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# The Experience of Counseling Interns and Their Perceived Preparedness of Multicultural Counseling: A Phenomenological Study

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The Experience of Counseling Interns  
and Their Perceived Preparedness of  
Multicultural Counseling: A Phenomenological Study

A Thesis Presented to  
The Graduate Faculty of  
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By

Bianca Maria Milz

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Master of Science in  
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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to acquire additional knowledge into the lived experiences of counseling interns and their perception of readiness for multicultural counseling. A phenomenological approach was used to understand the lived experiences and describe the essence of the phenomenon. Master's level counseling interns (N=8) in CACREP accredited programs were surveyed in which they responded to five open-end questions related to their experience. From those responses two themes emerged, participants described their perceived preparedness related to their mindfulness and education with diverse populations. The textual and structural descriptions of responses were combined (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to arrive at the essence of the participants' experiences: Perceived preparedness of multicultural counseling was characterized by heightened awareness. The overarching finding from this study showed that all counseling interns perceived themselves prepared for multicultural counseling. These findings contradict previous findings by Malott et al (2014) study regarding a perceived lack of cultural knowledge of white counselors which was believed to thus affect their abilities to provide services across cultures (Malott et al, 2014). It is recommended to explore further research on an individual's open mindedness or in other words mindfulness and its contribution to multicultural counseling competence.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

With the growing population in the United States, coming into contact with many diverse populations is unavoidable for the counseling profession. By 2060, it is estimated that the U.S. non-Hispanic/non-Latino population will decrease by 43.6% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015a). In order to effectively work with clients, students currently enrolled in CACREP-accredited counseling programs are required to have knowledge in the area of multicultural issues in order to meet CACREP standards (CACREP, 2016). Knowledge in Multicultural counseling does not stop at program training. A continued understanding is required of the profession from obtaining and maintaining licensure to upholding the standards for everyday practice. Multicultural knowledge is required for the practice to meet the needs of the changing population and society.

### **Statement of the Problem**

For the counseling profession, the topic of diversity is embodied in the core values of the profession, which strives to honor diversity and embrace multicultural approaches (ACA, 2014). In addition to this value and the many other values, the ACA Code of Ethics provides a basis for the ethical principles such as autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, fidelity, and veracity (ACA, 2014). Of these ethical principles, nonmaleficence or avoiding harm, is especially important in multicultural counseling. Counselors who are not competent in the issues diverse clients experience and fail to properly address these issues may harm the client-counselor relationship (Hays & Erford, 2018). Though CACREP approved programs have standards in place to meet requirements in the area of multicultural issues, little is known from a student's perspective regarding their experiences and their perceived preparedness for multicultural counseling.



**Purpose of the Study**

There are few qualitative studies regarding to graduate counseling internship students and their belief in their abilities to perform multicultural counseling, specifically their self-efficacious multicultural beliefs. The majority of the research utilizes quantitative measures, thus a need for qualitative research is needed to examine the experiences of counseling interns and their perception of multicultural competence. The purpose of this study is to acquire additional knowledge into the lived experiences of counseling interns and their perception of readiness for multicultural counseling.

**Significance of the Study**

This study's aim is to explore the experience of counseling interns and provide an in depth understanding into multicultural counseling development. This information would not only provide information into the experiences of students but also provide insight for the profession regarding implications for counselor education. This information could potentially be utilized to improve training experience for counseling interns and work to increase the perceived preparedness to work with diverse populations. Understanding a counselor's preparedness to work with diverse populations would be especially crucial for the profession as there is a need for counselors to provide services to underrepresented populations. Gaining an in depth understanding of counselor multicultural preparedness may assist in increasing a professional's willingness to work with many diverse populations, especially populations in high need. A study by Flasch, Bloom, & Holladay (2016) found phenomenological research to be useful providing an overall picture of the lived experiences of counseling students regarding self-efficacy and counseling competence. They obtained a deeper understanding of students' experiences including what was helpful and not helpful (Flasch, Bloom, & Holladay, 2016). This author is

also interested in the lived experiences of counseling students, however, with a specific focus on self-perceived multicultural counseling preparedness. This study intends to identify the essence of student experience with an expectation that students will describe their experiences and provide a deeper understanding to the “what” and “how” students perceive their preparedness for multicultural counseling (Moustakas, 1994).

Research question: What are the lived experiences of counselor trainees and their beliefs regarding their preparedness to provide multicultural counseling?

### **Definition of Terms**

*Bracketing:* This term refers to the method used in qualitative research in which investigators set aside their experiences, in an attempt to develop fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

*Culture:* This term refers to shared values, practices, social norms, and worldview a particular group (Hays & Efford, 2018).

*Mindfulness:* This term is described as being attentive to experience by holding an attitude of openness and acceptance of the experience (Greason & Cashwell, 2009).

*Multicultural awareness:* This term refers to recognition of the impact of culture on the student’s own life as well as the impact on others (Ivers, Johnson, Clarke, Newsome, & Berry, 2016).

*Multicultural Counseling:* This term refers to counseling that integrates cultural identities and considers how identities influence the counseling relationship, process, and outcome (Hays & Efford, 2018).

*Multicultural Counseling Competence:* This term refers to the attitudes/beliefs, knowledge, and skills working with culturally diverse clients (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavid, 1992).

*Multicultural Knowledge:* This term refers to understanding situations, thoughts, and feeling of different cultures to inform one's counseling (Ivey, Ivey & Zalaquett, 2014).

*Multicultural Counseling Development:* This term refers to the process contributing to multicultural competence.

*Multicultural Issues:* This term refers to the role of contextual factors that contribute to the way an individual perceives and responds, especially in counseling (Ivey, Ivey & Zalaquett, 2014).  
Pedagogical strategies.

*Peer debriefing:* The term refers to a reflexive technique in which a peer or professional in the field is consulted with and reflects the investigators responses to the research process and proposes alternative interpretations (Hays & Singh, 2012; Slattery, 2004).

*Preparedness:* This term refers to an individual's readiness to providing a service.

*Reflective field notes:* This term refers to notes on reactions or questions during data analysis

*Self-Efficacy:* This term refers to belief in the ability to perform skills.

*Self-perception:* This term refers to a counselor's beliefs about multicultural knowledge and self-awareness (Constantine & Ladany, 2001).

*Supervisee:* A counseling intern student receiving supervision when working with clients.

*Trainee:* An individual enrolled in a master's degree seeking counseling program.

*Trustworthiness:* This term can be described as the rigor and credibility of the study (Hunt, 2011).

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers and counseling programs continuously work toward improving multicultural program practices by attempting to understand students and their multicultural counseling competence. In reviewing the literature, multicultural competence is identified based on the influence of variables including program training (program ambience or learning environment), instruction strategies and courses, and clinical experience. Other variables identified include a trainee's own identity and experience working with multicultural issues. Although previous studies have focused on identifying factors related to multicultural competence of counseling students, limited research has focused on a qualitative understanding of student experiences and belief in their abilities. This literature review will explore the association of counseling variables and the impact on students' perceived belief in their ability to provide multicultural counseling. This review will attempt to provide an understanding into the lived experiences of counselor trainees and their beliefs regarding their preparedness to provide multicultural counseling.

### **Impact of Program Experience on Multicultural Competence**

Program environment plays a key role in predicting a student's multicultural competence. In a study by Dickenson & Jepson (2007), researchers investigated program related variables in predicting trainees multicultural counseling competence. These variables included program cultural ambience, multicultural instructional strategies, and multicultural clinical training experiences. In this study, they wanted to know how these variables influence a trainee's experience in a program and how it might influence self-reported multicultural competencies (Dickenson & Jepson, 2007). For the purpose of this study, they utilized the Multicultural Counseling Inventory (MCI), the Multicultural Social Desirability Scale (MCSDS), the Multicultural Environmental Inventory-Revised (MEI-R), and a questionnaire designed by the

first author in which students were asked to rate their training including traditional strategies such as teaching and assignments, exposure strategies to encourage direct contact, and participatory strategies such as role-plays. The program represented participants from all geographic regions in the United States which included the Midwest (26.3%), Southeast (23.0%), Northeast (20.3%), and Pacific region (3.4%). The sample of participants included 516 trainees with 82.2% identifying as female. Of these participants, 82.0% identified as Caucasian, 6.3% identified as African American, 5.4% as Hispanic, 1.7% biracial or multicultural, 1.5% as Asian, 1.1% as Asian American, 2.0% as other, and 3.8% reported being international students. Discussing the student's level of experience in the program, 70.7% reported being enrolled in the program 1 year or longer. Half of the participants reported completing one or more multicultural courses with 18.4% currently enrolled in a course, 19.7% had never have taken a multicultural course, and 5.6% reporting no training at the time. Findings for this study indicate uncertainty to the extent of the trainee's exposure to multicultural coursework, supervision, and practicum. The main finding was that the program environment was a significant predictor across multicultural competencies. In other words, those who perceived that multicultural training was integrated in their program curriculum, supervision, and in recruitment efforts, contributed to a student's self-reported multicultural competencies (Dickenson & Jepson, 2007). These findings illustrate the importance of program training, recruitment, and the impact on a trainee's self-perceived multicultural competence. Trainees who do not feel they receive enough exposure to multicultural issues may not perceive themselves as being multiculturally competent.

Dickenson, Jepson, & Barbee (2008) utilized the same data from Dickenson & Jepson's (2007) study to assess the same variables (program cultural ambience, multicultural instructional strategies, and multicultural clinical training experiences) if they would predict student cognitive

and affective attitudes toward racial diversity and gender equality. The measures utilized in this study are the Quick Discrimination Index (QDI), MCSDS, Multicultural Environment Inventory-Revised (MEI-R), and a previously used questionnaire designed by Dickenson in which students were asked to rate instructional strategies and training experienced in their program. In this study, the findings suggest that in addition to a culturally sensitive program environment, interactive and process-oriented instruction leads to effective multicultural training (Dickenson et al, 2008). These findings continue to support the importance of program environment and influence on multicultural training experience, highlighting the importance of instruction and a trainee's comfort with multicultural issues and populations. Trainees who feel their program is sensitive to multicultural issues and provides adequate instruction are more comfortable with multicultural counseling.

### **Program Supervision and Clinical Experience**

Supervision and clinical experience provide real life practice of a trainee's multicultural competence. Vereen, Hill, & McNeal (2008) investigated variables that influenced multicultural competency in trainees. In this study, they were interested in identifying group differences among trainees based on their clinical supervision, number of multicultural classes, and the number of non-white clients a trainee had worked with (Vereen et al, 2008). For this study, multicultural competency was measured using the Multicultural Awareness-Knowledge-Skills Survey (MAKSS). Data from 198 participants was utilized for this study, which included a majority of master's level students (82.7%), as well as doctoral (14.3%), specialist (1.5%), and other (1.5%). Of those participants, 81.3% identified as female, while 18.7% reported as male. Racial and ethnic backgrounds were also identified with 81.6% reporting as Caucasian, 6.6% as African American, 4.1% as Hispanic, 2.6% as Biracial/Multicultural, 2% as Asian, 1% as Native

American, and 1.5% as other. Findings from this study identified influential variables as receiving clinical supervision related to multicultural issues and counseling non-white clients (Vereen et al, 2008). These findings provide support for further development of a trainee's multicultural competence including the importance of incorporating multicultural issues into supervision and receiving first-hand experience working with diverse populations. Although coursework may provide skills needed, it is important for a trainee to have the ability to gain real-life experience with diverse clients and receive culturally appropriate supervision in order to increase their self-perceived MCC.

### **Program Experience of Non-White Students**

In exploring the previously discussed literature, a representation of perceived Multicultural Counseling Competence (MCC) from a diverse sample was lacking. A study by Dickenson, Argus-Calvo, & Tafoya (2010) provided insight into this area by conducting a mixed method design to explore the effects of multicultural training courses on self-perceived MCC and attitudes toward racial diversity (Dickenson et al, 2010). The participants recruited for this study included counseling students who predominantly identified as Hispanic. There was a total of 60 individuals who participated in the study. Of those individuals, 93.3% identified as Hispanic, 3.3% as Anglo, 1.7% as Biracial, and 1.7% as other. Also, 80% of the participants reported as female and 20% as male. The measures used in this study included Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills Survey-Counselor Edition-Revised (MAKSS-CE-R), QDI without the Gender equality attitudes scale, and a series of 5 open-ended questions from the Guided Inquiry. Intervention was also provided in this study; two courses were taught in which one was a multicultural class and the other a human development with no infusion of multicultural curriculum. Findings of the study identified that individuals participating in a multicultural class

reported more positive cognitive racial attitudes in pre-test and post-test measures than those who did not take the class. However, there was no change in affective racial attitudes. Findings from the open-ended questions indicated that students experienced an increase in awareness of biases and racial identity as a result of multicultural training (Dickenson et al, 2010). Self-reflection assignments were also identified as influential. Activities that highlighted power dynamics were also beneficial. These variables influenced a students' self-perceived MCC. The study found that Hispanic students MCC were impacted positively by their multicultural training in the form of coursework focused on increasing awareness into biases and racial identity through reflection and activities.

### **Group Differences in Program Experience on Multicultural Competence**

Hill, Vereen, McNeal, and Stotesbury (2013) explored the influence of programmatic and dispositional variables on self-perceived multicultural competence. They wanted to know how well a program was preparing trainees to be multiculturally competent counselors as well as students' awareness into their own cultural background (Hill et al, 2013). The authors wanted to identify variables that aided trainees in developing multicultural competence. Of particular interest, was group differences in multicultural competence based on gender and ethnicity. The researchers also wanted to identify group differences in self-perceived multicultural competence based on counseling specialty and accreditation status (CACREP). In this study, data from 201 participants was utilized with 81.6% reporting as female and 18.4% as male. The measures used in this study included the QDI and the MKASS. Results from both measures suggested that trainees perceived themselves positively in relation to their multicultural competence (Hill et al, 2013). However, ethnicity was the only variable identified as having an influence on self-perceived multicultural competence. Other variables such as gender, program accreditation, and



specialty had no impact on a trainees self-perceived multicultural competence (Hill et al, 2013). This study indicated that participants who identified as African American and Hispanic scored higher on their self-perceived multicultural competence compared to those who identified as Caucasian and Asian. This study expanded on the previous understanding of self-perceived multicultural competence of counseling trainees in regard to gender and ethnicity. These findings suggest that a trainee's own ethnic background may influence their MCC. In other words, students from diverse ethnic backgrounds may perceive themselves as more prepared for multicultural issues.

### **Self-Efficacy and Multicultural Competence**

Previously discussed literature provided insight into a counseling trainee's experience in relation to their multicultural competence. Up to this point, the research appears to highlight a relationship with a trainee's experience in a program and their identity. However, additional literature introduces an additional variable to multicultural competence. A trainees' preparedness to provide multicultural counseling may not only rely on program experience and counselor awareness but also on their beliefs in their ability to work with client from diverse backgrounds, which is also known as self-efficacy (Barden & Greene, 2014).

### **Supervision and Self-Efficacy**

Constantine (2001), focused on multicultural supervision and the impact on multicultural self-efficacy. The author wanted to know if time spent discussing multicultural issues could predict MCC self-efficacy. This study sent out questionnaire packets to 20 academic programs with 122 questionnaires returning completed. Regarding participant demographics, 77% identified as female and 22.1% as male. Regarding racial and ethnic backgrounds, 72.1% identified as white, 9.8 % as Latino, 7.4 % as African American, 4.1% as Asian Americans, 1.6%

as biracial, and 0.8% as international. Of these participants, 48.4 % reported having a master's degree, while 51.6% reported holding a bachelors. In this study, the measures included a demographic survey, Multicultural Awareness-Knowledge-Skills Survey (MAKSS), and Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (SDS). Data was analyzed using a hierarchical multiple regression analysis on the scores received for the MAKSS. Findings indicated a relationship between social desirability and MAKSS scores. Findings also indicated that previous MC training predicted scores on the Multicultural Awareness-Knowledge-Skills Survey. Trainee's benefit from multicultural supervision by increasing multicultural competence and their belief in their ability to work with diverse populations.

### **Supervision and General Self-Efficacy**

To further support previous findings, Constantine (2002) examined general counseling self-efficacy and self-reported Multicultural Counseling Competence (MCC) in counseling supervisees (Constantine, 2002). In this study, previous training and supervision was examined to identify possible influences in supervisee's self-reported MCC. The author wanted to see if training and supervision increased students' self-efficacy and self-reported MCC. In this study participants were recruited through convenience sampling at a northeast regional counseling program in the United States. Survey packets were distributed in practicum courses. Of these participants, 72.3% identified as female and 25.5% identified as male. In this study, 76.6% of participants reported as white while 9.6% reported as Asian American, 8.5% as African American, 4.3% as Latinos, and 1.1% as biracial. The CCCI-R was utilized in this study which is used by supervisors to assess supervisee's cross-cultural counseling competence (Constantine, 2002). The other instrument was the CSES, which is used to measure knowledge and skill competencies for individual and group counseling (Constantine, 2002). Lastly, a demographic

questionnaire was provided in order to identify race/ethnicity, sex, age, degree earned, total months counseling experience, and previous courses related to MC issues. It was concluded that previous MC training and supervision, alone or combined, predicted CCCI-R scores (Constantine, 2002). These findings indicate that multicultural training and multicultural supervision are important in preparing a trainee for working with diverse populations.

### **Relationship of Multicultural Competence and Self-Efficacy**

Additionally, Barden & Greene (2014) were interested in Multicultural Counseling Competence (MCC) and multicultural self-efficacy (MCSE). They wanted to know the relationship between the level of MCSE and self-reported MCC. They also wanted to know if there was a relationship between MCSE, MCC, and specific demographic data. Lastly, they wanted to know if there was a difference in MCSE and MCC based on the demographics of gender, ethnicity, and time in a graduate program. In this study, 118 counseling graduate students participated. These participants attended a CACREP accredited program from the southeastern part of the United States. These participants were recruited through convenience sampling during different points in the program and recruited during classes (Barden & Greene, 2014). Participants were from both masters (86.6%) and doctoral programs (12.6%). Of the participants, 80.7% of the participants identified as females, with one participant indicating “other.” Regarding race/ethnicity, 63.9% identified as Caucasian, 10.9% as African American, 10.1% as Hispanic/Latino(a), 6.7% as Asian, 0.8% as Native American, and 7.6% as other. Length of time in the program was reported as 66.1% for first-year master’s students, 19.3% for 2<sup>nd</sup> year master’s students, 1.7% for 3<sup>rd</sup> years, 5.9% for 1<sup>st</sup> year doctoral students, 5.9% for 2<sup>nd</sup> year doctoral, and 0.8% for 3<sup>rd</sup> year doctoral students. The authors utilized the MCSE-RD and MCCTS-R. The first instrument is used to measure self-perceived ability to counsel racially

diverse clients and the other is used to measure self-perceived multicultural counseling competence. Analysis included a correlational design in order to determine the relationship between MCSE and MCC. This design was also to assisted in determining the relationship of the demographic variables and the identified constructs. The collected data was analyzed using a two tailed correlation, linear multiple regression, and ANOVA. Findings indicated that self-reported measures used to identify MCC were not measuring MCSE (Barden & Green, 2014). It was also found that constructs were significantly related but not synonymous (Barden & Green, 2014). On the other hand, results did indicate a relationship between MCC, MCSE, and time in a graduate program. This study did not identify a relationship between gender, ethnicity, and MCSE. It did identify time in the program as predictive of MCC. Researchers concluded that participants' experiences such as time in a graduate program, completed coursework, and supervised clinical experience/or work experience influenced their perception, positively impacting their MCC and self-efficacy. Implications from the study conclude that although MCC and MCSE are related, they are not identical, thus it is important to incorporate both in counselor training. Time in the program was also a predictor for both MCC and MSM, however, MSM is an indicator for knowledge and not skills (Barden & Green, 2014). Limitations included generalization of findings to other institutions and limited diversity of participants. Other limitations include the small effect size and significance to the hypothesis. This study informs the proposed study by providing an understanding of MCC and MSCE. Of particular importance, is that researchers were able to identify a relationship between time in the program and a participant's knowledge. Length of time in a program was related to one's confidence in multicultural skills.

### **Focus on Quantitative**

While investigating students Multicultural Counseling Competence (MCC), a theme has been unearthed. Previous studies on the topic are quantitative in nature. Researchers have identified numerous quantitative supports for identifying multicultural competence in counseling students. These studies attempted to measure participants knowledge and awareness of their multicultural competence. A limitation of quantitative methodology is the lack of attention given to the lived experiences of students. Although a student may be able to demonstrate competency in the area of multicultural counseling through a self-reported multicultural competency scale, this does not adequately capture a student's belief in their own abilities.

For example, Vereen, Hill, & McNeal's (2008) study relied solely on self-reported responses from the MKASS, thus limiting the students from further explaining their experiences with the identified variables. In another study, Hill, Vereen, McNeal, and Stotesbury (2013) wanted to know how well a program was preparing trainees to be multiculturally competent counselors and determine how students are integrating multicultural competencies into their own cultural background (Hill et al, 2013). As noted in Vereen, Hill, & McNeal's (2008) study, the limitation continues to be a lack of a qualitative understanding of trainees and their self-perceived multicultural competence.

A study by Flasch, Bloom, & Holladay (2016) provides support for qualitative research on this topic. The authors received promising findings in a phenomenological study to understand an overall picture of the lived experiences of counseling students in regard to their self-efficacy and counseling competence. Not only were students able to describe their lived experience but they also provided insight into student feedback for program structure and training (Flasch et al, 2016). These findings illustrate the importance of providing students the

freedom to describe their lived experiences for the purpose of counselor development.

Qualitative research is suitable for this area of interest in that it allows the freedom for students to expand on the many discussed factors that may influence their lived experiences in a counseling program, in particular for the purposes of understanding multicultural preparedness.

### **Student of Color Perception of Training Environment**

In further support of utilizing quantitative methodology, a ground theory study conducted by Seward (2014) identified important aspects of multicultural training according to students of color. Participants consisted of 20 master's level counseling students of color who were currently enrolled in a multicultural course or had been enrolled previously. A majority of students identified as Black (n=12), while the other students identified as Hispanic (n=4), Asian (n=2), and multicultural (n=2). Of these participants, 16 identified as female. This study conducted interviews with participants utilizing two open ended questions: a) As a student of color, can you talk about what you perceive you need to learn in your multicultural training course(s)? and (b) Can you talk about how your class is doing, or did, in regard to meeting your educational interest and learning needs? (Seward, 2014). Key themes identified included learning about other cultural beliefs, being unsatisfied with course breadth and depth, experiencing isolation and alienation, perception of MCC in peers, classroom racial climate, credibility of instructor, pedagogical strategies, advocacy for others and themselves, fulfilling an obligation, and withdrawal from learning process. This study provided great insight into the lived experiences of non-white students and important variables impacting students' training. This study focused on students of color and their experience in a program and less on their beliefs regarding their preparedness to perform multicultural counseling.

### **Multicultural Competence with Specific Populations**

Multiculturalism includes not only different racial and ethnic populations but also many populations from other diverse backgrounds. The populations a counselor might encounter will come from many diverse backgrounds and may identify with more than one population. Some studies have gone on to focus on specific populations including working with individuals from low income communities, elderly clients, different religious beliefs, or a specific demographic (McBride & Hayes, 2011; Magaldi-Dopman, 2014; Soheilian & Inman, 2015; Clark, Moe, & Hays, 2017).

For example, McBride & Hays (2012) found trainees and professional counselors that hold fewer ageist beliefs rated themselves as higher in multicultural competence (McBride & Hays, 2012). Of particular interest, is that 60.9% reported never taking a gerontology course and 23% stating they had taken at least one (McBride & Hays, 2011). On the other hand, participants did report discussing the topic of gerontology, with 59% reporting that it took place in their multicultural course and 77% reporting that it took place in their human growth and development course. The authors recommended future qualitative inquiry to investigate students' attitudes about geriatric populations.

Soheilian & Inman (2013) found a relationship between MCC and Counselor Self-efficacy (CSE) (Soheilian & Inman, 2013). This study focused on the differences of white and non-white trainees in the areas of MCC, CSE, and empathy. Among the findings, was that diverse trainees scored higher in MCC and CSE, however, there was no difference in empathy when compared to white trainees. Researchers indicated future research in trainees' level of multicultural training and also on race/identity variables.

In discussion of specific populations, a counselors' lived experiences can vary based on the population and experience a counselor has with a specific population. Counselors may report higher multicultural competence with one population while decreased competence in another. Utilizing qualitative methods would provide a deep understanding of the lived experiences of counseling trainees and their multicultural preparedness or belief in themselves.

### **Conclusion**

Within the last few decades, attention has been focused on the topic of multiculturalism and the need for counselors to be educated in this area. This is crucial for the field of counseling in order to prepare counselors to work with diverse populations. In line with CACREP standards, an understanding of social and cultural diversity is required with many programs implementing multiculturalism into discussion and at the very least requiring one course specifically focused on this topic. Although students are receiving an education incorporating the topic of multicultural counseling, it does not necessarily indicate that a student feels prepared to perform multicultural counseling. In addition, the literature brings to light that there are many factors that may influence a student's preparedness to work with diverse populations. Regarding the discussed literature, a reoccurring theme appears to identify the factor of program environment, student's own identity, their level of knowledge of the population, and belief in themselves that they can actually utilize the skills learned from program training. With this information, even with education, do students actually perceive themselves as prepared for working with diverse clients? If education is a contributing factor, what about their education influenced or affected their preparedness? It is also important to understand in general, how did they perceive their experience with the preparation process? Specifically, are students experiencing a positive or negative experience with the preparation process. If at all possible, how could their experience be



improved and what else is important for development? With this, the overarching question continues to focus on the phenomenon of what are the lived experiences of counselor trainees and their beliefs regarding their preparedness to provide multicultural counseling?

This study was inspired by previous qualitative work focused on the experiences of counseling students' self-efficacy, perceived preparedness, and training (Seward, 2014; Collins, Arthur, Brown, & Kennedy, 2015; Flasch et al, 2016). Seward (2014) found qualitative methodology helpful in uncovering an emerging theory for students of color and their experiences in a counseling program. Although there is minimal qualitative research on this topic, the literature that is available provides an in-depth understanding of the experiences of counseling students. Further qualitative study is needed to follow up with the vast quantitative findings and help understand counseling trainees and their perceived level of readiness.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

A phenomenological approach was used for this study. The use of a phenomenological approach on the topic of preparedness of multicultural counseling is relevant for this type of research as perceptions can be subjective and may vary from person to person (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological research is suitable for this topic because although perceptions can vary based on individuals, it allows the opportunity to gain an in depth understanding of the lived experiences and transforms it into a description of the universal essence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The author wanted to understand students' experiences with multicultural preparedness as well as their belief regarding their ability to provide multicultural counseling.

As stated previously, a reoccurring theme in the literature appeared to identify many factors that may contribute to student perceived preparedness of multicultural counseling. With that, this study intended to understand if students actually perceived themselves as prepared for working with diverse client. If education was a contributing factor, what about their education influenced or affected their preparedness? It was also important to understanding in general, how did they perceive their experience with the preparation process? Specifically, were students experiencing a positive or negative experience with the preparation process. If at all possible, how could their experience have been improved and what else was important for development? Thus, the overarching question was focused on the phenomenon of what are the lived experiences of counselor trainees and their beliefs regarding their preparedness to provide multicultural counseling?

#### **Participants**

This study was interested in responses from counseling graduate students currently enrolled in CACREP- accredited master's programs in the United States with a focus on students

who are pursuing an emphasis in either Addiction, Clinical Mental Health or School counseling. Specifically, students who have completed at least one semester in an internship at a CACREP approved public school. Responses were collected from participants throughout the United States using the CACREP directory. In order to de-identify responses, participants were asked to identify their location based off their region. It should be noted, initial data collection was directed toward participants in CACREP programs under the 2016 standards. Due to limited participation, data collection was expanded to all CACREP public programs in the United States.

### **Procedures**

A request for participants was sent out through an individual email request to each public institution in the CACREP directory. An email was drafted to program coordinators asking to provide the information to students that would be interested in participating. Coordinators were provided an additional research request attachment to provide to students interested in participating. The research request attachment (Appendix A) provided information about the purpose of the study and an online link to the survey. Qualtrics was the chosen medium in which participants completed and returned the survey online as identified in Appendix B. Prior to beginning the survey, clients were asked to read the implied consent for the survey in which the consent explained that by completing and returning the survey, participants are giving consent.

The first question on the survey asked participants if they were 18 years or older. The second question asked if participants were currently enrolled in a master's level counseling program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP). The third question asked if the participant had completed at least one semester of internship. The first three questions were single response questions, meaning participants could answer either "yes" or "no" in response. Students who answered "no" to any

of the first three questions would be taken to a page thanking them for participation in the survey. Students who answered “yes” would be directed to the next questions beginning with demographic information. Demographic information collected included age, identity in terms of sex/gender, racial/ethnic background, current year in their counseling program, program emphasis (Clinical Mental Health, Addiction, School Counseling) and region they live in.

The second section of the survey included a brief statement about the following questions and asked participants to answer the questions truthfully and honestly. In addition, a definition for multicultural competence was provided as a way to benchmark for responses. The survey utilized open-ended questions to allow room to expand on participant experiences. Participants were allowed unlimited space to respond to each question. After completing the survey, participants were directed to a debriefing page providing contact information of researchers, IRB information, and counseling information for participants experiencing negative feelings following the survey.

### **Data Analysis**

This study utilized phenomenological analysis to understand internship counseling trainees’ lived experience regarding their perceived preparedness to provide multicultural counseling. The study sought to obtain a description of experiences with a focus on what they experienced and how they experienced it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants provided information on their experiences through a self-reported survey. Participants shared their experiences utilizing examples, provided information about their own personal experience, and specific positive or negative experiences in relations to their multicultural development.

The phenomena of this study are the experiences of counseling students’ perceived preparedness to provide multicultural counseling. This phenomenon was explored with a group

of 8 individuals who all shared similar phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The experiences of the participants and the researcher are considered shared, lived experiences as those who participated including the researcher are expected to share the similar phenomena, self-perceived preparedness in multicultural counseling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In an attempt to bracket herself out, the research provided a description of her own experience in order to remove herself and focus on the lived experience of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The data was examined using printed copies of the results while utilizing a pencil and highlighter to identify key words or impressionable quotes sentence by sentence for each participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Codes were assigned by each question using an eclectic style of coding. Eclectic style coding is the process of selecting a compatible combination of two or more coding methods (Saldana, 2016). The two coding methods utilized included in vivo coding and descriptive coding. In vivo coding is the process of providing a code of a short word or phrase from the actual language of the participant while descriptive coding is the process of using a word to summarize the topic of the passage. (Saldana, 2016.) A code was identified for each sentence whether the code used the actual words from participants or a single description of the sentence content. Codes were then analyzed through second coding cycle using pattern coding which is a way of grouping codes into more meaningful and smaller number of categories (Saldana, 2016). Patterns coding allowed the opportunity to condense the codes and develop themes. For example, participants who described their level of readiness received a code of work experience, additional training, or continued education and were then be categorized under the theme of training. This phenomenological approach provided themes on what was experienced and how the phenomenon was experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Themes identified from the data provided an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon,

the lived experiences of counselor trainees and the meaning of those experience regarding their preparedness to provide multicultural counseling.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is important in the field of counseling as it is a fundamental principal of professional ethical behavior discussed in the profession ACA Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014). In qualitative study, trustworthiness can be described as the rigor and credibility of the study (Hunt, 2011). Demonstrating trustworthiness was important to not only demonstrate ethics the profession holds, but also in demonstrating the credibility of the study. Multiple strategies were utilized to maximize trustworthiness. In this study, bracketing was used during pre-data analysis, reflective field notes during analysis, and peer debriefing during the process of analysis.

### **Bracketing**

Bracketing is a method used in qualitative research in which investigators set aside their experiences, in an attempt to develop fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Bracketing was used in the form of pre-data analysis journaling of personal lived experience to remove biases or assumptions from the study's focus (Hays & Singh 2012). The following information was the authors attempt to bracket herself from the topic.

The focus of the study is important to the author because of her strong desire to work with diverse populations. The author comes from a diverse background and at times felt more prepared than her peers when working with diverse populations. For example, the author experienced some negative interactions with peers when provided an understanding on her own diverse background or witnessed peers handle a multicultural issue in a way the author believed to be harmful. Because of the author's own experiences, she often worries about diverse clients'

experiences, which has encouraged her to persist in talking about multicultural issues. The author believes integration of multicultural issues is crucial for program training and a counseling professional's development. The author herself at times worries about working with diverse population include not being fully educated on where a client might be coming from or unintentional microaggressions. This topic is also important to the author personally because at times the author has had conflicting beliefs in her own level of preparedness when working with some populations over others. In addition to education, the author has sought out a fellowship to further develop her professional identity as a diverse counselor. The author believes the fellowship will help provide additional support for her own development but also when working with diverse population. Part of the fellowship requirement is to commit two years of service to diverse populations which was something the author did not hesitate in committing. The author is dedicated to looking through a multicultural lens and believes multicultural counseling development is a life-long process. The author enjoys learning about individuals from diverse backgrounds and believes she will continue to develop her identify as multicultural counselor.

### **Reflective Field Notes**

In addition to pre-data analysis journaling, reflective field notes were utilized as an additional strategy to maximize trustworthiness. The author recorded reflective field notes of her own reactions or questions during data analysis (Hays & Singh, 2012). These reflective notes took place during the analysis of participant responses. While reviewing the responses of participants, the author journaled her own thoughts, biases, and questions. Many of the reflective notes where additional questions the research had for participants if she had the opportunity to ask them.

**Peer Debriefing**

Peer debriefing was a strategy also used to establish trustworthiness. Peer debriefing is a reflexive technique in which a peer or professional in the field is consulted with and reflects the investigators responses to the research process and proposes alternative interpretations (Hays & Singh, 2012). In this study, the author participated in peer debriefing by consulting with her faculty advisor throughout the data analysis period. This type of debriefing was beneficial for the author to not only process the research progress but also express any challenges the author was experiencing regarding her own thoughts and biases. Feedback from the author's advisor provided the opportunity to view data from a different perspective and move forward with a focus on the phenomenon under examination.



## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### Demographics

Entries received for this study totaled twenty-nine, of which twenty-one responses were removed due to being incompleteness or not meeting initial requirements. Of the remaining eight responses, participants' ages ranged from 23 to 38 years of age. One participant identified as male while seven participants identified as female with two of the seven identifying as cis and gender fluid. In addition, participants identified their racial/ethnic backgrounds as the following: White (n=7) and Black (n=1). Participants identified their current years in their program as 2nd year (n=4), 3rd year (n=2), final/last year (n=2). Participants identified their emphasis as either clinical mental health (n=5) or School Counseling (n=3). Participants identified regions in which they attended school, as identified by the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) regions. Responses were received from three of the five regions: North Central region (n=3), Southern region (n=4), and Western region (n=1).

The North Central region (which includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wisconsin) yielded 37.50% of the responses. The North Atlantic region (Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands) yielded 0% of responses. The Southern region (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia) generated 50% of responses. The Western region (Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, and Pacific Rim countries) brought 12.50% of responses.

### **Data Analysis**

For data analysis, the author highlighted key words or impressionable quotes sentence by sentence for each participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data was examined utilizing horizontalization as a means to identify significant statements and then develop a cluster of meaning from these statements (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After the development of meaning, the author used textural descriptions of provided experiences to understand the meaning and depth of essence of the experience (Hays & Singh 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2018). From the textural description the author then utilized structural description and identified multiple possible meanings to describe the setting that influenced the phenomenon (Hays & Singh 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Following textual and structural descriptions, the author composed as description that presented the essence of the phenomenon also known as the invariant structure, which focused on the common experience of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The results and conclusions were then discussed leading the author to provide recommendation for future research.

### **Survey Questions**

The following questions were developed to understand what counseling trainees experienced and how they experienced it regarding their perceive preparedness for multicultural counseling. The results of the survey questions were organized by each question. The themes from the questions were identified and then the essence of the experience was described.

#### **Question 1: Please describe your level of readiness when thinking about working with diverse clients.**

The first question related to the participant's own perception of their readiness to work with diverse clients. This question provided freedom for participants to describe their level of

readiness. From this question, a majority of participants described the level of readiness as being ready or prepared and confident in their level of readiness. In addition to stating their level of readiness, participants then went on to further describe their readiness relating to what has specifically prepared them for working with diverse clients which included training, personal experience, and being open minded. One participant described their experience as follows:

The classes I've taken and the experience I've had so far has made me feel pretty confident in my level of readiness. I feel like I could be ethical with diverse clients.

**Question 2: Reflecting on your master's level counseling program, could you explain what has influenced or affected your readiness to working with diverse populations?**

The second question focused on a participant's education and readiness to work with diverse populations. Overall, a majority of participants described their program as having a positive influence on their level of readiness. From this question, participants described their experience based on course(s) or training completed and instruction of course(s). For example, participants described their course education with a particular focus on multicultural courses as a contributing factor on their readiness. A majority of participants described their multicultural course(s) as a positive experience that encouraged openness and educated participants about themselves and others. In addition, this question invoked discussion focused on the instructor who presented the multicultural information. Some participants in particular discussed the instructor impacting their experience with some describing a positive or negative experience.

One participant described their experience as follows:

I took a cross cultural class that opened me up to realizing how much more I know than my peers. It also forced me to look at how much I don't know and need to learn.

**Question 3: Explain your experience with the preparation process regarding multicultural competence.**

The third question allowed participants to share their experiences related to their preparation of multicultural competence. Overall, participants experienced a positive experience in the preparation process of developing multicultural competence when having an open mind to learn about others through direct experience or training. A majority of participant described their own openness contributing to their experience with the preparation process for developing multicultural competence. For example, some described a positive experience with having a general openness of others regardless of different views. While others described a positive experience of having openness to learning about others through education. In addition, this question emerged additional discussion suggesting the benefits of direct contact with others to gain insight into multicultural differences. Some described going out of their own way to immerse themselves with different cultures while others described benefiting from an assignment focused on immersing students into different cultures. This led to an additional discussion of open mindedness focused on course education such as assignments, courses that were multiculturally incorporated, and continued education. A participant described their experience as follows:

Keeping an open mind is one of the most important parts. We often encounter people with different values, beliefs, and norms than our own experience.

**Question 4: How might your experience have been improved regarding your readiness for multicultural counseling?**

The fourth question inquired about possible improvements that might have assisted in a participant's multicultural development. Overall, the participants described their experience with

a focus on improvement for themselves and their own needs. Participants either described future improvement for themselves such as a need to continue to learn about different cultures or they described improvements related to their program. For example, those who described the experience based on themselves, the participants focused their discussion on their own experiences and how they gained awareness through exposure of others. Participants described their improvement for themselves directed on their need to continue learning about different cultures. However, those who described improvements with a focus on their program experience provided suggestions such as offering additional multicultural courses, course delivery, and need for diverse faculty/students. One participant shared their experience as follows:

Working with clients pushed my comfort zone and allowed me to understand what I needed more education in.

**Question 5: What other information do you believe is important regarding your multicultural counseling development?**

The fifth question was designed for a participant's last opportunity to provide any additional information related to their experience. Participants provided suggestion they identified as important regarding multicultural counseling development with a majority describing the importance of having an open mind to learn about others through direct experience or education. Responses from this question reiterated their experiences described in question three. Participants suggested having an open mind as an important factor related to their experience in their multicultural development. Participants also suggested the importance of continued education/learning. Participant did not limit their response to a focus on the average classroom learning style but also suggested outside classroom learning such as immersing oneself in cultural events or something unfamiliar. These suggestions provided insight into the

overall experience of counseling interns and concluded the factors that may influence an intern's perceived readiness for multicultural counseling. One participant described a suggestion as follows:

I think it is important to just come into it with an open mind. I'm a Caucasian female from a small, suburban town. Go into anything with an open mind and be willing to immerse yourself into something unfamiliar! Being open-minded is important regarding multicultural development. A closed mind will not learn much.

### **Themes**

From these responses two themes emerged. Participants described their perceived preparedness related to their experience with mindfulness and education with diverse populations.

#### **Mindfulness**

The first apparent theme that emerged from responses was focused on being mindful of cultural differences. A reoccurring term that led to the theme of mindfulness was participants' use of the word "open mind" when discussing learning or working with diverse populations. A majority of participants described their level of readiness based on their open mindedness to acquire knowledge of cultural differences, stereotypes and biases, and their openness to learn more if needed. Most participants described they were ready to work with diverse clients based on their knowledge of others however many had the need to explain what led to gaining this knowledge with all participants sharing the experience of being open minded to cultures different than their own. The overall theme suggests counseling participants that are mindful of themselves and of others, perceived themselves ready to work with diverse populations.

**Education**

The second theme that emerged focused on a participants' education. The education theme was supported by the subthemes of traditional training (program training or continued training) and nontraditional training (life experience or work experience). Participants suggest training influenced a participant's perceived level of readiness. Results showed little over half of responses identified training as being a contributing factor to their level of readiness for multicultural counseling with a majority of participants expressing positive responses for the specific program related courses. Even when given the opportunity to express other contributing factors to their perceived level of readiness, participants referred back to their program training in regard to positive experiences with their multicultural development. However, it should be noted that some participant in particular expressed needs for improvement that were directly involved with their program such as the need for advanced multicultural course, negatives of online multicultural course delivery, negatives to a short duration course, and the program's overall lack of multicultural competence. One participant went as far as to describe their negative experience with course material and its influence on their level or readiness.

In addition to education, some participants described gaining an education in multicultural issues not solely on training received from their program or another training but also based on their life experience immersed themselves into a culture different than their own. Some participants shared living in another country allowed them to learn about other cultures while others described participating in activities in the community involving cultures different than their own. Other participants shared information such as learning about diverse populations through their work with statements of "I work in an underserved area" or "I work in an urban

school district.” Overall, participant all experienced some form of education on multicultural counseling whether acquired through traditional means but also thinking beyond the classroom.

### **Essence of the Experience**

The purpose for phenomenology is to reduce individual experience from the phenomenon and grasp the universal essence (Van Manen, 1990). The author combined the textural and structural descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to arrive at the essence of the participants’ experiences: Perceived preparedness of multicultural counseling was characterized by heightened awareness. This awareness was revealed when participants described becoming conscious of themselves and others contributed to a) helping build relationships with their clients, b) improving their skills for the future, and c) holding themselves as a professional accountable. Participant preparedness meant investing in their education and growing their awareness of themselves and diverse populations.

The overarching question of this study was focused on the phenomenon of what are the lived experiences of counselor trainees and their beliefs regarding their preparedness to provide multicultural counseling? With that, the essence of the participants’ experience involved feelings of confidence in their preparedness and overwhelmingly wanting to share what helped them develop to their level of readiness. Developing feelings of confidence were rooted in continued support and practice of multicultural counseling skills. Encouragement from their program education heightened their awareness of themselves and of others and facilitated the opportunity to further develop their skills. Participants positive experience with the preparation process reiterated the contributing factors to their feeling of confidence. This positive experience with the preparation process empowered them to continue performing and developing their skills. Which



ended with participants stating the key to their multicultural development was to continue being mindful of themselves and others.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to acquire additional knowledge into the lived experiences of counseling interns and their perception of readiness for multicultural counseling. This study aimed to identify the experience of counseling interns and provide an in depth understanding into the multicultural counseling development. The author was interested in the lived experiences of counseling students however with a specific focus on self-perceived multicultural counseling preparedness. Phenomenological research was used to analyze the data providing insight into what participants experienced and how they experienced it. This study intended to identify the essence of student experiences with an expectation that students would describe their experiences and provide a deeper understanding of the “what” and “how” students perceive their preparedness for multicultural counseling.

The overarching finding from this study showed that all counseling interns perceived themselves prepared for multicultural counseling. In addition, these findings suggest counseling interns perceived preparedness of multicultural counseling was influenced by two major themes: mindfulness and education. Participants identified being mindful of themselves and the difference of others encouraged the development of their multicultural counseling skills. In addition, participants described the contributing factors such as traditional and non-traditional education that further developed their skills and thus their perceived preparedness.

These findings could be of particular interest into the development of counseling interns and their multicultural identity. It appears finding from this study suggest other factors may impact a counseling interns perceived preparedness for multicultural counseling which does not limit to an individual’s ethnic/racial background alone. For example, although Hill et al (2013) findings suggest students from diverse ethnic backgrounds may perceive themselves as more

prepared for multicultural issues. In this study, with the majority of participants identifying as white, participants all expressed confidence in the level of preparedness and described specifically what contributed to their development. These findings are not only important to understand the experiences of counseling interns but especially helpful understanding from a perspective of the majority which identified as white. These findings also contradict previous findings by Malott et al (2014) study regarding a perceived lack of cultural knowledge of white counselor which was believed to thus affect their abilities to provided services across cultures (Malott et al, 2014). As a result, these findings could provide further insight into the training practices when directed toward white counseling trainees.

Participants in this study overwhelming participated in discussion with the focus on mindfulness. Participants described the importance of being mindful of themselves and the differences of others which led to their perceived preparedness. Findings of this study support previous findings indicating mindfulness as a predictor for non-judgmental attention and awareness (Gervais, Hoffman, 2013; Greason & Cashwell, 2009, Ivers et al, 2016). In particular, this study supports Greason & Cashwel's (2009) previous work suggesting those who experience mindfulness demonstrated a positive self-perception of the abilities to perform multicultural counseling, student self-efficacy.

Findings from this study have implication for program development specifically the methods used to develop multicultural counseling preparedness. These finding support Dickenson & Jepsen (2007) findings which suggested those who perceived that multicultural training was integrated in their program curriculum, supervision, and in recruitment efforts, contributed to a student's self-reported multicultural competencies (Dickenson & Jepsen, 2007). This study also provided support to Castillo, Brossart, Reyes, Conoley, & Phoummarath's (2007)

findings suggesting that taking a multicultural course increases cultural self-awareness.

However, participants experience provided implication for the methods in multicultural courses, specifically, participants shared positive experiences with assignments involving direct community involvement and their own multicultural development. These finding may further support Hipolito-Delgado et al's (2011) findings of the impact of emersion activities on self-perceived multicultural competence. Suggesting assignments that not only encourage hands on experience but encourage awareness have positive impact on a student multicultural development.

### **Limitations**

There was initially a limit in a diverse sample size regarding individual from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds along with limited participation or representation of regions in the United States. Also, it is possible some participants may have provided what they believed the research the research expected from them and less on what they actually believed or felt. There was also limitation in survey responses. Three out of the eight participants skipped 2-3 questions. One participant skipped question 3 related to how their experience might have been improved while two participants skipped questions 4 and 5 related to additional information important regarding the multicultural counseling development and experience with the preparation process regarding multicultural competency. These skipped questions possibly suggesting the questions were possibly perceived as repetitive or participant did not clearly understand what was asked from the skipped questions. This further highlights the limitation of an online survey instead of face to face interview where participants could ask further questions to clarify.

**Recommendations**

This study provided insight into the lived experience of counseling interns and contribution into developing their multicultural competence. Though it may be hard for the programs to gauge where a student is at with the perceived level of preparedness, improvements in a universal strategy is needed in a program to develop multicultural competence regardless of the varying levels of preparedness. It is suggested future research further direct interest into developing participant heighten awareness of themselves and diverse populations. A study by Lonn & Juhnke (2017) conducted a similar phenomenology study on counseling students, though directed on the topic of non-disclosure during triadic supervision, they too found heightened awareness of counseling students as a contributing factor to disclosure. With that, it is suggested future research direct interest into how programs can further encourage participant heighten awareness of themselves and diverse population.

It is also recommended that continued research be done in the area of development of multicultural identity with an incorporation of both inside classroom learning and outside classroom learning to encourage a stronger development in a counselor's multicultural identity. Specifically, starting with a qualitative study focused solely on what components of inside and outside learning are crucial in enhancing a counseling interns' multicultural development. Overall, continued focus is needed on understanding counseling trainee' development, to further support the possible factors that may encourage trainees to continue to seek further education to maintain a life-long process of multicultural development. Concluding, it is recommended to explore further research on an individual's open mindedness or in other words mindfulness and its contribution to multicultural counseling competence.

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**APPENDIX A: RESEARCH PARTICIPATION REQUEST**

Greetings,

I am writing to you to request your participation in a research study for students who are currently enrolled in a master's level counseling program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP). In addition, this study is interested in students who are pursuing an emphasis in **Addiction, Clinical Mental Health, or School Counseling**. The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of students who have completed at least one semester in internship. My goal is to find a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of students and their preparedness for multicultural counseling in CACREP-accredited programs. Ten to twenty responses are needed.

This study is used to fulfill the requirements of graduation from the Counseling Program at Minnesota State University Moorhead in Moorhead, Minnesota. Attached in this message you will find a link to access the survey. Before starting the survey, you will be provided an implied consent. A debriefing letter will also be provided after completion. **The survey should take 10-30 minutes to complete.**

Participants are able to withdraw from this research at any time by contacting the co-investigator, Bianca Milz. You will only be asked to complete one survey and there will not be any future contact from the researchers. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relationship with the Counseling Program at Minnesota State University Moorhead. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time. If you feel that you are experiencing adverse consequences from this study including emotional discomfort, please contact your local university-sponsored counseling center, call 2-1-1 or visit 211.org to find available counseling resources.

This research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at MSUM, for questions regarding your rights in this study, please contact: Dr. Lisa I. Karch, Chair of MSUM Institutional Research Board, lisa.karch@mnstate.edu, phone: 218-477-2699.

We value and appreciate your contributions to this research study. To participate, please click on the link below and read the implied consent form. If you agree to the consent form, then you may proceed to the survey: [https://mnstate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_41wdt5j3OTYlaqF](https://mnstate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_41wdt5j3OTYlaqF)

Thank you,

Dr. Jessica Brown, Primary Investigator  
Program Advisor and Thesis Committee Chairperson  
Counseling Department  
Minnesota State University Moorhead  
Jessica.Brown@mnstate.edu  
Office Phone: 218-477-4721

Bianca Milz, Co-Investigator  
Master's Student  
Counseling Program  
Minnesota State University Moorhead  
bianca.milz@go.minnstate.edu  
Cell Phone: 218-329-3070

**APPENDIX B: IMPLIED CONSENT**

You are invited to participate in a study on experiences of students and their preparedness to provide multicultural counseling while attending a master's level counseling program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

I hope to learn additional knowledge into the lived experiences of counseling interns and their perception of readiness for multicultural counseling. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you were identified as a graduate counseling student attending a CACREP accredited program.

If you decide to participate, please complete the enclosed survey. Your return of this survey is implied consent. The survey is designed to provide a deeper understanding of students and their perceived preparedness for multicultural counseling. It will take about 10-30 minutes to complete this survey.

No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, but your responses will be used to improve training experience for counseling interns. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to complete the survey.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relationships with Minnesota State University Moorhead. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time.

Please feel free to ask questions regarding this study. If you have additional questions, please contact Dr. Jessica Brown, Counseling Department, [Jessica.brown@mnstate.edu](mailto:Jessica.brown@mnstate.edu), 218-477-4721 or Bianca Milz, [bianca.milz@go.minnstate.edu](mailto:bianca.milz@go.minnstate.edu).

Any questions about your rights may be directed to Dr. Lisa I. Karch, Chair of the MSUM Institutional Review Board at 218-477-2699 or by e-mail at: [irb@mnstate.edu](mailto:irb@mnstate.edu).

Thank you for your time. Sincerely,

Principle Investigator: Jessica Brown, PhD  
[Jessica.brown@mnstate.edu](mailto:Jessica.brown@mnstate.edu)

Co-Investigator: Bianca Milz  
[Bianca.milz@go.minnstate.edu](mailto:Bianca.milz@go.minnstate.edu)

**APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE**

## Section 1: Demographic Information

Q2 Please indicate if you are 18 years or older.

- Yes
- No

Q3 Please indicate if you are currently enrolled in a master's level counseling program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

- Yes
- No

Q4 Please indicate if you have completed at least one semester in a master's level counseling internship.

- Yes
- No

Q5 Please indicate your age

Q6 Please indicate your identity in terms of sex/gender

Q7 Please indicate your racial/ethnic background

Q8 Please indicate your current year in a master's level counseling program

Q9 Please indicate your program emphasis (e.g. Clinical Mental Health, Addiction, School Counseling)

Q10 Please indicate the region in which you live in:

- A. **North Central:** Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, or Wisconsin.
- B. **North Atlantic:** Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, or the Virgin Islands.
- C. **Southern:** Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, or West Virginia.
- D. **Rocky Mountain:** Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, or New Mexico.

- o E. **Western:** Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, or Pacific Rim countries.

## Section II: Survey Questions

**The following questions will give you an opportunity to tell us more about your experience.**

Please answer openly and truthfully.

Multicultural Counseling Competence refers to the attitudes/beliefs, knowledge, and skills when working with diverse clients.

Q13 Please describe your level of readiness when thinking about working with diverse clients.

Q14 Reflecting on your master's level counseling program, could you explain what has influenced or affected your readiness to working with diverse populations?

Q15 Explain your experience with the preparation process regarding multicultural competence.

Q16 How might your experience have been improved regarding your readiness for multicultural counseling?

Q17 What other information do you believe is important regarding your multicultural counseling development?

**APPENDIX D: DEBRIEFING FORM**

Title of Study: The Experience of Counseling Interns and Their Perceived Preparedness of Multicultural Counseling

Thank you for participating in this study. Your time and consideration is greatly appreciated in advancing the literature in the field of counseling.

The purpose of the study was to understand the experiences of counseling interns and their perception of readiness for multicultural counseling.

If you have questions about this study, or if you would like to receive a summary report of this research when it is completed, please contact Bianca Milz, bianca.milz@go.minnstate.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights during the study, please contact Dr. Lisa I. Karch, Chair of MSUM Institutional Research Board, lisa.karch@mnstate.edu, phone: 218-477-2699.

If you feel that you are experiencing adverse consequences from this study, including emotional discomfort, please contact your local university-sponsored counseling center, call 2-1-1 or visit 211.org to find available resources.

All research data for this study will be stored in a password-protected file on a password-protected computer for a period of 5 years following the study as required by the Minnesota State University Institutional Review Board. All data will be de-identified from the respondents.

Thank you again for your participation.

Principle Investigator:

Jessica Brown, PhD

Jessica.brown@mnstate.edu

Co-Investigator: Bianca Milz

Bianca.milz@go.minnstate.edu