Design**

**Narrative Inquiry.** Qualitative research focuses on the qualities (such as words and observations) that are difficult to quantify (Creswell, 2014). There has been a growing interest in narrative across fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and counseling (Holstein & Gubrium, 2013). This approach to studying human experiences falls outside of traditional scientific and positivist paradigms. In contrast, narrative inquiry focuses on stories as the object of study and phenomena of interest. Using story as a metaphor, people enact narratives to create meaning and develop ways of knowing in various contexts.

The epistemic interest of narrative research is to gain qualitative descriptions of the essence of particular lived experiences (Baptiste, personal communication, May 28, 2014). The findings of such inquiries are often presented as rich descriptions that reveal structures and meanings of the studied experience. Bruner (1990) described narratives as functions that allow people to recast chaotic experiences in casual settings in order to make sense of them. Here, the function of storytelling creates a pathway to conveying meanings (Bruner, 1990; 1991). Stories are useful to both participants and investigators because they are tools that individuals commonly use to express, understand, and communicate experiences. Stories are used to make sense, and to communicate that sense to others (Feldman et al., 2004). Stories have been said to help mediate reality and to construct meanings within organizations (Schram & Neisser, 1997). In this study, stories of conflict in multicultural counselor education were examined. In order to understand participants' stories about conflict, I used a methodological design that aims to open up narratives to an analysis of the internal meanings they make via story telling. This analysis aimed

to uncover the process of how experienced conflicts have translated into specific and even unanticipated meanings in the wake of multicultural counseling classes.

Narrative researchers utilize the stories of experience in various ways depending on the social science discipline. Despite these nuanced differences, all narrative research jointly examines stories and storytelling as both method and phenomena of study (Creswell, 2014; Glesne 2011). Narrative analysis is a form of research that focuses on the textual devices at work in the construction of oral or written narratives (Glesne, 2011). Narrative analysis focuses on the ways in which people make and use stories to interpret the world, but it does not treat narratives as stories that transmit truths or facts about the world. This method views stories as social products that are created by individuals in context of specific social, historical and cultural locations. Because theories supporting narrative analysis support the idea that people produce accounts of themselves that are “storied,” it also suggests that the social world itself is storied, and that these stories circulate in order to produce personal identities and truths. Research that focuses on the role and function of narratives usually involves life story research, oral histories, or recounting experiences (Glense, 2011; Polkinghorne, 1988). In this narrative inquiry, I am interested in both the stories of conflict in addition to the function of recounting experiences of conflict. The approach of narrative inquiry involves multiple steps of analysis. Riessman (1993) argued that it is the mechanism of storytelling that becomes the object of investigation-not necessary the event of the stories themselves. This method is well suited to investigating the student experiences of conflict because of the importance given to the construction and telling of a story.

The aim of this study is to discover and describe the meanings that counselor trainees make out of their experiences of conflict in their multicultural course. I used qualitative

interviewing and analysis to compile the stories of conflict in multicultural counseling courses that participants tell, and analyze the content and context of each story, focusing on insights, understandings, and meanings. Once all of the stories were collected, they were compared in order to examine similarities or differences in content and interpretation. Through this analysis, stories were enacted in order to illustrate themes, insights, and meanings (Ezzy, 2002).

Webster and Mertova (2007) maintained that narrative research often also utilizes text and artifact to help construct and convey meanings in a story. For example, anecdotes, journals, photographs, objects may often enter the oral story telling process. In analyzing both the content of the narrative as well as the components that support the story (acts of telling, affect, artifacts, etc.), I attempted to grasp the meaning that participants attribute to the experiences of conflict in addition to witnessing the process of storytelling (Polkinghorne, 1988). While participants were encouraged to bring these artifacts, only one provided a final essay as a means to support her story. As a result, I primarily focused on story-telling features: acts of telling and affectations.

Because narrative analysis captures cultural context, requires the recounting of experiences, and uses the concept of story broadly, it makes this method a viable selection for this study about student experiences of conflict. By deploying a constructivist approach to this narrative inquiry, I am also positing that the stories of conflict are inherently situated within historical, social, and cultural contexts (Riessman, 2003), and serve as vehicles to concretize meanings.

Both examining stories of conflict experienced in a multicultural counseling course in addition to the examining the mechanism of storytelling (Muller, 1999) were components to this narrative inquiry. This means that I examined both how participants choose to narrate their story (e.g., with humor, anger, ambivalence) in addition to the content of the story. These components

collided to generate rich, descriptive, and synthesized meanings. Due to the plurality of storytelling and the multitudes of conflict experiences, narrative analysis was the best fit for this research.

### **Research Questions**

The primary goal of this qualitative investigation was to understand the experience of conflict in a multicultural counseling course. In training to become a counselor and counselor educator with a specialization in multicultural issues, I have taken a multitude of courses that emphasize cultural competence. One consistent observation made in each of these courses was the tension felt among participants in a course when a sensitive cultural topic came up. I have witnessed and personally engaged in difficult dialogues with others and have been exposed to various cultural collisions in both my personal and professional life that resulted in the capacity for developing new meanings and schemas. Visiting counselor education literature confirmed that conflict is commonly felt in courses such as these, which led me to wonder: How do other counselor trainees make meaning of their experiences of conflict? An exploration of this experience may be useful in developing counselor education programs' multicultural curriculum— evolving to incorporate skillful facilitation of conflict. One central research questions will guide this narrative inquiry: How do counseling students experience, understand and reflect upon conflict that occurs in a multicultural counseling course? The major components of this question are “how,” “understand,” “experience” and “reflect.” The open nature of the word “how” facilitates an openness to any emerging responses participants share with researchers related to the notion of either conflict or difficult dialogues. The word “experience” highlights the idea that the researcher will be seeking comprehensive stories in participant responses. Lastly, the words “understand” and “reflect” implies that participant responses relates

to their own subjective relativity of knowing, and that respondent stories will be reflective in nature. An additional research question will examine how students are impacted by the conflicts they experience, which aims to explore generated meanings and transformations in light of conflict experiences.

**Research Question 1:** How do counseling students experience, understand and reflect upon conflict that occurs in a multicultural counseling course?

**Research Question 2:** What impact do these experiences of conflict have on students?

### **Participants**

**Researcher.** I am a White American female, and a PhD candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision. The purpose of qualitative research is to minimize the personal influences of researcher bias and jointly maximize the genuineness of participant narratives (Creswell, 2014). As a feminist researcher, I adhere to the notion that methodology should be informed by discourse. This standpoint also necessitates that researchers position their personal subjectivities related to the investment in their research. For the present study, a feminist standpoint will be utilized, whereby social identity and knowledge is constructed through complex systems of location, power, history, and culture. Given my personal experiences and investment in the understanding of meaning making process that result from conflict in multicultural counseling courses, I will attempt reduce this bias in the analysis of the qualitative data obtained by bridling, which is a long-form process of bracketing-a well-known process of establishing trustworthiness (Dahlberg, 2006). Bridling involves free writing and memo-ing at each step of development and analysis.

Prior to the interview stages of the research and in order to attempt to understand my own subjectivity as it relates to the topic of conflict, I turned my interview questions toward myself. I

answered them aloud to understand how my participants might experience the questions, in addition to better grasping how my own conflict experiences were understood. This reflective process shaped how I understood myself in relation to the topic of the study, as well as assessed for potential biases.

Additional steps were to be taken to ensure trustworthiness of the voices of the participants. More information on this procedural analysis of data will be provided below and methods for trustworthiness will follow.

**Participants.** Participants were all graduate students between the ages of 22 and 28, who were currently enrolled in a master's program for counseling that is CACREP accredited, and who have completed a course that addresses multicultural counseling competencies. Previous studies that explored difficult dialogues in multicultural counselor education suggest that the path to multicultural competence may be experienced by White students differently from that of non-white students (Sue et al, 2009). In order to obtain a relatively homogenous sample, I initially restricted my participant demographics to white-identifying women between the ages of 22 and 28. Through recruitment, however, it became evident to that conflict experienced needed to be the primary guide for screening participants. Throughout recruitment, I obtained 15 inquiries from students who were eventually ineligible to participant due to their age, ethnic or gender identity, in addition to the combination of these. The prevalence of conflict within a diverse group struck me. Eventually, I decided that stratifying the sampling to only those inquiries who articulated conflict experiences would be eligible, rendering other demographic information such as gender and race to emerge organically. I increased my sample size to allow for more diversity within my eventual sample.

Participants were also recruited from various CACREP-accredited universities due to the need for research in this area. While similar coursework exists in counseling programs that are not CACREP-accredited, the standardized curriculum in social and cultural diversity enabled more shared curricular experiences among participants from different universities. I intended to find students who were still currently enrolled in their programs, but had completed a multicultural course in order to be able to reflect backward on the experiences of conflict via story telling.

In order to generate rich and descriptive data from the narratives of my participants, an eventual sample size of 7 was selected. Previous qualitative research addressing the experiences of counselor trainees (Kiersky, 2014; Sue et al., 2009a, Sue et al. 2009b) has gained meaningful results in using between six and eight participants. In addition, researchers who have used a narrative approach to explore conflict in the classroom have had sample sizes between five and six participants (Burton & Furr, 2014; Sue et al., 2009). In these studies, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews exploring participant experiences. Narrative inquiry emphasizes depth of stories rather than breadth (Patton, 2002). Inclusion of gender diversity as well as members of minority populations were also sought out as a means to give voices to those who need to be heard—an important component of qualitative research (Cohen, Kahn & Steeves, 2000).

**Sampling.** Through careful data collection, groups of participants were selected purposefully and through self-report of having experienced a conflict or difficult dialogue in a multicultural counseling course. Purposeful sampling selects participants based on information-richness for in-depth examinations of specific phenomena (Patton, 2002). This involves seeking



out and selecting participants individually or in groups that are especially knowledgeable about the phenomenon of interest.

Purposive sampling will allow for insights into the particular experience of conflict and difficult dialogues. To locate participants, various purposive sampling strategies were implemented. In this approach, participants who knew people who had generally similar experiences or characteristics will, in turn, also know people with similar experiences and characteristics (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2013).

Ultimately, my representation of participants included seven students who ranged in age from 22-28. Five participants identified as White, one participant identified as Latina (Mexican-American), and one participant identified as biracial (White-Hispanic). Six participants identified as female, one identified as non-binary or transgender. Three identified as sexual minorities. In terms of program status, all were currently enrolled in a master's program in counseling and had completed at least one year of study.

**Methods of Recruitment.** I utilized various recruitment methods in order to obtain the seven qualifying participants. Strategies to recruit participants included predominately e-mail and word of mouth. In addition to utilizing my personal professional network of counselor educators at Penn State to connect with students, I used the CACREP database to contact counselor educators, department heads, and administrators from other programs to request they send my recruitment letter to their student list-servs (see Appendix B). My recruitment letter included my research purpose, sample criteria, and requested that eligible individuals contact me via e-mail. In addition, I posted recruitment materials to the American Counseling Association's graduate student list-serv, which accessed students from universities nationwide. I also contacted counseling student groups from various CACREP-accredited universities that had social-

networking websites, and requested for my recruitment letter to be posted to their websites. Eventually this yielded my sample of seven eligible participants. Once I had initial access to my participants via e-mail, I followed up to further explain the study, and gather more information about their conflict experience. This step enabled me to identify participants who articulated having experienced a conflict. Despite my recruitment letter outlining this sample criteria, it became evident that I needed to confirm that this was the case in a follow-up after a few interested participants admitted to not seeing or noticing that criteria upon e-mailing me.

Once participants were selected, we selected a mutually agreeable interview time, date and location (when applicable). All participants were e-mailed informed consent documents and were signed and returned prior to beginning interviews. All interviews but one were conducted via video-chat, which were audio and video recorded with screen capture software.

In order to ensure that these recordings maintained privacy and confidentiality, they were saved stored on a password protected external hard drive and only accessed from my home office. Once saved on this secured hard drive they were deleted from my computers. All interview data, including recordings, transcripts, and participant information was stored on the same secured hard drive.

**Delimitations.** To increase homogeneity, the sample was delimited to students currently enrolled in a CACREP accredited master's program in counseling, who have completed a course that meets the multicultural education requirements. These courses often have titles such as: multicultural counseling, social and cultural issues in counseling, or counseling diverse populations. This will delimit responses that cannot be attributed to lack of multicultural counselor education, or those currently enrolled in a multicultural counseling course. Ensuring

participants have had some form of multicultural or diversity training will be essential to gaining information that relates to experiences of conflict in these settings.

Additionally, participants will be counseling students who have identified as having experienced conflict of some kind in their multicultural counseling course. For the purposes of this study, experiencing conflict may represent varied incidents and reactions. Based on the research of Sue et al (2009b), these reactions will be delimited to those that are cognitive, behavioral, or emotional.

**Limitations.** In accordance with narrative research, some limitations exist in conducting interviews. I worked to help participants feel safe in narrating their experiences of conflict by making the purpose of the study clear, ensuring anonymity, allowing them to ask any clarifying questions, and using transparency in my research process.

Finally, the findings of this study will apply primarily to specific students. Namely, full-time female students between ages of 22-28. Experiences of faculty were not represented. The dynamics for conflict are present between students and faculty members who teach multicultural counseling courses (Burton & Furr, 2014, Sue et al, 2009a). Future studies might want to address how conflict and difficult dialogues are experienced by those who teach multicultural counseling, in addition to what features of conflict lead to transformation.

### **Data Collection**

A traditional positivist paradigm posits that data collection methods are deduced from the research questions, however qualitative research views the research questions and the data collection process as two distinct pieces (Maxwell, 2005). Instead of literally translating research questions into data collection methods, the research questions serve as a hermeneutic framework

for the study and the interview schedule is designed in order to obtain narratives that provide insight for the phenomena of conflict.

I attained narratives by conducting individual semi-structured interviews with each participant in locations preferable to participants. All but one interview was conducted via video chat. All interviews were digitally audio and video recorded and were properly stored to ensure privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. Semi-structured interviews facilitate open-ended communication that broadly provides direction throughout the interview process without impeding on the ability for participants to tell their stories in detail (Miller & Crabtree, 1999). As the interview unfolded, I used probing questions and more specific prompts as participants offer more details of stories. This method allows each interview to change and shift reflexively and depending on the narrator’s detail.

Table 2  
*Interview Schedule*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
What was your multicultural course was like for you?	To facilitate and open up dialogue, gather preliminary content information about conflict story.
What was your experience of conflict?	To obtain conflict stories, in order to address research question 1.
What were some emotions you were feeling when you experienced this conflict?	Aims to understand the feelings/emotions/affective qualities of conflict experience.
How did this experience of conflict (or words used by participant) affect you?	This question speaks directly to research question 2: “What impact do these experiences of conflict have on students?”
How was this conflict different than other experiences of conflict you’ve had in your life?	Aims to grasp unique features (if any) of conflict in MC course context.
How are you different now?	Aims to understand how participant experienced transformation, reintegration, or meaning making.
What, if anything, do you wish could have been done differently?	Aims to gather information that may contribute to data that will shape potential future research about pedagogy and conflict.

Once interviews were complete, the recordings were transcribed into text. These texts served as a primary source of data. Lindseth and Norberg (2004) recommend using recorded interviews to generate a narrative text. Doing so allows for both researcher and participant to share and expand on understandings of the narrative in person. Here, the interviewee is still the primary author of their story and the interviewer is able to act as a live witness. Participant story telling can incorporate artifacts to enhance or provide descriptive components. As such, participants were informed of the option to bring any artifacts to their interview that might enhance or help bolster their story telling. Two participants elected to contribute reflective writing and final papers to enhance their story telling. These additional documents were given permission by participants to be e-mailed after interviews had concluded.

Narrative interviews provide more in-depth understandings of the meanings of certain lived experiences, in order to form more comprehensive understandings of a given phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 1988). I asked questions aimed at expanding the story, encouraging the participant to reflect on his/her experience of the phenomena. For this study, the phenomena of inquiry is that of conflict; one that is motivated by cultural difference or discussions of cultural difference.

Throughout the data collection process, I kept a journal and an audio-recording device to monitor thoughts and feelings about the overall research process, including data analysis. These memos and journals were periodically shared with the committee as a means to aid in my bridling as well as help foster reflexivity.

## **Procedures**

In the following section, I will describe the procedures of how I approached data collection and analysis. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. All of the

interviews were digitally audio and video recorded. The recorded interviews were first listened to and transcribed into both nonverbal and verbal communication, (e.g. pauses, sighs, tearfulness) to be prepared for interpretation and analysis. Using a multi-phased analysis attempted to gain more in-depth understandings about participant experiences of conflict in multicultural counseling courses.

As a narrative researcher, I viewed each participant as a story teller. While I asked questions that prompted their stories, each interview moved forward at the directive of the participant. Together, each narrator/participant and I engaged in an open dialogue where stories emerged that shed light on the experience of conflict. I used a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix B) to outline and provide some direction to the interview process, but it was used loosely through each interview. Each interview began with a broad generative question, and moved to more specific questions that aimed to gather more detail in their stories. With each interview, the order, prompts, and probes were different and changed in accordance to the story telling of the participant.

After each interview concluded, I recorded my initial thoughts and reactions both on paper and with an audio-recording. These recordings included some of my emotional responses (e.g., surprise, shock, disappointment, happiness), that had been activated by listening to each participant's story. These recordings helped facilitate the bridling process, assess for bias and assumptions, and helped thicken preliminary themes used in my analysis later on.

**Data Analysis.** In order to fully examine the content of each narrative, in addition to explore how each story was told, I used several two overarching phases of analysis, with stages within each. The first phase of revisiting narratives included both listening and re-experiencing narratives. The second phase of analysis was broken into three major analytic stages: (a)

transcribing individual transcripts; (b) conducting a vertical thematic analysis; (c) conducting a horizontal analysis across narratives (Feldman et al, 2004). By analyzing the text both vertically and horizontally, I aimed to obtain rich meanings both within-and-between each participant.

*Re-experiencing narratives.* First, the narrative text was re-experienced several times openly enough to allow the researcher to be moved and touched by it (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). This naïve reading and understanding is regarded as an initial conjecture that will guide a more formal multi-phased structural analysis, which is the second step. This initial phase incorporated both hearing and reading the narratives of participants, including their emotions of both interviewer and participant. Referring to my bridling journal aided in re-experiencing the interviews, in addition to taking notes while I listened to interviews. This phase of analysis intended to provide insight about the general concept of my research questions: conflict.

Questions I asked myself in order to enhance this process include:

How were emotions and thoughts experienced by the interviewer and narrator during the interview?

1. How did each interview begin, process, and end?
2. How was I feeling as I listened to the interviews?

This step in analysis allowed for immersion beyond reading transcripts. By simply re-reading, and re-listening without coding or analysis, I was able to become more familiar with each participant's experience of conflict in the way they retold and recounted it. Doing so granted me a sense of feeling for each of the participants and their stories.

The second phase of analysis involved an in-depth structural analysis. This structural analysis was broken up into several phases: (1) detailed transcription, (2) conducting a thematic vertical analysis, (3) coding stories, and (4) conducting a horizontal analysis between narratives.

These structural analyses allowed for a formal way to identify and formulate themes in the narrative.

***Detailed transcription.*** Transcribing the recording into text was done in detail. Included in transcriptions will be pauses, silences, utterances, and shifts in affect, in addition to the participants' words. Doing so aided in capturing richness of stories and the unique features of each participant. Transcribing verbal narratives meant accumulating and converting into text that which was both coherent and fluid, loose and fragmented. Each communication feature, even that which does not translate into text cleanly, was included in transcription in order to increase both confirmability and accuracy of this study.

***Vertical Analysis.*** After individual transcripts were developed, conflict stories were identified within each larger narrative. Doing so required an examination of ideas expressed as "scenes" with characters, a plot, meaningful or critical events (Fraser, 2004). Surveying texts for beginning/ending phrases helped in identifying scenes "it all began when..." or "that's about it" (Flick, 2009). If participants elected to use artifacts such as course journals these were also incorporated into understanding the stories. Once stories were identified within transcripts, they were numbered for coding. During the initial vertical structural analysis, the narrative text was divided into units of meaning which were further condensed and abstracted to form themes, subthemes, and possibly main themes. Once these were established, the original text was revisited in alongside the naïve understanding that was developed (Fagerberg & Norrberg, 2009). This allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the narrative text as an interpreted whole (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

Once stories were identified and numbered from the text-based transcript, they were coded for meanings and themes. Reading and re-reading through the stories while referencing



bridling journal and notes enabled me to write memos about the emotions, meanings and themes of each story. Immersing myself in the data was a key component to the coding process, so I revisited my bridling journal entry from my first naïve readings revisiting phase of analysis. This allowed me to become reflexive and immersive in my coding process and categorize stories based on topics or meanings in the stories. By focusing on both the content and the stylistic qualities of the narratives presented, I was able to understand what kinds of meanings were shaped by experiencing conflict in a multicultural counseling course.

*Exploring story-telling features.* In addition to coding stories for content themes, I also explored story-telling features of each narrative. When analyzing the stories, I focused on on speech patterns, vocal inflections, direction (linear/non-linear), affectations, and transformative moments. Transformative moments were assessed as moments in the story where a shift in thinking occurred, or when participants begin to describe how they were changed, shifted, or transformed by their conflict experiences. Coding for transformation was accomplished in order to translate back to my conceptual frameworks that suggest transformative meaning making occurrences come from experiences of difficulty or conflict.

When exploring story-telling features, inflections, directions, affectations and transformative moments, I asked myself:

1. What did these characteristics of stories reveal about the story teller's meaning making?
2. What did these characteristics stories reveal about the overall narrative presented?

Analyzing stories for story-telling features required a different focus; away from coding for thematic content and toward story-telling style. By focusing on narrators' stylistic features, I was able to gain more clarity about the meaning being attributed to the emergent themes. I also began

understanding the distinctive characteristics of each participant, which shed light on their unique conflict experiences.

By analyzing these stories vertically, I was able to begin obtaining a thorough and rich understanding about stories of conflict in multicultural counseling courses. I was then able to compare stories between and among transcripts to gain a rich and saturated understanding of the dynamics and meanings developed from conflict stories. In the final phases of analysis, I used the observations and interpretations made during phases of analysis to explore differences and similarities among and between participants. Doing so enabled the development of common categories across stories and narratives.

***Horizontal Thematic Analysis.*** The in-depth vertical analysis of each story aimed to provide generative thematic insights into what has happened for each participant in addition to how it happened. Questions that aim at understanding why a narrative has happened attempts to be answered in the horizontal thematic analysis. This was done by comparing and contrast stories and themes between each transcript, and grouping what emerges them based on similarities. As a constructivist narrative researcher, the work of interpretation involves engaging with the meaning embedded in narratives, rather than the external validity of what each narrative claims (Feldman et al. 2004). In this sense, the work of horizontal thematic analysis is always political, as suggested by Stone (1988), because “it always involves the choices to include some things and exclude others, and to view the world in a particular way when other visions are possible” (p. 306).

By analyzing each narrative horizontally, the exposure of understandings, meanings, or reasons between each story was illuminated. In this process, it was important to acknowledge that despite the importance to be mindful in the search for multiple meanings and themes

embedded across narratives, a single researcher cannot possibly extract all potential interpretations. The elements outlined in the results of the horizontal analysis are single descriptions among an array of interpretations that could be made out of each participant's story telling. The criterion for inclusion was guided by some central understandings about transformational learning, conflict, and intercultural maturity as outlined in the conceptual framework.

This approach to thematic analysis is sometime regarded as inductive (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), meaning that a theory or idea would emerge from multiple rounds of narrative analysis. While an a priori theoretical understanding of intercultural maturity, multicultural competence, and transformational learning is familiar and undoubtedly influencing how I understood and explained some of the participant's narratives, I wanted the interpretations and thematic understandings of the horizontal analysis to emerge organically. However, those interpretations that fit into the established theoretical concepts developed by Mezirow (1978, 2006) and King and Baxter Magolda (2005) were noted in the results.

### **Limitations of the Study**

While the purpose of this study is not to make generalization to a larger population, I remain specific in the extrapolations that can be drawn from a study such as this. Limitations of this study included researcher bias, sample representation, and trustworthiness. The sample was recruited from various universities between the south-east and Midwest, which limited diversity regarding geographic location. It is important to note, however, that the intention of narrative qualitative research is not generalizability, but rather, transferability. In this case, findings may only be transferable to narratives in the similar settings where my participants may dwell (medium-large cities in the eastern United States).

There was significant room for researcher bias as a female counseling student and counselor educator. As a counselor education doctoral student who attended her master's program in the same city and graduate program where two of her participants may be coming from, I risked over identifying or underestimating the power of commonalities with my participants. In addition, I have also experienced and witnessed conflict in various multicultural courses and diversity trainings. While I honored the uniqueness of individual conflict stories, my own experiences risked conflating or biasing how I heard the conflict stories of my participants.

The sample, given the larger number of interested participants (i.e., 7 vs. 15) remained small with a relatively homogeneous group in terms of age and gender. The findings from this study are limited to full-time master's level counseling students between the ages of 23 and 28, who identify themselves as experiencing conflict, and in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. It is very likely that age, including social and cognitive development might impact how older or non-traditional students might experience conflict, and I encourage other researchers to look into this supplementation to the empirical research on conflict in multicultural courses.

In addition to this homogenous sample, the study included a representation of students at a similar phase in their master's program. A second limitation, therefore, included representations of students at various stages in their professional development, including those students who are continually processing experiences from their multicultural class but have since graduated. Greater representation of students, both full- and part-time, including those who have just begun or recently graduated, might have enhanced understanding about conflict in multicultural counseling classes.

Another limitation to this study was in its data collection. I used audio- and video-recorded interviews as the primary source of data, which required complete reliance on honest self-reporting from each participant. I attempted to negate this limitation as much as possible with rapport building, thick descriptions, member-checking, and bridling. I created thick descriptions by obtaining both audio and video recordings of interviews, which in turn generated expansive transcripts that incorporated participant pauses, affectations, utterances, and laughter. I sent these transcripts and a summary of my initial vertical analysis to each participant to obtain feedback and give them opportunities to review and clarify anything. One participant elected to clarify some points she made in order to reach consensus. I also reviewed my findings with a colleague in counselor education as well as my committee chair and methodologist.

#### **Qualitative Validity: Trustworthiness**

Because narrative analysis relies on the researcher's interpretations of qualitative data, steps were taken to ensure interpretations are as trustworthy as possible. I followed established standards for establishing trustworthiness for the conduct of good qualitative research (Hunt, 2011). I was transparent in explaining the procedures and methodologies of the present study to the participants.

Much of qualitative research relies on constructivist paradigms (Golafshani, 2003). This perspective indicates that individuals have multiple and potentially diverse meanings of a given reality. Data triangulation, bridling, and other components of establishing qualitative validity proposed by both Yardley (2008) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) allowed me to establish trustworthiness in developing cohesive, rich, and saturated interpretations of narratives.

**Bridling.** Bridling is a qualitative research term used by Dahlberg (2006) to describe a process that qualitative researchers should initiate in order to address their assumptions as they

aim to either interpret or describe experiences. Dahlberg's (2006) bridling breaks away from the use of bracketing, a common technique used in phenomenological research. Bridling sets out to accomplish two things: first, it aims to enact the process of bracketing in that pre-understandings and assumptions are restrained so they do not limit the "researching openness" (Vagle, Hughes & Durbin, 2009). Second, bridling works as an active process in which the researcher continually tends to the understanding of the phenomena of interest as a whole throughout the study.

Dahlberg (2006) explained bridling as a mechanism by which a researcher provides themselves with enough elbowroom in order to gain adequate distance from the research question so that they might see it in various ways. It sets out to accomplish continuous reflexivity in research so that it is seen as a project in and of itself. For the present study, I adopted the positional components of bridling in order to critically maintain reflexivity throughout the length of the study. Vagle, Hughes and Durbin (2009) maintained that bridling serves to allow the researcher to pursue a never final, always partial reflexive stance that is never completely resolved, to initially and continually "figure out what to do with [my] ego and how to draw on whatever humility can be mustered" (p. 365).

**Member Checking.** In addition to bridling, member checking was utilized as a method to enhance rigor and accuracy of data analysis. Member checking provides researchers and participants with opportunities to correct, edit, challenge, or enhance the interpretations that emerged through the structural analysis. In this study, participants were be given the opportunity to assess the adequacy of that data, and reflect on reading their stories again. Secondary interviews were made possible to each participant follow member checks to clarify any discrepancies. I provided participants with both the transcript as well as the initial summary and

interpretations of their narratives for the purpose of verifying plausibility (Carlson, 2010).

Questions that I asked in the member-checking process include:

1. Am I on the right track with your story??
2. Did I understand this in the same way you did?

In addition to member checking, I also followed Yardley's (2008) recommendations for establishing validity in qualitative research. In accordance with these recommendations, I demonstrated *sensitivity to context* (Yardley, 2008). Doing so required knowledge of the sociopolitical and cultural context in which the study occurred, as well as being familiar with the literature that orients the study itself. Yardley's second principle, *commitment and rigor* (Yardley, 2008), was demonstrated by the degree of attentiveness and care to the data collection and to the participants. As a trained mental health counselor, I needed to be mindful of the balance and subtle differences between counseling and interviewing for qualitative research. Finally, in accordance with Yardley's (2008) third principle, *transparency and coherence* was demonstrated. Each stage of research was described and written up accordingly, and I utilized transparency in making interview questions and schedule, the procedures of participant selection, and various elements of the analysis available to my committee.

Finally, trustworthiness was established following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) guidelines for establishing quality rigorous research: *credibility, transferability, dependability* and *confirmability*.

Credibility indicates the level of accurate information gathered in the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I attended to credibility in multiple ways. By developing and utilizing well-cited research methods that enhance rigor, such as data triangulation, developing thick descriptions and member checking. I triangulated my data by comparing the narrative texts

against the reflective writings that I obtained from my participants. By collecting and reviewing various empirical articles in the areas of research relevant to this study, I developed a foundational purpose and significance that enhanced its rigor. In triangulating the data between the preexisting theoretical foundations, provided artifacts, and the narrative interviews, I was able to see multiple perspectives of the experiences of conflict.

Writing long summary composites of each participant's narratives with thick descriptions and sharing these summaries with my participants enhanced the credibility of their accuracy. Each member validated the summaries and transcripts provided and aided in clarifying points of confusion or additional negotiation of meanings. In each member check, each participant provided feedback, and one clarified two points regarding her tenor and diction. We aimed to reach consensus which became integral in honing in the accuracy of the information provided (Creswell et al., 2007).

As an additional measure of establishing credibility, I used rigorous self-reflective techniques in the form of bridling, (long-form memoing, audio self-recording, journaling) as a means to reveal information about myself as I journeyed through the dissertation process. This allowed me to assess for ways in which I may have unwittingly impacted the interview, transcription, and analysis process.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings in the study are transferable to other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I worked with counseling students who were all impacted in various ways by their multicultural counseling course. My sample size is small, the demographic categories were relatively homogenous in terms of gender and age, meaning I may make some inferences about the findings of this study to other students who have similarly been impacted by conflict in their multicultural counseling courses in similar age



groups. Despite this, however, there were diverse identity representations within my sample in regard to sexual orientation and cultural identity, so I am more cautious about the transferability based on these demographics. As a qualitative researcher, my goals are not necessarily in the generalizability or in identifying some truth or essential qualities among the experiences of my participants (Patton, 2002). Rather, its purpose is to illuminate the experiences of the individuals with whom I interviewed, in developing deep and particular meanings from their unique narratives.

Dependability aims to answer the question: “how dependable is this information?” and is commonly compared to the quantitative concept of reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the practices of journaling and confidential record-keeping enhances dependability. I ensured my participants information was kept confidential by assigning random numerical values and pseudonyms to each of their identifying information, in addition to their affiliated university. Because the nature of their dialogues were sometimes critical and even uncomplimentary of their program or university, it became especially important to ensure the protection of their identities.

Confirmability can be understood as how clearly information is outlined in explaining each component of the research process. This clarity is important in order for other researchers to confirm the findings of my study. In clearly explaining each step of my research process, creating a transparent process in which each step is clearly outlined, I have enhanced the confirmability of my study. In doing so, readers and other researchers may follow similar steps in order to draw their own conclusions (Polkinghorne, 2007).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I outlined the constructivist and postmodern frameworks that provide the theoretical undergird to my study. I provided rationale for selecting narrative inquiry as a methodological approach to understanding conflict experiences in multicultural counseling courses. Because I too have been a counselor-in-training who experienced and witnessed her own conflicts in multicultural coursework, I addressed the methods by which I aimed to manage my own bias and enhance the trustworthiness of my study.

The subsequent chapters will be organized first by participant, beginning each chapter with a thick and descriptive summary of each participant's narrative and the following vertical thematic analysis results that followed. Each of these summaries are abbreviated forms of each interview, and have been validated and confirmed by each participant through the member-checking process. The second section of each participant chapter includes the results of the vertical analysis with story-telling features and structural themes. My aim in doing this is to present each narrative in a way that first gives the reader of the sense of distinctiveness of each participant's story, and aims to address the first research question: How do counseling students experiences, understand, and reflect upon conflict that occurs in a multicultural counseling course? In chapter eight, I will present the results of the horizontal thematic analysis conducted across each narrative in which I identify the similarities and differences between each participant, in addition to relating these themes back to Mezirow's (1978) Transformational Learning Theory and King and Baxter Magolda's Developmental Model of Intercultural Maturity (2005).

## CHAPTER FOUR: SAMANTHA

### “It just felt icky.”

“...I had very low hopes. I think I might have been going into the course kind of expecting that it would be...kind of a waste of time, and very shallow. Admittedly, having very low standards, anything could have exceeded them, but I was pleasantly surprised with the integration of some of the good readings and good films and clips and things like that. I remember some more kind of interactive exercises, case material, things like that. So yeah, it was better than I had hoped. I think in general, when we talk about multicultural issues, do we really care about being multiculturally competent or is it just kind of lip service? I think that's why I kind of had a jaded approach to this course...

...So, the town I grew up in was like a planned community that was built on the idea of different SES groups living together or different races living together. Like instead of having a church and a temple and a synagogue we had interfaith centers where we'd practice together in the same space, and where low-income housing was built alongside single-family homes, so, diversity is something I took for granted growing up it wasn't odd to me. It was part of the fabric, and it wasn't until I got older until I realized that this is not what the world is like at all. And it was kind a rude awakening, like, this is not how most places are, and this is not how most people were raised growing up. And so I think I went into the class with a slightly different struggle. I think a lot of the tension that I feel sometimes in that class is about people being oblivious to privilege is that they've never considered it, and a part of me feels like that's where a lot of my frustrations come from...

...I feel like I have frustrations around that where there's this tip toeing which in some sense I understand, like, these are not things that are hard to talk about, but I think that's were

some of my frustration and conflict kind of came up. I think that part of it is that the particular cohort I'm in is not a very diverse cohort. There's not a lot of diversity, and so, to be fair, I think there was some concern from white students who have a lot of privilege and are worried about saying the wrong thing or be perceived in a certain way and a fear for students of color or more diversity, a feeling that they'll have to be spokespeople or something like that. So it's kind of an odd dynamic, I mean, here we are talking about diversity and being multiculturally aware and were not really living that truth if that makes sense...

...I can also think of one specific time when we were talking about spirituality issues and there's one student who, incidentally I've had some personal experiences with. I had already had some kind of feelings about her approach to spiritual issues and how this might manifest. And our teacher had made us move our desks into this circle while we're talking about it so we could see each other. She was talking about how there's been all this talk about how you're going to have to pull your own values out of a situation and be sensitive to the client's particular needs and particular feelings and sensitive to their cultural background and all that. And she was said "what if it's really hard because I honestly think that if I don't counsel them toward Jesus I'm actually doing them harm." I can't remember if that's how she put it exactly but it was something like that, where she had a really strong reaction to how she's been told this entire program that she needs to put these things aside and damnit she didn't want to do it anymore.

...I remember having a very strong-very strong reaction to that. And the instructor handled it very well, which helped. but that was definitely one of the highest moments of tension where I was very emotionally reactive...

...At the same time, I had to appreciate that she said that aloud to a group knowing that it was probably not going to be well received, so I at least have to give her credit for being real

with her feelings, after all this time of being like “lets have these real conversations and be real about them.” So I have to appreciate she did that it was just also that it flies in the face of kind of what we had been talking about [inaudible trailing off]. That sticks out.

I was angry. I think part of me felt like, if you want to do this type of work this is not the place to impose your personal spiritual beliefs. A part of me felt like if that if you can't put these feelings aside you need to know that about yourself and then put yourself in a situation or a line of work where that's ok. I was annoyed, angry, frustrated--If you know this about yourself then why would you have joined a secular program where it's such a struggle? You knew that! If you knew that this was going to be a struggling thing then go into pastoral counseling, that's okay, it's fine to know that's what you want to do! Yeah, I had a really strong reaction to that idea, feeling like you need to impose your beliefs on others...

..I also put myself in the kind of seat of being like a client, going in to her and feeling like “here I am, coming at my most vulnerable” it's such a huge thing for clients to be able to reach out and then come in and then come in to feel like...even when the counselor is the most empathetic, the client will still feel like they're being judged and feel has all these fears.

It just skeeves me out thinking about the client coming in feeling so so judged and how difficult that would be. I think there is some sort of threat to the profession in terms of what we're supposed represent or what is supposed to be our responsibility. And you know, at the same time I think that my personal beliefs are so far from her personal beliefs that that's activated as well. That there was so much judgment inherent in what she was saying, I had a reaction to that too. Then the idea of how that manifests in terms of our work with clients? Yeah, definitely...

..I think also felt a fear in wondering about her clients so far. How well has she managed this with the clients she's seen so far? So, yeah, I think a lot of it is that...

...In some ways it's almost like, the intrapersonal stuff was sort of instigated in the class then now continues to cycle outside of it just because I feel like talking about difference with other people in my life, that these are conversations we've had, or will continue having. The intrapersonal stuff has definitely sort of...stuck with me. Because my reaction to the class was kind of like "ugh, I have this aversion or discomfort with this." and because of that, because it stirred up this stuff in me I had to contend with that stuff, and because of that its forced some changes and thoughts and consideration...

...It was like-this is so maddening! Why do people like this exist! Yeah. I do think it's partly that. I do think we need to have these discussions but – I'm a fairly jaded individual. I *get* that we need to have these conversations, that there are people who are like "I'm 25 years old and I've never considered privilege before". Like where have these people been living? Don't they read books? But I know that it's my reaction. Like, you don't know what you don't know. I think part of it is feeling like – we shouldn't need a class. Jaded part of me knows we do. But part of me wishes we *shouldn't* need to be in this type of class, in this kind of program, in this type of environment, taking this class because we have to because the competencies say we have to. So part of it is that. Like a disappointment and a frustration..."

### **Vertical Analysis**

Samantha had low expectations for her multicultural counseling class. In reflecting on previous experiences with diversity trainings and multicultural curriculum, she assumed it would be a "check-list item," something that the students and her counseling program could mark as complete without any real in-depth examination of diversity issues. While she described her

“jadedness” as present upon entering the class, her attitude shifted when she observed her instructor attempting to take the material deeper than the surface. She understood that the tasks of the multicultural counseling course included personal exploration, being “real” or authentic with your experiences, and emphasized personal growth. As such she felt various kinds of tension or conflict within her multicultural class when these expectations were not met. Despite being white, she felt her personal history didn't necessarily feel congruent with the narrative of white identity development that was presented in class, resulting in some frustration with her classmates. She felt this to be especially true in cases where she observed other white classmates demonstrating unawareness about issues of diversity. In recalling her experiences, Samantha felt especially tense in hearing a classmate express discomfort in putting aside her religious beliefs. It made her feel angry, both personally and professionally. Part of her felt that this imposition of religious belief would do harm to an already vulnerable population of future clients. She felt “annoyed, angry, and frustrated” at her classmate for putting herself in a line of work that purports to maintain non-judgement toward its clients. She reported having a strong reaction to the notion of a fellow counselor imposing their beliefs on others.

### **Story-telling features**

Samantha's speech patterns provided more insight into her narrative. At times she spoke quietly, when she was considering alternative points of view or contradicting herself. Other times her voice raised as if she was physically embodying her feelings of frustration and anger while narrating particular moments of interpersonal tension with others. For example, when she described her feelings around hearing a classmate's insistence on imposing her religious beliefs on her clients, she expressed, “I was annoyed, angry, frustrated-If you know this about yourself then why would you have joined a secular program where it's such a struggle? But you knew

that! If you knew that this was going to be a struggling thing then go into pastoral counseling, that's okay, it's fine to know that's what you want to do!" She narrated her inner dialogue during the interview with me, as if she had been reliving the experience. This happened on other occasions when she expressed frustration at the lack of personal growth of her classmates. Samantha's narration and speech patterns presented her as a precise person, who aimed at story telling not in a linear way but at various levels: in the past-tense, processing in the present, and re-tooling the narrative as if she was experiencing it again. Samantha shifted her processing between personal experiences, sources from her class experiences, as well as the experiences of others. This entertainment of multiple perspectives might suggest an intermediate level of intercultural cognitive development (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005).

Samantha's story was not told in chronological order, but rather was told in order of significant event. She followed each conflict story with reflective thoughts and processing. This may have been in part because she had just finished her course a week prior to our interview. Because the style of her narration switched between story-telling in the past-tense, and present-tense meta-narration, it was evident that she was still processing the experiences of her course during her interview with me.

### **Structural Themes**

**Dueling feelings.** Samantha often had conflicting and simultaneous expectations for the multicultural counseling course, the expectations of her fellow students, and for herself. Toward the end of our interview, she ebbed and flowed between acknowledging a "jadedness" for the need of a course like this, and a simultaneous understanding that it needs to exist for professional purposes. She was processing her story as she was telling it, and this was evidenced in the way she would begin sentences with "I'm contradicting myself here, but..." or "part of me knows



this, but as I talk about it it makes me feel” Because Samantha had just finished taking her multicultural course only a week prior to our interview, she expressed that it was all “feeling very fresh,” as she talked about her experiences.

Samantha’s dueling feelings she was experiencing came into play at various points during our interview. She would simultaneously describe feeling two different ways, and demonstrated an awareness of this fluctuation with me. She described feeling jaded about the need for a course that dealt with issues of diversity despite also understanding the need and being aware of its relevance to the counseling profession. Another example of this came up when describing a conflict experience with a classmate. Samantha felt frustrated, annoyed, and angered that this person possessed the perspective that they had, and yet she also described feeling empathic and even impressed that this person would be brave enough to state their controversial in the classroom environment. In these moments, my counseling skills became valuable. I was able to accurately point out these dueling feelings with double-sided reflections that enabled her to elaborate being between two outlooks.

**Inter/a personal tensions.** Samantha experienced tension and conflict on different levels, both interpersonally and intrapersonally. At the interpersonal level, Samantha expressed feeling frustration with her peers, specifically at their lack of “openness” or “willingness” to confront specific issues such as privilege: “I feel like I have frustrations around that where there’s this tip toeing which in some sense I understand, like, these are not things that are hard to talk about, but I think that’s were some of my frustration and conflict kind of came up.” Despite these tensions being located at both interpersonal and intrapersonal levels, they were not necessarily mutually exclusive. At the intrapersonal level, meaning those conflicts that activated the relationship with the self, (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005) Samantha indicated that parts of her personal growth

were activated. While talking about the conflict with her classmate, she turned the reflection inward: “what if that student was my client? How would I handle that? It certainly brought up some of those tensions?” She acknowledged openly with me that the conflict with her peer served as a catalyst for inward thinking, about how she may have uncovered some implicit bias against religious individuals.

**Professional misrepresentation.** When orating her story, Samantha considered her conflict both personally and professionally. When she described the frustration she felt toward her classmate, she asked open-ended hypothetical questions about the professional integrity and misrepresentation. For example, she expressed fear and concern that her classmates would be working as a professional counselor: “I was angry. I think part of me felt like, ‘if you want to do this type of work this is not the place to impose your personal spiritual beliefs... I was kind of annoyed, angry, frustrated-If you know this about yourself then why would you have joined a secular program where it’s such a struggle?” Samantha understood her frustrations as both personal and professional, but seemed especially bothered by potential ethical dilemmas that she anticipated her classmate might have. For Samantha, this individual represented a threat to the counseling profession, which seemed to incite her experience of conflict.

In summary, Samantha presented a narrative that wasn’t presented in a linear way, but was rather organized by experience. It was layered with complex levels of awareness, insights, interjections and precision. Samantha’s conflict experience enabled her reflect back onto herself, evaluating and assessing her own personal growth as a professional counselor among others.

## CHAPTER 5: ALYSSA

### **“It made me stronger.”**

As a whole, I don't think it was a bad experience, I wish I would have gotten more out of it. The only way I feel like I would have gotten more out of it was if my class mates were more “in it,” as much as I was. But I felt very supported by my professor and I learned a lot from the class. Thinking back on it, I did enjoy it. I thought it was interesting. But I think it would have been better if my classmates were more open to discussion because a lot of people weren't, and I was one of the few that was, and that's when the conflict happened.

Our professor had us do this in-class activity where everyone was standing in the middle of the classroom. And he would make a statement. If we agreed with the statement, we'd go to one side of the room. If we disagreed we'd go to the other side of the room. It was things like, “I think marijuana should be legal.” Something like that. If we agreed we'd go to one, if we disagreed we'd go to the other. The one that was prompted where the conflict started was gay marriage, and if same sex marriage...it was something along the lines of ‘if you think its okay, if you don't think its okay.’ There were a few people who went to the opposite side of the room, as in, they were against it. So that's the back story.

It got to the point though where a few weeks later toward the end of the semester our professor was just trying to prompt us into talking. And nobody would talk about anything. So, I decided to go back to that day where we did that in-class activity, and I was like, “So, I know that some of you decided that you're against gay marriage, and I'm just curious if its religious reasons, y'know, like, what is it?” There were only like 3 students who went to the other side so I guess I was kind of calling them out in a way, 3 or 4 of them. And so a few people started talking

and they were like “Yeah, well, its just kind of against my religious beliefs, and I'm like ‘ok, alright.’” And then this is when it all started.

When some people shared that it was against their religion, that it was religion and spirituality-based, and I said, “I identify as a Christian. and I’m also Gay.” So, from that moment on it just kind of exploded. My point was that people in the LGBT community can have faith and they can practice a religion and spirituality. I was kind of challenging them a little I guess.

And this one person, whenever I disclosed that I was gay and Christian, this person kind of laughed, like “heh, a gay Christian.” Something along those lines. And from that moment on I was like “oh no...” So this person started to tell me how I should be at home raising children, and then he started quoting the bible. And at that point, our professor stopped him.

But, the thing that got to me the most emotional and sent me into a full blown anxiety attack, like crying, like I literally couldn’t even talk because I couldn’t breathe, was, and I quote this, he said, “You are an abomination.” And for me, that was it. And the reason that was so hard for me was because it took me 21 years to come out. And the reason it took me that long was because of religion. Because in my undergrad for three years I was in this really conservative evangelical Christian group. And they were my source of people. And they were very against any LGBT anything. So in my undergrad, when I was just starting to realize that I liked other women, that I was attracted to other women, I approached the pastor and the pastor’s wife. And they say, “ok, go home and read the bible.” And so I go home and read the bible, and I just bawled. All night. And so I was just like “great. I don’t have any support.” So, all the externalized homophobia that I had received was all now internal. So, I had been able to through counseling and all this other stuff, by the time I took the multicultural counseling class I was out, I was comfortable with myself, I was in a very strong place mentally and emotionally. But those

words that he said, that was what I had always felt in myself. That I was an abomination. And that other people believed that. And so him saying that just set me off. Absolutely set me off emotionally.

I ended up not really being able to say anything for the rest of the class but I stayed. It was the next week that, a little bit more happened. I processed it with my professor right after, I processed it with them maybe the next day. And so supportive, and he made me feel so much better. He talked with me about filing a grievance against this person and I didn't want to do that. It wasn't the point of me sharing that. The point of my sharing that was people could step back and have a different perspective. Because that's the point of the class for me. The point of the class is to have this types of confrontations-not harassment, which is what that was, but for people to be able to talk about these things in an open way. Because we're counselors.

Everyone's different. Everyone has their own culture, and we need to be aware of how words like that hurt people. Something like saying that to me, a few years ago, I don't even want to know what could have happened from that. Because I was in a very dark place. So, the next week I showed up for class. And my professor was like, that's going to be over half the battle, just you even showing up to class and showing that you're there and present.

This person attempted to apologize to me. and personally I don't think it was an actual apology as in "I'm sorry I hurt you," I think it was an apology so he was saving his own butt. So he wouldn't get in trouble, because he knew what he did was wrong.

That kind of worries me, for his future clients. That worries me for other people. That if you want to work with any population, you're going to have LGBT people in that population. It's just going to happen. So how are you going to deal with that? Are you going to say something like that to your client? Probably not. But, you need to be more mindful and aware and you need

to put yourself in other people's shoes and I think that in that sense this person lacked empathy. Because they hadn't really thought about what it would be like to be in that community. That's basically it in a nutshell. But it was a very intense experience for me.

....Anger was in there because of the people who didn't support me and the fact that this person was sitting there telling me how I should be, and telling me what I should do brought a lot of anger and frustration. But also anger at the arrogance and the ignorance, just that lack of knowledge. Purely. Just a huge lack of knowledge. And empathy. Even sympathy. So yeah. I would say that all of those things were kind of happening at the same time.

...[I'm changed by it because] It kind of solidified my beliefs. Solidified who I was. I am glad that I had the experience. Honestly...I think it made me stronger. It strives me to want to educate people. And to put myself out there. Just so people can actually learn. I guess those are some meanings from it. Educating people. In a nice way. And sharing my experience because I think people should know.

### **Vertical Analysis**

Alyssa understood that the purpose of her multicultural counseling class was to have open exchanges with her classmates in order to learn, develop new perspectives, and discuss more challenging topics surrounding cultural identity. In one instance in her class, she decided to take the risk in challenging some of her peers' reactions to a discussion on marriage equality. She indicated that some of her classmates maintained the perspective that their religious beliefs would prevent them from supporting marriage equality. As a lesbian and a Christian, she felt compelled to press these students to explain their perspective. What ensued was a personal confrontation that left her feeling vulnerable, angry, and worried. Alyssa's personal journey to feeling confident in her religious and sexual identity came from years of personal growth and

working on herself. When her classmate confronted her, calling her an “abomination,” it tapped into the tasks of her personal journey. Without having the capacity in the moment to say anything back, she looked to her classmates and her instructor to help mediate. In the moments following the confrontation, she became worried when her classmates didn’t step in to support her. The silence of the room felt like hours, despite only moments passing until her classmates began to stand up for her.

Upon reflection, Alyssa’s feelings shifted from frustration over the lack of personal growth of others to concern about her confronter’s lack of professional growth. She reported that the lack of empathy, arrogance and ignorance that her classmate displayed made her worried for their future clients.

Despite the conflict, Alyssa maintains that by being able to process it with her instructor and with her supportive peers, she was able to develop deeper personal meanings. She indicated that the conflict did not impact her negatively, rather, it made her sense of self strengthen. She said that she was “glad that [she] had the experience.” In addition to the development of a stronger sense of self, she felt compelled to share her story with others in order to educate. Although not explicit at first, after discussing it in our interview it was partly her reason behind wanting to participate in the study.

### **Story-Telling Features**

The story-telling features of her narrative provided me with more insight about her experiences and story. She spoke directly, concisely, and without hesitation. For example, at the end of each conflict story or narrative moment she would wrap up her thoughts with a direct concluding sentence and wait for my next question, as if her responses were written and she had been reading them aloud. It had been a year since her multicultural class had ended and she

seemed to have come to precise conclusions and meanings, which was evident in the style of her narration. Her precision also caused me to believe that she had told this story to others and had processed through a lot of her feelings about the conflicts she experienced. It did not take her a long time to articulate and isolate feelings or reflections about her experiences, which led me to believe that the transformative qualities of them had been sorted through.

### **Structural Themes**

**Professional misrepresentation.** Alyssa's story returned to the notion that within the multicultural counseling class, there are expectations for difficult dialogues, conflicts, and personal growth. Despite her own conflict feeling more like "harassment," Alyssa had already entered into the multicultural class with the expectation for heavy exchanges, in order to develop professional ethical responsibility to multicultural competence.

Alyssa consistently returned to the concept that ethical obligations to the counseling profession drove her to challenge her peers thinking, despite not expecting to be personally confronted in what ensued. But even in the wake of the confrontation, she reflected upon the events both personally and professionally. She felt worried for the future clients of the person who confronted her: "it worries me, for [their] future clients. That worries me for other people." She articulated that the individual she had conflicts with misrepresented what she understood to be foundational to the counseling profession. She questioned how they might be unable to work with queer clients in the future, expressing worry and fear that this individual might not be professionally prepared or competent to align their values with the ethical expectations of the counseling profession.

She also reflected upon her conflict on a personal level, remembering her difficult journey to self-acceptance, and how this confrontation jointly reminded her of a challenging time



in her life and of how far she had come. In light of both the personal and professional reflection, Alyssa still felt that these were the tasks and objectives of the multicultural counseling class, and those that would enable her to become a responsible and ethical counselor.

**Intersecting narratives.** Alyssa framed the conflict within her multicultural class within a larger personal story of personal growth. To help me understand why the conflict in her class hit her so deeply, Alyssa undergirded her story within a larger narrative framework. She told me about her past, her struggles coming out as a sexual minority, and the intrapersonal conflicts she experienced where her religious and sexual identities intersected. For example, she explained, "...the reason it was so hard for me was because it took me 21 years to come out. And the reason it took me that long was because of religion...in those moments it all came back." Hearing the word "abomination" immediately brought her back to a larger and more personal narrative: "for those moments it brought back that self-hatred that I always felt...it brought back those memories of not having support." In telling her story of conflict, Alyssa also had to tell another story. By situating her conflict story within a large narrative, Alyssa infused her experience with more complexity and deeper meaning. In analysis, it became challenging for me to think of these experiences as mutually exclusive. She told them in tandem and situated one within the other, leading her to reflect and make meaning of her experiences in a larger way.

**Meaning making: advocacy.** In this phase of vertical analysis, I looked for features of language that demonstrated meaning making. What emerged was Alyssa's strengthened and solidified sense of self. On eight separate occasions, she used the words "stronger" and "solidified" when describing how she felt about her conflict. Even from the beginning of our interview, Alyssa expressed feeling "happy" with her multicultural counseling course multiple times throughout our interview, saying she felt it was "interesting" and "enjoyable." Even in

spite of her challenging confrontation, she began the interview saying that she wished that her peers had been as “in it” and she had been. She even claimed ownership over instigating the conflict, being open to discussion and feeling comfortable challenging her classmate’s thinking. These pieces of her narrative and the linguistic devices she used demonstrated Alyssa’s growth and her resilience in light of a difficult exchange with another student, who challenged multiple pieces of her identity.

Additionally, Alyssa demonstrated the development of new meanings in light of her experiences in her increased desire to educate and advocate for others. She explained, “It strives me to want to educate people. And to put myself out there just so people can actually learn.” She put herself out there in order for her classmates to learn about a different perspective, and despite what ensued as a result, she continues to feel that it was a transformational learning experience.

## CHAPTER SIX: RAIN

### “Is this what counselors are?”

Okay, the class was pretty large. It was an intro class so there were a lot of people: internship, practicum, all types of people. There was just always a lot of conflict. Like all the time. There were a few minority individuals, myself included. It was very uncomfortable, because we wanted to be respectful but it grated on our nerves a lot. We wanted to stand up for ourselves, and it just kind of got passed off as if we were being defensive.

.... Especially with the eight week-classes were intense, because you're sitting there with people all night. It's not like in the morning where everyone's awake, everyone's getting tired, not as professional as they might have been had they been more awake. There was a lot of silencing behavior. Not very professional. A lot of crying, yelling, it was something else. It was especially hard when you see this side of people that you hadn't seen before, and its kind of like ooh, red flag. I'm not sure I'd interact with them in the future. I mean I'll work with them professionally, it's not like I hate them or don't ever want to contact them again, but [cringe face] yeah... those sides of people-sometimes I think 'Do I wish I hadn't seen that or not?'

With regards to trans issues, sometimes it became almost like a joke, where people were treating it like a game, saying things like, “should this person be able to use this restroom or not?” and I was like “this is my life, not just a conversation for us to be having.” And getting really into like-I hope I don't get too mad here, but they were getting into like 7th grade biology stuff, like conversations about trying to tell me about who I was, what I've been through.

Whenever I'd speak out immediately after class “oh wow, I saw this movie with a trans person in it-”and that's all anyone would ever talk about, what they've read in the news. But that's my life, I know where you're coming from. You're not being rude, but it was like I was the token trans

person that must know about everything trans happening. Or, they would take me aside and just straight up ask me “what do you have going on down there?” Yes-I get that a lot, even in a counseling program. I wish I could understand more why that’s happening, but there was just a lot of that. Feeling very unsafe and not wanting to go to the class, but knowing that I need to be strong and peak out if I can...

...With regard to sexual orientation, there were a lot of people who were like “is bisexuality real, why don’t you just pick someone?” and just going back to these old tropes that you wouldn’t expect from master’s level educated people. Having high expectations were not a good idea... And they just got very emotional, like “you’re hurting me, I can’t believe you’d treat me this way. You’re horrible.” Stuff like that. I would never speak like that. I just keep thinking to myself “okay, this is why I think like that and this is my lived experience, and this is just-I would never start yelling or be catty or passive aggressive or anything like that.

...Something else that relates to the tokenizing experience was, in one class, we were talking a lot about trans issues. I just kind of sat there. I was exhausted. I don’t think I even raised my hand, I was just like, “no, I’m not into it today. I don’t want to expand my energy today.” Then the next day, in a different class, someone sat down at my table, turned to me, and said, “you know, the other day in class when we were talking about trans issues, there were a lot of places you could have jumped in. I really wanted to hear your perspective, and I’m wondering why you didn’t? And I was like...um...I appreciate that you like hearing from me and learning from me but it would take a lot out of me, and it just wasn’t the time for me.” That’s just how I handled it. I mean on the inside I was like “I don’t like this. this makes me feel weird.” but we had to go about it in a cordial way.

...I feel [my feelings] are going to all be negative even though I did have some positive moments. I'll start with positive first. I do feel like there were people who wanted to hear from me, who were from other minority experiences, who wanted to learn a lot from me but they didn't demand that. So when that expectation is there, "you *will* teach me when I want you to," I don't want that. So I guess some feelings were open, interested, willing to share, accepted, but I'd say most of the time I felt frustrated. Fearful. A lot. It was a lot of sitting there and listening to people and trying to formulate and articulate an intelligent response, but my heart was racing and I didn't know how it would be understood, if what I say would even land on their ears, or would they just move on? So, feeling nerve-wracked and let down. For sure. Disappointed, and most of all with the negative emotions just exhausted. Like I said, it was the intensity of the class going on all those hours. I'm very social justice oriented, so, even hearing about experiences that I don't know I get very ready to defend if the other person is exhausted and can't speak. So its very exhausting, like, let's fight against classism, like, what next? What will go on in this three-hour class? It was definitely emotionally taxing when I think about it, walking into that room and being ready for anything. Good, bad, neutral...

... I would say that I've learned a lot about how to be-this is kind of sad-but I've learned about how to work more within the politics of school, how to make things more palatable unfortunately, how to water things down even though that's not who I want to be. but I've just learned how to survive. I now have a stock answer if I'm ever needing to respond to something. I've been through it. I know how to answer.... [the students] just didn't want to handle any challenging, from me, from the professors, from other students, so I've learned how to survive and adapt and not get as hurt anymore. Because I still get it today from people who weren't in that class, they still come to me with the same invasive questions. So its taught me some skills-I

don't know if it's good or bad to have these skills, but its made it a bit easier on me. I've learned to lower my expectations a bit....

... It makes me nervous and simultaneously pushes me to be more of an advocate. It's one of the most important positions for me in life, because I'm a victim advocate, and I'm a guardian advocate, and that's really salient to my identity, especially professionally. So, just kind of seeing the failures of others-well, not failures. That's not fair to say, because I guess those are my expectations coming in. But maybe more of like witnessing the growth of others, it did definitely make me nervous. I'd vent to my partner about it and I wouldn't be nasty or say that "this person is like awful" but I'd just talk about how I'd be exhausted, and he'd say "I kind of feel good that I never went to counseling." I was like "oh no, this can't be good." I don't want people to feel like they can't go to counseling, but a lot of people who heard me vent, who are outside the field, I don't want them to worry about why my classmates would be saying those things, especially the jarring stuff. Is this what counselors are? Is this what they're all holding inside?... It's pushed me more to want to help others learn as well....

... With him, I sometimes was internally angry at him. I mean I would listen to people say things like "I love my confederate flag" and I don't care what you think it represents, it doesn't represent a history of racism." and he's just agreeing with everyone so he doesn't have to challenge anyone at all. and I was like "please! Challenge them!" But by the end of the class I realized that I didn't think he could.... Maybe just like me he has to dumb things down just because of higher ed. In order to try to survive... So when I was mad [at the professor] I was actually like "wait we're kind of the same." Which is tough, because I want to know why it has to be this way. Its not like I want to be yelling at the podium, but I wish there was more of a way to-because I thought that's what this class was, that if we take the time to share our biases, and

work through them whereas I think a lot of people were like, “I took a step to share. I’m done now.” They just kept them. I mean I know it takes a huge step to come out in to a class of all different types of people and say “here’s my issue,” but once people are saying you have to work through they get defensive and accuse others of attacking them. Okay, that’s not really working through it.

### **Vertical Analysis**

Rain’s 8-week intensive class on multicultural counseling was challenging for them. They experienced insensitivity from classmates in regard to their identity, specifically in a sense of invalidation and erasure. Their expectations for the multicultural counseling class went unfulfilled, especially as they witnessed the lack of professional growth and disposition in others. Rain felt that the behavior of their classmates misrepresented what it meant to be a counselor and even a graduate student, resulting in a sense defensiveness and protection for the profession as a whole. Rain identifies as gender-non conforming, and performs their gender as feminine. The interactions with their classmates resulted in Rain feeling nerve-wracked, disappointed, and exhausted. Their classmates treated their identity “like a game,” and continually called upon them to represent and speak on behalf of all transgender issues.

What Rain gained from their experiences in their multicultural class was a sense of unsafety and fear in the classroom in dealing with their classmate’s insensitivity. These feelings caused Rain concern that their classmates may be misrepresenting what it means to be a counselor. Having the expectations that graduate students in a field like counseling would validate and honor their experiences and their gender identity also went unfulfilled. The tasks of multicultural counseling, namely personal and professional growth seemed far off for Rain, especially after experiencing these conflicts in their multicultural counseling class. Rain had to

develop certain skills in order to preserve their wellbeing throughout their class. They feel an increased desire to advocate for and educate client about their rights, especially for those clients who have experienced counselors lacking cultural awareness surrounding trans or other diversity issues.

### **Story-telling features**

Rain had taken their multicultural counseling course over a year ago, and this might have impacted the precision and accuracy of their experiences. Rain's speech was relaxed and articulate, which created a calm and pleasant ambiance for her narration. They spoke with an easy tenor, and did not stutter or stammer. They also articulated their story with long sentences which created a sense of continuity and flow between ideas. As a result, I experienced Rain's narrative with ease. There were few contradictions in their narration, but they did tell their story in a non-linear way, with significant events or moments framing the story, rather than time. The non-linearity of their narrative suggest that what resonated for Rain was their feelings and reactions to the events, and not the events in and of themselves.

### **Structural Themes**

**Identity.** Throughout Rain's interview, they referred to both a surprising amount of insensitivity from others with regard to their sexual and gender identity. Included in this insensitivity was a sense of invalidation, erasure, invisibility, and tokenizing. These themes came up consistently throughout Rain's story. Simply existing as a counselor-in-training in a multicultural counseling class was not a privilege Rain could enjoy, their identity constantly came into play in both productive and counterproductive ways. Rain's gender and sexual identity was repeatedly called into question. For example, Rain recalled classmates having conversations about "what restroom [a trans person should] use" and asking "is bisexuality even real?" Rain



shared these examples with me, which demonstrated their frustration in relation to other students invalidating and challenging these pieces of their identity.

While Rain doesn't mind taking time to educate others about trans issues, they didn't feel consistently agentic in taking this task on. Often Rain felt like they were required to speak on behalf of trans issues, as students explicitly called Rain out and questioned their silence when they did not have the energy to represent trans experiences on behalf of others' learning, "when that expectation is there, that 'you *will* teach me when I want you to,' I don't want that." Rain repeatedly said "this is my life" during our narrative, to suggest that a dialogue about gender identity or sexuality wasn't something they could excuse themselves from. These components of Rain's identity were immediately positioned within that dialogue at the onset, unable separate their it out from what their classmates considered to be course content.

**Professional misrepresentation.** Rain's expectations for their multicultural counseling class went largely unfulfilled. On multiple occasions they indicated feeling nervous, worried, and fearful that their classmate represented a generation of incoming professional counselors. They would often use words like "worry," and "nervous" when explaining their disappointment of their classmates. In particular, Rain expressed worry about how their peers would be called upon to represent counselors who might work with diverse populations. They asked hypothetical questions in their narration, such as "Is this what counselors are?...Is this what they are holding inside?" and turned these questions into personal reflections about Rain's identity: "What if they wouldn't want to work with me?" Rain explained that they expected their classmates to be "wanting to learn," eager to "have the discussions," and willing to "share our biases and work through them. Instead, Rain consistently articulated disappointment that these expectations went unfulfilled. What resulted, was a sense of concern that their peers might not be reflecting the

ethical disposition that had been articulated to them throughout their counseling program. Rain had the desire to learn, put “their perspectives out there” and be open to professional critique. They shared with me a sense of simultaneous disappointment, which overtime generated fear and concern that their peers may be unfit counselors. Rain also shared with me what it was like to communicate their experiences to their partner: “I’d vent to my partner about it and I wouldn’t be nasty that people were being awful, but I’d just talk about how I’d be exhausted and he’d say, ‘I kind of feel good that I never went to counseling,’ and I was like, oh no. This can’t be good (pg. 4 line 41]. Witnessing the lack of professional growth of their classmates made Rain nervous for how those individuals outside of the counseling might be interacting with unfit counselors. They said, “I don’t want people to feel like they can’t go to counseling...I don’t want them to worry about why my classmate would be saying those things, especially the jarring stuff”. Rain revisited this idea multiple times throughout our interview, which suggested that they may still be thinking about how their classmates may be impacting the lives of others in the same way that they had impacted Rain.

**Meaning making: self-preservation.** When Rain discussed how they had been impacted by the course, they consistently returned to the concept of survival and adaptation. The means to self-preservation took on different shapes for Rain, including establishing ways of guarding themselves from invasive questions or harmful comments, coming up with canned responses to placate the inquiries from their classmate, and overall lowering their expectations of people. At the institutional level, Rain expressed feeling sad about disclosing their needs for self-preservation within a counseling program, where they assumed safety and respect would be upheld.

Rain used the words “survive,” “protect,” and “strategize” when describing the how they had been impacted by their conflict experiences. Each of these words suggests a need to actively consider ways in order to protect themselves from further harm. Rain developed a need to preserve their mental health, they “learned how to survive and adapt [in order to] not get hurt anymore.” As Rain shared these meanings with me, they acknowledged that it felt like a sad conclusion to draw. Despite this admission, Rain also articulated that this awareness of self-preserving lead them to develop more desire to advocate for client’s rights in walking away from counselors that make them feel uncomfortable or insensitive, especially for those who are sexually or gender diverse. On the other end, Rain developed a deeper desire to strategically advocate in educating counselors who might not be representing the values of the field in culturally responsible ways.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: ELENA

### “I felt cheated.”

The course was definitely an experience-learning to experience others and the world around me, and how I interacted with different types of people, and the people just happened to be my cohort members—a small cohort of 24 people. I was surprised at the level of diversity in the class even beyond things such as race. I was often very surprised, and I felt over time a range of emotions, shock, feeling overwhelmed, frustrated. And then also feeling sense of community, empathy, compassion and support... those emotions were inspired by being in a lot of new types of conversations, being able to participate in conversations I've never had before about race, about what we think about stereotype, just about really honest opinions and conversations we haven't had before. The conversations that mostly sparked conflict were about Caucasian vs. African-American viewpoints on identity, mainly because that conversation tended to last the majority of the semester and I felt that other minority populations were being left out. Over time, while I appreciated the dialogue, I had this feeling of frustration we were missing another picture of this puzzle, and you know, we're not really addressing it...

... [In class] we were discussing the differences between an Arabic person and a Muslim person. I remember sharing an experience of cultural immersion—you know—we were expected to do a class project over a year, and my immersion was to go to a mosque. I ended up wearing hijab and covering my hair and wearing loose clothing, and when I shared this with the class I felt that my experience and thoughts were negated by someone in my class who has a very feminist point of view and is very individualistic. She was pointing out how easy it was for a woman to give in to that stereotype of conformity and the way that Muslim women cover their hair, and [she felt] the way that Muslim women perform in their culture felt wrong to her. I was

taken aback by that because it wasn't my purpose in that project to tell someone that their beliefs and values were wrong, it was my goal to participate, and I thought that making personal judgments about someone else's experiences wasn't really the point of that class...

... I remember thinking: isn't the point of the class to explore something beyond what we're thinking and believe and know? Everything I believe and know I want to challenge every day, to be a better clinician. I want to find value in what other cultures and other populations bring and, I felt like she didn't want to explore something outside of herself. This student was very feministically-oriented and just disagreed with woman covering their heads, and I thought, there's more to that, you know? We can't always lead with our personal judgements; we have to explore the world. Not necessarily let our personal judgments hold us back....

... I think that this class was really a melting pot of personalities and experiences and cultures. At the beginning of the semester we all agreed to be open and honest, and yet over time I saw how hesitant people were to do that, and at times I felt cheated ... in graduate school we're all making the agreement to learn, to be open to conflict to be open to have a dialogue and when members of a cohort not agreeing to that, or being afraid to speak or not using silence appropriately or really withholding their thoughts and feeling from the class...I thought that in one way we say we're agreeing to be honest and the class as a whole didn't agree to that. There's a sense of disillusionment that I had never experienced in my personal life; I expect people in my own life to not be as honest with me and I really expected people in my class to be, at times I really questioned their level of honesty and commitment...

... It definitely impacted me because I could see how they were responding to other people, and I wondered what they were thinking. We would sort of start a dialogue I noticed some people wouldn't participate and I thought to myself, something is lost in translation here.

It's like the authenticity left the room. I don't really know how to explain it the than that. It just didn't seem like a productive environment anymore and at times you could tell because people I knew expressed personal opinions to me outside of class were suddenly silent and I thought, that's not productive to being an effective counselor, that's not productive to being an effective person. You never know who's going to walk through your door and you're afraid to have a conversation with your classmates? How are you going to have a conversation with a client? Many questions were unearthed and unfortunately not answered...

...I think I felt most cheated when people were silent, and I think I felt even more cheated when people in class, and I'm including myself in this, were brave enough to start an important, that we felt were relevant to bring up. I felt it was relevant to bring up people with disabilities because I have a disability and it's not visible to most people. We spent so much time talking about White and African-American cultural identities that other minority populations were being swept under the rug. So I felt cheated when I wanted to bring this up and did, and one other person spoke with me about this and then all of a sudden there was this silence and someone eventually brought it back to white and black cultural identity without even really touching on what I said. I felt my experience was neglected and I think that's really what I was getting to when I said I felt cheated- like my experiences were not validated...

... As a person with a disability I've been through so many different things in life, positive and negative, and traumatic and transformative and I had never really been in an environment as a person to experience this level of connection with others. It took so much for me to bring it up, and then as a student I felt invalidated and cheated because here 24 people were in a class and yet not all of them were agreeing to tough it out and appreciate the dialogue and participate in a dialogue and work through conflict, it didn't seem genuine.

... I would also like to add that a lot of those things (personal and professional growth) happen simultaneously, and I for one felt that my personal growth just as a human, expanded in many ways, I really have to keep my professional growth check in order to be open to learn from other people from the professional tasks. We're always functioning as people, even when we're not wearing our counselor hat or that clinical hat, so that growth is just going on 24/7. When you walk into a classroom many different things happen. For me, I really wanted to identify as being a graduate student. I wanted to accept that I'm still learning. Understanding that I'm still in development as a person, I'm still in development as a student and that means being open to different perspectives. I'm being open to what it means to be a counselor and what it means to be a good listener. What it means to work academically means that there is always an ongoing conversation that involves more of those tasks. So [these tasks] are always at the forefront of our minds. Participating in school and taking those personal tasks and skills into the professional...

...Also I was an observer of conflict between other students. A lot of the times in class, two students would always note that they were older and they'd experience the world for longer than we had. Being in class with two people over the age of 50 can be overwhelming, especially when they are constantly bringing up their age. As if it makes their experience more valid than mine because they were there. Hearing this phrase constantly come up "I was there...I was there when...for those of us who are a little bit older in the room..." etc., at times I wondered, "do you even value my experience because I'm younger than you?" I wondered if they were ageist for a moment in a few classes because it seemed to be a theme. I felt confused, I wondered why it was so important for them to focus on their age, I felt frustrated at times because those two students tended to dominate conversation. In places where I wanted to contribute, I felt that my input didn't matter and I felt invisible because there was so much energy in the room from them... I

think it spoke a lot to how conflict manifested itself, because it didn't exactly spark people talking more, people actually talked less. And those students who I knew spoke fervently on other topics became more and more silent over the semester. And there was this fear of apology and offense, and I observed a lot of that and had more confusion. Why are we apologizing for having thoughts and feelings and opinions and ideas when this is the class to really do that?

... I think I'm different now in that I'm more patient. In the beginning of the semester, though I didn't express it, I was very quick to anger, and I self-scrutinized a lot. If I wasn't necessarily getting the response from the class that I wanted it was frustrating because it I would wonder "did they understand what I said? Am I being heard?" And now I really just allow people to express their emotions and really just know that their emotions are theirs and my emotions are mine and I can control what I say and do.

### **Vertical Analysis**

Elena's expectation for a multicultural class included an emphasis on personal exploration, openness, and honesty. She anticipated that the learning outcomes for this course would come at the result of a mutual agreement to dialogue, despite the potential for difficulty. Although her intentions were set for experiencing the mutual demonstration of personal and professional growth by her classmates, her story indicated that this was not entirely fulfilled. She narrated a range of emotions: shock, overwhelm, frustration, in addition to empathy, compassion and support.

What was missing for her was the unevenly distributed participation of her class. Some voices were louder than others, some were silent, and the imbalanced dialogue led her to feel "cheated" from the educational experience she had prepared for. She indicating feeling disillusioned by class. By making the collective agreement to learn, she felt disappointed when



her classmates with withheld their feelings from the class with silence. She expected honesty, participation, and commitment and felt her classmates did not maintain their agreements. The class began to feel discouraging over time, as she noticed that her environment seemed ungentle, unproductive, and unprofessional. She felt “frustrated and distracted” by more dominant voices in the class, who continually expressed themselves exclusively through their personal cultural identities, instead of making space for the perspectives of others; something she felt integral to the professional development of counselors-in-training.

She expressed feeling a sense of erasure when her classmates discussed issues of diversity, as the dialogues seemed to her to place emphasis on race and ethnicity. She indicated that as a woman with an invisible disability, it became especially evident that the dialogues about diversity seemed to be missing other representations. When she attempted to broach this among her classmates, however, it was received with a silence that made her feel perspective and her identity invalidated.

She concluded by expressing that the tasks of multicultural counseling classes are layered: there is an ongoing attention to personal growth happening constantly, and that this growth sometimes rubs against the tasks of professional identity development. Understanding that development is still occurring allowed her to remember to be patient with her peers in both their parallel and intersectional developments.

### **Story-telling Features**

Elena had just completed her multicultural class at the time of our interview, which may have impacted the features of her story-telling. She presented her ideas non-linearly and with some simultaneity, as if she was still sorting them out for herself. Having been so close to her

class finishing, she would oscillate between narration and meta-processing aloud. This influenced how I understood her experiences: as fresh and still being processed.

Elena spoke with choppy, disconnected sentences that would eventually form a coherent idea or thought. Despite this, her narrative did not feel rushed or disconnected. I was less aware of this during the interview, but noticed it more during the listening and transcription phase of analysis. During these phases, I found it difficult to parse together some of her sentences and this distracted my focus away from the content of her story. This was validated in the member-check process, when Elena pointed out that her transcription felt choppy as if she had been stammering. She told me that she had been nervous in our interview and it must have come across in her story-telling. She requested that some of the thoughts and transcriptions be smoothed out to sound more fluid, which she did on her own. While this revision process aided in the content analysis phase, I continued to use the original transcript to explore story-telling features.

### **Structural Themes**

**Unmet expectations.** Elena's desires for an open dialogue, a respectful exchange of mutual ideas, and a collaborate learning environment went unmet. She repeated throughout our interview that she felt disappointed and cheated out of a learning experience she had anticipated. She consistently expressed what her desires for the class were, only to then begin to talk about how these desires went unfulfilled. While she didn't necessarily talk about where these desires came from, or how her expectations for the class had been shaped, her returns to professional identity development might suggest that she felt a professional obligation to be a dedicated student. She would frame her desires with phrases like, "this is the class to..." and "the point of this class is..." which indicated that she had some preexisting idea about what a multicultural class is supposed to be, something that went largely unmet: "as a student I felt invalidated and

cheated because here 24 people were in a class and yet not all of them were agreeing to tough it out and appreciate the dialogue and participate in a dialogue and work through conflict, it didn't seem genuine all the time."

**Professional misrepresentation.** Elena was 28 years old, and had been working in a mental health setting prior to returning to school for her master's degree. This professional working experiences impacted how she viewed herself as a student, as well as how she came to understand what it means to be a counselor, "I really wanted to identify as being a graduate student. I wanted to accept that I'm still learning, that just because I've been a therapist for 3 years there's still room to grow. So understanding that I'm still in development as a person and I'm still in development as a student being open to different perspectives means I'm being open to what It means to be a counselor." She consistently used the words "we" and "us" throughout her story when talking about her classmates which might convey a sense of personal or professional community that grounded her expectations for collaborative learning. The sense of professional and personal community she felt added more depth in meaning making when processing disappointing interactions with her classmates. It wasn't simply a peer saying something she disagreed with, it was felt much deeper: it didn't align with her preexisting schemas around what it means to represent the professional disposition of being a counselor in training. Hearing other students saying invalidating, difficult, and even hurtful remarks challenged her on a personal and professional level. I talked with Elena about the dueling tasks of professional development and personal development in the multicultural class, and felt connected with her in reflecting on my own experiences as a counselor in training.

**Dueling identities.** Elena told three primary conflict stories within her narrative. Each of them manifested at the onset of various identity experiences being expressed at the same time.

Elena felt that some of her classmates were too narrowly focused on their own worldview and wondered how this tunneled focus allowed extra space for other voices to be heard and represented. When attempting to represent her own identity and experience, she was met with silence and divestment from her classmates. This made her feel “invisible”, “confused”, and “frustrated”. On four separate occasions, Elena described different classmates doing this: one focusing narrowly on feminism and individualism, two focused on their age, and one focusing on their cultural identity. As a whole, Elena also described the class focusing its time on a predominant discourse: that of Black and White cultural relations. She qualified these points to me as significant by calling them “patterns” and not just one-time only occurrences: “while I appreciated the dialogue I had this feeling of frustration because we’re missing another picture of this puzzle and we’re not really addressing it”. When I asked her if she felt if there were only a few dominant voices dominating the conversation through a particular cultural lens, she emphatically agreed.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: JESSICA

### **“If I’m going to stand up for that, I have a lot to lose.”**

I took the class in the spring of 2015. The class was mostly women, there were two guys in the class-they were both white. There were some women of color in the class, the majority of people in the class were white women. The professor was an older white man, and that kind of set the tone for the class in terms of what happened. He did some okay things with bringing up topics about racism and homophobia a little bit and issues surrounding feminism, but it was really just a superficial kind of touching on things. One of the two things he always said was “I believe in white privilege! I believe in it, and you should believe in it too!” and that was kind of about as deep as we got-just limited to “oh yeah, white privilege exists, believe in it now.” So that's great, but we should be past that, moving on. That was one thing that he went to a lot, he would also band together with the other guys in the class and say things like “well we gotta stick together because us white guys are the enemy and all these women in here...we gotta stick together.” That was just kind of, um, the wrong message to send. We need to be more open to experiences and working together in talking about things, and it kind of became a bit of an us versus them mentality in the class which was off putting...

...it made it more uncomfortable to speak about things. When you enter a class and right from the get go the professor isn't open to your opinions or perspectives immediately, it does set the tone to be like, ‘the things that I’m going to say aren’t going to be important because it’s not what the professor believes in’... We would be in class and the way he’d prompt us to talk about topics would be like ‘what are some prejudices that you have or have heard about this particular group of people?’ and people would just say racist things and homophobic things and that would just kind of be the end of it. There would be no resolution to the conversations, there would just

kind of be declaration of terrible things that people find to be true about minorities, and it would be really uncomfortable to be in, to hear about all these groups just kind of being talked about like they're test subjects or something. That isn't really benefitting us in any way I can see other than people feeling like this is a safe place to share your prejudices with everyone but not get over them. I was surprised at the things that people felt like were okay to say that not okay, but rather damaging and hurtful. People who say or profess to be Christians and want to be Christian counselors that they would be saying really terrible things about people... I was pretty shocked about it, to see that everyone would be nodding their heads about it instead of saying "woah that's not okay," and see that the professor's not doing anything to restructure the beliefs or challenge them, but just saying "okay, thanks for sharing" and then moving on. So I guess it was a lot of thinking 'oh my gosh I can't believe this is happening,' feeling a lot of surrealist feelings, and feeling a lot of disappointment in my counseling program not having professors in place who kind of move people past a point of a superficial idea of what it means to be multiculturally competent... I was pretty silent in the class, I didn't honestly feel like it would be an environment where that would be good for me to say, 'no this goes against my feminist beliefs, or, no that sounds really racist and terrible.' I never thought there would be the kind of support in the class that I would have needed to say something like that.

I was in the struggle between wanting to say these things and feeling like someone should definitely say something, that this isn't okay, but then feeling like I couldn't for the sake of my grade and the connections that I want to make in graduate school. If I want to get a job or go for a doctorate, and my professors think that I'm a combative person it's going to reflect poorly on me. So I was just being stuck in that place of knowing at what point it's worth it. I want to say that it's *always* worth it to stand up for people and to say 'no, this is wrong,' and 'this is the right

thing,' but just from the other experiences I had in undergrad, it had really given me a perspective that realistically that isn't something that I can do and feel like I can come out on top. If I'm going to stand up for that, then I have a lot to lose.

I went to the same school for undergrad. It's a Christian school, so a lot of the students are really conservative and a lot of the professors were really conservative. I had a particular interest in philosophy and psychology so I took those classes and challenged some of the things that the professor was saying in terms of theological perspective with a philosophical one. One professor actually asked me to stop talking in class and told me to stop asking questions. At that point I didn't feel like I was being combative, I felt like I was a participant in class, so that was a frustrating experience for me. Then in another class, another professor would have a lot of anti-homosexual views and I challenged that professor and I feel like my grade was affected by that. I was called in to see that professor a few times about nit-picky things. In my opinion it would just be like, 'I know why I'm here, it isn't about those things'.

...The experience kind of made me feel on the outside of my cohort, and a lot of times in class now I'm a lot more hesitant to speak up in class. I don't really feel like my opinions are something that I should be sharing as much. I had once incident to where I was called to meet with my supervisor about class where I had expressed my opinions, so I now try really hard to pick my battles and reevaluate how it is that I am reacting to the situation, to make sure that my reactions are appropriate, and not acting just in my emotions. I'm trying to just slowing down and thinking about a better way to talk about it, or end up just not talking about it. For me it's been really just about slowing down with my reactions about what I want to say and the points that I want to make. Like you said, evaluating things and figuring out if it's going to be worth it or something that I want to fight for. I guess I wished there to be more conversations about

things, less about just acknowledging that there are terrible things in the world but also about how we work as counselors to avoid perpetuating these things. This is how people can be better. These are steps people can take to not be a terrible person. And just more pushing for people to reevaluate the racist and homophobic ideology that people have.

### **Vertical Analysis**

Jessica spoke about how most of her conflicts were distilled by the lack of her professor's willingness to bring the dialogue to a deeper place with her fellow students. She felt like it was being addressed only superficially, resulting in disappointment and disillusionment. Because of this lack of depth, Jessica reported that it ended up feeling like a kind of confessional of racist attitudes, and then nothing was done with it. In the end, it made her really uncomfortable to hear her fellow students admitting to believing certain stereotypes with regard to various minority groups, and then simultaneously hearing her teacher not doing anything to restructure or challenge bias beliefs; not taking it to a deeper place, not deconstructing it, and not applying it to the work they'll be doing in the future. Her conflict seemed to be a combination of hearing students saying shocking things and being disappointed by the leadership in the classroom. She felt concerned that these students, who purported to be good Christian counselors, may not be as open-minded as she expected.

She was saying that she felt uncomfortable knowing about her fellow classmate's in this way led her to feel disappointment and fear that her classmates were going to be counselors. She was fearful because she had heard all of these things that went unprocessed, and now they're going to be let out into the world. Despite that fear, she wasn't surprised by what she witnessed, because the environment is a conservative Christian parochial school. She recalled times in her undergraduate program when she expressed her opinion about things in a direct and maybe



contrarian way. She'd get negative feedback and even poor evaluations from her teachers. This has shaded her willingness to share a difference of opinion in her graduate program, out of fear that she's going to have to ask these same teachers for letters of recommendations in her job search in the coming months and she doesn't want to rock the boat and challenge her professors out of fear that it will impact her job search.

The meanings that she drew from her experiences were in learn to pick her battles, to strategically express her opinions without coming across as disrespectful despite feeling disrespected. This admission became complicated even as she expressed it to me, as said she felt guilty for contributing to a silence about things, because of her holding back and not speaking up anymore. When I asked her if she had ever expressed any of these things in her class, if she had felt safe enough to, she said no, and that she was pretty quiet throughout the course of the class but certainly felt an inner turmoil as a result throughout it.

### **Storytelling Features**

I interviewed Jessica twice due to technical issues with our first recording, and so our second interview got right to the point in telling her story. She began framing it with the setting, describing the demographic makeup of the class, including the instructor: "class was mostly women, there were two guys in the class-they were both white, there were some women of color in the class, the majority of people in the class were white women. The professor was an older white man, and that kind of set the tone for the class in terms of what happened". This breakdown of gender and race contextualized the events of her class, as she later described how these things were related. Her story wasn't told in chronological order, but rather in order by significant feeling and event. This might have been due to the fact that it was a second telling of her story, and that she had distilled it down to the most significant moments.

Despite interviewing Jessica twice, her story-telling styles were similar both times. She spoke directly and coherently, detailing the events of her class and her experiences straightforwardly. It had been almost a since her multicultural counseling class had ended, and her conclusions about it seemed more synthesized. She did not appear processing her experiences as she described them. I recall wondering in my interview if she presented a similar affect in her multicultural counseling class, especially as described fearing being misinterpreted by her peers and professors as combative.

### **Structural Themes**

**Lack of leadership.** Jessica directed a lot of her frustration toward the instructor of her multicultural course. She was the first participant that explicitly felt that her instructor was a significant contributor to the conflict and tension she felt. While she also felt annoyance toward her class mates she appeared to excuse them as learners, and ultimately held the leadership accountable for not restructuring her classmates' misguided class contributions. In sharing her experiences with me Jessica vacillated between expressing her desire for more challenging dialogues, and feeling unable to facilitate this on her own. In several places, she expressed disappointment and unfulfilled when she characterized what she felt a professor should be: "this is what a professor is, someone who is going to work to change your beliefs and help you grow in it rather than just stay and that same level by just simply saying, 'yes there are problems'". Instead, she felt "disappointment in [her] counseling program not having professors in place who kind of move people past a point of a superficial idea of what it means to be 'multiculturally competent.'" In hearing Jessica's story and re-reading it during analysis I felt empathy in hearing her looking for leadership in her course and not finding it. As she expressed frustration, I too felt frustration as a counselor educator.

**Self-preservation.** Jessica deployed different strategies to help assuage her experiences. She utilized silence as she assessed her class environment for safety and did not feel it. She never thought there would be the support needed to express a difference of opinion when hearing “racist” and “homophobic” remarks from her fellow students. This perceived lack of safety was structured by the previous experiences she had challenging professors in her undergraduate education. In order to help me understand what she meant by risk-taking and having a lot to lose, she framed her conflict story within a larger narrative. She stepped outside of her conflict story and told me about how she had historically received backlash from instructors when she expressed an opinion outside of the majority of the class. Because she attended the same university for both degrees, these previous experiences shaped those that occurred within her multicultural counseling course. She had to bite her tongue “for the sake of [her] grade and the connections that [she] wants to make in graduate school, if [she] want to get a job or go for a doctorate...and [her] professors think that [she’s] this combative person it’s going to reflect poorly.” Jessica clarified to me that she did not feel as though she was a combative person, but feared that is how she would be perceived for stepping outside of the normative structure of the classroom.

In our interview, she was so strategic and thoughtful in her summary and her criticisms that I found it difficult seeing her being misinterpreted as a combative person. Because of this, however, she required building skills in order to preserve the professional respect with her instructors and classmates. She deploys silence, and marinated more deeply in weighing the risks/benefits of expressing herself.

## CHAPTER NINE: VANESSA

### **“I finally just put my foot down.”**

It's one of my favorite classes. Because I learned a lot about myself and other cultures... but I think my favorite part was just learning about the identity development models. There was a lot of self-reflecting, awareness of who we are and where we come from...I realized how much of my childhood and adolescence I was valuing white culture more than my own, trying to fit in. I had a lot of white friends, and I tried to fit in with them-wearing Abercrombie and fitch, haha, Things like that. My family would always be like, “why are you trying to fit in with them, because that's not how our culture is.” I had a lot of backlash from my family, while still at the same time, trying to fit in with my own friends. I'm Mexican, but I don't speak Spanish, and I think that's why I familiarize myself with my other friends. At the same time, I didn't always fit in exactly with them. So during this class, I sort of started reflecting on all that and just thought of how I've come to embrace myself now as a Mexican American. During the class I was realizing how many comments that I just laughed off, or racist jokes that I just laughed off, that I started calling people out whenever they said that. Or just would stop laughing, and people would just be like, “what's wrong with you, why are you being so serious, or you've changed a lot.” And I'd try to explain it to them a lot. I guess another scenario was when I was trying to explain white privilege when I was learning about it in class to my [white] friends and a lot of them said that it didn't exist. So, that caused some conflicts with my friendships.

I had more than one person telling me that I had changed, and how I can never-I guess I was talking a lot about what I was learning in that class, which is what interested me the most, and people just kind of got sick of it because it made them feel uncomfortable. It got to a point

where I even lost a friend because was like, “I don't believe that white privilege exists and I don't think I should feel bad about being white.” I mean, that's not the case, but, yeah.

When I started the program and the class there was just so much reflection and self-awareness. We did our autobiography reflection paper and just realizing how much has happened and with me becoming my own person now and just being independent and not needing other people's approval. Then when we went over the racial identity development models, especially the Latina one, and I really related to it. It was like, “this is where I'm at right now, and I guess I need to embrace my own and just practice my own culture as well as celebrate others. I don't have to feel guilty for embracing white culture back then, and I can embrace my Latino culture now.

I definitely felt guilty, I felt shame, on both side. For how I tried to value white culture over my own, and then also I felt bad when there was that shift, because my friends who have known me for so long in a certain way, but when there was that shift in my thinking they felt like they didn't know who the person I was anymore...one of my best friends, she's married and has kids, and she wants to go back to school eventually so she always wants me to share what I would be learning in class and it was kind of her way of staying connected with education, and so I would share with her and up till Fall everything was great. She loved learning about what I was learning about. And then with this class, she was having trouble. When I was sharing with her that stuff [that I was learning in the Multicultural Class] she, from her view, feels like she hasn't benefitted from white privilege, and that's why she doesn't think it's real. She basically told me, that because she grew up poor, that her dad died at a young age and because she didn't have the opportunities to go to school/college. My parents helped me pay for college. So she was like, “I didn't have that, and you had that, so I think you're benefitting from it more than I am.”

And so there was that conflict with us, and I tried to explain to her that I'm not saying that I don't have privileges, but this is just what I've been learning in class. And slowly our friendship was just diminishing from Spring, to Summer, to this past fall is when she just kind of said, "I don't feel like we connect anymore, I feel like we're going in different paths and I just don't see the need to continue our friendship."

...It almost felt like she was trying to get me to not talk about my education, and to bring me back to devaluing my own culture, and everything I've learned and been through to get me to this point. So for me, I was just, not willing to choose between her and my education and what I believe in, for a friendship. We had issues in the past where we wouldn't talk for a while and so I was going to risk that again. I wasn't going to risk myself again. So I finally just put my foot down. I'm not just going to back to the way I was, because I'm uncomfortable with it... This was the first time that I've felt strong enough to speak my mind about things. Before I'd just try to subtly say things but I'd just stop if I anticipated any type of conflict. But I guess now, I kind of found my voice in the program. I guess it was kind of because I was educated on what I was feeling. So it wasn't just my opinion, it was what we were learning.

... I'd say I'm stronger. It's helped me. I'm more resilient. I'm more open about talking about it, and it's taught me about how to approach it in a better way. Because when I was first trying to talk to her about it I was just learning about it, so I didn't know how I can talk about it in a way that was less threatening to her. And so I guess I've learned that. And now it's something that I'm still interested in learning about. In our clinical mental health class we have to present in one of the four CACREP areas and I chose social/cultural diversity for that reason, because it's one of my interests.

I've learned so much through these models, it's something that I can apply with clients in a psychoeducational manner. That I show them these models and say, "hey, this exists," and kind of normalize it for them. Maybe there will be a little bit of self-disclosure in terms of "hey I went through this too" and I hope that it'll be easier for me to help others, since I know how things are in going through this.

### **Vertical Analysis**

Vanessa reported that her multicultural class was one of her favorites so far. She learned a lot about herself, others, and developed a strong sense of awareness and personal growth. Despite this, she did experience a conflict with a peer outside of her class as a result of taking the course.

In taking her multicultural class, she had come to realize that throughout her childhood and adolescence, she had valued white culture more than her own in order to fit in. Vanessa identifies as Mexican-American and Latina, but felt tension growing up as a minority by devaluing her cultural background. Learning about the cultural identity development models in her multicultural counseling class validated and gave a language and theory to her experiences growing up. During the class she was able to process these experiences and begin to embrace herself as a Mexican American. During this process, she began to feel tension with some of her friends who felt she had been changing and shifting her attitude.

Because Vanessa related so strongly with the Latina identity development models, she felt that it was time for her to embrace herself. One friend in particular struggled with Vanessa's new outlook on herself. She reported feeling disillusionment in herself in relation to her identity, and no longer wanted to risk feeling that way-even if it meant risking the loss of a friend who couldn't understand. She reported that a close friend refused to understand Vanessa's

perspective, and expressed feeling like this same friend wanted Vanessa to begin devaluing her own culture again. She was not willing to risk it. For Vanessa, this was the first time that she felt strong enough to speak her mind about things directly. She felt driven to advocate for her well-being.

### **Story-Telling Features**

Vanessa situated her conflict story within a larger narrative of personal growth and history. She began talking about her childhood experiences to provide a structural framework for the conflicts she experienced. She vacillated between an older story of personal growth—of her cultural identity development—and the experiences from her multicultural counseling course. She didn't provide very much information in the way of setting. This might have been due to the fact that Vanessa was attending the same program I had received my master's degree four years earlier. We shared the same instructor and experienced the same classrooms. At the very beginning of our interview she said, "it was probably similar to when you were there," and so she provided less detail in terms of the physical environment. The content of Vanessa's story dealt very much with personal growth, strength, and resiliency, and her physicality congruently embodied these affectations while she told her story. She expressed herself with intention, strength, and a synthesized sense of self.

Vanessa told her story linearly but not chronologically. Time was not dictating the order of events that she described. Instead, the trajectory of Vanessa's story was dictated by her journey of personal growth, and mirrored the order of the cultural identity development models she described being so influenced by. Having been familiar with the models she was describing, I was able to follow her story with ease, despite it not being in chronological order.



## Structural Themes

**Development.** In this phase of analysis, the theme of development was most significant. Vanessa's story was told as a linear narrative, with milestones of personal growth being markers of shift that propelled her meaning making. Her story moved across a network of experiences, including those of her childhood. Although the highest point of tension came outside of the classroom environment, Vanessa maintains it was the intense reflection and emphasis on personal growth in the multicultural counseling class that created a shift in thinking. As she described her conflict, she used the words "shift" and "change." This might suggest that her conflict was driven by a process she was feeling. Vanessa used the language from the cultural identity development models to describe her personal narrative, which suggests a kind of progression through personal tasks. Each shift that Vanessa described came with different emotional reactions. In building her awareness that she had been unknowingly rejecting her Latina cultural identity in favor for the hegemonic culture, she described feeling "shame and guilt" on both sides of her social life: "[I felt shame] for how I tried to value white culture over my own, and then also I felt bad when there was that shift, because my friends who have known me for so long in a certain way, when there was that shift in my thinking they felt like they didn't know who the person I was anymore." She related to the developmental models she was learning about. In learning about these models, her personal experiences had been validated: "it wasn't just my opinion, it was what we were learning. She described feeling personally resonant with what she had learned in class. She encountered the same disillusionment and dissonance that the models had described, and this validated her experiences in a way that enabled her to move toward a more synthesized sense of self: "when we went over the racial identity development models, especially the Latina one, I really related to it. It was like, this is where I'm at right now,

and I guess I need to embrace my own and just practice my own culture as well as celebrate others. I don't have to feel guilty for embracing white culture back then, and I can embrace my Latino culture now”.

**Interpersonal conflict.** Another theme that became apparent was the tension Vanessa felt with others as a result of her personal development. This interpersonal conflict manifested in a few different ways. Vanessa’s experience within the confines of her her multicultural class was relatively conflict free in terms. She described a few moments where she wished her classmates had been more sensitive to the experiences and perspectives of others, especially around the ideas of privilege and microaggressions. For example, “there were some students in the class that still didn’t completely get it. They’d ask inappropriate questions that they should re-think or rephrase before asking”. In one moment of conflict in-class, she described another student challenging Vanessa’s experiences as a minority: “...someone in the class was like ‘what microaggressions do *you* hear?’ Acting as if I hadn’t heard any-she’s also Black and from her point of view maybe because I’m lighter complexion that I don’t really hear anything like that”. These two interpersonal conflicts were not central to Vanessa’s story, however. The primary tensions she felt was that between a close friend outside of class. Vanessa felt that components of her friendship represented what she had been working hard to dismantle: self-deprecation and devaluing her Latina identity. She explained to me, “[they would try] to bring me back to devaluing my own culture, and everything I’ve learned and been through to get me to this point. So for me, I was just not willing to choose between her and what I believe in, for a friendship.... I wasn’t going to risk myself again. So I finally just put my foot down. I’m not just going to back to the way I was, because I’m uncomfortable with it.” While the choice to dissolve this friendship

did not come easily, Vanessa felt it might be necessary in order to to protect herself from going backward on her path to personal growth.

## CHAPTER TEN: LISA

### **“How many of those do we have in our program?”**

I just finished my class in the spring semester, and we had a couple of problems throughout the course of the semester. In the beginning of the semester we had an incident, I guess you could say. Our class was watching a documentary film about the Tulsa race riots of 1921, and that's a very intense topic. The entire class is white, although myself and one other student-we consider ourselves biracial because we're also Hispanic. The entire class is female, and one male.

Anyway, during the film, someone was talking to another student during the film and whispering back and forth and someone laughed, and we weren't sure if it was them or someone else, and it turned into a big hubbub. Everyone in the class assumed that the people who were talking were making fun of the film, or laughing at the people in the film. I did hear some comments about the appearance and the speech of the people in the film. The included interviews with survivors of the Tulsa race riots, so, there were some rude remarks. I'm not sure who said them, the room was dark. And so it got around the entire program within 24 hours that somebody was making racist comments during the film. In almost every other class I was in, people were coming up with rumors about what was said and who it was. Another faculty member addressed it and was trying to tone down the rumors, and when the next class rolled around for multicultural, our professor addressed it. We had sort of a difficult dialogue about it...It was a very heated class...there was someone else in the room who made comments and whoever it was didn't say anything. I think there was a lot of anger about that, because everyone heard the comments, but we didn't know who said them. That was an unresolved conflict. It certainly

brought light to how rumors were spread around a graduate program...that was the first thing that happened.

The other thing was that the only male in our class was a white male. He has been difficult throughout the semester. He hasn't tried to grow with the class. He responds to the course material in a very defensive way. As a white male he felt like we were blaming him, even though he's never actually been singled out. And so I think he was just struggling a lot with white guilt and privilege and dealing with the guilt of white privilege. He's very self-focused about it, and other students don't respond well to that, obviously. We're all trying to grow as counselors and learn how to be multiculturally competent and he is not. He's in the program, but I'm not really sure he'll continue because he's had such difficulty in this course. We had a project where we were supposed to interview at least 6 people. It could be anyone, just as long as the interview was with people that you didn't know. We were supposed to ask them three questions about racial identity. The project was basically aimed at racial identity development and where people are in those stages.

So for that project, the white male individual that I was talking about didn't do the assignment at all. And it was a partnered assignment, and he refused to do the project with his partner, so they separated their presentation into three interviews and discussed them. When he gave his half of the presentation, he didn't show his interviews at all. The entire presentation was about himself. He had selfies about himself through the years, and even had his family tree, and it was really bizarre. by that point a lot of people in the room were pretty mad. Everyone else took the time to do this assignment and he just basically decided he was above all of that...One of my classmates told him that she felt like it was a 'fuck you' to the class. She was so angry; she didn't hold anything back. I was angry, too. because I felt like it was really narcissistic and really

self-focused...he said that he hated the class, and after that point he stopped participating in anything in the class, no discussions, he wouldn't pay attention to other people's presentations, he just didn't even look up from his desk. He just stayed seated at his desk. So, those were the major conflicts that we had.

...It was the epitome of disrespect. I felt very angry that someone in counseling, of all fields, is making those kinds of comments... I really hope that the administration takes those things seriously. I feel like it's a really important role of an institution that's providing a counseling program. When you get right down to it, what are counselors here for? The clients. Right? We're here to help people. And if you have these horrible racial attitudes that are going to come out and you can't even hold them in during a film, how are you going to control them in a counseling session when you're with a client who is an African American? That would be really harmful, for a client of any minority background. To experience even greater oppression and feel like it's supposed to be a therapeutic environment. I feel like it needs to be addressed in some way. Maybe not necessarily kicking them out of the program but it needs to be addressed... If somebody from our program goes out and ends up becoming case law it reflects on our program, and it reflects on my degree. When I go out into the work world, I don't want people to say 'ooh, you're from [affiliated university]. That's where that other person who said all that racist stuff came from'...

...I learned a lot and I felt like I entered into it with a higher level of racial identity development because I come from a minority background, not just racially but also in terms of sexual orientation and family structure. I felt like I was aware of the issues before, but now I'm more aware of those issues for people of different backgrounds who are dissimilar from my own. The girl that asked said that she felt like she hadn't gotten anything out of the class, which really

shocked me! She said that she felt like the entire class people were fighting. And that she felt very blamed as a white female for all sorts of things, and she felt like as a white female who grew up in poverty, she felt invalidated by the racial focus of the course. So, I was really frustrated to hear that and other students who responded because they responded very similarly to her. And I was like “you didn't get anything out of it? Why didn't you get anything out of it?”

...I think the conflicts made me more aware that we'd all like to believe that counselors won't have any biases at all, but everyone has biases. And while everyone has good intentions and wants to help people, we have adopted non-racist attitudes, and accepting attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals, it doesn't mean that we are as close to multicultural competence that we may like to think that we are. I think it's kind of a harsh reality to face, and I hear things from even my friends that are really difficult to digest and downright offensive even. And it's shocking. But at the same time you have to understand that they are going in their own development. But when I look at my classmate, the one who gave the presentation all about himself, I still get a little worried. You wonder, ‘how many of those do we have in our program? How many counselors actually graduated from their program and are actually seeing clients?’... I identify myself as a counselor. No, I'm not out of the program yet, but I already identify with that role. I'm here for the client. And it's frustrating when I don't see myself as taking that responsibility seriously. I feel like that's what it is. When you're not taking yourself the multicultural class seriously, you might as well be saying that you're not taking seriously your multicultural clients. I mean, they're going to come in. They are not going to all be like you or from the same background as you. It's unavoidable... I think everyone can find a way to relate to these issues, but its work. Its self-work.

## **Vertical Analysis**

Lisa had just completed her multicultural class. Within the larger narrative of her experiences, different conflict stories occurred within her experience in her multicultural counseling class. They were largely related to the lack of professional and personal development of others, namely in witnessing and hearing disappointing comments from classmates. These experiences resulted in a general concern over the institutional response to these conflicts, as the resolutions did not align with her expectations for the course. In the end, she felt more aware of the “harsh realities” of multicultural competency development.

The first conflict story told was in watching a documentary in her class about the Tulsa race riots. In the darkness of the viewing, the students of her class had heard laughter and disparaging comments about the physical appearance of the riot survivors being displayed in the documentary. Her class attempted to process this, but without anyone admitting that they made the comments it felt largely unaddressed and unresolved for the rest of the semester. She felt upset and angered that someone in her class, a future counselor, could make such disparaging comments and not own up to it. The silence of her classmates created concern that some of her classmates may be harboring racist attitudes that were going un-checked.

In addition to this, she told a secondary conflict story about a male classmate who refused to participate in various components of the class. In her story, she felt that this particular classmate was unwilling to grow personally and professionally. She observed his refusal to engage, his withdrawal from class participation, and his stagnated personal growth. This student worried her as she considered his future clients as well, and the potential harm that he might incur by not being a willing participant in the multicultural counseling class. She was impacted by the uneven distribution in terms of willingness to participate and exhibit personal growth as a



class. She was shocked at his unwillingness to participate, his refusal to engage with others in the class, and feared that this individual would pass the class—something that she felt would reflect poorly on her own education. She worried about the institutional response to students like these, and how it might reflect on the quality of her education differently.

Her reactions to her classmates came in light of feeling success in her own personal development toward multicultural competence. She expressed that as a racial and sexual minority, she felt that she had been engaged in multicultural dialogues and experiences ahead of her students, and that this had influenced her willingness to participate, engage, and hold higher expectations for others in her class. The conflicts made her feel more aware that all counselors, future and current, might have biases. Despite being a harsh reality to face, Lisa feels that it's something that every counselor must address with themselves and with others.

### **Story-telling features**

Lisa was presented her story with coherence, thoughtfulness and expansion. She did not tell her story in a linear or chronological way. Instead, she focused in on major events and then offered reflections of such events. She set up the larger narrative by breaking down the demographic representation by gender and race. Doing so placed the people in her story within a larger cultural framework. Lisa started and ended her narrative in different positions. She began narrating the content of her experiences in a chronological way, but ended the interview with musings and reflections about her experiences. She seemed to be processing her experiences as she was describing them to me.

In attempting to gain a sense of Lisa's identity, I asked her follow-up questions when she brought up her own cultural lens. Lisa's narrative was divided between content and process, and in the moments where I asked her follow-up questions about her identity, we engaged in more of

a dialogue than a researcher listening to the story of a participant. We talked about how she experienced her bicultural identity, and how her experience “as a biracial individual, makes [her] privilege complicated, and [she] know[s] it is, because [she] doesn’t look Hispanic”. I shared with her what I knew about the concept of *racial passing*, where a person might be classified as a member of one racial group is accepted or positioned with another racial group. In her experience, she was accepted and positioned as white despite identifying as biracial and Hispanic. This incongruence in positioning created moments of confusion and tension in attempting to make meanings out of her experiences in her multicultural counseling class. She expressed appreciation to me for learning this concept because “it really spoke to [her] experiences as a biracial woman”. I felt by having this exchanged, I was able to develop a deeper understanding of her unique perspectives in her class.

### **Structural Themes**

**Interpersonal conflicts.** While Lisa described a few different conflict experiences between her classmates, there were consistent themes among and between them. Each of the conflicts dealt with witnessing or engaging with the perceived lack of personal growth of others, or feeling frustration at their unwillingness to participate. The conflicts she described were invariably involving other classmates, and not just within herself. She grew frustrated with her classmates when she understood them to be lacking in sensitivity and willingness to expand their worldviews. She was particularly bothered by two guiding experiences, one feeling less resolved than the other. When describing one conflict with a male classmate, she consistently referred to him as “the white male student.” This might have been due to the fact that he was the only white and only male student in the classroom, but she also seemed to suggest that there was something about his whiteness and his maleness that had a role in the conflict itself. She expressed that his

unwillingness to examine his privilege came off as “narcissistic and self-focused,” and that he acted “as if he decided he was above all of [it]”. Each of the conflicts that Lisa told me about had an interpersonal dimension to them.

Intrapersonal development. Lisa’s intrapersonal experiences underscored her determination to grow and challenge herself. While she told me about her experiences, she always added the caveat that she recognized that her expectations were largely her own, and didn’t expect others to be processing the same way or at the same level. Lisa paused throughout narrating her conflict stories to personally reflect upon them. She related some of the experiences back to herself, expressing that it “opened her eyes” to the nature of the self as it relates to becoming a counselor. She also made references throughout her narrative to personal growth, suggesting that her interpersonal conflicts and intrapersonal reflections were related.

**Professional misrepresentation.** When Lisa told me about the different conflicts she experienced in her multicultural counseling class, she expressed how she was considering her experiences against a larger backdrop of professional development. In thinking about her own professional development, she expressed, “I identify myself as a counselor. No, I’m not out of the program yet, but I already identify with that role. I’m here for the client. And it’s frustrating when I don’t see myself as taking that responsibility seriously.” While telling her story, Lisa would often enter into a hypothetical dialogue with the individual she was frustrated with in defense of the counseling profession. For example, in her narration she directed questions to the classmates who she grew frustrated with “...if you have these horrible racial attitudes that are going to come out and you can’t even hold them in during a film, how are you going to control them in a counseling session when you’re with a client who is an African American? What are counselors here for? The clients. Right?” She expressed feeling frustration and worry that her classmates

weren't taking as seriously the tasks of becoming multiculturally competent. She worried that it would reflect poorly on her program and her degree: "It reflects on our program, and it reflects on my degree. When I go out into the work world, I don't want people to say 'ooh, you're from [state university]. That's where that other person who said all that racist stuff came from'". Lisa frequently returned to this theme throughout our interview, that she felt worried and frustrated at how her classmates were misrepresenting what she felt it meant to be an ethically responsible counselor, in training or otherwise.

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN: FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

In this chapter, I will review the results of the horizontal thematic analysis to reveal emergent themes, categories, sub-categories, and codes across each narrative. This was accomplished by taking the initial vertical themes categories, sub-categories and codes outlined in each narrative chapter and developing a codebook (see Appendix D). This codebook was then used to assess for the prevalence of themes across each interview, assessing for one code at a time. Not every code created from the vertical analysis generated the final themes and categories that emerged in the final horizontal analysis. Some of these codes merged and shifted in the second analysis phase to generate the horizontal thematic categories that are outlined in this section. In addition, I will also describe the implications of each of these thematic categories within the larger theoretical context of transformational learning and intercultural maturity outlined in chapter two. Finally, I will discuss the limitations and explore suggestions for further research.

In the horizontal analysis phase, three categories emerged under a larger theme. The theme had categories and several sub-categories within them (see Appendix D). Each category and sub-category provided insight into the generative research questions of this study, where are: (a) How do counseling students experience, understand and reflect upon conflict that occurs in a multicultural counseling course? And (b) What impact do these conflict stories have on students?

The overarching theme of the horizontal analysis will be understood as *experiences and their impact* and yielded three sub-themes: (1) expectations, (2) conflict, and (3) transformation. The first two sub-themes, expectations and types of conflict, addressed the multiple ways in which the students in my study experienced tension, difficult dialogues and conflicts in their

multicultural counseling class. These two sub-themes included several categories. The first sub-theme, class expectation, included four categories that were consistently represented in each conflict story. These four categories included: (1) difficult dialogues, (2) personal growth (3) participation/engagement, and (4) professional growth. Each of these themes represented participants' expectations for their multicultural counseling course.

The sub-theme, conflict, included three categories and several sub-categories. The three major categories within this sub-theme included: (1) interpersonal, (2) intrapersonal, and (3) institutional conflict. Within the interpersonal category, four sub-categories emerged: (1) insensitivity from others, (2) lacking personal growth, (3) misrepresentation of counselor identity of others, and (4) silence. The second major category, intrapersonal conflicts, included three sub-categories: (1) identity conflicts, (2) personal growth, and (3) silence of self. The third major category of institutional conflicts had no sub-categories. Institutional conflicts were conflicts that emerged out of frustration with the program, course structure, curriculum, or institution.

The third sub-theme addressed the second research question, what impact do these conflict stories have on students? This domain, transformation and meaning making, included two major categories that illustrated how each student generated meaning in light of their conflict experiences. These categories included: (1) advocacy and (2) stronger sense of self/self-authorship.

It is important to note that the presentation of these thematic categories and subcategories are presented linearly. This is likely the result of categories being developed in order of stories being told in generally linear-narratives. This does not, however, imply that there is a linear quality to how these categories may be experienced. More research would be needed to explore how and when these categories may be experienced by students in the course of their

multicultural development. As a constructivist researcher it is also important to understand the way context influences how these categories may occur in a non-linear way.

## **Expectations**

It is important to note that all but one participant expressed positive hopes for the multicultural counseling classes, and which have been reflected in four categories. Samantha however, had indicated negative hopes, and minimal expectations going into her class. Some of her expectations included “superficial” and “shallow” dialogues, some of which she predicted would be a “waste of time.” The remaining participants indicated that they had hopes for challenging exchanges that were generative, that fellow students would be exploring tasks that lead to personal and professional growth.

**Expecting difficult dialogues.** The first major category within the expectations domain emerged for Elena, Alyssa, Lisa, and Rain, who all expressed the collective expectation that their class would be having difficult dialogues. For example, Elena expressed that she expected to be open to conflict, “we’re all making the agreement to be open to conflict, to be open to having a dialogue.” Similarly, Alyssa articulated the expectation that her instructor helped facilitate difficult discussions, and this framed her anticipation for the course: “The point of the class is to have this types of confrontations...It was set up in a way where we were supposed to have these discussions.” Rain expressed similar expectations, in that they expected people would be willing to express difficult or narrow perspectives in order to work through them. For example, that people would go about discussions even if coming from a place of ignorance in a gentle way. Wanting to learn, wanting to put your perspective out there, but if you start critiquing it in a professional manner, it was shut down, they didn’t want to hear it.” Rain’s expectation was that even “ignorance” could be brought into the multicultural counseling class in order for it to be

challenged in gentle ways. Finally, Lisa directly used the term ‘difficult dialogues’ to describe one element of her expectations for her multicultural counseling class: “But in a multicultural class all of these things come up every time the class meets. So, I think it’s that the entire class consists of difficult dialogues.”

**Expecting personal growth.** Expectations for personal growth was defined in the analysis codebook as the following: “student descriptions of expecting openness, honesty, and demonstrating effort toward personal growth.” It emerged for every participant. They each framed their expectations for their multicultural class as an environment which enabled students to expand and engage in aspects of personal growth. For example, Elena demarcated the multicultural class as distinct from other spaces in her life as being one where people can be more honest and committed to personal growth: “Isn’t the point of this class to explore something beyond what we believe and know?... I expected people in my own life to not be honest with me and I really expected people in my class to be.” Similarly, Jessica expressed the expectation that her instructor would be helping students facilitate work toward personal growth: “...one of the expectations I had going in, that this is what a professor is, someone who is going to work to change your beliefs”. Jessica placed more expectation on her professor to be facilitative in developing the personal growth of others. She also placed this expectation on her fellow students. For example, her use of the word “we” suggests that she locates herself within the expectation she was placing on her classmates: “we need to be more open to experiences and working together in talking about things”. Rain also expressed the expectation that her classmates would be taking their personal growth seriously. They expressed, “that’s what this class [is], that if we take the time to share our biases, we work through them.” Lisa also framed her expectations for a multicultural class as one that is different from the rest because “you don’t



have that personal component in other classes. You aren't being forced to examine to think that personally in other classes.

**Participation/Engagement.** The expectation for participation and engagement was defined in the codebook as “students who express expectation for themselves and others to be engaged, present, and participating in the classroom.” This expectation was demarcated from personal growth because while personal growth may be manifested in the participation and engagement in class, participation may be occurring without personal growth. Several participants expressed that they expected their peers to be participating and engaged. This category becomes especially relevant in understanding the types of conflict, when participants describe a lack of participation, engagement, silence, or withdrawal in moments of tension and difficulty.

**Professional Growth.** The final category within the domain of class expectations was professional growth. This category was defined in the codebook as “students who express the expectation that their classmates be demonstrating professional growth as indicated by ethical or professional standards.” Similar to the expectations for personal growth, several participants framed their expectations within the tasks of professional development. Elena, Alyssa, Lisa, Rain and Jessica all expressed their expectations with language informed by professional standards. For example, Alyssa's outlined her expectations for the class as “people be[ing] able to talk about these things in an open way. Because we're counselors” When parsing out how the conflicts in the multicultural counseling class were either similar or different than those that occur outside of the classroom environment, Rain expressed that their expectation (while unmet) was that the classroom environment included “people who acted more professionally.” The expectation for professionalism suggested an awareness that counselors-in-training were

experiencing a developmental process in regard to professional identity. These participants expected their peers to be enacting their professional growth and disposition in the navigation of multicultural competency.

These collective expectations for difficult dialogues, personal/professional growth, and participation/engagement provided each of these experiences with a framework for their story. Expectations are beliefs that are centered on what will occur in the future. For these participants, they were preexisting beliefs that they compared their lived experiences against, resulting in a myriad of feelings and reactions—including conflict.

### **Conflict**

As each participant narrated their conflict experience, different themes emerged in regard to how each conflict was understood and characterized. Three major categories with various sub-categories surfaced within each vertical analysis that were also consistent across each narrative. Interpersonal conflict, intrapersonal conflict, and institutional conflict were consistent across many of the narratives and stories told by each participant. It is important to denote that within the domain of types of conflict, participants did not experience them in mutually exclusive categories as they are outlined in this analysis. Rather, many of the types of conflicts interacted and informed the others, resulting in a complex and dynamic system of experience.

**Interpersonal.** Interpersonal conflicts were described as those conflicts which were experienced between people. They included conflicts between students, students and their peers outside of the class, and students and their instructors. This category is also relevant to the interpersonal dimension King and Baxter Magolda's Intercultural Maturity Model (2005), which pulls from various fields to outline interpersonal maturity as the developmental capacity to “construct and engage in relationships with others that show respect for and understand of the

other's perspectives and experiences (pg. 579)". The participants consistently described their conflicts in one of each of these domains. Interpersonal conflicts were sub-coded with the four following sub-categories: (1) insensitivity from others, (2) lacking personal growth, (3) misrepresentation of counselor identity and (4) silence of others.

*Insensitivity from others.* The vertical analysis consistently yielded among several narrative that conflict moments included insensitivity from other students. This was defined in the codebook used for horizontal analysis as "students describing others in the class (either students or instructors) as demonstrating insensitivity or disrespectfulness." During the horizontal analysis phase, I coded each narrative for this theme and several occurrences emerged. For example, both of Lisa's conflict stories within her narrative include students disrespectfully laughing at the movie depicting the Tulsa Race Riots and another student's disrespectful attitude toward the learning material. She explained to me, "I got really really angry when people were making those comments during the film, because it felt like it was disrespectful. And it was making fun of something so serious. Over 300 people died in the Tulsa race riots. And they're talking and watching a film like that and hearing someone make fun of how a survivor talks or looks. It was the epitome of disrespect." Rain's experience also frequently referenced the insensitivity and disrespectful questions and comments lodged at them throughout their multicultural counseling course. When Rain initially described their experiences to me, they characterized their classmates as "crying, yelling... silencing behavior, not very professional. It was something else." With regard to their classmates discussing gender and sexual minorities, Rain had to field inappropriate and insensitive questions that they almost felt were "like a joke." In one particularly insensitive moment, a fellow classmate asked them "so what do you have

going on down there?” As Rain recounted this experience, I felt myself churn with sadness, disappointment and empathy for their experiences.

Alyssa also experienced insensitivity from her classmates, particularly revolving around being confronted for her sexual identity: “the thing that got to me the most emotional and sent me into a full blown anxiety attack, like crying, like I literally couldn’t even talk because I couldn’t breathe, was, and I quote this, he said, ‘You are an abomination’. Prior to this escalation, she described insensitive affectations being made from the same student, who would audibly laugh under his breath whenever she identified herself as both gay and Christian.

Jessica’s conflicts were consistently categorized alongside hearing her fellow classmates making “racist and homophobic” statements in class that felt more like declarations than exploring assumptions. These insensitive remarks led her to doubt the leadership and trust the space as a safe one to express her own viewpoints.

***Lacking personal growth.*** This code was defined after the vertical analysis phase as “students describing others not demonstrating work towards personal growth, or willingness to expand awareness of self and others” and came up frequently in each narrative. This theme was present in every narrative. Each participant characterized specific conflict stories as a result of someone else’s stiltedness or unwillingness to expand, grow, or be challenged in their personal development. For example, Lisa described three occurrences where conflict was characterized as resulting from her classmate’s lacking or delayed personal growth: “he hasn’t tried to grow with the class ... It’s really concerning because I don’t think that the issues of self-reflection and personal growth will be addressed...”. Similarly, the conflicts from Rain’s class indicated communication styles that were lacking in maturity and personal growth: “they just got very emotional, like “you’re hurting me, I can’t believe you’d treat me this way. You’re horrible.”

Stuff like that. I would never speak like that.” Rain also described their classmate’s unwillingness to “handle anything challenging” as an indicator of slow or lacking personal growth.

***Misrepresentation of counselor identity.*** When the conflicts were characterized by lacking personal growth with a direct mention of professional identity development it was coded as misrepresentations of counselor identity. Every participant except for Vanessa described students in their class speaking or behaving in ways that misrepresented what it means to be a counselor. Several conflict stories articulated fear, worry, or shame that someone else was acting in ways that were incongruent with the ethical responsibilities of seeing clients or inhabiting professional spaces.

Many participants including Samantha, Alyssa, Rain and Jessica, imagined what it might embody the future potential clients of the students that were misrepresenting their professional identity and creating interpersonal conflicts in the classroom. The collectively expressed words like “worry, “fear”, and “concern” that their peers would be representing a field of counselors equipped to work with diverse populations. In describing a conflict with another student, Lisa posed hypothetical questions in our interview, “I still get a little worried. You wonder, “how many of those do we have in our program?” When reflecting upon the experiences from their class, Rain also posed similar hypothetical questions, imagining themselves as a future client to her classmates: “I worry about my classmates . . . especially the jarring stuff. Is this what counselors are? Is this what they’re all holding inside? What if they don't want to work with me or validate me?” Alyssa posed similar questions, as if the individual she had conflicts with was in the room: “That kind of worries me, for his future clients. That worries me for other people. That if you want to work with a specific population, you’re going to have LGBT people in that

population. Its just going to happen. So how are you going to deal with that? Are you going to say something like that to your client?"

All the participants expressed feeling worried about a potential threat to professional harm as a result of multicultural incompetence. Being able to position their conflicts with a professional lens might be one unique attribute to conflicts experienced in counseling programs and multicultural counseling classes in particular. The dual tasks of personal and professional development, as articulated by Elena, are "always happening in the classroom". While these tasks are experienced individually, a classroom environment provides a setting where these individual tasks interact in ways that create collisions and conflicts.

*Silence of others.* The quality of silence consistently emerged across several conflict stories. After the vertical analysis phase, the sub-category "silence" was defined in the codebook for the horizontal analysis phase as "participants describing others withdrawing emotionally or physically in moments of conflict or resulting in conflict". The sub-category of silence became central to Elena's experiences, especially as she described feeling "cheated" in moments where her classmates were silent in moments she expected participation. When Elena took the risk of challenging her class to consider other perspectives of diversity, she was met with disinterest and silence from her classmates: "I felt most cheated when people were silent...they didn't participant and it was like the authenticity left the room". When I asked Elena directly about the silence, acknowledged how silence itself seemed to facilitate conflicts in and of themselves. We both agreed during the interview that it was a surprising and interesting phenomena; the notion of conflicts in silence. This conversation turned my focus toward listening to other participant's narratives for moments such as these and several emerged. For example, the frustrations that Samantha felt with her class could also be traced back to moments of silence or lacking

participation from classmates. She critiqued her classmates for their unwillingness to take risks and “tip-toeing” around specific difficult conversations. Additionally, Alyssa felt her emotions heighten in the moments of silence that followed the confrontation she experienced in her class. She consistently brought up this theme when articulating her experiences: “it took so long for my peers to say anything and stand up for me...I was like ‘they aren’t saying anything?’”

**Intrapersonal.** Intrapersonal conflicts are those that each participant described that involve conflict or tension with themselves. These conflicts included how participants came to understand themselves in relation to diversity issues, how participants viewed themselves, and how a larger narrative of personal growth played a role in the conflict they experienced. This category also relates to the intrapersonal dimension of King & Baxter Magolda’s intercultural maturity model (2005), which includes a range of identity-related topics including how an individual’s intersecting social identities such as race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation inform how they view and interpret social situations, including conflict. The themes which emerged were consistent with the tasks of intrapersonal maturity, which include how individuals view themselves. This view informs how individuals mediate and understand issues of diversity. Relevant factors of the intrapersonal domain of the intercultural maturity model affect how students act in intercultural situations. This category was broken into three smaller sub-categories: (1) identity conflicts, (2) personal narrative and (3) silence of self. These categories are also consistent with the research of Burton and Furr (2014).

***Identity conflicts.*** As described earlier, many of the conflicts students experienced highlighted the tasks of both personal and professional growth. For some participants, the description of interpersonal conflicts in the classroom were situated within larger intrapersonal conflicts with the self. Identity conflicts were defined in the codebook as those “expressions of

multiple cultural identities resulting in conflicting attitudes about themselves”. This theme was particularly saliently for Lisa, Alyssa, Vanessa, Elena and Rain. They all described their identities as multiple and intersectional, and that these intersecting social identities create conflicts with the self. These inner conflicts were explored, identified and experienced within the setting of the multicultural class. For example, Alyssa’s dual sexual and religious identity was called into question by a classmate, resulting in a difficult confrontation. Elena’s attempt to represent the perspective of individuals with disabilities in her class was met with invalidation and silence. Vanessa’s Latina identity, particularly a Mexican-American woman who struggled with how to identify herself between her White peers and her family was realized in her multicultural class, resulting in conflicted peer relationships. Lisa also articulated a sense of disillusionment resulting from her Hispanic identity, as she recognized the complicated nature of her privilege as a white-passing woman. Each of these participants articulated personal identity conflicts within the more specific narrative setting of the multicultural counseling class.

***Personal narrative.*** The sub-category of personal narrative emerged for Alyssa, Jessica, Vanessa, Rain, and Samantha. Participants consistently situated their conflict story against a larger backdrop of personal growth. This theme emerged in each of their vertical analyses and was consistent between narratives in the horizontal analysis phase. It was defined in the codebook as “students also narrating a larger history of personal growth, which impacted their sense of tension or difficulty in their multicultural counseling course”. For example, Alyssa’s narrative included framing her conflict story within a larger narrative of personal growth that were relevant to how she processed and experienced her conflict. The larger narrative of personal growth made a significant impact on the way that Alyssa considered her experiences. For these participants, larger narratives such as childhood experiences, identity development, or former



conflicts were inseparable from the events of their multicultural class. This finding might suggest that students bring with them a multitude of life experiences into the classroom, and will ultimately impact how they interact with themselves and others.

***Silence of self.*** Conflict experiences caused some participants to enact their own emotional withdrawal, silence, or self-removal in the class. While some students characterized this reaction to conflict as a measure of self-protection, others expressed it as a demonstration of exhaustion. Previous research (Burton & Furr, 2014), suggests that when conflicts and difficult dialogues in the classroom are handled in unproductive ways, students have a tendency to shut down, withdrawal and disengage from the material and from their classmates. This was true of Rain and Alyssa, whose similar conflict experience resulted in their emotional withdrawal from the class. Alyssa described her disposition in class for the remainder of the semester post-conflict: “I ended up not really being able to say anything for the rest of the class.” Rain described their experience similarly: “I just kind of sat there. I was exhausted. I don’t think I even raised my hand, I was just like, “no, I’m not into it today. I don’t want to expand my energy today.”

***Institutional Conflict.*** The last category within the sub-theme of conflict includes institutional conflict. This category included conflicts or resolutions that were driven by an incongruence between what they expected out of their course and what occurred, in addition to those conflicts that were characterized by a sense of disillusionment or discontent at the institutional level. This might include resulting feelings regarding including the instructor, affiliated university, curriculum, or program as a whole. A commonality between many of the participant’s conflict narratives included a sense of being let down in a number of ways. This might be relevant to the research of Burton and Furr (2014), who suggested that how instructors

manage conflict in multicultural counseling classes has a large impact on how students make meaning out of them.

While each participant described a sense of disappointment toward their program, instructor, class, or the curriculum as a whole, Jessica, Samantha, Lisa, and Rain articulated these disappointments consistently throughout the class. The participants were divided in their reactions toward the institutions of their learning. The remaining participants indicated that their program and instructor functioned in positive ways that allowed them to reflect and make meaning of their experiences, despite conflict happening. The codebook described institutional disappointment in two different ways: (1) “students having unmet expectations for the course resulting in negative conceptions;” or (2) “students expressing disappointment in program, instruction, educational institution or curriculum.” This disappointment was expressed consistently with Jessica, whose conflicts stemmed from the lack of leadership from her instructor. Jessica’s frustration vacillated between the instructor and the culture of the school, based on her previous interactions with other professors. She felt that the professor and the institution played a role in the conflicts and sense of disappointment she felt about her multicultural counseling class: “...I was pretty shocked about it, to see that everyone would be nodding their heads about it instead of saying ‘woah that's not okay,’ and to see that the professor’s not doing anything to restructure the beliefs or challenge them, but just saying ‘okay, thanks for sharing’ and then moving on. So I guess it was a lot of thinking ‘oh my gosh I can’t believe this is happening,’ feeling a lot of surrealist feelings, and feeling a lot of disappointment in my counseling program not having professors in place who kind of move people past a point of a superficial idea of what it means to be ‘multiculturally competent.’”

### **Transformation and Meaning Making**

I included transformation and meaning-making as a code at the onset of the horizontal analysis phase in order to assess for moments of change or shifted thinking as a result of conflict. This category was developed as themes of change and transformation emerged in the vertical analysis phase of each transcript. This category attempts to answer the second research question: What impact do these experiences of conflict have on students?

By analyzing each narrative vertically and horizontally for these categories, I was able to consider each participant's conflict experience in relation to Mezirow's (1978) transformational learning theory as well as King and Baxter Magolda's insights on intercultural maturity (2005) and self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Baxter Magolda uses self-authorship to describe the way that one organizes meaning in life. Self-authorship becomes a vehicle by which individuals can make meaning by drawing on various dimensions of experiences. I analyzed each participant's conflict stories for moments of transformation, change, shifted thinking and self-authorship to situate my participant's experiences within a larger theoretical framework. While most of the participant's described a sense of being different after completing their course, the ways in which they articulated this difference varied across several fields. Some suggested feeling stronger, more resilient, and having a stronger sense of identity. Others felt a stronger sense of awareness about different perspectives and identities. Not all meanings made were positive, however. For some participants, the disappointment in their multicultural counseling course experiences as a whole required that they built protective faculties in order to self-preserve. For example, Lisa described that she had been transformed by her conflict experiences in a way that made her more aware that while "we'd all like to believe that counselors won't have any biases at all, everyone has biases."

**Advocacy.** For Alyssa, Lisa, Vanessa and Rain, advocacy became a common thread in the meanings that they derived from their conflict experiences. Each of them felt a stronger desire to increase understanding and knowledge on behalf of their personal experiences of conflict for counselors as a whole. Rain—who personally identified as an ‘advocate’ in other components of their life—felt that the experiences of conflict and misunderstanding in their multicultural class made them hungrier to educate others about issues related to gender and sexual diversity. This was also consistent with Alyssa’s narrative, who described a deeper desire to tell her story in order to educate others: “It strives me to want to educate people. And to put myself out there. Just so people can actually learn”. Alyssa even realized mid-interview that her interest in participating in a study about conflict in multicultural counseling classes was motivated by the desire to share her experiences as an act of advocacy.

**Stronger sense of self.** Research about conflict suggests that resolutions can be generated in ways that enhance self-worth, and produce new meanings. In a qualitative study on personal growth, transformation, and interpersonal conflict, Rowe (2002) sets up the argument that conflict experiences can violate the same structures of meaning as a conflict event. The results of this study upheld the intersection of conflict and transformational learning, further supporting Mezirow’s (2000) argument that conflict and the rebuilding of meaning structures represents transformative change. For Alyssa, Lisa, Rain and Vanessa, their conflict experiences transformed into generating a stronger and more solidified sense of self, consistent with the findings of Rowe (2002) and aligned with the theoretical understandings of Transformational Learning offered by Mezirow. For example, Alyssa said, “It kind of solidified my beliefs. Solidified who I was. I am glad that I had the experience. Honestly”. Within each phase of

vertical analysis for each participant, themes of transformation and change emerged. As such, it became an important code to assess for in the horizontal analysis.

These findings are consistent with King and Baxter Magolda's model of intercultural maturity (2005). At the mature level of development within the intercultural domain, the model articulates that students will "understand ways individuals impact community practices and social systems, and are willing to work for the rights of others" (p. 576). Lisa, Rain, Alyssa and Vanessa also collectively demonstrated desire for meaningful and respectful interactions with others, even if they were difficult or resulted in negative experiences. This is also consistent with the mature level of intercultural development, which suggests that students demonstrate a heightened ability to engage in intercultural interactions with others that are respectful, informed by cultural understanding, and mutually negotiated (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005).

### **Domains of Intercultural Maturity and Transformational Learning**

The horizontal analysis phase of this study revealed that participants presented aspects of both intrapersonal and interpersonal domains of intercultural maturity (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). All participants demonstrated an evolving awareness and acceptance of multiple perspectives, especially in regard to establishing a personal process for adopting knowledge claims (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). In addition, some demonstrated an evolving sense of identity such as Lisa, Rain and Alyssa, and other participants demonstrating the developing capacity to author an internal self that openly engages in personal development. Interpersonal and intrapersonal domains were more explicitly linked to her narrative, as two primary thematic categories that emerged from the vertical thematic analysis resulted in interpersonal and intrapersonal tensions between self and perceptions or interactions with classmates.

The conflict that several participants felt and described ended up resulting in the processing and construction of new meanings, consistent with both transformational learning (Mezirow, 1978) and the trajectory of intercultural maturity (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). Alyssa, Vanessa, and Samantha collectively indicated their own personal growth in the wake of conflict, as well as expressing generations of new positive meanings. For example, Samantha indicated feeling more aware of how her experiences of conflict in her multicultural counseling class made her feel more “willing to see things from [a different] worldview.” Alyssa expressed feeling “stronger” and having a “stronger sense of self” as a result of the conflict she experienced.

Not all of these participants expressed experiences of transformation or positive personal change. In revisiting these two frameworks, it may be of note to suggest that the intercultural maturity of participants may have impacted the means by which they were able (or unable) to move through various phases of transformational learning.

Overall, the horizontal analysis yielded both commonalities and differences among and between participants. The results of this phase of analysis may increase understandings about student experiences of conflict in multicultural counseling classes. While each participant experienced different kinds of conflicts, each category conveyed similar qualities in terms of their emotional reactions and meaning making. For several participants, conflicts resulted in a stronger sense of self. For others, however, conflicts resulted in a sense of unresolved frustration and disappointment. Each of the participants expressed worry or concern with how their programs were responding to these conflicts, specifically those which involved students who witnessed the lack of personal growth in others. These findings may be especially valuable to counseling programs that underscore the need for gatekeeping or remediation.

## **Implications**

Findings highlight numerous factors that could be detrimental to how students are experiencing and impacted by conflict and tension, such as a better understanding of the dueling tasks of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and professional development. The participants in this study who generated stronger senses of self and increase penchants for advocacy as a result of their conflict indicate a higher level of intercultural maturity, which is consistent with the findings of King and Baxter Magolda (2005), who indicate that strong intercultural maturity is a strong indicator of acting in prosocial ways.

Findings from this study align with previous research that suggests that conflict is present and being experienced by students in multicultural counseling classes (Burton & Furr, 2014; Sue et al., 2009). If counselor education faculty and scholars can facilitate these conflicts in ways that result in transformational learning outcomes, they may be able to create learning environments that are more conducive to the development of multicultural competence. Burton and Furr recommend three types of conflict interventions from the literature: (a) de-escalation only, (b) supportive confronting, and (c) protective confronting. Burgess and Burgess (1997) defined de-escalation as those responses to conflict that reduce the reactivity of a rapidly emergent conflict. Burton and Furr (2014) found that interventions such as accurate listening, reflection, modeling humility, and acknowledging the difficulty of being in a course with such heavy content helps students normalize their emotional reactions. Burton and Furr (2014) recommend that counselor educators' model humility with anecdotal experience that demonstrates the reality of human error in responses to culturally-motivated conflicts. These authors do not recommend using humor, as it can be widely misinterpreted as insensitive and diminishing the gravity of students' emotions.

Burton and Furr (2014) also categorize supportive confronting as those interventions which simultaneously de-escalate conflict while helping students in their professional development and multicultural awareness. Linking the conflicts being experienced to the broader issues of counseling (for example, how an emotionally activated student's reactions might relate to understanding or working with similar issues that might affect future potential clients). Reflective assignments, such as those that are commonly assigned in multicultural counseling courses, allow students to carve space out to explore their opinions and feelings related to sensitive issues in the safer context of writing (Burton & Furr, 2014; Sue, et al., 2009b).

Finally, these researchers (2014) recommend interventions referred to as protective confronting, which are those mediations to conflict that derail learning outcomes and inflict emotional harm on students. In conflicts such as these, "shutting down the dialogue" and "taking steps to protect the lone outlier (Burton & Furr, 2014, pg. 3) consist of taking any means necessary to protect students or others from verbal or personal attacks. Conflicts such as those that Alyssa experienced might require an intervention such as this. In these scenarios, Burton and Furr (2014) recommend acknowledging the conflict but stepping away from it in order to revisit and process at a later time. In these scenarios, meeting privately with students who either provoked or were victims of conflict is recommended. While the literature supports the use of this intervention style, caution should be used to avoid it becoming strategies to permanently dismiss or avoid processing conflicts in the future (Sue et al, 2010).

Similarly, research by Ober, Granello and Henfield offers a model of supervision to counselor educators that wish to enhance multicultural competence in meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways (Ober, Granello & Henfield, 2009). These authors also utilize the developmental approaches to conducting supervision, namely in assessing where a student



might exist developmentally in regard to their counseling skills and apply a multicultural lens. These developmental approaches theories that counselors-in-training advance through development sequentially, progressing to increasingly complex stages. Carney and Kahn (1984) proposed that a multicultural lens be applied to developmental models. This approach suggests that supervisors help their supervisees move from limited awareness to diversity issues to increased understandings. Counselor educators may find the findings of this research potentially applicable to understanding how to navigate the tasks of personal, professional, and intercultural development that facilitates conflict in meaningful ways.

Seeing students as emerging professionals who may exist along various domains of intercultural maturity development may provide counselor educators with important insights about the identities, experiences, and growing edges of every student in a multicultural counseling class. In particular, supporting students who might need additional guidance in their intercultural maturity development, in order to raise what Landreman (2003) called *intercultural consciousness*. The findings from this study may aid in helping counselor educators develop strategies for remediation and gatekeeping. Using a model such as the King and Baxter Magolda Model for Intercultural Maturity may help counselor educators in identifying the features of various levels of intercultural maturity to evaluate both readiness for practicum or overall student evaluations.

Specific emergent themes in the horizontal analysis that may be valuable to counselor education include institutional conflict, intrapersonal growth, and counselor misrepresentation. Counselor educators often frame learning objectives as pathways to professional development. For example, multicultural competence is outlined by both the ACA and CACREP as foundational to ethical and competent treatment. The adage, “know thy self” is not just the

ancient dictum of Socrates. This expression is frequently used as a means to understand how to become an effective counselor. The tasks of a multicultural counseling incorporate self-knowledge, professional growth, and counseling skills. Within a multicultural class, students are evaluating themselves and others. For many of these participants, these dual intra- and interpersonal growths create conflicts within themselves and each other. Intrapersonal conflicts within each participant were common, and incorporated the project of personal growth against a larger narrative. Each counselor-in-training enters a multicultural counseling class with a personal narrative, some of which may be activated by assignments and discussions that involve personal reflection. Counselor educators should expect the potential for both intra- and interpersonal conflict that is incited by this request to personally reflect in a classroom setting. It may serve counselor educators who teach multicultural counseling courses to review the literature around facilitating conflict and difficult dialogues, attending workshops or learning sessions at conferences that explore strategies for facilitating and managing conflict in productive and potentially transformative ways, in addition to reflecting on their own multicultural and professional development.

One noteworthy training designed by Goodman (2016) emphasizes the priority of addressing social and cultural diversity, including various experiences of oppression in the classroom. Goodman emphasized that in most cases, faculty do not intentionally mean to create inclusive classrooms (1995). By utilizing models of social identity development, Goodman provides a framework for faculty to explore their own social identities in order to understand how they are encountering and navigating difficult dialogues about social identities in the classroom. The social identity model that Goodman utilizes is based on the work of Hardiman and Jackson (1992), and suggests five different stages that people in both dominant and

subordinate social identity groups experiences themselves. These stages can help faculty explore and make meaning of culturally-informed individual and interpersonal dynamics in their own lives, and understand how this impacts how they are experiencing students. In having faculty members reflect on their own social identities and how this impacts their dominant worldview, they are able to arrive at a higher level of competence in navigating dialogues with others and between others. The aim of this training seeks to improve classroom dynamics to develop higher sensitivity and greater knowledge.

Additionally, participants frequently expressed their conflict in terms of disappointment in others—specifically related to others misrepresenting the counseling profession. In CACREP-Accredited programs, counselors-in-training are exposed to lessons on professional identity early in their respective programs. Doing so allows them to understand the professional identity that they will be developing and assuming throughout and at the culmination of their training. When students behaved, spoke, or acted in ways that the participants of this study felt were incongruent to this professional identity, conflict ensued. This became a familiar trend in each conflict story and may be particularly relevant to counselor educators who teach multicultural counseling courses. Similarly, many of the same participants who experienced conflicts due to professional misrepresentation also expressed institutional conflicts; that is, frustrations with their program, instructor or educational institution for mishandling (or even inciting) conflicts in the classroom. Counselor educators may find particularly valuable that experiences of conflict may be exacerbated if they are not facilitated effectively by program leadership. These findings are consistent with Burton and Furr (2014), who maintained that specific types of conflict interventions by faculty range from being effective to injurious.

It may serve counselor educators and counseling programs to explore the faculty experiences of conflict navigation. For example, counseling programs may want to develop systems whereby students are able to anonymously provide program feedback in the specific area of conflict management, as many conflicts may come and go without instructors or programs being aware. When counseling programs engage in self-evaluation, assessing for how students are experiencing faculty in relation to facilitating conflicts as well as how faculty are experiencing conflicts themselves may be particularly valuable in minimizing conflict. When conflict is unavoidable, as it often is, doing so may also allow faculty to better understand how all members of a multicultural counseling class—students and teachers alike—can experience conflicts in productive and potentially transformative ways.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Findings demonstrate the diverse and distinct quality of stories of master's level students who experience conflict in their multicultural counseling class as they navigate the complex tasks of professional identity development. Because not every student experiencing conflict articulated positive new meanings, further research may be needed about the factors of conflict experiences that foster positive transformation. Interviewing students like Alyssa and Vanessa, whose conflict experiences resulted in resiliency and transformation may be one means of finding this information. A grounded-theory study, in particular, using a larger number of students who experienced intra-personal conflicts (that is, inner conflicts with themselves) may generate early theoretical understandings of how transformative learning can be fostered in students who may inevitably experience conflict in their multicultural counseling classes. Mixed methods studies using assessments that evaluate professional development alongside the

experience of conflict may also shed light onto the conflicting tasks of personal and professional multicultural counseling development.

Because so few studies account for the student perspective of conflict experiences in multicultural counseling, research as a whole is needed to better understand these dynamics. Communications and educational research has made strides in understanding conflicts in the classroom that are culturally motivated, so counselor education researchers may find interdisciplinary scholarship valuable. Additional narrative research to hear from program directors or faculty members that oversee conflict mediation may be valuable in understanding how conflict is being experienced at an institutional level.

Because of this study's small sample, similar studies with different cultural representations might be useful to understanding the specificities of how the cultural identities of those experiencing conflict impacts conflicts experienced. In order to understand the experiences of counseling students more globally, additional research would be needed for part-time and non-traditional students, students from minority backgrounds, international students, students taking online or hybrid-versions of multicultural counseling, as well as male-identifying students. Studies such as these may either highlight the nuances of student perspectives and experiences of conflict, or generate more patterns between all students who experience conflict. Two participants expressed confusion and surprise that a course such as multicultural counseling would take place at a length any shorter than a 15-week semester. Rain's articulated that the brevity of their 8-week summer intensive made it more intense and gave less time to explore and process appropriately.

While many counselor educators understand that conflict can serve as a useful catalyst for self-growth and learning, it is valuable to also maintain key components such as respect and

fairness to multiple identities and experiences (Ratts et al, 2015). In order for conflict to be utilized for enhancing self-reflexivity, counselor educators must make mindful choices in response to the often-inevitable conflicts that occur in the classroom. With this in mind, researchers may also want to explore the outcomes of the interventions laid out by Burton and Furr (2014).

In light of the new multicultural counseling competencies published in January 2016, a study such as this might have impact on how we are considering students working toward newer conceptions of multicultural competency. One potential takeaway, for example, is in the acknowledgement that conflict may be unavoidable due to the various points of professional and personal growth and various levels of intercultural maturity. This study reinforces the notion that counselor trainees might attempt to appreciate meaningful exchanges even if it comes with the risk of feeling vulnerable or uncomfortable at times. It is imperative that counselor educators begin examining the sometimes unavoidable and unpleasant experiences of conflict in order to facilitate them in ways that limit their potential harm and perhaps instigate transformation and meaning making. By assuming this social responsibility, counselor educators can create inclusive and trustworthy spaces where conflict can safely exist and the voices of every student is validated and affirmed.

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**APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT**

**Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research**

**Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research:** The Pennsylvania State University

**Title of Project:** Conflict Stories in Multicultural Counselor Education: A Narrative Inquiry Among Counselors-In-Training

**Principal Investigator:** Lauren Benoist, Graduate Student  
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**Advisor:** Dr. Katie Kostohryz  
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University Park, PA 16802  
(814) 867-4918; [kzk18@psu.edu](mailto:kzk18@psu.edu)

**1. Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research study is to explore student conflict in multicultural counseling courses by investigating the perspectives of students who have experienced conflict in a multicultural counseling course.

**2. Procedures to be followed:** You will be asked to participate in an individual interview. Interviews will be audio-recorded. You can choose not to answer certain questions.

**3. Duration:** Interviews will take 60-90 minutes to complete.

**4. Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. All data will be stored on the primary investigator's computer and will be password protected. Only the primary investigator will have access to these files. Recordings will be destroyed by the year 2021. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no identifiable information will be shared.

**5. Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Lauren Benoist at (954) 829-4799 with questions or concerns about this study.

**7. Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

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Participant Signature

Date

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Person Obtaining Consent

Date

**APPENDIX B**  
**PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER**

Subject line: *Students-Chance of \$50 for sharing your experience of conflict in multicultural training*

Dear Counseling Students,

Have you experienced conflict in your multicultural class? If so, I would love to hear your story. I am reaching out to you seeking participants for a qualitative study through the Pennsylvania State University College of Education, Department of Educational Psychology, Counseling, and Special Education.

The purpose of this research study is to understand the student perspective of conflicts experienced in multicultural counseling courses. If you are currently enrolled full-time in a CACREP-accredited master's degree program in counseling and have completed a course in multicultural counseling/social cultural issues/diversity topics and experienced conflicts, tension, or difficult dialogues, please consider sharing your experiences with me in the form of an interview. Selected participants will be entered into a drawing for a chance to win a \$50 visa gift card. This study has been approved by Penn State University's IRB #00004544.

If you are interested in contributing to this research by sharing your experiences, please contact me via email at [Lbenoist@psu.edu](mailto:Lbenoist@psu.edu). I value your perspective and pledge to keep your story confidential. Any potential participants engaging in this study are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Thank you in advance for your participation.

## APPENDIX C PROPOSED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Before interview begins clarify participants preferred name, gender pronouns, and any other relevant identity information.

1. *Generative narrative question:* I am very interested to learn about you and your experiences of conflict in your multicultural course. Can you tell me the story of what your multicultural course was like for you? Please include anything that you find relevant and add as many details as you like.
  - a. Follow-up on any conflict topics introduced using shared language.
2. How did this experience of conflict (or words used by participant) affect/impact you?
3. What have you thought about since the conflict happened?
4. Is there something you wish could have happened differently?

**APPENDIX D  
HORIZONTAL ANALYSIS OUTCOMES**

Theme	EXPERIENCES AND THEIR IMPACT								
Category	EXPECTATIONS				CONFLICTS			MEANINGS	
Sub-category	Difficult dialogues	Personal growth	Participation-Engagement	Professional growth	Interpersonal	Intrapersonal	Institutional	Advocacy	Stronger sense of self
<b>Codes</b>	Framing expectations for challenging conversations Expressing desire for honesty and openness Expecting the demonstration of personal and professional growth Desiring meaningful exchanges between people				Experiences or identity invalidated  Describing others as insensitive  Witnessing immaturity or lack of personal growth  Silence of others	Silence  Withdrawal  Conflicts with self, beliefs, values  Identity conflicts	Frustration with school, program, teacher  Expressing disappointment in education  Unmet educational expectations	How student is different now  What was learned  Self-preservation Expressing desire to educate others  Expression of renewed strength in self  Solidified identity  Self-authorship	

**APPENDIX E**  
**VERTICAL ANALYSIS CODEBOOK**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Code definition</b>
<b>Expectations for class</b>		Students describing expectations they had going into their multicultural class
	<b>Difficult dialogues</b>	Difficult but meaningful verbal exchanges between students in class
	<b>Honesty</b>	Students expressing that they expect honesty or openness from their classmates
	<b>Personal growth</b>	Students express that they expect themselves and their classmates to be demonstrating work toward personal growth
	<b>Participation</b>	Students express that they expect themselves and their classmates to be participating in class
	<b>Professional Growth</b>	Students express that they expect their classmates to be demonstrating professional growth (as indicated by ethical and professional standards).
<b>Interpersonal conflict</b>		Conflicts with others
	<b>Invalidation</b>	Students describing feeling that their ideas, thoughts, or contributions to class were not honored or valid by either students or instructors.
	<b>Insensitivity from others</b>	Students describing others in the (students or instructors) were insensitive or disrespectful.
	<b>Lacking personal growth</b>	Students describing others not demonstrating work toward personal growth, (i.e., awareness of self, awareness of others, immaturity)
	<b>Misrepresentation of counselor identity</b>	Students describing others not representing what it means to be a counselor (ethical responsibility, awareness of biases, cultural competence). Might be described by participant as “worry” or “fearful” for their future clients.
	<b>Silence of others</b>	Students describing others withdrawing emotionally from class, staying silent, not contributing
<b>Intrapersonal conflict</b>		Conflicts within self
	<b>Identity conflicts</b>	Students expressing multiple identities resulting in conflicting attitudes about themselves
	<b>Personal growth</b>	Students describing larger history of personal growth impacting their sense of tension or difficulty in multicultural counseling course.



	<b>Silence of self</b>	Students describing their own emotional withdrawal in multicultural class in reaction to tension or difficulty in multicultural counseling course.
<b>Disappointment</b>		Students expressing overall disappointment
	<b>Unmet expectations</b>	Students having expectations for course (see above for codes for expectations) unmet.
	<b>Interpersonal disappointment</b>	Students describing being disappointed in their peers perspectives
	<b>Institutional</b>	Students expressing disappointment in program, instructor or educational institution
<b>Transformation</b>		Students describing what they learned, how they are different.
	<b>Advocacy</b>	Students describing wanting to educate, advocate, or campaign for others as result of conflict
	<b>Stronger sense of self / self-authorship</b>	Students describe strength, resiliency, or more solidified sense of identity as result of conflict
	<b>Self-preservation</b>	Students describe building protective faculties or establishing strategies to avoid conflict, have conflict more constructively as a result of conflict

## Lauren N. Benoist, LPC NCC

### Education

Ph.D. Counselor Education and Supervision: The Pennsylvania State University (*Expected Summer 2016*)  
M.A. Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Roosevelt University  
B.S. Psychology: Appalachian State University

### Teaching Experience: Courses Taught/Co-Taught

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- **Adler University:** Research Methods and Program Evaluation, Treatment Planning and Intervention, Counseling Skills, Professional Development
- **Roosevelt University:** Introduction to Counseling Skills/Pre-Practicum, Interventions to Youth Violence
- **Pennsylvania State University:** Clinical Mental Health in Schools and Communities, Elementary School Counseling Internship & Seminar (Guest Lecturer), Assessment in Rehabilitation and Human Services (Guest-Lecturer)

### Clinical Experience

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School Counselor: Chicago Academy for the Arts High School  
Clinic Supervisor: CEDAR Clinic, Pennsylvania State University  
Doctoral Clinical Internship: The CEDAR Clinic, The Pennsylvania State University  
Counseling Intern: Saints Mary and Elizabeth Community Behavioral Health Clinic, Chicago, Illinois

### Non-Refereed Publications

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- Benoist, L. N. (2014). Blurred lines: Indigenous Canadians and Globalization of Counseling. *Chi Sigma Iota RAM Report*. Fall 2014.
- Benoist, L. N. (2012). Facts vs. Fears: Examining Counselor Attitudes Towards Utilizing Technology. *Counseling Today*. May 2012.
- Benoist, L. N. (2008). Keeping Punishment Just: Examining Alternatives to Corrections for Drug-Addicted Offenders. *Carolina Correctional Association Newsletter*. August 2008

### International and National Presentations

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- Benoist, L. N., (2015). *Navigating Intercultural Conflict in Multicultural Counselor Education*. Breakout Session- International Association for Counseling, Verona, Italy.
- Benoist, L. N., Chang, H. (2014). *Intersections in Identity: Counseling practices that address the postmodern shift in identity development*. Breakout Session- Canadian Counselling Association Research Conference, Moncton, New Brunswick.
- Benoist, L. N., Calandriello, F., Kostohryz, K., Casado, J. F. (2015). *Creating a Collaborative Counselor Education Training Clinic: The Real World Model*. Breakout session: Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Conference (ACES).
- Benoist, L. N., Hunt, B. H. (2015). *A Primer On the Use of Intersectionality In Multicultural Counselor Education*. Breakout session submitted to: Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Conference (ACES).
- Benoist, L. N. (2014). *Postmodern Identity Development and Implications for Practice and Curriculum* Roundtable Discussion-Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues in Counseling National (ALGBTIC) Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana
- Benoist, L.N. (2014). *Intersectionality, Identity, and Culturally-Critical Counseling*. Breakout Session-Chi Sigma Iota Pennsylvania Conference, University Park, PA
- Benoist, L. N., Mack, C. (2012). *Counseling LGBTQ People of Color: New Models in Identity Formation* Poster Presentation-Illinois Counseling Association Annual Conference, Springfield, IL
- Benoist, L. N. (2013). Invited Speaker for Northside Literacy Coalition meeting: *Advocating and communicating with/for clients with disabilities*. Chicago, Illinois.