Professional Identity Development Among Counselor Educators In-Training: The Impact of Privilege Awareness and the Intersectionality of Social Identities

Tristan Kayla McKenzie

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PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AMONG COUNSELOR EDUCATORS IN-TRAINING: THE IMPACT OF PRIVILEGE AWARENESS AND THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF SOCIAL IDENTITIES

by

Tristan Kayla McKenzie

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Counseling Education and Supervision

The University of Memphis
August 2023
Abstract

In counseling education, one learns the unique ability to help people from all walks of life with a never-ending list of human endeavors. This dissertation explored the lived experiences of counselor educators in training and how their privileged and/or marginalized social identities impacted their professional identity. Though this dissertation explored all social identities, the primary focus was race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The importance of looking at all aspects of a person and how experiences with privilege and marginalization impact a person, including their professional identity, is explained in the literature review as well as the need for more research regarding addressing privilege and marginalization in counseling. A phenomenological qualitative method was employed to grasp the phenomenon of counselor educators’ professional identity development and the undeniable impact of experience with privilege and marginalization. This research was developed and analyzed through a constructivist lens, specifically using a Constructivist lens with Critical Race Theory and an Intersectionality Framework to ensure all elements of the participants' stories are considered. Lived experiences of participants were gathered via virtual semi-structured interviews. Ten counselor educators in training were interviewed. All participants were enrolled in a CACREP-accredited doctoral program and had at least one of the following experiences; as a teaching assistant (TA), the instructor of record for a graduate-level course, or who had taken the CACREP-required teaching course. From the results, emerged four themes (1) awareness of privilege and marginalization, (2) the role of intersectionality, (3) professional identity development, and (4) privilege and marginalization as a motivator. The findings of this research study align with current research regarding the importance of privilege awareness among counselors and counselor educators, the need for specific instruction among masters and doctoral students about the impact of privilege
and marginalization, and the stages of professional identity development as a counselor educator. Specifically, experiential, and collaborative learning was found by participants to be the most effective.
To my parents, Eric, and Laura McKenzie, to my fiancée Taylor, my brother Chase, and my grandmother, Cynthia (Cici), I dedicate this dissertation to you.
Acknowledgments

I start by thanking my dissertation committee for understanding the challenges of completing this dissertation and believing in and supporting me.

To Dr. Stephen Zanskas, thank you for your guidance and calming presence. I always feel reassured after talking with you. Your interest in my topic helped reinforce the importance of this research. In addition, as my favorite professor, I admire your passion for this field and your ability to see and honor multiple perspectives. Your teaching method ensured everyone was heard and understood, which I strive to emulate.

To Dr. Patrick Murphy, your generosity, and hours of guidance as my supervisor and serving on my dissertation committee were never unnoticed. Working on the Race-Based Trauma Research team inspired me and reminded me why this research is important. I have learned much from you and am a better counselor and researcher.

To Dr. Pamela Cogdal, your grace and compassion for students help me believe in myself. I admire your guidance as a professor, supervisor, faculty advisor, and colleague. Thank you for all that you do for students and the profession.

To Dr. Taneshia Greenidge, I appreciate you for serving on my committee only a semester after joining the faculty. There is levity to your presence that puts me at ease when you are in the room.

This journey was only bearable because of the rest my cohort, Joy Hutchinson, Keith Hembree, Zakeya Good, and Hannah Maust.
Joy, I am beyond grateful for having you in my cohort and by my side during this journey. My favorite conference buddy, your vivacious personality helped me leave my comfort zone and experience things I would never have. I cannot thank you enough.

Keith, thank you for the coffee breaks this summer; they were much needed. Sorry you were the only guy in the cohort, but you filled the role well.

Hannah, thank you for the coffee/work on the dissertation/wedding planning visits. You are the self-care guru of the cohort, and I always felt better after talking to you.

Zakeya, your energy permeates the room and leaves a glow behind. I appreciate the passion you have for the work you do. You also thought I was funny, which is always a plus.

To my Dean of Students and UofM family, being a Tiger will always be an honor because I can share that with all of you. To the best graduate assistantship experience I could have imagined. I cannot thank you enough for the opportunity.

To Dr. Justin Lawhead, aka the best Dean of Students, thank you for allowing me to learn from you and gain experience working in higher education. I appreciated how I never had to worry about my studies not being prioritized. I am grateful for being seen as more “than just a GA.”

Melissa Morgan, my work mom/bestie. Thank you for letting me always vent to you. I always felt better knowing I could come to talk to you. I enjoyed all our conversations and the stories we shared, mostly about dogs.

To Ann Buchanan and Elbonè Malone, thank you for the energy and laughter you brought to the office. You both inspire me with your grace and passion for the field.
And to the rest of my UofM family, Darren Wibberding, Amber Bush, and the rest of the BIT team. I have learned so much from each one of you. Your care and dedication to the students make me proud to be a Tiger!

To my fiancé, Taylor Davey. Thank you for your patience and love, and support over these years. You might be the only other person as excited as I am to cross the finish line. Through all the tears and “quiet” weekends, thank you for allowing me to be me. I cannot wait to have you through life’s challenges.

To my mom, Laura McKenzie, thank you for your emotional support. I do not know what I would do without the hours of phone calls venting to you about my frustrations. Your willingness to listen and remind me that I will get through this and that it is okay to take breaks is always what I need. I will forever be your energizer bunny.

To my dad, Eric McKenzie, you believed in me before I believed in myself. Your trust in me helped me through my insecurities. Knowing you were always there helped calm my nerves with the reinsurance that I have everything I need and can always ask for help. You and Mom are my biggest cheerleaders. I am blessed every day to have you both as my parents.

To Cynthia Simmons, my Cici, you are my favorite person. Our Friday calls always put me at ease. Thank you for always reminding me that I have what it takes to keep going.

To my friends, Madeleine Holdford, Rachael Arnwine, Grace Pepper, Elisabeth Snell, and Kendra Farrell. I love you all; thank you for loving me.

Maddie, thank you for being my OG best friend. Thank you for being my member checker. Your willingness to understand my topic on a deeper level to help me develop my themes was beyond helpful. I am forever grateful for your analytical brain and ability to see multiple points of view that ensured the voices of my participants were being represented.
Rachael, you know I could not have survived these years without you. I could always talk to you because you understood what it is like to be in this stage in life, working non-stop but loving it because you are following your passion. Thank you for listening to me and being my soul sister.

Lastly, and most certainly not least, my pups, Jovi and Meeko. Jov, thank you for being the lovable, goofy girl you are. Meek, you are my soul pet. You have been by my side through it all. I couldn’t have done it without you, bud.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

An extensive history delineates the need for multicultural and social justice competence in counselor education programs (e.g., Buckley & Foldy, 2010; Killian & Floren, 2020; Ratts, 2009; Sue et al., 1992). Accordingly, programs have aimed to enhance students’ multicultural competence through the development and infusion of ethical codes, program standards, and competencies in counseling education curricula (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2015; Ratts et al., 2015). However, it is argued that these efforts are designed to increase White students’ self-awareness with less attention given to the multicultural inequities of marginalized students (Haskins & Singh, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Counseling is a new profession compared to other fields or disciplines, such as nursing or social work. Though counseling is relatively young, the field is growing exponentially. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021), the employment of counselors is expected to increase by 23 percent from 2020 to 2030. The counseling profession evolved out of psychology. Psychology and counseling overlap because both disciplines learn theories developed by predominately White, upper-class men (Grzanka, 2019), which does not always translate well to working with diverse populations. That is only part of the problem; another concern is how the educational system is set up. Higher education and graduate programs inherently benefit privileged individuals (Kromydas, 2017). The statistics represent that 52.9% of the US undergraduate population is White. The statistic of graduate students is even greater at
62% in 2019 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Race and ethnicity are only one identity that affords privilege or marginalization. Multiple identities should be considered when reflecting on privilege.

Addressing privilege and marginalization on a large scale is needed; however, change can begin at the university level and, more specifically, the program level. This is where counseling comes into the picture. As counselors, advocating for clients and social justice is a part of our professional identity (Ratts et al., 2016). Counselor educators are poised to confront injustices within the curriculum.

This study highlights the need to prepare future counselor educators to address injustice, privilege, and oppression. Not only in multicultural counseling courses but all courses, students need to be comfortable having conversations about privilege and marginalization if they intend to be counselors in the modern day (Buckley & Foldy, 2010; Chan et al., 2018; Grzanka et al., 2019; Haskins & Singh, 2015; Hays et al., 2008; Killian & Floren, 2020; Manis, 2012; Reynolds, 2011). One cannot expect to be culturally competent if unable to self-reflect on the privileges and marginalization they have experienced that have shaped who they are today (Chan et al., 2018; Grzanka et al., 2019; Hays et al., 2008; Langrehr & Blackmon, 2016; Ratts et al., 2016; Ratts, 2009). As social justice advocates, our duty as counselors is to confront the injustices that impact those we serve (Ratts et al., 2016; Ratts, 2009; Reynolds, 2011; Sue et al., 1992). This begins with training and education. As with counselor educators, there needs to be more intentionality with how one perceives this obligation to their students, so having a clear professional identity is crucial (Dollarhide, 2013; Mellin et al., 2011; Thacker et al., 2021). Moreover, one cannot separate one’s social identity from one’s professional identity, subsequently impacting the learning of future counselors (Chan et al., 2018; Grzanka et al., 2017; Haskins et al., 2016).
Purpose of the Study

The researcher explored privilege awareness of counselor educators in training from both privileged and marginalized backgrounds. Privilege is a concept that is well known but not always fully addressed in educational settings. This problem not only impacts grade school (Harrison et al., 2021) but also secondary and graduate education (Bennett et al., 2019), and if it is addressed, the focus is mostly on privilege due to race with less emphasis on other privileged identities. Privilege as a topic often is overlooked in diversity initiatives and trainings, which typically focus on broad issues such as racism, oppression, and inclusion (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Reynolds, 2011; Thacker et al., 2021). This oversight is a driving force for this study. While diversity training is practical in informing students about the adverse effects of racism, it keeps the conversation about one’s privilege at a distance (Hays et al., 2008; Langrehr & Blackmon, 2016). Traditional diversity and inclusion efforts fall short without discussion and reflection on privilege and marginalization (Bennett et al., 2019; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

The ACA Code of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies highlights the need for counselors to be aware of issues related to privilege and oppression (ACA, 2014; Ratts et al., 2015). In addition, counselors should be cognizant of how these issues impact the clients’ worldviews and advocate for diminishing disparities due to privilege. It is also part of a counselor’s identity to constantly grow as a lifelong learner (Granello & Young, 2019). Miller et al. (2019) assert that conversations in counseling education programs tend to look outward at societal structures rather than looking within at how one’s structures create disparities. They also emphasize the lack of focus on inequalities based on socioeconomic status (SES), focusing more on other social identities such as race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, and religion. In addition to the lack of conversation on privilege based on SES, there is also
a lack of research on the topic (Miller et al., 2019). That is why the current study addresses both race and ethnicity and SES.

The current study aimed to give voice to the experiences of counselor educators in training. Through a phenomenological qualitative analysis, this study explores counselor educators’ in-training views and awareness of the intersectionality of their privileged and/or marginalized status(es) and how this awareness can impact professional identity development. Critical Race Theory (CRT) and an intersectionality framework guided this study by highlighting the need for this inquiry and informing methodological practices. The employment of both theories helps expand the tenets of CRT to delve deeper into not only addressing racism and White hegemony ingrained in the education system but also how the intersectionality of social identities impacts professional identity development among counselor educators in training.

Considered the fourth (Sue & Sue, 2016) and fifth force (Ratts, 2009) in counseling, social justice was a driver of this study.

**Significance of the Study**

Storlie et al. (2018), indicate that only 4% of research articles between 2004-2016 addressed topics related to social justice in counseling. Traditional counseling research functions to allow dominant worldviews with typically homogeneous samples, yield inequitable participation in research, which distances implications for clients of color (Snow et al., 2016). To change this, Hays (2004) asserts that counselors should decolonize research practices by focusing on participant voice that explores and presents the collective knowledge of a community.

This study helps address the gap in the literature through its focus on counselor educators in training as opposed to counselor educators and counseling master’s students. The researcher is
interested in how the training of a doctoral program prepares students to reflect on social identity, their privileged and marginalized identities, and how this impacts their professional identity, which includes how they teach and supervise future counselors. This study looks beyond single identity analysis (e.g., race, gender identity) to include multiple aspects of a person. People are not solely impacted by one identity, but all identities. As they say, “a whole is greater than the sum of the parts.” Further, there is a lack of research that focuses on the intersectionality of identities; rather, most research in counseling education and multiculturalism focuses on one identity (Chan et al., 2018), such as racial identity (Hays et al., 2008; Henfield et al., 2013). When only one aspect of a person is considered, it ignores the person as a whole and all one brings into the world in which we all live.

Additionally, with increased conversations about one’s experiences with privilege and marginalization, people will hopefully be more comfortable having and initiating these conversations in the future. Since the majority, 71.38% of faculty and 55.33% of doctoral students (CACREP, 2017) in counseling education, identify as White, it is essential to hold space for these conversations. White fragility is a term coined by Robin DiAngelo, which refers to the defensiveness experienced when White people are challenged on their ideas about race (DiAngelo & Tatusian, 2016). DiAngelo and Tatusian (2016) indicate that this defensiveness detracts from the issue and places the focus back on the White person. Though this study is about the intersectionality of identities, it is important to acknowledge that most conversations about privilege and marginalization center on race, as highlighted in the literature review.

This study focused on professional identity development due to the researchers’ belief that one cannot separate who they are personally from who they are professionally. This belief includes the notion that one’s experience with privilege and marginalization impacts their
worldview, which can translate to teaching, research, and scholarship practices. Current research on professional identity development in counseling education does not focus on the impact of privilege and marginalization or on teaching students (Calley & Hawley, 2008; Dollarhide et al., 2013; Mellin et al., 2011).

The plan for this study was not to highlight deficits in the current training of counselor educators but to fulfill the commitment to the profession as lifelong learners who continue to evolve and grow. A focus on professional identity development could strengthen the current confusion in the profession due to the increase in subspecialties within the field. By focusing on professional identity, through research, we can identify the unifying factors that form a counselor’s identity, which can advance the profession, especially in the legislative climate (Calley & Hawley, 2008).

Definition of Terms

Intersectionality: “an analysis on the linkages among mutually constitutive identities as opposed to exclusively examining identities as silos” (Chan et al., 2018, p. 66).

Privilege: “a right or benefit that is given to some people and not to others” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Marginalization: “treatment of a person, group, or concept as insignificant or peripheral” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Social Identities: a person’s sense of whom they are based on group membership (Tajfel et al., 1979).

Gender Identity: “One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.).
**Socioeconomic Status:** Defined and based solely on household income.

**Sexual Orientation:** “An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.).

**Professional Identity:** consists of factors related to academic degrees, service involvement, courses taught, scholarship or research involvement, and self-identification (Calley & Hawley, 2008).

**Pedagogy:** the way counselor educators deliver curricula, provide socialization of students, and how to prepare students to be professionals (Baltrinic & Morris, 2020).

**Theoretical Framework**

The researcher employed an intersectionality framework while considering a CRT lens to conceptualize the research problem, develop the research questions, and analyze the results. It is believed that one identity cannot exist without the other (Grzanka et al., 2017; Haskins et al., 2015); therefore, it is essential that the researcher considered multiple aspects of the participants’ social identities and how they corresponded with each other. This is especially important when considering privilege and marginalization since it is possible to have both privileged and marginalized identities (Chan et al., 2018). Specifically in this study, the focus is placed on race and ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES). These two identities were chosen because it aligns with CRT and the analysis of race and bias in institutions, such as academia. SES is also investigated as it is a significant component in access to education. It is also one of the few identities that can change after you are born.

One of the paradigmatic assumptions of phenomenological studies is constructivist in nature (Hays & Wood, 2011). Therefore, a social constructionist framework is used in combination with CRT and intersectionality. These theories can work in conjunction with each
other due to the assertion that the human experience is subjective and unpredictable (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). One of the suppositions of constructivism is that multiple realities exist, and data is contextually relevant (Hays & Wood, 2011). This provided depth and rationale for gathering participants' experiences.

**Research Questions**

1. What are counselor educators in training’s awareness of their privileged and marginalized identities?

2. How does the intersectionality of counselor educators’ race and ethnicity and socioeconomic status impact their professional identity development?

**Limitations**

Given that this is a phenomenological qualitative approach, this limits the generalizability of the results as the sample of this study cannot represent counselor educators in-training. Due to the small sample size, the results speak more to the context of the experiences of counselor educators in training rather than quantifying the findings on a larger scale. Though not generalizable, this qualitative approach allows for transferability as the experience of the participants can be applied to contexts outside of the study (Finfgeld-Connett, 2010). This study does not intend to generalize; instead, it seeks to gather the complexity of opinions and experiences, which cannot be evaluated in numerical terms.

Another limitation was the researcher’s personal bias and opinions. As counselors, researchers, educators, and humans in general, it is impossible not to have bias. In phenomenological research, the researcher is already related to the phenomenon being studied (Vagle, 2009). Therefore, the researcher can either be intentional with this relationship or attempt to separate themselves from the research. The researcher is, first and foremost, a counselor, in
which it is their ethical duty to be aware of one’s own biases to ensure they do not impede on clients and the counseling process. Further, the researcher is also a member of the population being studied (i.e., a current student enrolled in a counseling education and supervision doctoral program).

In the pursuit of validity and the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher engaged in bridling through an intentional relationship with the research. Meaning is unavoidable. The researcher cannot simply be devoid of making meaning from the interviews and experiences of the participants (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2019). Meaning is something that we have and something that continues to evolve. It is the responsibility of the researcher to remain open to new information in order not to make assumptions and take meaning for granted. Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2019) assert that the act of bridling is the conscious decision to slow down to reflect on the process of meaning-making and understanding to ensure one is not understanding too quickly, with careless mistakes. Questions the researcher continued to ask are, “What is it that I understand?” and “Why do I understand in this way?” The aim was to increase self-awareness on the part of the researcher and to be more attentive to the phenomena under investigation. Thus, the goal of bridling was to remain open to new information to open one’s understanding to additional possibilities (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2019).

**Delimitations**

To help eliminate any extraneous variables, the researcher included eligibility criteria for participants. For instance, participants needed to be currently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited doctoral program in the United States (U.S.); they were required to take either the teaching course or have experience as a teaching assistant (TA) or instructor of record for a course in
counseling education. This increased the likelihood that participants had a similar education and had exposure to teaching pedagogy, which is a part of one’s professional identity.

**Organization of the Study**

This research study is presented in five chapters. The first chapter provides the study’s background, relevance, and significance. It also provides an overview of the key terms, theoretical framework, research questions, limitations, and assumptions. Chapter two provides an overview of the relevant and current research on the topic, including counseling education, teaching pedagogy, professional identity development, and phenomenology. Chapter three describes the methodology that will be utilized. It includes a section on participants, eligibility requirements, recruitment, methods, and procedures (e.g., interview process), and data collection and analysis.

Chapters four and five were completed after deducing that saturation was met and interviews were concluded. Chapter four contains the results, including demographic information, the themes and codes derived from the interviews, and how the research questions were addressed through the data. Chapter five summarizes the entire study and consists of a discussion of the findings, any limitations of the study, assumptions, and implications for future research and practice, and conclusions.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior research about multiculturalism frequently places culture in a monocultural lens by focusing on a single group or social identity (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability status, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation) (Chan et al., 2018). This study highlights the importance of increased awareness among counselor educators regarding the intersectionality of social identities and the privilege and marginalization of these intersecting identities. Additionally, this study explores how one’s race and socioeconomic status identities affect professional identity development and how this translates into the creation and implementation of teaching pedagogy. We cannot ignore that our work, whether through research, teaching, supervising, or counseling, reflects who we are (Calley & Hawley, 2008; Corey et al., 2019; Granello & Young, 2019).

Counseling as a Profession

Counseling is a relatively new profession compared to other helping professions, such as nursing and psychology. It is not a profession that simply emerged; instead, it followed a sequence of specialized practices that were not identified as a profession until years later (Marini & Stebnicki, 2016). The profession’s origins are commonly attributed to Frank Parsons, known as the father of vocational guidance, who started the vocational bureau in 1909 (Jones, 1994). This led to career counseling in schools.

It was not until the middle of the century that counseling gained prominence (Marini & Stebnicki, 2016). In 1942, Carl Rogers published Counseling and Psychotherapy, transforming the counseling profession (Granello & Young, 2019). Rogers talks about how the field of counseling emerged in the 1920s due to increased interest in an individual’s right to satisfying adjustment, a shift from prior analytical observations of adjustment (Rogers, 1942). In
his book, he initially defined counseling as professionals who spend time interviewing people to promote change in one’s attitudes and behaviors. Then, he outlined how counseling was initially used in child-guidance clinics, student counseling, mental hygiene for adults, social work, industrial personnel work, and war efforts (Roger, 1942). Roger’s text is fundamental to the counseling field as it depicts the core conditions of counselors of unconditional positive regard, congruence, and empathy.

The emergence of a professional counseling organization emerged approximately a decade after Roger’s published his book. The American Counseling Association (ACA) has been in existence since 1952 and was initially called American Personnel and Guidance Association, then American Association for Counseling and Development (AACD) in 1983, before becoming the ACA in 1992 (Marini & Stebnicki, 2016).

**Multiculturalism in Counseling Education**

Diversity is a crucial component of counseling education, as it is required to be interwoven throughout the curriculum. American Counseling Association (ACA) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) have ethical codes and standards highlighting the need for multicultural competencies (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016). However, privilege nor marginalization is addressed in the ACA Code of Ethics; oppression is mentioned once in the definition of social justice. Privilege is only mentioned only three times in CACREP competencies, while oppression is mentioned twice, and marginalization is not mentioned once. Further, they do not provide much guidance on incorporating these competencies in the classroom. The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies were created and revised in 2015, showing the increased importance of incorporating multicultural standards in counseling (Ratts et al., 2015). Within these
standards, privilege is addressed several times, mainly regarding counselors' need to be aware of, knowledgeable, and skilled in understanding privilege and its effects on clients.

Due to the increase in awareness of the importance of including multiculturalism in counseling education, several studies have emerged focusing on these issues. One study explored the experiences of faculty who teach multicultural counseling courses. Reynolds (2011) surveyed faculty regarding their beliefs of group dynamics, teaching philosophy, and student reactions. The survey consisted of Likert statements about multicultural teaching and open-ended questions about pedagogical strategies, student reactions, group dynamics, and treatment by students. The results of this study found that the majority of faculty believed that students responded positively, with few exceptions. The professors’ culture impacted the way they taught and designed the course. Several participants approached the course on a personal level and utilized self-disclosure in teaching strategies. There was less agreement on course content. Some professors focused on specific populations, while others focused on general concepts such as marginalization and racism or a skills-based approach (Reynolds, 2011). Regarding the aspects of the multicultural competence model that include awareness, knowledge, and skills, participants attended less to skills, reflecting the findings of past research (Reynolds, 2011).

Additionally, qualitative responses highlighted the differences in teaching approaches. This included variations in teaching practices, pedagogy, and course design. When asked about group dynamics, participants viewed students as engaged and expressive in emotion and self-disclosure. However, participants emphasized the need to create and maintain a safe environment that fosters self-expression and disclosure (Reynolds, 2011). Recommendations generated based on the study results include the need for faculty to have competencies to facilitate uncomfortable discussions, address resistance, and attend to students’ diverse and unique expectations. Finally,
Reynolds (2011) suggests that faculty who teach multicultural counseling should prepare to manage the environmental and political realities present. For example, students' negative experiences, which includes negligence to acknowledge important and relevant current events, could lead to undesirable feedback or course evaluations.

Some limitations of this study were the generalizability and the fact that the research collected responses via survey; there was no opportunity to gather the in-depth lived experiences obtained through interviews. In the current study, the researcher addressed these concerns with counselor educators in-training to begin this conversation before students are educators themselves. On a larger scale, when doctoral students have these conversations, it prepares them to handle and facilitate these conversations in their future classrooms.

**Professional Identity Development**

Professional identity is one factor that plays a vital role in how counselor educators teach, conduct research, and engage in service. This identity differs based on your role in the counseling profession. A counselor educator differs from a practicing counselor who differs from a counselor who supervises pre-licensed counselors. It is vital to examine how counselor educators’ professional identity develops as it impacts the training of future counselors. Along with this, one must consider the role one’s social identities play in professional identity development, as you cannot separate the person from the profession.

Dollarhide et al. (2013) conducted a qualitative study using grounded theory to explore the identity development of doctoral students and the transformational tasks involved in integrating multiple identities. They assert that future counselor educators must have a secure professional identity to educate master’s-level students adequately. Researchers point to the need to understand the transition from a counseling professional to a doctoral student, to a university
professional (Dollarhide et al., 2013). To understand this development, four separate studies were created with four distinct populations (i.e., professional counselors in the community, counselors in training, counselor educators in training, counselor educators).

Researchers hypothesized that understanding the transitions and experiences between roles could result in the development of a theory that can be confirmed or disconfirmed in further research (Dollarhide et al., 2013). For this study, 23 participants were interviewed at specific points in their doctoral degrees. From these interviews, researchers developed three themes or transformational tasks (i.e., integrations of multiple identities, evolving legitimacy, acceptance of responsibility).

The first task integration of multiple identities from counselor to student to counselor educator. First-year students identified most strongly with their counseling identity. During the mid-point of their degree, they mainly identified as a doctoral student. By the end of their program, they were able to transition from doctoral student to counselor educator. The next task, evolving legitimacy, included both internal and external validation. Participants in their first year of the program succeeded as practitioners yet struggled as doctoral students. External validation, which served as a sense of legitimacy, came from professors for participants in the first year of their program. Participants in years two and three of their program identified their final test as their dissertation. Students at this stage in their program experienced internal and external validation with a lack of personal confidence and feedback from professors. Students in the dissertation phase experienced confidence from performance and more awareness of peers and colleagues as a source of legitimacy.

The final task, acceptance of responsibility, included the shift to accepting responsibility to create new knowledge and teach this new information. Further, participants' definitions of
counselor education became more personalized the further they were in the program. Overall, findings suggest that professional identity development evolves as students’ progress through the program. Students moved from the need for external validation to internal validation (Dollarhide et al., 2013). It was recommended that programs adopt a cohort model since most participants highlight the importance of peer support.

One limitation of this study was the assumption that all doctoral students in counseling education are professional counselors. Some students do not obtain licensure right after their master’s program; therefore, they might not identify as practitioners. One suggestion the researchers made regarding improving students’ self-confidence was recognizing their success as practitioners. This would not be possible for students who did not and will not practice as professional counselors. However, the researchers make several suggestions that could apply to students from all backgrounds (e.g., peer support group, emphasizing current program success). The present study explores professional identity development focusing on the social identities that make participants who they are. Personal experiences are investigated and emphasize how their intersecting identities inform their professional identity.

Mellin et al. (2011) explored the identity development of practicing counselors across specializations (i.e., school, mental health, community). The researchers examined how professional counselors define the profession and distinguish themselves from other helping professions, such as psychology and social work. Regarding how participants define counselors, three themes emerged: counseling merged: counseling services provided, counselors education and training, and a focus on wellness and development (Mellin et al., 2011). Additionally, 97% of participants described counseling in generic terms instead of by specialization. Addressing their second research question about how counselors distinguish themselves from other helping
professions, researchers found five themes: case management, personal growth, testing and assessment, global vs. individual, and no difference. Participants described how social workers are more involved in case management. Participants believed that counselors, more than social workers and psychologists, focus more on this area for personal growth and wellness. Participants viewed psychologists’ role as more focused on assessment than counselors. Then, a smaller percentage (10%) of participants viewed counselors as more individual-focused than social workers, and (9%) of participants viewed the three professions as more similar than different (Mellin et al., 2011).

One limitation of this study is the eligibility criteria. They decided only to collect data from counselors who passed the National Counselor Examination (NCE) within the past ten years. This limits the differences that could emerge from more experienced counselors or counselors who took different licensing exams, which predate the NCE. Further, the researchers only recruited individuals who obtained the NCC credential, so it is possible that the findings do not reflect the broader population of counselors. This study is similar to the current study in its exploration of how professional identity is viewed; however, the present study focuses on counselor educators in training. This focus encompasses more than one’s counselor identity but also their identity as a professor, researcher, leader, and/or supervisor.

Another qualitative study conducted by Kuo et al. (2021) focused on the professional identity development among international doctoral students in counselor education. Specifically, researchers explored how counselor education doctoral students’ cultural identities and experiences impact their professional identities. Through interviews with 13 participants, they developed four categories, “multicultural background and experiences, navigating general differences in culture within society/educational environments, unique considerations, and
cultural values and unique challenges influenced wanting to engage in more advocacy/professional identity” (Kuo et al., 2021, p. 121). This study increases awareness of the professional identities of international students and the challenges they endure. Some obstacles mentioned include language barriers, institutional challenges (e.g., problems with visas), and degree reciprocity, which caused participants to question their counseling efficacy and complicated their professional development.

Further, many participants shared how their multicultural background, including their values and religious beliefs, helped form their professional identities (Kuo et al., 2021). One new finding was that students reported that because of the challenges they endured while studying in the U.S., they became more interested in advocacy work, which they integrated into their professional identity. Like the current study, they reflected on the interaction between multiple identities (i.e., race, ethnicity, national identity, SES, gender, religion). It was discussed how the awareness of these identities is crucial for effective multicultural counseling (Kuo et al., 2021), which is an overarching goal of the present study.

**Pedagogy in Counseling Education**

There are several studies regarding pedagogy and training in multicultural competence. Some research utilizes theories as a framework (e.g., Intersectionality, Critical Race Theory); several assess different training approaches (e.g., didactic, experiential, community services learning), while others point to incorporating the Multicultural Competencies as a lens to create and evaluate competent training. Still, there is no one method proven most effective in addressing multicultural competence, which is why more research is needed.

Learning about one's privilege is crucial for counselors, as it will undoubtedly affect their work with clients in some capacity (Ratts et al., 2015). In a counseling relationship, counselors
inherently have power in the relationship. This imbalance of power can be impacted by the counselor’s privileged and marginalized identities. This power imbalance can hinder the therapeutic process, especially when a counselor from the dominant cultural group devalues the client’s beliefs and values (Boyd, 1996). Understanding these power imbalances is imperative in working with clients and should be addressed in counseling education.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a practical framework to "deconstruct the endemic nature of White supremacy in education while employing a socially just approach in efforts to curb the spread of it" (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 3). This is not to say that there is a problem in counseling education, but more so to bring to light the importance of including privilege in topics of conversation. Though CRT places race at the center of its analysis (Parker, 1998), CRT scholars aim to address the intersectionality of race and other social identities in their analyses (DeCuir, & Dixson, 2004). Due to the complexity of social identities (e.g., class, sexuality, gender), this study explores not only race as a privileged or marginalized identity but also considers interrelated identities, with a focus on the intersectionality of race and SES.

Critical Race Theory can be used as a framework to create equitable training in counseling education (Haskins & Singh, 2015). Further, CRT’s tenets can assist counselor educators in addressing equity and social justice issues in the curricula and within relationships between faculty and students, and in practice between counselor and client. Haskins and Singh (2015) outline how CRT can enhance pedagogical practices and revise multicultural competencies by applying the tenets of CRT counseling education. They describe four ways in which counselor educators can integrate CRT into their pedagogy by:

(a) investigating the influence of intersectionality and racism on self and curriculum, (b) examining the role and impact of color blindness in pedagogy, (c) identifying how
embedded Whiteness in the curriculum benefits select populations, and (d) integrating nontraditional perspectives to ensure cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. (p. 292)

The researchers illustrate how each strategy mentioned above can be addressed through the three dimensions of multicultural competence (i.e., beliefs and attitudes, knowledge, and skills). This guideline encourages counselor educators to expand the use of multicultural competencies to address student development as well as competency among counseling faculty (Haskins & Singh, 2015).

It is essential to note that the researcher intended to use this framework in 2019. This well-established theory has been around since the 1970s. However, it was not until recently that CRT became a source of debate in American legislature and popular culture (Price, 2021; Sawchuk, 2021). Before these past couple of years, likely, most Americans have never heard of CRT (Fortin, 2021). Charles Price, an associate professor at Temple University, points out that CRT stems from critical theory, which asserts that the only way to understand modern society is to recognize the power relationships between groups (2021). As stated earlier, this theory originated as a law theory to challenge the assumption that the legal system is fair and impartial. From that came the recognition that it is not just power that is the problem, but also race and how they cannot be separated. Price (2021) notes that CRT is not divisive but becomes so when used for political means. Due to CRT being oriented toward activism and growing from the recognition that social movements can invoke change, this increases apprehension for those against change.

Further, CRT is not a topic typically taught in grade school and is more often introduced to students in graduate school. When examining legislation that specifically mentions CRT, bans brought forth seem to be less about CRT itself and rather about banning teaching concepts such
as conscious or unconscious bias, systemic racism, and privilege, and additional topics that highlight the importance of multiculturalism and diversity (Harrison et al., 2021). This ban reaffirms what CRT is all about, which is a lens that illustrates how educational systems (e.g., policies, beliefs, practices) sustain educational racism, which is precisely what is happening when institutions prevent these conversations from taking place.

In conjunction with CRT, intersectionality can be utilized as the foundation for counselor education pedagogy and practice. Chan et al. (2018) addressed the challenges of incorporating multiculturalism in counselor education. Due to the complexity of privilege and marginalization, intersectionality aids in encompassing multiple viewpoints when creating multicultural frameworks. The researchers argue that this lens can guide how to challenge the institutional marginalized of students.

Further, they make a case for incorporating an intersectionality framework when considering pedagogical approaches in counseling education. First, they highlight the need for self-reflection among counselor educators about how their privileges have restricted their perspectives within the classroom (Chan et al., 2018). To incorporate an intersectionality framework, educators should reflect and help their students do the same on the intersection of their identities. According to Chan et al. (2018), researchers underscore the monocultural formats frequently utilized, "which can reinforce hegemony through the gaze of a dominant group" (p. 67). This focus is problematic because it can lead to prescriptive practices reducing the applicability for understanding marginalized students and clients. Finally, Chan et al. (2018) outline specific questions as a prompt to open discussions regarding student and faculty experiences and issues concurrent with counseling education, such as social, political, and cultural concerns.
Another study examined differences in pedagogical approaches in multicultural counseling courses (i.e., didactic, experimental, community service learning) on students' growth in multicultural skills and relationship and social justice advocacy constructs (Killian & Floren, 2020). In this study, students were assigned to one of the three approaches, and growth was assessed over the three pedagogies of multicultural knowledge and awareness constructs. Results indicated an increase in multicultural knowledge in groups in the community service-learning and experiential courses, as well as growth in the construction of multicultural relationships. Researchers define experiential pedagogy as active learning that encourages students to take the initiative in their education by engaging in critical self-reflection on their worldview, bias, and beliefs. In comparison, community service learning combines experiential and didactic techniques by providing students the opportunity for direct experience working with diverse populations and communities (Killian & Floren, 2020). Independent of pedagogy, researchers observed an increase across all six constructs aligned with the Multicultural and Social Justice Competencies developed by Ratts et al. (2015). This finding highlights the importance of multicultural training in counseling education. The researchers encourage the use of specific pedagogy among counselor educators and its impact on students' multicultural competence. The current study expands on this idea by exploring the use and development of pedagogy among counselor educators in training to understand the potential impact on students.

Another study proposes a pedagogical model which focuses on race, racism, and racial identity development (Buckley & Foldy, 2010). Researchers emphasized the need for psychological and identity safety for optimal learning to increase multicultural competency among counselors in training. This study recommends a model that centers on the relationship between the classroom, multicultural counseling competency, and psychological safety.
Researchers define psychological safety as the belief that class is a safe space to take interpersonal risks and argue that this is necessary for learning and discussing sensitive topics about race (Buckley & Foldy, 2010).

Buckley and Foldy (2010) discuss factors affecting psychological safety. Contextual factors that impact safety include "societal-level, program, and classroom-level dynamics" (p. 698). Societal factors consist of the unequal distribution of power among different ethnic groups. Classroom factors involve the unknown beliefs of peers about how race affects interpersonal context, which may influence students' judgment of the risks and benefits of sharing differing viewpoints. Researchers contend that a social identity threat occurs when activated by specific settings, which arouse cues that trigger the sense of risk to one's identity.

Further, this threat is believed to impact students' trust, comfort, and performance (Buckley & Foldy, 2010). To combat this anxiety, researchers recommend including racial identity development in teachings. Increased awareness of one's own racial identity development may reduce the perceived threat to social identity when discussing race-related topics (Buckley & Foldy, 2010). This, in turn, will increase the student's psychological safety.

Looking at the different contexts, the organizational or institutional context is considered the school program students are enrolled in. Safety is the context that can be increased by creating a philosophy and clear mission that emphasizes the importance of diversity and multiculturalism. However, researchers advise programs to go beyond stating the value of multicultural competence in implementing practices that reflect the mission of the program training (Buckley & Foldy, 2010).

Buckley and Foldy (2010) outline recommendations for increasing identity safety by acknowledging and valuing differences in social identity and avoiding the use of colorblindness

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strategies; an emphasis on multicultural-centered teaching approaches is encouraged to increase competency. Lastly, researchers advocate for students' learning goals to focus on the process of learning as opposed to fixed performance goals to signify that competence is attainable for all students, regardless of background.

**Intersectionality in Counseling Research**

Grzanka et al. (2017) examines the use of intersectionality research in Counseling Psychology by analyzing themes from four manuscripts. The overwhelming theme was that researchers commonly use intersectionality to discuss multiple identities and not as a critical framework to challenge the systems perpetuating privilege and marginalization. Further, they encourage utilizing newer research approaches over traditional ones to expand awareness about how systems of marginalization are experienced (Grzanka et al., 2017). This idea aligns closely with the social justice aspect of this study, which aims not only to point out discrepancies in education but also to address potential solutions to improve the field of counseling education.

Another study examined the professional identity development for marginalized counselor educators using narrative theory and an intersectional lens to understand the holistic experience of this process as defined in the transformational task model (Thacker et al., 2021). This model was also used in a previously mentioned study (i.e., Dollarhide et al., 2013) and described the tasks to be completed over time to transform identity. The purpose of their study is to understand counselor educators' experiences as they negotiated their marginalized identities through professional identity development. Researchers recruited eight participants using criterion-based selection. From their open-ended interviews and after two cycles of initial coding, the themes were sent back to their participants for feedback. Then, the themes were reviewed by the three authors. From this, five themes emerged from the data: “the intersectional
self, context, intersectional navigation, impacts on the self, and the confluence” (Thacker et al., 2021, p.4). The first theme, the intersectional self, includes participants' components of self. This theme had two subthemes: authenticity and development. Authenticity outlines a representation and expression of self in its genuine form, including personal identifiers, professional roles, and expressive traits. Further, participants described their authentic selves through the intersection of their privileged and marginalized identities and expressed and desired to express their authentic selves in professional settings (Thacker et al., 2021). The next subtheme was development, which highlighted the evolving growth of participants as they strive for authenticity.

The second theme was context, with climate as a subtheme (Thacker et al., 2021). Context referred to the overarching basis for how participants navigated identity negotiation. Climate involves the perceptions of how contexts such as physical environments and the individuals within them relate to form norms and expectations. Across these environments, power impacts participants’ impression of support or marginalization. Participants agreed that they experience more power as faculty than doctoral students; however, not all participants felt supported in their environments (Thacker et al., 2021). Overall, some participants experienced barriers or safety in expressing themselves authentically.

The third theme, intersectional navigation, involves a multifaceted identity negotiation process and demonstrations of inclusion to withstand marginalization. From this theme, three subthemes emerged negotiation, intersectionality in motion, and relational influence (Thacker et al., 2021). Negotiation included the process of questions negative experiences and deconstructing and negotiating their identities. Participants would question which one of their identities was the source of the problem. Power was also a factor in this theme, as participants could express themselves more authentically, typically due to their privileged identities. On the other side,
participants who experienced less power were more active in the process of identity negotiation. The second subtheme, intersectionality in motion, included cultivating inclusivity across contexts. For this process to be successful, participants had to be aware of identities that need nurturance to integrate them into their authentic selves (Thacker et al., 2021). The third subtheme, relational influence, highlighted the impact of positive modeling and mentorship on identity development.

The fourth theme, impacts on self, focuses on the interpersonal factors and pressure and responsibility. Interpersonal factors validate and invalidate experiences by mentors, colleagues, and supervisors, while pressure and responsibility refer to the interpersonal factors that stem from internalized beliefs. They found that having supportive individuals in their lives was unparalleled as it affirmed their perception of self (Thacker et al., 2021). Some external pressures resulted from tokenism, and it felt as if some people thought of them as one of the only marginalized people in their environment. Regardless of experience, participants continually negotiated their authentic selves.

Overall, a theme found based on all participants’ experiences was a confluence, which refers to the negotiating of identity (Thacker et al., 2021). This highlighted the need to continuously negotiate aspects of self—due to professional identity development being an endless journey. This study emphasizes the challenges of identity development among marginalized students and how lack of power due to marginalized contexts promotes identity negotiation (Thacker et al., 2021). The intersection between participants’ privileged and marginalized identities determined how and which identities they negotiated. Those with privileged identities felt increased safety to explore marginalized identities. Researchers only focused on race, sexual orientation, and gender identity, whereas the current study will include age, SES, religious
affiliation, disability status. This study emphasizes the need for further research on the intersectionality of identities, which is the present study’s focus.

**Gaps in Literature**

Past studies have assessed privilege awareness among graduate students (Langrehr & Blackmon, 2016) and counseling master’s students (Hays et al., 2008), differing approaches to teaching pedagogy (e.g., intersectionality framework, MSJCC constructs, increasing safety, CRT approach, social justice) (Buckley & Foldy, 2010; Chan et al., 2018; Haskins & Singh, 2015; Killian & Floren, 2019; Manis, 2012), the impact of training on master’s students (Langrehr & Blackmon, 2016), the exploration of professional identity of counselors (Mellin et al., 201) and counselor educators (Haskins et al., 2016; Reynolds, 2011). Dollarhide et al. (2013) focused on the professional identity development of doctoral students, but social identities were not included in their analysis. This study, to this date, is the first to explore the intersectionality of social identities among counselor educators in-training through an intersectionality and CRT framework.

**Previous Research Methods**

One method used to explore a similar topic is grounded theory. Dollarhide and colleagues’ (2013) study aimed to investigate the identity development of doctoral students during their doctoral program, and the results were used to develop a theory of professional identity transitions during their program. The current researcher did not intend to develop a theory from the results gathered. Instead, the focus is on the participants' lived experiences to give voice to how privilege and marginalization impact them during their journey to become counselor educators.
Regarding privilege and marginalization, Chan et al. (2018) use an intersectionality framework to address multiple cultural identities in counselor education. They point out the challenges of treating identities as separate constructs when it comes to identity development. Further, they highlight the importance of using an intersectionality framework to address the inequalities perpetuated by institutional marginalization. The current study put this notion into action by further spreading awareness of this concern to support the inclusion of discussions within counseling education. This is a crucial component of the study as identity development is impacted by the context in which they study (Chan et al., 2018).

The researcher conducted a phenomenological study, which has been utilized in counselor education research before. For instance, Henfield et al. (2013) conducted a phenomenological study to explore the experiences and challenges of African American students in counselor education programs. Additionally, they completed their analysis through a CRT lens, similar to the current study. The authors identified three themes to summarize the challenges of African American students. These themes include feelings of isolation, peer dissonance, and faculty misinterpretations (Henfield et al., 2013). The current study includes doctoral students from all backgrounds to explore the differences among participants.

Another study explored the intersectionality of African American mothers in counselor education through a phenomenological perspective. Haskins et al. (2016) interviewed eight participants to examine the experiences of African American counselor educators who are mothers. They used the intersectionality lens to explore the intersecting identities of counselor educators, African Americans, females, and mothers. From this exploration, they developed six themes to encompass their experience. Findings found that participants experienced inequities in support and marginalization from students and faculty, which resulted in feeling isolated and
tokenized (Haskins et al., 2016). Additionally, this study pointed out the differences in the support they received based on their race and their identity as a mother, receiving more support as a mother than an African American. This finding highlights the benefit of utilizing an intersectionality framework as part of the participants’ experience would have been missed without its consideration.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Purpose

For this study, a qualitative phenomenological design is used to explore the lived experiences of counselor educators in training about how their intersecting social identities (i.e., race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status) have impacted their development as counselor educators thus far. A phenomenological qualitative was employed as it allows for the emergence of thick and rich descriptions of their experiences regarding the effects of one’s privileged and, or marginalized status and how it impacts their professional identity development (Creswell, 2016). In addition to the phenomenological design, the researcher conceptualized participants’ stories from a Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality Framework. These theories allowed the focus to highlight the importance of counternarratives by recognizing how one can experience both privilege and marginalization because of one’s intersecting identities (Bowleg & Bauer, 2016; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005).

Researcher Positioning

Researchers reflect on their philosophical assumptions in qualitative research, which inform the research (Creswell, 2013). These relate to the initial ideas for the study and how the research is enacted. These assumptions are formed by the researcher’s history, life experiences, and worldviews that have led them to this moment. The researcher also considers the paradigms or beliefs that guide the research process. There are several theoretical perspectives or paradigms to consider (e.g., positivism, constructivism, critical theory, postcolonial) (Creswell, 2013).

As the researcher of this study, it is essential to take a stance on the topic of inquiry. I align most closely with social constructivism and critical theories. Social constructivism aims to understand the world in which individuals, in this case, counselor educators in training, live
(Creswell, 2013), which is the primary focus of this study. In addition, critical theory, specifically CRT, aims to empower people to transcend the constraints placed on them due to their marginalized identities. This speaks to the study’s goal of highlighting a need and promoting change. To be effective, the researcher must acknowledge their power and use this theory to engage in social action (Creswell, 2013).

The accompanying subjectivity statement addresses the researcher’s beliefs and worldviews. The intent is for the reader to be able to determine the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. The study aims to explore the lived experiences of counselor educators in training and their awareness of their privileged and marginalized identities, and how these experiences impact professional identity development. It is expected that this will bring attention to this topic and the importance of considering how one’s social identity cannot be separated from professional identity and encourage these conversations as it impacts how one educates students.

My interest in this topic arose in the summer of 2020 when there was an increased awareness of racism in the United States. Protests filled the streets of this country following the police shootings of Black men, the removal of statues of Confederate leaders, and an upcoming election (Viser & Woodson, 2021). With this came conversations about unequal privilege based on one’s race. Coming from a very conservative family, these conversations were rarely productive. There was much turmoil within my family relationships due to my viewpoints on privilege and acknowledging my privilege as a White person. This time caused me much distress because it created distance between myself and the family with whom I have always had a close relationship. Due to this tension and feeling so strongly about my need to address the problem, I sought to learn as much as possible to understand why these conversations can be so difficult.
Through this journey, I decided to focus on the multiple privileges one can experience, which are most prominent for people. I assumed that race is most prominent, so I completed a quantitative residency project to inquire which identity counselor educators in training believe to be most impactful. As I anticipated, more than half of the participants indicated their race as impactful on their professional identity, which was not true for any other identity. As mentioned earlier, self-awareness is the first step in multicultural competence (Ratts, 2015).

Therefore, I need to acknowledge the privileges I hold. I am a white, cisgender female who identifies as heterosexual and Christian. I do not have a disability status and come from a middle-class family. Currently, I would be considered lower middle class since I live independently, but I do not consider this a disadvantage because I can afford most of what I need. The only drawback I identify with is my age. Being 28 years old, I am the youngest in my cohort. Though several members of my cohort also chose to pursue their doctorate directly following obtaining their master’s degree, some in the program are established in their careers. With that, they bring additional experience and knowledge that I sometimes lack. That said, I also find some benefits of being younger and going straight through school. I am used to being a student, so the transition was not difficult for me; plus, I am working towards licensure while in the program, so my experience is growing. For me, I believe my most prominent privilege is being White.

Growing up, I never had to acknowledge I was White. My parents never sat me down and talked with me about what it means to be White. I never felt uncomfortable around police officers or people of authority, and I could easily fit in most places I went. Most people I encounter in public are friendly, so I have a positive outlook on humanity. It was not until I
started paying attention to what was happening outside of my bubble that I realized the world’s injustices and that not everyone had it as easy as me.

The only time I felt disadvantaged was in funding for school. My parents, though middle-class, did not have a college fund set aside for me and were not financially able to help pay for school. I was not eligible for the Pell Grant because our household income was above the cut-off, despite them needing the means to help pay for school. I am first-generation, too, so I did not know much about financial aid or applying for scholarships. The scholarships I found I was not eligible for because I am not a minority, and I did not know that first-generation meant my parents did not earn a degree. My dad went to college but never graduated. Despite this, my college experience was positive. I did well academically, learned to access resources and support, and never felt like I did not belong. My professors were always receptive to a request for assistance, and I never had to worry about being unable to access the help I needed.

As a graduate student, I hold a graduate assistantship in the Dean of Students Office, working with students with difficulties that impact their academic success. Concerns consist of academic difficulty, financial strain, physical and mental health problems, and relational issues, to name a few. I see the challenges some students face based on their marginalized identities in working with students. These challenges can be due to a need for more support outside of school and school officials. Thankfully, the students I work with are referred for help, but many struggles clandestinely. In my opinion, most of this oversight is due to a lack of awareness of how students’ privileged, and marginalized identities impact their success as a student. My experiences with privilege, unproductive conversations with family and others regarding privilege, and my work with students inspire my interest in this topic. In general, I have always been an advocate for those less fortunate than me. I believe this is a strength I possess: the
capacity to care for others. However, this strength can sometimes be my downfall, as I can give too much of myself to someone or a cause to the point where it depletes me. I will have to hold myself accountable in the research journey to stay focused and not follow every lead I find, which can overwhelm me and cause me to go off track. I will remind myself that this study is just the first step in this research exploration.

**Selection of Participants**

**Sampling**

The researcher used convenience and criterion sampling to recruit participants. Convenience sampling includes participants who responded to the call for participants. Convenience, purposive, and criterion sampling were employed to recruit participants. The call for participants was first shared on listservs, specifically listservs commonly used by counseling graduate students (i.e., CESNET, COUNGRADS, DIVERSEGRAD-L). The next step was to email doctoral program directors and request them to share the research study with their students. However, the researcher recruited enough participants through the listservs that emailing programs were unnecessary.

From there, the researcher used criterion sampling to ensure participants met the study’s eligibility. The participants are counselor educators in training currently enrolled in a doctoral program. Inclusion criteria included status as a current student enrolled in a CACREP-accredited program. Participants must have had experience with teaching by either taking a teaching course, having experience as a teaching assistant (TA), or as the primary instructor of a graduate-level course. These inclusion criteria helped to eliminate some confounding variables that could arise from different experiences gained in various programs. Counselor educators in training were
chosen instead of current counselor educators because the researcher was interested in how their current training in the program impacts their professional identity development.

The number of participants recruited for the study continued until saturation was met. Looking at past phenomenological studies in counseling education (Haskins et al., 2016; Henfield, Woo, & Washington, 2013;), participant numbers have ranged between 8-11. Since this is a qualitative study, recruitment continued until data saturation was met after interviewing 10 participants.

Grant funding was used to recruit a diverse and robust participant pool to ensure participants are compensated for their time. Participants were offered a gift card of $25.00 to Amazon.com, which was sent to them via the email they provided. The researcher was awarded $250 from the ACA Counselors for Social Justice Division to cover the costs. This award covered ten participants’ compensation.

**Materials**

As stated, a semi-structured interview was employed to gather information about participants’ experiences as counselor educators in training, their views, and opinions on their own intersecting social identities, whether they view them as privileging or disadvantaging them within the field, how they intersect impacts this, and how this informs their professional identity development, including teaching, counseling, leadership and service and research. Before the interview, participants completed a demographic questionnaire to understand what specific identities the participant identified with to inform interview questions.

Prompts for the interview included, “How has your identity as an *insert identity* impacted the way you interact with students?” or “How has your intersecting identity of *insert identity* and *insert identity* informed your identity as a future counselor educator?” Before the
questions were finalized and to increase the trustworthiness of the questions, they were reviewed by the researcher’s chair before starting the study. This additional step allowed for feedback to ensure the quality of the questions was sufficient (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

**Data Collection (Procedures)**

The interview questions were based on the research questions specific to the individual. The participants’ social identities slightly affected the question being asked. The questions were based on prior research, including findings on similar topics. The results also shed light on unanswered questions of the researcher’s exploratory quantitative study on the same subject, which inquired about the degree of impact participants’ social identities have on their professional identity and the degree of privilege or disadvantage they believe they experience based on their social identities.

The informed consent was provided with the initial call for participants and disseminated through listservs (e.g., CESNET). If participants determined they were eligible, they were prompted to complete a demographic questionnaire. Through a logic model, the survey assessed eligibility; if all questions were endorsed, that confirmed eligibility, and participants were directed to a website (calendy.com) where they scheduled their interview and provided a contact email. Then, the researcher emailed the participant to confirm their scheduled interview and to provide the Zoom link and a copy of the informed consent. Once the interview was scheduled, on the day of the interview, the researcher reviewed the informed consent with the participant before starting the interview.

For this study, a semi-structured interview format was used to gain insight into the experiences of counselor educators in training and how their background and experiences with privilege and marginalization impacted their professional identity development. Interview
questions were open-ended to allow participants to reflect on their journey to where they are today as emerging counselor educators. An interview guide was followed to ensure consistency between interviews. Interviews following the interview protocol took between 45 and 90 minutes and were conducted over three months. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities, and all identifiable information was redacted from the transcripts. The interview took place over HIPPA-compliant Zoom video conferencing software. Interviews were audio recorded via Zoom and transcribed by a professional transcribed. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement and was given access to a password-protected OneDrive folder, which included the recordings. Once all recordings were transcribed, the participants were provided with the opportunity to review their interview transcript, clarify any responses, and make any needed changes to ensure their responses were accurately represented. Approximately five years after the completion of the study and after the researcher defends their dissertation, all records and data collected from participants will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

The researcher was interested in exploring the experiences of doctoral students in counseling education programs to understand how their experiences thus far have informed their views on their own social identities and how they impact their development as counselor educators. Interviews and the coding process coincided—this way, the researcher could determine when the data was saturated, subsequently concluding the interview process. The coding process began by transcribing the interviews, isolating significant sentences from the transcription, organizing the sentences into distinct categories, and from the categories, developing themes using in vivo terms (Creswell, 2016). These themes reflect the essence of participants’ experiences to align with the phenomenology design of the study.
To increase the trustworthiness and validity of this process, the researcher took steps to ensure the accuracy and confirmability of the study (Creswell, 2013). The researcher recruited two peers to conduct member-checking. Both have experience with qualitative and quantitative research. The first member checker is a White, female-identifying person, who has experience working in a behavioral neuroscience research lab and completed several courses in research and statistics. She graduated with her B.A. in Psychology and French. The other member checker was also a White, female-identifying person who graduated from a counseling, education, and supervision doctoral program, completed several research courses, and completed a phenomenological dissertation. This step aided in the process of identifying themes, eliminating any conflicting codes or themes, and developing a consensus among themes derived from the transcriptions (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher also kept a reflective journal to document thoughts, emotions, and questions that arose during the interview process. For the transcription process, outside help was recruited, and the transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement before transcribing interviews. This ensured that the information being processed was kept confidential and secure. The final disposition of all materials was clearly defined once their job was concluded.

Since most of the data was obtained through interviews, coding made a viable option for organizing the data. Interviews with participants were transcribed, cut, and broken into meaningful segments and then coded to conceptualize the data (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Both descriptive and analytical coding apply to this study. Since descriptive codes are derived from the participants’ actual language, it was appropriate to gather participants’ experiences with perceived privilege and marginalization; therefore, their language was pertinent to the analysis. Additionally, when inquiring about participants’ experiences or perceptions of
how privilege is addressed, analytical coding assisted in comprehending what was taking place (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013).

For analyzing data, the researcher utilized keyword and thematic analysis. Keyword analysis was suitable for expanding awareness of how participants discuss privilege and marginalization. The researcher analyzed the frequency in which words were used if words were used in an unusual way, and the words in the context of the surrounding words (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). This was applicable since it focuses on the language participants used to describe and define privilege and how that translates to their work with others, including students, colleagues, supervisees, and more. A thematic analysis was beneficial to compare interviews between different participants, such as other social identities. With this method of analysis, the researcher identified any patterns in the data (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Then, from these patterns, the research developed themes representing the “reality” of what is happening in counseling education.

Thematic analysis can be applied to multiple methodologies and theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is versatile and does not require a theoretical framework. However, when approaching the data from a theoretical lens, the researcher is responsible for deciding on a theory and ensuring that the chosen philosophical approach is compatible with the thematic analysis (Campbell et al., 2021). In addition, a theoretical thematic analysis was used rather than an inductive one to address specific research questions (Moira & Delahunt, 2017). Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Intersectionality Theory guide the research questions. Thematic analysis can infer meaning about a phenomenon by looking at it through the lens of a specific theoretical framework (Campbell et al., 2021). In essence, the thematic analysis illustrates how CRT and intersectionality theory is essential in understanding the phenomenon of
the impact of social identities and privileged and marginalized experiences on the professional development of counselor educators in training. The thematic analysis includes six steps: familiarization with the data, identifying initial codes, searching for themes, evaluating themes, defining themes, and generating the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase one was familiarization with the data. In this stage, the researcher read and re-read the interview transcripts to gain initial ideas about the data. A professional transcriber simultaneously transcribed the interviews while interviews were still being conducted. This allowed for immersion in the data, which helped identify themes and commonalities, and differences between participants. While reading through the data, it was ensured that CRT and intersectionality theory was the underlying driving forces for how data was conceptualized; this helped the researcher go beyond their own frame of reference in understanding the data. Multiple copies of transcripts were printed to allow for different stages of analysis. The first time reading through, interesting quotes related to the research question were highlighted. Then, transcripts were re-read, and different areas were highlighted in different colors. Some areas highlighted were views and experiences with privilege and marginalization, experience within counseling education, and views and experience with professional identity development.

Phase two was generating initial codes. Again, descriptive, and analytical codes were derived, starting with descriptive. After familiarizing with the data, the first run-through included looking for language that specifically addressed the research questions. So, when participants talked explicitly about their experience with privilege and marginalization, the intersectionality of their identities, and their professional identity development, that was coded. Then, analytical codes were derived from the patterns within and across interviews that helped shape the emerging themes.
Phase three included searching for themes. Phase two helped identify patterns, which were then taken and organized together to identify the themes. To help sort through the data, the researcher placed all the isolated statements and their assigned initial codes in an Excel file. Data were first sorted by research question and by the participant. Once codes were consolidated and refined, themes emerged. After the initial themes were named, the research returned to the Excel file and assigned each meaning unit and set of codes a theme.

Phase four was defining themes. Once themes were assigned, the research had a peer conduct member checking to see if they also assigned each statement to the same theme. After it was found that statements could fit into more than one theme or subtheme, themes were revised. Themes were more often collapsed or renamed instead of deleted. For instance, one theme is “The Role of Intersectionality,” and one subtheme within that is “Duality of Privilege and Marginalization;” however, that subtheme was first labeled as “Privileged Identities Compensated for Marginalized Ones.” It was found that the original subtheme was too narrow and did not encompass the experiences of participants who did not have the privilege of having specific identities carrying the weight of more marginalized ones.

Phase five was generating the final report, which included synthesizing all the data into a digestible format. This phase included the interpretation of the data, which followed the analysis to uncover meaning. Data interpretation should be and was “based on the experiences and perspectives of the participants” (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013, p. 466). This assertion was at the forefront of the researcher’s mind during all analysis phases. Thus, when the researcher conducted the interviews, the interpretation acknowledged alternative perspectives to ensure that interpretation led to understanding (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). One would never want to misrepresent the participants; therefore, the researcher was open to negotiating the
meaning behind the language used by participants, which is why steps were taken to ensure the researcher’s own frame of reference was never the only account considered.

Summary

This phenomenological qualitative study explores the impact of the intersectionality of social identities. This study specifically focuses on how the intersection of one’s privilege and marginalization because one’s race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status has impacted professional identity development among counselor educators in training. This study incorporates the common facets of a phenomenological qualitative design while utilizing an intersectionality and CRT framework. The research includes the participants’ narratives, highlighting the essence of the phenomenon.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Overview

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of counselor educators in training, their awareness of their privileged and marginalized identities, and how their identities impact their professional identity. Ten counselor educators in training were interviewed from various backgrounds and geographic locations. Participants were interviewed about their experience with privilege and marginalization identities and how those contribute to their professional identity development as counselor educators.

A phenomenological method, along with Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Intersectionality Theory, was employed as the theoretical orientation to analyze the data. Though participants were asked about all their social identities, this study specifically focused on how one’s racial and ethnic identity and socioeconomic status interact to impact one’s professional identity.

Research Questions

For this phenomenological qualitative study, the goal was to gain insight into the experiences of counselor educators in training, their reality regarding their marginalized and privileged identities, and how this has informed their professional identity development. This population was chosen due to the limited studies identifying counselor educators in training. Instead, research predominantly identifies counselor educators, practicing counselors, and master’s students in counseling education as the study population. This research fails to analyze the journey from master’s student to counselor educator and practicing counselor to counselor educator. The process of developing into a counselor educator remains largely unexplored.
Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Intersectionality Theory provide a framework for examining the concept. CRT stems from critical theory that offers a lens to analyze power differentials between groups of people (Price, 2021). Even though CRT was initially developed with a focus on race and racism in the legal system, educators are now using it to discuss issues of inequality and discrimination in the educational system and to show how racism is widespread in academic institutions (Haskins & Singh, 2015).

Further, intersectionality theory can serve as a vital tool of counselor education pedagogy in conjunction with CRT with its consideration of the whole person. The challenges of integrating multiculturalism in counselor education were covered by Chan et al. (2018). Due to the intricacy of privilege and marginalization, intersectionality helps develop multicultural frameworks by incorporating various points of view. Intersectionality aligns and goes beyond CRT. The application of both theories broadens the scope of CRT, allowing it to address racism and White hegemony that is ingrained in the educational system as well as how the intersectionality of social identities affects counselor educators in training as they construct their professional identities (Grzanka et al., 2017).

The primary inquiry places aspiring counselor educators in the center of a social issue affecting the educational system and challenges them to act as change agents in creating safe spaces for counseling master’s students. The study’s research questions centered on the experiences of counselor educators in training concerning the intersectionality of their privileged and marginalized identities and how these identities affected the formation of their professional identities.
Participant Demographics

The 10 participants were counselor educators in training (i.e., current students in Counseling Education and Supervision Ph.D. programs) across the United States. Participants’ demographic information was collected as it relates to their social identities. Other information collected included the qualifying data to participate in the study, what they received their master’s degree in, and whether they planned to focus their career on academia post-graduation.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Geographic Region</th>
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<td>West</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>55-64</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>$100,000 -$149,000</td>
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<td>45-54</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* See additional demographic information below.

Eight participants identify as heterosexual, one as bisexual, and one as unknown. Eight participants indicate not having a disability status, while two do. Four participants are Christian, five are agnostic or not religious, and one is unknown.

**Participant Profiles**

**Adelaide**

Adelaide is a white cis-gendered female between 25-34. She identifies as bisexual and “straight-passing,” married to a male. She identifies as middle-class and highly educated. She is from a rural community in the Midwest and currently living in the Western region of the U.S. She graduated from a Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) program and got a specialist in education between her master’s degree and entering the doctoral program. She currently works in the community as an LPC in private practice. She also has a position at a university as a clinical director and instructor for a university in the Western region of the U.S. She is currently in the last year of her doctoral program and will graduate with her Ph.D. in counseling education.
in December 2023. She has experience as a co-instructor for counseling diverse populations, counseling theories, and foundations of counseling. She was the instructor of record for first-year undergraduate students, “University 101,” and another undergraduate course, “Introduction to Human Services,” and is teaching a master's practicum course in the Fall of 2022.

**Brittney**

Brittney is a black cis-gendered female aged 25-34. She identifies as heterosexual. Her religious affiliation is Christian. She labels her SES as middle-class, though she grew up in poverty. She lives in the Southeast region of the U.S. and is enrolled in a virtual Counselor Education program in the Southern region of the U.S. She is a school counselor with six years of experience. She has been teaching master’s level school counseling for two years and recently defended her dissertation, graduating in August 2022. She has experience teaching college and career readiness, supervision and practicum, and intro to school counseling. Brittney plans on teaching full-time in the future.

**Miya**

Miya is a white, gender-fluid female; her pronouns are she/her. She is between the ages of 25-34 and identifies as heterosexual and agnostic. Her SES, based on income, situates her in the upper middle class. She lives in the Southern region of the U.S. She identifies as a “military spouse” but is not invested in that identity. She identifies as an artist, which she considers a significant component as she identifies with people who think outside the box. She received her master’s degree in CMHC and started the doctoral program less than six months after graduating. She works as a Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC) in a private practice setting in the southern U.S. She has experience as a teaching assistant but has yet to be the course instructor of record.
Camille

Camille is a white cis-gendered female between the ages of 55-64. She identifies as heterosexual and Christian. Her SES based on income is middle-class. She resides in the Midwest region on the U.S. She has a documented disability but “refuse[s] to acknowledge it.” Other roles she identifies with include divorced, mom, married, and grandmom. She has been working as an LPC for two years in the Midwest. She is also licensed as an associate sex offender treatment provider. She did not take a break between her master’s in CMHC and the doctoral program.

Jay

Jay is a white cis-gendered female between the ages of 45-54. She is single and child-free by choice. Her sexual orientation and religious affiliation are unknown. She lives in the Western region of the U.S. She identifies as middle-class and highly educated. She has her MBA and pursuing her third career. She is currently working as a pre-licensed therapist in private practice in the western U.S. She received her master’s in CMHC and started the doctoral program immediately after graduating “due to [her] age.” Regarding professional identity, she identifies as a counselor first, and specifically as a social justice counselor. She is starting to lean into her counselor educator identity more but is unsure if she wants to teach full-time.

Napoleon

Napoleon is a black cis-gender male between 55 and 64 and identifies as heterosexual and Christian. He resides in the Southeast region of the U.S. His SES based on income is unknown, but he states that he has more financial means than what he grew up with due to his
education. He completed his undergraduate degree in 1986 and did not return to school for his master’s in CMHC until 2014. Other identities include student, husband, brother, uncle, and therapist.

Jennifer

Jennifer is an Asian cis-gender female between the ages of 25-34. She identifies as heterosexual. Her religious affiliation is agnostic. She is an international student from China located in the Northeast region of the U.S. She received her master’s degree in community counseling in China. After working in the field for three years, she discovered she loved teaching, which motivated her to come to the U.S. to pursue her doctorate in counseling education.

Rachel

Rachel is a white, cis-gendered female aged 45-54. She identifies as heterosexual. She does not have a religious affiliation. She is situated in the upper middle class based on income. She lives in the Midwest region in the U.S. She said she “reads as a middle-aged white mom pretty strongly.” She received her master’s in CMHC in 2006 and spent time working before returning for her doctoral degree. She is the behavioral health director for a community mental health agency. She is pursuing her doctorate, intending to teach master-level students. She is towards the end of her doctoral program and talked about how her experiences with teaching shifted her professional identity from a counselor first to an educator first.

Juliet

Juliet is a white, cis-gendered female between the ages of 35-44. She is in the Southeastern region of the U.S. She identifies as heterosexual. Her religious identity is Christian but clarified that she does not identify with several of the values of Evangelical Christians
because she also identifies as progressive and liberal. She used the term “exvangelical” to better describe her religious affiliation. She considers herself highly educated and a first-generation college student. She labels her SES as middle-class, but she grew up in poverty. She has a physical disability that she is learning to accept; it sometimes limits her. She has spent most of her career working with people experiencing homelessness and poverty.

**Meghan**

Meghan is a white, cis-gendered female between the ages of 35-44. She labels her SES as middle-class. She identifies as heterosexual. She does not have a religious affiliation. She is proud to be from the Midwest and strongly identifies with the Midwestern value of being hardworking and how it has impacted her journey to be where she is today. Though from the Midwest, she is currently located in the Western Pacific region of the U.S. She is a first-generation college student and a fourth-year doctoral candidate.

**Findings**

The participants were asked which identities they believed were privileged and/or marginalized. Though this study focuses on the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, participants were first asked about all identities to understand their perspectives. Out of all participants' identities, one’s education and identifying as “highly educated” was a privilege often endorsed by participants. Interestingly, two participants out of nine also identified their education as a marginalized identity where they were raised. Socioeconomic status was the second most endorsed privilege by participants. However, several participants considered how their experiences have changed regarding SES due to education improving their economic means. Because of this, several participants were able to reflect on how this shift has increased empathy for those they serve. For instance, Juliet stated, “I
do think that the identities that are more on the spectrum of marginalized impact me more because they increase my empathy.”

Additional privileged identities include white race (6), cis-gendered (5), Female in counseling (5), Christian religion (3), heterosexual (3) straight-passing (2) and married (3). Marginalized identities, socioeconomic status, and female identity were the most marginalized identities endorsed by participants (4). Additionally, three participants felt disadvantaged being a female in counseling education. Something not considered was the identity of a “school counselor” in counseling education programs. Both participants felt disadvantaged or marginalized compared to their clinical mental health peers in their respective programs. For example, Meghan said, “In my doctoral program...school counseling is more of a marginalized counseling identity than it is a privileged identity...It was remarkable...to realize how there’s a hierarchy in the counseling profession. I’ve joked, I feel like I’m getting a second master’s degree and a Ph.D. at the same time because of the requirements of the program. I’m not a licensed professional counselor. I don’t want to be licensed professional counselor. I wanta be a school counselor educator, so that’s been an interesting journey these last several years.”

Narrative Report

Themes

From the interviews, four themes emerged, along with up to five subthemes under each central theme. There are a total of 13 subthemes. The four themes are Awareness of Privilege and Marginalization, The Role of Intersectionality, Professional Identity Development, and Privilege and Marginalization as a Motivator.
Theme 1: Awareness of Privilege and Marginalization

This first theme captured participants' general awareness about the concept of privilege and marginalization and how that applied to them. Though participants were prompted to discuss these concepts generally, there was a focus by participants on race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, followed by gender identity, which was not pertinent to the research question but still produced interesting results that will be covered in the discussion for recommendations for future research. The three subthemes that emerged from this theme include “race & ethnicity,” “SES,” and “differences across settings.”

All participants experienced experience with either privilege or marginalization, and most participants had experience with both. Adelaide recognized her privilege from her white and cisgender identities. Though she identifies her queer identity as marginalized, she receives privilege from being “straight-passing.” She spoke about how her privileged and marginalized identities differ based on the setting. For instance, she grew up in a rural Midwestern town and reflected on how liberal and highly educated identity is viewed differently in her hometown. She reflects on the duality of her female identity as privileged in counseling due to receiving more clients yet marginalized in counseling education: "I don’t think I have privilege there. I see my male colleagues being taken more seriously. If we show up in a similar way, I think they’re seen as, oh, I respect this person, or like, wow, Adelaide’s kind of a bitch. Even though many of us are women, I do think there’s still this, like, male professors are seen as more esteemed, don’t have to work as hard to get good evaluations and stuff like that."

Rachel also reflected on how her privileged and marginalized identities differ based on the setting, specifically regarding gender. She stated, “The places...where marginalization comes in a little bit is with gender in particular settings. I’m in a leadership role in the organization
where I work, and I sit in a room sometimes where I’m the only woman, so I definitely feel a different environment in those settings than when I’m in meetings that have a mixture of genders. Even with that, I recognize on a regular basis that I’m not experiencing marginalization in the way that truly marginalized people do. There’s a level of privilege that I have regardless of where I’m at or what I’m trying to accomplish.”

Miya could relate to Adelaide regarding “straight-passing privilege.” When reflecting on her privileged and marginalized identities, she recognized how her gender identity, though it can be considered marginalized by society, she does experience disadvantages because of it. She stated, “I’m more gender fluid, but I didn’t have the language for that until later. I don’t necessarily have the hardships that some other people do that are very, very in that community. Growing up as a white, very straight appearing—I’m married to a CIS male—very, very privileged in all way, shape, and form.”

Jay feels disadvantaged economically and socially. She shared how even though she “highly educated” and situated in the middle-class based on annual income, she is economically limited. She stated, "Because I’m pre-licensed, and I’ve been in school for five years. Money is a real issue for me. I experience a lot of stress, and I feel like an outsider in a lot of contexts because I’m middle class but on a very limited income.”

Jennifer also feels disadvantaged economically, but due being an international student. When discussing privileged and marginalized identities, she reported that her most prevalent disadvantage is her international student status. Jennifer’s second language is English, and she spends additional time ensuring she understands her studies. Her SES based on income is considered poverty level. Since she is an international student with an F1 visa and is only legally allowed to work 20 hours a week. She said, “It’s not been easy because I rely on my stipend.”
That’s basically the only income I have. Before I came here to the US, I worked for a few years, and I had some savings. It’s just very expensive to move and then to relocate to a different country. I feel with my economic status right now, I’m restricted in many ways. On a different level, the conditions I am in, or I was in, for example, sense of safety wasn’t there because of, for example, housing situations. That had a huge impact on my personal well-being and my progress in the program.”

Brittney reflected on her experience moving social locations due to her career and growing up in a “very low-income, single-parent family.” When asked which identities she views as privileged and marginalized, she stated, “Socioeconomic status? It’s definitely privileged now, but I grew up very poor, so I’m like having to retrain my brain to identify that new; the fact that I’m not, I still feel marginalized in that way because that’s how I grew up as a child. I haven’t been that in a long time, so I’m trying to disassociate myself from viewing myself as marginalized in that way.”

Juliet also moved social locations due to her education and reflected on how she views being highly educated as a privilege, but her family does not have the same views. She said, “I did come from a background of poverty, and I’m a first-generation student, so education was pretty frowned upon actually in my family because it was not something that people had a lot of access to and didn’t respect. A lotta times out of that, I don’t know, sense of, honestly, a sense of self-preservation, preventing shame. If I think education’s stupid, I can’t be to upset that I didn’t have opportunities to get it. Being the one who was very focused on academics and school and very good in school, all those things, kinda made me a little bit of a black sheep in my family.”

Meghan is a school counselor like Brittney and takes pride in her professional identity as a school counselor. Due to her experience in the program, she will often refer to herself as a
“public educator.” Within her doctoral program, she considers her school counselor identity as marginalized and wants to advocate for school counselors in counseling education when she graduates. She shared, “I think the intersectionality of my identities and how my professional identity, I think I see myself, once I finish this program, I wanta be a faculty member and I also wanna contribute to our profession in meaningful ways, advocating for school counselors, advocating for school counselor education leadership.”

Napoleon does not believe in receiving privilege or disadvantage due to his social identities but can recognize it in his clients. He stated, "I don’t feel that I experience any privilege or disadvantage for either. But I can see where my clients may experience that at times in the clinical setting. As far as professional and at school, I do not...I don’t feel like I receive any privilege or disadvantage. I don’t. Me personally.” However, reflected on past experiences as an undergraduate student when he and his sister experienced “direct racism,” which impacted him, along with his work with clients and passion for social justice.

Camille also shared how she does not perceive privilege due to several identities, including racial and SES, but can recognize the duality of privilege and marginalization of the religious identity. Camille identified most strongly with her Christian identity overall and its impact on her professional identity. She clarified her identity as separate from Christians that are judgmental and how she stopped attending church due to the judgment present there. Camille thinks her religious identity is both privileged and marginalized. She shared, “I would say Christian identity is more marginalized now than it has been in the past because, I mean, but at the same time, a lotta Christians passed a lotta judgment on other people and marginalized other populations. I think there’s a balance that’s striking.”
Race & Ethnicity

Participants had the most to say regarding privilege and marginalization due to race and ethnicity. Most participants were White and focused on the privilege they received from that identity. Participants shared how their racial privilege impacted their access to resources impacting educational opportunities and job attainment. They also shared how they were privileged based on the assumptions by other people in their lives, known and unknown.

Rachel said, “I mean, I was contemplating going back to school for a doctorate and decided to do it. Didn’t really encounter a lotta barriers to that. I think part of it is I’ve just been a recipient of privilege. I have education. I’ve had opportunities and things like that. I think that all probably came together to lead to me being in a program.”

Participants were able to put their racial identity into perspective compared to others. Juliet shared, “If, for every opportunity I’ve had, probably there was a person of color who didn’t have that opportunity. That goes for both race and for socioeconomic opportunities, like getting jobs or getting other types of opportunities. Getting loans, being able to get a mortgage, being able to get a car loan with decent interest. Being able to be accepted to universities that maybe they wouldn’t have accepted somebody who looked different than me. I’d like to think that’s not the case, and it’s all my merit and bootstraps and all that stuff, but I don’t believe in that. There’s every opportunity that someone who was exactly like me on paper might not have gotten into the universities that I got into. Things like that.”

Camille described a different experience, sharing how she felt disadvantaged being a White person accessing funding for college. She said, “I feel maybe I would’ve had a better chance at some scholarships had I been a different race. I feel that me being white and considered white privileged was a hindrance. When I tried to apply for work-study, I know
people at my university that got work-study were either Latino or African American. Do I feel privileged? No, I actually feel kinda disadvantaged.”

Participants also described how their racial privilege impacted assumptions made by others. This included counseling clients, clients' parents, professors, students in counseling education, and people in society.

Rachel shared how her racial and gender identity, along with her age, impacted the assumptions of others. “I think that in society at large, I am in the Midwest, and it’s a pretty much middle of the road, sort of Caucasian orientation to most of the societal norms. I definitely experience that privilege, just in general. I think that there’s a certain amount of white lady privilege that occurs. You can move in the world, and you kinda get summed up by the people around you with certain stereotypes, but they’re not necessarily negative stereotypes. I think I read as a middle-aged white mom pretty strongly, which is true. I think that sometimes just makes certain environments easier to navigate than someone who would have a different identity than I do.”

Participants who identified as having a marginalized identity shared how they had been disadvantaged. Specifically, participants shared how their racial identity impacted their educational experience, including access to funding for education. Brittney talked about how her marginalized status impacted her transition to college and her feeling of belonging.

“It was very hard being an African American person at that university because it’s huge, but it’s still not very diverse in the ways that I was used to because I came from a predominantly Black school, and it was a little bit harder for me to acclimate myself into that environment. That’s probably more like the world. No, that really is more like the world than my high school,
so I had to learn how to adjust. Figure out where I fit in in that environment. I would say, it definitely made it harder for me to relate in some ways or be related to in some ways.”

**Socioeconomic Status**

The participants were also asked to reflect on their socioeconomic status (SES). Most participants came from middle-class households. Some of the privileges experienced by the participants identifying as being in the middle class spoke about how they were able to access education due to having the necessary resources and family structure that supported that life decision to go to college.

Adelaide spoke to this, saying, “I grew up kind of... upper middle class, and so I had access to education in a way that I know other people don’t. I didn’t grow up in an impoverished area, so I did have access to resources there. Then I was also able to get help from my parents throughout some of my education. I mean, I don’t know what I would’ve done had I not had that. It would’ve been a very different experience for me.”

In addition, there were some participants who came from less financially privileged households that both hindered and aided their access to education. Brittney “grew up in a very low-income, single-parent family.” This made it difficult to access resources and quality education during grade school. However, her financial disadvantage was a benefit to her when applying to colleges and accessing funding. Brittney shared, “I would say initially, being poor helped me financially to go to college, but it did make it harder, I think, for me to identify with the people who I was in college with because most of the people who I went to school with were not. So, it was like we were coming from completely different perspectives.”

Her experience speaks to the complexity of the intersection of multiple identities and privileges and disadvantaged that coincide with each person and situation. She synthesized how
she views both sides of SES privilege and disadvantages when it comes to paying for college, saying, “I would say initially, in some ways, it was good and bad. The fact that I didn’t have any money obviously, made me, helped me go to college for free. Like I tell my students, you either have to kind of be like poor or rich to afford college. Poor enough to get scholarships or rich enough to afford it yourself. It’s hard to be middle class in America.”

Jennifer spoke to experience with both a privileged and marginalized SES. She shared how it is a privilege to study abroad when not everyone has that ability. However, being an international student in the U.S. comes with financial restrictions. She shared, “I would say it’s not been easy cuz I rely on my stipend. That’s basically the only income I have. Before I came to the US, I worked for a few years, and I had some savings. It’s just very expensive to move and then to relocate to a different country. I do feel with my economic status right now, I’m restricted in many ways. With my F1 visa, I’m only allowed to work 20 hours per week. I cannot do other jobs, but, for example, peers who are US citizens can do additional work alongside their studies and their school job. That really restricts me...It’s just a legal thing. I think there are resources out there, but they couldn’t do anything for the international students just because it’s a legal requirement.”

Differences Across Settings

This subtheme emerged as participants shared how their privileged and marginalized statuses differed based on the setting. For instance, participants experienced differences due to their geographic setting and varying opinions generationally.

Regarding geographic differences, most participants reflected on the differences between where they are now, their families, and where they grew up. Juliet identified being “highly educated” as one of her privileges and shared how differently education is viewed where she is
from. “I did come from a background of poverty, and I’m a first-generation student, so education was pretty frowned upon actually in my family because it was not something that people had a lot of access to and didn’t respect. A lotta times out of that, I don’t know, sense of, honestly, a sense of self-preservation, preventing shame. If I think education’s stupid, I can’t be to upset that I didn’t have opportunities to get it. Being the one who was very focused on academics and school and very good in school, all those kinda things, kinda made me a little bit of a black sheep in my family.”

Adelaide related to Juliet regarding how education is viewed along with her other identity as a “liberal” and having a more progressive point of view. Adelaide said, “One of the identities that I forgot to mention is that I’m liberal, and so I come from a very conservative, rural area, and so I also look very different. I definitely don’t feel like I have privilege there...Being educated, sometimes I’m viewed very differently, and people make assumptions. All of my identities look very different when I’m back home than when I’m in academia specifically or within my community.”

Meghan shared the impact of her parent’s privilege on her and how it has changed. “My race and ethnicity has impacted my socioeconomic status because even though my parents were not college educated, they were white, and...of a generation that they were able to get employment. That was fruitful. So that they could provide. If I were to potentially compare that to a family in my community that was Black or Brown, that might not have been the same—more of a generational influence. Even though my parents didn’t have the opportunity to go to college, it was absolutely a generation where your whiteness got you things that... you know. I think things are much different now. However,....that certainly has an impact because of how I was able to live.”
Camille spoke about how she felt safer in the context of academia than in society as a whole. “I feel my experiences with academia, with the exception of one or two instructors, I feel overall, it’s a safer place than society is right now. I feel that the people that, for the most part, there’s always the outliers, for the most part, they’re supportive and helpful. In society, we’re seeing more and more hate over what shouldn’t even be a thing.”

However, people who identified as having more marginalized identities compared to privileged spoke of seeing more similarities than differences between settings. Brittney explained that most of her identities show up the same across settings with the exception of academia. “I think that most of the settings where I operate, they’re about the same. In academia, the same way, maybe the only thing that would change is, in academia is, from my personal experience being a female, just because education—I work in school counseling—education is female-dominated. That would be more of a privilege than being marginalized in that way, being a woman. I think my race would still marginalize me in that setting. So yes and no.”

Another finding was how education impacted the awareness of privilege and marginalization. All participants had some awareness before starting their master’s degree, and as they continued their pursuit of education, their awareness only grew. Awareness grows within oneself and is about recognizing one’s privilege and marginalization. Participants were better able to recognize disparities among groups of people and how the intersection of privilege and margination encourages us to look at the whole self instead of one identity at a time.

Rachel shared how her education has shaped her awareness and impacted her work with others. Rachel explained, “Education has helped me a lot to be aware of privilege…One of the things I’m trying always to do is find a way to make sure what I’m talking about, the topic, is accessible to everyone. That’s a part that is hard to do because I don’t have everyone else’s
experience, so I don’t entirely know how to do that for each student. Trying to look for cues from people…I can read people’s faces and see how things are landing…and trying to bring people into the discussion that aren’t necessarily contributing…I want it to be accessible to everyone. I’m hoping that, through intentional thought and work towards that goal, I can continue to do that and get better and better and better.”

Miya reflected on her experience as a white woman in counseling education, sharing that she would not have had this awareness without her education. “So, I think a very honest reaction that I have that is absolutely rooted in systemic racism and bias that I had growing up as a white person is that there is a really big push right now in the counseling profession to have more, more diversity in educators. And at times, I’m like, wow, that’s like a disadvantage to me because I’m just your standard white woman in the profession. I do wonder if I were to explore this profession and this field today from the very start, if that would be a deterrent for me. I think it potentially could be. If I didn’t have all the education I already have because that education is really what makes me be able to recognize that thought and say, oh, that’s kinda racist.”

**Theme 2: The Role of Intersectionality**

The role of intersectionality emerged throughout the interviews as participants were consistently asked to reflect on all identities. This topic is undoubtedly complex given that no two people have the same experience and intersection between privileged and marginalized identities. It was difficult, at first, for several participants to conceptualize how their social identities and experiences with marginalization and privilege impacted their professional identity. It was clear that some participants understood the concept of intersectionality more than others. Juliet was an advocate of the importance of considering intersectionality throughout the interview. She reflected on the topic, saying, “I do think intersectionality is a big piece of it
because that is the combination of who you are as a person and the way you interact with your different identities and how they fit together. For instance, even my example of the intersectionality of someone going from poverty to middle class, talking about my experience versus my experience of my friend. That involved class. That involved race. That involved intelligence. I don’t like to bring that necessarily to the room. Makes me feel skeezy, but that is the thing. I’ll call it educational achievement….Just the way that those things are looked at differently from different people. I think…that intersectionality is absolutely key.”

Camille recognized the importance of looking at the entire person but had some difficulty seeing how one’s racial identity impacted success. Camille said, “There’s a lotta people that are really, really big, really, really famous, really, really rich, and they’re not all white. I get hung up on this whole racial thing. There’s many facets, and we have to look at all the different facets and all the different angles to come up. It’s not all whites are privileged, or all whites are racist or... It’s like there’s racism and there’s privilege and there’s judgment, and there’s whatever between every entity in this world.”

Privileged identities were more likely to be recognized through maturity and education. This finding makes sense due to the privilege of not having to consider one’s privilege because it does not cause harm. For example, white participants compared to black participants. Black participants were taught at a younger age what it means to be black, whereas White participants were less likely to come to terms with their “whiteness” until experiencing higher education. Now, most White participants have the ability and understanding to recognize how their privileged identity of being white intersects with all other identities and makes their marginalized identities less impactful due to the inability to separate the privilege of “whiteness” from their experience with marginalization.
Duality of Privilege and Marginalization

One commonality between several participants was how their racial identity as a White person compensated for any marginalized identities they had. Juliet described how she has disadvantaged identities with a disability and as a woman, but she understands how identities interact with one another, which also speaks to the following subtheme. “That’s why it’s so important to understand how many identities you have and how they play off each other. If I was a person of color with the same physical disability that I have, I believe that I would have a harder time. I have to look at those things, culminating together, and see how even in my more marginalized identities, my privilege makes those easier.”

Adelaide also described how being White provides privilege in most settings, saying, “I feel like the big thing is white intersecting with any of my identities. That is the overarching privilege that’s gonna carry me through anything. No matter what I identify as the dominating identity is going to be white. That’s no matter where I am, I’m going to have privilege because of that.”

Impact of Social Identities on One Another

Several participants were able to identify how their identities interacted with each other, while others had more difficulty reflecting on the intersectionality of identities. It was easiest for participants to recognize how one's race and ethnicity impacted their SES. This was most often associated with access to education (e.g., resources, funding). Adelaide shared how her experience as a White person could look different than a person of color. “There were times that I probably was getting paid more than a person of color would. I probably was offered more or considered more for jobs because of my race. And so, because of that, had just an easier path to making money in general and maybe more openness to making more money. Also, as a
counselor, I know that we learn that people of color [are] more likely to reach out to a therapist of color. Oftentimes ... they might drop off in counseling with a white therapist. But most people who seek out counseling are white, and a lot of them are going to seek out white therapists, so I also think that helps my career in counseling, too.”

Camille had a different experience when it came to securing funding for college. She shared, “Well, again, again, there were no scholarships available based on race, so that’s, it makes it hard. Being a first generation also makes me feel, as a white person, where’s the privilege everybody’s talking about?”

Then there was Jennifer’s experience as an international student, whose international status limited her ability to work in the U.S. She said, “With my F1 visa, I’m only allowed to work 20 hours per week. I cannot do other jobs, but, for example, peers who are US citizens, can do additional work alongside their studies and their school job. That really restricts me... It’s just a legal thing. I think there are resources out there, but they couldn’t do anything for the international students just because it’s a legal requirement.”

Napoleon identified his professional identity and personal identity as one. He reflected on the inability to separate the two and the importance of them being congruent. He said, “I believe it has some congruency. If they weren’t, then there would be dichotomy. I can’t profess these things in my social life and not be a part of my professional life. I believe in being ethical, and being ethical, you have to be professional. You have to be spiritual. You have to be educated. These are things that I share with my clients, but also with my coworkers or my supervisees. If not, I’m being duplicity I can’t be ethical and not have these things in my personal life and professional life. I think, for me, they mesh together. They’re one. If not, then I think you have an issue.”
Changing Identities (SES with Education)

Most participants’ SES improved after receiving an education. They shared their perspectives on their experience with both disadvantaged and privileged identities. It is to note that out of all the social identities, SES is the most likely to change compared to innate characteristics (e.g., race, age, gender identity). Most individuals with this change acknowledge it has only helped them in their work with others due to the additional perspective they now hold. Brittney shared, “As I got older and my socioeconomic status began to change, I think it helped, my former status helps me stay grounded. I always think about things from multiple perspectives because I understand that there’s a lot of privilege associated with having stable income. Having excess.”

Summary of The Role of Intersectionality

The topic of intersectionality was by far the most challenging question participants had to answer. Most participants reflected on how their marginalized identities were buffered by their privileged ones. Adelaide shared, “Being a white woman... would be very different than if I was a woman of color. Being in the queer community but being straight passing...affords me a lot of privilege. The big thing is white intersecting with any of my identities. That is the overarching privilege...that’s gonna carry me through anything. No matter what I identify as the dominating identity is going to be white. That’s no matter where I am, I’m going to have privilege because of that.”

Theme 3: Professional Identity Development

For this theme, participants were read a definition of professional identity and then asked to define and describe their own professional identity and the impacts of their social identities on their professional identity. The following definition was read to the participants; professional
identity consists of factors related to academic degrees, service involvement, courses taught, scholarship or research involvement, and self-identification (Calley & Hawley, 2008).

One commonality found was the shift of participants identifying more as a counselor at the beginning of their program versus a counselor educator more towards the end of their program. How many roles a counselor educator holds was also acknowledged, such as supervisor, teacher, clinician, researcher, advocate, etc.

The most significant impact on professional identity was the participants' education or academic identity—specifically, one’s education as a counselor and counselor educator. Among the social identities, race, followed by SES and spirituality, were found to be the most impactful on their professional identity. Jay explained, “My whiteness because I wanta help other white counselors understand their whiteness and become anti-racist counselors, so that’s really prominent for me.”

**How One Identifies**

When describing their professional identity, many participants defined themselves first by their job titles. Some participants identified by their current job title (e.g., counselor, professional school counselor), and some were more specific (e.g., social justice counselor, public educator). A few participants listed which identity was most prominent, followed by which identity is emerging (e.g., educator and supervisor first, counselor second, school counselor before counselor educator due to more experience). Though not all participants specifically identified their professional identity by their job title, most acknowledge their professional identity in an evolving or emerging state. The most common emerging identity was “counselor educator.” This finding was expected due to the population being counselor educators in training.
Several individuals talked about professional identity is more of an umbrella term used to describe several roles under a few titles. Camille said, “but with a professional, with a counseling identity, we have to balance ethics and education. And like you said, our academic progress with our research. There’s a lot to balance out. So, counselor professional identity is just, it’s not a thing. It’s not a thing. It’s an overarching umbrella that we live and work under.”

Miya also spoke to the complexity of professional identity and how it is not just one aspect of the profession, but it the intertwined personal and professional identities. She shared, “that’s like the personal identity piece of it where that then translates to every other expectation or responsibility within this field because we are a lot more than just one single profession. We kind of, we fall under an umbrella. Up until that point [the last year of the doctoral program], I was still very segregated. Oh, I’m a counselor today. Oh, I’m an educator today. Oh, I’m a supervisor today. I’m a researcher today. Then getting closer to the teaching, the real teaching part where I’m really working with students and realizing, oh, all of this is intertwined. It’s inextricable, and how do I, what’s the golden thread? Everyone has to come to their own professional identity and what their own golden thread is. So how did they touch on all of those things in their own unique way?”

After identifying and defining their professional identity, participants were prompted to reflect on how their social identities impacted the different areas of counseling education (e.g., research, teaching, leadership, service).

**Research Identity Development**

The participants discussed not only how their background impacted their research, but they also discussed how their professional identity and values impacted their research interests. Juliet talked about her background and values impact he research interests, “I think that my
background, gives me a lot of fire for research. I believe that, ugh, I think there’s been a lot of systemic oppression in the way that we have researched different populations in the past, not just who we choose to research but how we choose to research them and how we choose to interpret those results, and then where we put those results and what we highlight when we talk about them.”

Education and professional identity had impacts in several areas. Jay talked about her evolving identity and growing interest in research. “I am leaning into my professional identity as a counselor educator. I’m still actually not certain I’m going to become a counselor educator. I feel like my role is gonna be in advocacy. I also am just in the earliest phase of my research stuff, and I really, really think that research, anti-racism, clinical skills for anti-racism practice is the kind of thing I’m triangulating around. Researcher is what I’m starting to lean into more, but I don’t have it fully formed yet. I’m a little intimidated, still.”

**Educator Identity Development**

The impact on teaching centered on how their background and experiences influenced their teaching methods and work with students. Brittney spoke about how her background influences how she includes students in the teaching process. “My background gives me a deeper respect for multiple voices. I think that one of the unique things about the way that I teach in contrast to maybe some of my other counterparts is that I don’t view myself as the expert. I view the settings, we’re cofacilitators in learning because I learn from my students; they learn from me. It’s a equal exchange.”

Jay acknowledged how her learning had been shaped by the primarily white institutions (PWI) she attended. “I feel like a growth edge for me is better understanding learning styles because my background, I have a lot of classic white supremacist traits baked into my own
Some participants acknowledge how privilege shows up in the classroom and how they address that with students. Miya shared how her background and knowledge of privilege encourage her to reflect and be conscientious of how she presents information to students. She said, “You can attend college and be dirt poor. That’s what I did in my undergrad. Just remembering that. I’m constantly recognizing and before I speak or teach or encourage, wanting to address the challenges that are probably, that are absolutely faced by people. I think that’s such a benefit to me because I’m constantly trying to learn about myself and do better in how I—again, that piece of showing up. I probably wasn’t showing up, recognizing, and calling out my own privilege five years ago, but now I do that. Sometimes, I do it very, very directly, and I just say, hey, you’re learning about leadership and advocacy and racism from a white woman. Oh, the irony. Other times, it’s more subtle, where it doesn’t have to be said because, while that is important, it doesn’t have to be explicit then.”

Leadership and Service Identity Development

Leadership

Adelaide shared how her privileged identities overlapped with her identity as a woman in leadership. She said, “If I’m being honest with myself, I think I can approach leadership in a way that I’m very protected because I have so many privileged identities. I don’t, I absolutely think about how I’m coming across, and I think specifically, the identity of being a woman. Recently, I’ve been thinking a lot about, oh, I sent this email where I set boundaries. I advocated for myself. Afterward, my thought is, this person’s definitely gonna think I’m a bitch. Which is not
something I would think of if I was a man. I do think that is something that impacts myself as a leader.”

Service

Several participants identified getting involved in professional organizations as a service to their profession. Brittney talked about her experience as a black woman in the context of involvement in professional organizations. She shared, “When I think about service to the profession, like the school counseling profession, I think that my background has made me want to be a more active voice. I present at national conferences and state conferences and workshops and things like that just so that there is diversity represented. That’s important to me because I know at one time, there was this hashtag WASCA, so white ASCA, being the American School Counselor Association, just because at that time, the board was completely white. People who were presenting at conferences were predominantly white. I would like to be the face of changing the narrative.”

For Jay, service is a large component of her professional identity. She shared, “I’m involved in all kinds of service roles right now. It’s really, really an important part of my professional identity. I’m on several counselors for social justice roles, both at the school level and at the national level. I do a lot of local, like therapist association advocacy work, working on a diversity committee at a local counselor association, things like that. I participate in my state’s licensing board, their public meetings, their committee meetings. I try to stay involved with public policy in those ways.”

Other Factors Impacting Professional Identity

Though this study aimed to capture the experiences of privilege and marginalization, there were several other factors that impacted participants’ professional identity development,
including mentorship, values and beliefs, counselor ethics, experiences, personality, first-
generation status, and one’s education.

Napoleon shared how the mentors he had growing up were the most influential on his
journey to where he is today and how he plans to pay it forward. “It’s impacted it because I have
had some great role models as a child, and I wanta continue to be a role model and an advocate
for my race today. I think that’s a great impact for children. Black males today, I don’t think they
have some of the same opportunities or some of the role models I had as a child.”

Values and beliefs were other commonalities for some participants. Whether it was based
on values instilled in them by their family, their religious or spiritual affiliation, or the values
they have due to their counselor identity. Meghan reflected on how her midwestern values
impacted her work ethic, which is a component of her professional identity. “We always need to
be curious. We always need to be open-minded. Really honor where people are coming from. Try
to meet them where they are. Just don’t make any assumptions that somebody knows something
because they might not... I’m gonna go back to that Midwestern values. I just work, really, like
that’s my go-to. A lot of folks have commented my work ethic is almost to my own detriment
because...I just feel like as long as I work really hard, I feel comfortable. If I don’t work hard, it
makes me feel very uncomfortable...Pros and cons, right? It’s probably helped because I feel
like I do a good job for my community and in this program, but then I’m real tired.”

Experiences also played a role in defining one’s professional identity. These experiences
include within and outside of higher education. Jennifer shared how her experiences since being
a student have formed her professional identity saying, “I am a doctoral student in training to be
a counselor educator...I’ve taught a few courses, being in either a teaching assistant position or
guest lecturer position. I have been involved in research, most of them have been generated by
myself, and I invited my colleagues. I’ve been involved in the mentorship program in a local chapter of [Chi Sigma Iota] CSI, so I’ve been a chairperson. This is my second year. I think that’s kind of overall how I see myself professionally.”

Napoleon talked about how experiences helped shape his professional identity and personal identity. He explained, “Schooling, academics, service in the community, academics, participating in conferences, also writing, scholarship and research. All those help to not only for your personal identity, but for your professional identity. I’m all about investing in myself. Going back to school is a big, a huge investment.”

Several participants identified as first-generation college students. This mostly produced challenges for participants due to the difficulty it could be to procure funding for college, and some had to work while in school to pay for tuition. In addition, this impacted their experience in college due to decreased feelings of belonging. There was some overlap between having a first-generation status and having lower SES, but not in all cases, which is why those identities were separated. Meghan shared how being a first-generation college student impacted her feelings of belonging, sharing, “What’s just coming up immediately is the fact that I’m a first-generation college student. That’s an identity for me that impacts my professional identity because I just feel like I’ve been in a lotta spaces many times where I don’t feel like I belong. I feel like I have to work really, really hard to kinda prove myself.”

Juliet had a similar experience with feelings of belonging, but instead of experiencing that in college, she experienced it back home. “I did come from a background of poverty, and I’m a first-generation student, so education was pretty frowned upon actually in my family because it was not something that people had a lot of access to and didn’t respect. A lotta times, out of that...sense of self-preservation, preventing shame. If I think education’s stupid, I can’t be
to upset that I didn’t have opportunities to get it. Being the one who was very focused on academics and school and very good in school, all those kinda things, kinda made me a little bit of a black sheep in my family.”

Education, specifically the education received in their doctoral programs, impacted all participants in different ways. It increased participants’ confidence in their abilities as counselor educators, it improved their financial well-being post-graduation, it increased participants’ awareness of injustices and abilities to address them, and it overall helped people grow as a person. Miya shared how her education developed her into a creator of knowledge as opposed to simply the receiver of knowledge. She said, “A big part of the reason why my education is the most impactful is because my education has allowed me to show up and continuing to improve and grow as I show up. The way I showed up five years ago isn’t the same way I’m showing up now. That...impacts my development. I think an example of that is I used to attend conferences or Zoom meetings or whatever I could, but now I’m in a place where I’m showing up and wanting to present...and share that knowledge. A big piece of that has been my education, my educational knowledge and development.”

Theme 4: Privilege and Marginalization as a Motivator

Most participants shared how their awareness of privilege and marginalization has grown with age, experience, and education. It was found that this increase in awareness was also a motivating factor for participants. Two subthemes emerged from this finding, including how awareness increased empathy and how participants were motivated to participate in advocacy and work with others regarding the topic.
Awareness Increases Empathy

The more one learned about their privileged and marginalized statuses and how that impacted their journey, including those around them, the more motivated people were to evoke change. Several participants shared how exposure to new ideas and people only increased their empathy for others. Juliet shared how this increased awareness impacted her. “I think also maturing and learning to understand and recognize privilege has been very impactful because now, I see it. I don’t think I see it all the time. I think that’s the inherent nature of privilege. I think that I just gobble it up like everybody does a lotta times, but sometimes, when I am able to see it again, it enhances my empathy.”

Due to this increasing empathy, some participants returned to school, and some chose to engage in research regarding these systemic problems. Jay described her decision to pursue her doctorate, saying, “That then led me to the Ph.D. program when I graduated from the master’s program. All of it is completely based on my identity and my interest in helping fix what I see are the systemic problems with racism in our country. It’s 100% my race...I’ve been on a real...interpersonal journey to understand my—whiteness, and I have a commitment to learn about microaggressions and privilege and all of that thing in the way that I show up as a counselor educator and all these things. It’s like 100%. It’s one of the most important things in my life.”

Advocacy/Work with Others

This subtheme encapsulates how this motivation impacted participants' work with others. Participants shared their experience addressing privilege, how their background, including some participants' “whiteness,” was a motivator, the challenges of advocacy, the importance of advocacy on their professional identity, and the good side of privilege.
For Miya, her identity as a white woman impacts her professional identity and the way she works with others. She said, “I think my professional identity is, I’m a huge fan of critical thinking and critical reflection. My identity and unchosen part of being a white woman in America is constantly, I’m constantly reflecting on that in what I do, how I show up, and what I pay attention to because I don’t ever want to be the voice for someone. I want to help someone find their own voice or be heard. I think that’s something in advocacy that is really important that we do.”

When it comes to advocacy, there are numerous avenues in which one can advocate. Advocacy can present at all levels of society, from a micro level, which can look like conversations with people in one’s community, to a macro level, which could include institutional policy. The American Counseling Association (ACA) developed its own levels of competency as it applies to counseling professionals. They identify three levels of advocacy: client/student, school/community, and public arena (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009).

One subtheme that was identified by most participants was not only the importance of advocacy but also the challenges that come with advocacy work. Rachel expressed how she received pushback as a white woman advocating for groups outside her identity. She said, “Sometimes, it’s hard to advocate for minority groups or marginalized populations or communities when you’re not actually in them. However...just because I’m an artist, just because I’m a military spouse doesn’t mean I want to advocate for military spouses because it’s exhausting already, living in the challenges of that. I don’t wanta dedicate my whole life to it...I kind of try to parallel, that might be similar to the experience of people living in those communities. Just because you belong to that community or that identity...doesn’t mean you

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have to spend the rest of your life advocating for it. I receive pushback, and it’s been uncomfortable because of that, and that’s been a challenge.”

Summary of Findings

This phenomenological qualitative research study, which analyzed data from ten counselor educators in training, produced a number of conclusions their accounts of experiencing privilege and marginalization and how it affected the formation of their professional identities. There were numerous findings to be considered and further researched. First, participants bring all identities and experiences to the table, and it is impossible to separate one’s social identities from one’s professional identity.

Additionally, one’s education and educational experience was the largest contributor of increased awareness of systemic injustices and how that impacts the systems in which one operates as well as the systems in which students and counseling clients reside.

Further, individuals’ experience with privilege and marginalization impacts how participants conceptualized the topic. Experiences with marginalization are easier to identify because the nature of privilege is not having to recognize privilege. Therefore, privilege awareness typically came after awareness of marginalization. It was found that experiences with marginalization increases empathy for those with similar experiences, while experiences with privilege motivates participant to use their privilege to evoke change.

Lastly, this topic and the human experience will never be straightforward or easy to understand. Therefore, additional research is necessary, and there will always be more to learn about oneself, those around us, and who we are as a collective being.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Overview

Despite the growing literature on multicultural counseling and education, there is always more to discover and learn. Since the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) development in 1992 and the revision renamed the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) in 2016, research only shows the need for more research. One can never truly learn all there is to know; with research comes more questions than answers. Counselors have an ethical obligation to acknowledge the need for ongoing education to stay current on best practices while working with diverse populations. (ACA, 2014).

Given the growing research in counseling education and multicultural and social justice counseling, there is still a deficit in information on the experiences of counselor educators in training, with more focus being on master’s counseling students and counselor educators. The knowledge of the professional development process of counselor educators remains largely unexplored. When students start the doctoral program, they come from various backgrounds and life experiences. For instance, in the current study, some participants entered the doctoral program directly after graduating from their master’s counseling program. In contrast, others spent several years working in the field as professional counselors before returning to school. Some people had the privilege of not working while in school, while others could barely afford the essentials to survive. Some participants came from backgrounds where education was not sought or valued, while others came from privileged families with multiple graduate degrees. Some people experienced discrimination making it more challenging to attain a sense of belonging, while others had the privilege that afforded them the opportunities to be where they are today. All these unique experiences define who they are today and how they represent
themselves as counselor educators. To understand this journey, the researcher sought to answer two questions: 1) What are counselor educators in training’s awareness of their privileged and marginalized identities? 2) How does the intersectionality of counselor educators’ race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status impact their professional identity development?

To address these questions, ten individuals currently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited counseling education and supervision doctoral program were recruited and interviewed about their experience with privilege, marginalization, and professional identity development. Analyses of these interviews revealed the commonalities and differences in professional identity development due to these experiences with privilege and marginalization. This inquiry produced four themes, including 1) Awareness of privilege and marginalization, 2) Role of intersectionality, 3) Professional identity development, and 4) Privilege and marginalization as a motivator.

The Study and the Researcher

This study was inspired by the complexity of a person and the importance of looking at the whole person as opposed to part of a person. Chapter 2 outlined the need for multicultural research beyond a single identity (Yampolsky et al., 2013). All humans are beautiful and deserve distinct consideration to be seen for who they are. The complexity of a human’s experience is one that cannot be fully understood (Ratts et al., 2016). However, that does not mean we should not strive to understand ourselves and those around us. This awareness is essential in the field of helping professionals. For counselors, understanding the human experience is vital in treatment. To work with a person on a deeper level concerning one’s social and emotional well-being requires a unique consideration of the nuances and intricacy of a person. That is one reason the
education of counselors goes beyond techniques and requires introspection and consideration of how we impact the world around us.

Being a counselor educator is no easy feat. Not only do counselor educators have to account for themselves and how they show up, but they must account for the learning and development of future counselors and counselor educators. They must produce research pertinent to the field to ensure that we do not stop evolving and improving as a profession. Counselor educators have been involved in service and advocacy to better the field and help their communities and humankind. These are the pillars of our profession. We are helping professionals, but we can only truly help if we know how our identities, experiences, background, and journey to where we are today do not impact the ones we serve. Counselors cannot be perfect and account for all mistakes, but it is counselors’ ethical duty to go beyond the “standards of care” towards what is considered “best practices.” Counselor educators in training must grasp these concepts to disseminate the information and knowledge to counseling master’s students.

Discussion of Themes

Awareness of Privilege and Marginalization

Participants were prompted to reflect on experiences with privilege and marginalization, and most people chose to discuss their privilege related to white racial identity. At the same time, the two Black participants also had the most experience with marginalization due to their racial identity. Jennifer, as the one Asian participant, had the most dichotomous experience being the majority race in China while a minority in the U.S. Regardless, she spoke about how coming to the U.S. increased her awareness. She said, “Living in China, how I’m viewed in terms in social identities, the priorities are very different. When I came here, I realized race can be very
dominant factor for people to perceive other people. I guess it’s a awakening journey. I had my ideas about the U.S.; everything’s equal.” Outside of Jennifer’s unique perspective, it was clear that participants spent the most time in their life reflecting on their ethnicity concerning the topic of privilege and marginalization. Socioeconomic status (SES) and gender identity often arose when discussing specific situations and experiences, such as access to different opportunities. This finding aligns with the assertions in CRT regarding the unavoidable and pervasive nature of race relations in this country.

**Role of Intersectionality**

Including intersectionality as a lens through which not only to view the topic but also the participants added a layer, or multiple layers, of analyses to consider. Though the inclusion of more variables increases the complexity and room for error, it creates a more authentic and deeper understanding of the phenomenon, which is the goal of this study.

As mentioned before, talking about intersectionality was difficult for some participants, while all participants acknowledged the density of identity. They were able to say that their identities cannot be separated and, therefore, must be viewed as such. One cannot simply bring one identity to the table, but all must be considered when evaluating how one shows up, whether in a therapeutic relationship, as an educator, a researcher, or an advocate. All identities are always present.

**Professional Identity Development**

Participants were in different stages of development depending on their history before starting their doctoral program, their experiences while in the program, and their progress thus far. Participants who just started the programs and had less experience with teaching and research held less confidence in identifying as a counselor educator. For most participants, it was
not until they were the course instructor of record before feeling like counselor educators themselves. This finding is similar to Dollarhide et al. (2013) findings, where specific transformative tasks and the integration of multiple identities were needed for professional identity development. This study shows the need for integrating more than just professional identities and roles but also the social identities that one brings to the role of counselor educator.

Privilege and Marginalization as a Motivator

This finding was inspiring to discover because it reflects the motivation for this study. The more participants learned about their privilege and marginalization, especially their privilege, the more motivated they became to seek change. This motivation transcended multiple levels of advocacy, from motivation to talk to the person who does your hair or changes your oil to the motivation to conduct research and become involved in professional organizations to become an agent of change and serve as a role model to encourage others to advocate for social justice.

Recommendation for Future Research

More research is needed on this topic using intersectionality theory. Specifically, multicultural, and social justice-orientated research could benefit from employing an intersectionality theory when exploring the intricacies of human experience. This framework should not be limited to qualitative studies and should include quantitative research. The researcher conducted a quantitative study before the current study but could not produce fruitful research due to copious variables when examining the intersectionality of one’s identity. Only descriptive statistics were able to be obtained. The researcher attempted to study this topic by sending a survey through list-serves. After gathering data from more than 200 participants, the results were analyzed. However, for the quantitative study, all social identities were explored,
which made it difficult to interpret data. No two participants had identical social identities. Once separated into groups, the data sets were too small to run complex statistics; therefore, the generalization of the results was unsuccessful. This demonstrates the nuances in identities and the breath of a human being, which is another reason why qualitative research is a crucial tool in understanding the complexity of a human.

One unexpected finding, but relatable to many helping professionals, is the challenges of advocacy. Advocacy and social justice were essential to the participants’ professional identity. This finding is unsurprising given the ethical and moral principles of counselors. What was interesting was how an individual’s identity could be a hindrance in attempts to advocate for certain populations. This included pushback received from peers, colleagues, and even program faculty.

Further, the duality of privilege and marginalization due to gender identity should be investigated. The counseling profession has become increasingly a female-dominated field; however, that trend is behind when it comes to counselor educators. For example, CACREP statistics show that in 2022, 81.03% of students enrolled in a master’s degree program were female-identifying students, while 56.24% of full-time faculty members were female-identifying (CACREP, 2023). This trend produces the duality of privilege and marginalization for both male and female-identifying students. This creates a duality considering that the female gender identity is considered more of a disadvantaged identity in society but more privileged within the counseling helping profession. Participants stated both positive and negative experiences regarding their gender identity. Participants identified as more privileged in counseling relationships, mixed in counseling education, and disadvantaged regarding leadership roles. Further exploration is needed to understand this phenomenon.
Additionally, it would be interesting to see how counselor educators’ views on privileged and marginalization varied compared to the general American public or other helping professionals such as nursing and social workers. Another approach could examine the differences in beliefs between counselor educators in training and current counselor educators or doctoral students compared to master’s students. There are many avenues to explore, all vital to this study’s broader goal: to increase awareness on this topic to evoke change.

**Recommendations for Counselor Educators**

This study supports the need for more intentional training for master’s and doctoral students regarding privilege awareness and the concept of intersectionality. Several participants were first exposed to the concept of privilege in their master’s degree programs, and some did not learn of the concepts until their doctoral studies. Again, as reflected in the research, the focus of multicultural education is on diverse populations as separate populations rather than the intersectionality of identities (Chan et al., 2018). Additionally, there is more literature regarding counseling education pedagogy; however, there needs to be a shift towards the usage of heutagogy as it places the learning back on the student and creates a more collaborative learning process (Baltrinic & Wachter Morris, 2020; Blaschke, 2012).

Participants in this study who attended in-person programs expressed that they benefited from their in-person program having mentors and a cohort who could support their educational journey. This finding is consistent with the finding of Dollarhide et al. (2013), who reported that students’ confidence grows in the program with peer support and, after completing transformational tasks, integrating all their identities. The key here is the support from others. Every counselor educator remembers their experience in the doctoral program. Not one participant said they could get through the program without help from another individual,
whether a faculty member, advisor, peer, family member, or friend. People need people to make it through the hard times. Knowing this information makes a case for programs to incorporate a cohort model if not done so already.

Research on privilege, marginalization, and the development of multicultural competence of students, indicates one’s teaching pedagogy as the way to address the problem (Baltrinic & Wachter Morris, 2020; Buckley, & Foldy, 2010; Killian & Floren, 2020; Manis 2012) or the development and infusion of multicultural competencies (Ratts et al., 2016; Sue et al., 1992). Further, there has been a subtle push towards the use of heutagogy as opposed to pedagogy (Blaschke, 2012). Whereas pedagogy places the power of learning in the teachers’ hands, heutagogy focuses on developing the learners’ capacity to foster autonomy, which places the learning back on the students. Heutagogy fosters lifelong learning and reduces the natural power imbalance between student and instructor. There needs to be more research and training by counselor educators on the topic of heutagogy to encourage a collaborative learning experience.

**Limitations**

Some of limitations of this study are due to the nature of qualitative study, the researcher’s learning along the way, and the complexity of the topic. These analyses are descriptive and informative and are based on participant self-report data from counselor educators in training across the United States. Representative sampling techniques were not used despite being drawn from a national sample. Instead, convenience, purposive, and criterion sampling were employed to ensure that participants fit the study well. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all students enrolled in a counselor education and supervision program.
However, given the array of individual backgrounds and experiences of students enrolled in doctoral programs in the U.S., including their experience of privilege and marginalization, it is unlikely that one would be able to find identical experiences among participants, which limits the topic from being generalizable in any format.

Common in social science research is the limitation of self-reported data due to social desirability bias (Creswell, 2013). Further, given the sensitivity in sharing one’s experiences with privileged and marginalization, it is conceivable that participants answered in alignment with what is societally deemed a privileged and marginalized status. Additionally, some participants drew on experiences considered outside of themselves. Though some responses were not directly related to participants’ experiences, this data added context to how people conceptualized these concepts.

**Conclusion**

As counselors, educators, researchers, social justice advocates, and humans, we cannot be complacent in thinking we have learned all there is to know. Counselors are lifelong learners, which means we constantly strive to better ourselves, those we serve, and our profession. As counselor educators, we should incorporate and seek out different forms of learning. Based on the research (e.g., Buckley & Foldy, 2010; Chan et al., 2018; Haskins & Singh, 2015; Killian & Floren, 2020) and the experiences of the participants, incorporating more experiential and collaborative learning would be beneficial in increasing awareness of privilege and marginalization within at both micro and macro levels of understanding. Participants gained confidence and competence by learning from others and practicing themselves. Most importantly, we must remember that we can always learn more; we can always improve.
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https://doi.org/10.15241/aam.2.1.48


Now.


https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00126
ARE YOU ENROLLED IN A CACREP-ACCREDITED COUNSELING EDUCATION AND SUPERVISION DOCTORAL PROGRAM

AND

HAVE YOU TAKEN A COURSE ON TEACHING OR HAVE GRADUATE-LEVEL TEACHING EXPERIENCE?

If so, I am looking for research participants for my dissertation research study focusing on professional identity development and the impact of privilege and marginalization due to one’s social identities, specifically race and socioeconomic status.

This is a semi-structured interview that will take place on Zoom for approximately 60-90 minutes. Participants will receive a $25 gift card as compensation for their time.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN THIS RESEARCH, PLEASE COMPLETE THE SURVEY AND THE RESEARCHER WILL CONTACT YOU TO SCHEDULE AN INTERVIEW

The contact for the IRB staff and the University of Memphis is 901-678-2705 or irbememphis.edu

This research is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Stephen Zanskas in the department of Counseling Education and Supervision at the University of Memphis. To learn more about this research, contact Tristan McKenzie at tkmckenzie@memphis.edu.
This consent is for your records – no need to return to the researcher

Consent to Participate in a Research

Professional Identity in Counselor Education: The Intersectionality of Social Identities

Why are you being invited to take part in this research?

You are invited to participate in a qualitative study on the intersectionality and privilege awareness of counselor educators in-training. You are being asked to take part in this research because you are a graduate student working on a doctorate in counseling, education, and supervision.

Who is doing the research?

In charge of this research is Tristan McKenzie M.S. (Lead Investigator, IU) of the University of Memphis Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Research. She is being guided in this research by Stephen Zanskas, Ph.D. (Advisor). Other people on the research team may assist at different times during this research.

What is the purpose of this research?

By doing this research, we hope to learn more about counselor educators’ in-training views and awareness of the intersectionality of their privileged and/or marginalized status(es) and how this awareness can impact professional identity development.

Are there reasons why you should not take part in this research?

You should not take part in this research if you meet one of the following criteria:

- You are not enrolled in a doctorate in counseling, education, and supervision program
- If your program is not CACREP-accredited
- If you have not had one of the following teaching experiences: taken either the teaching course, experience as a teaching assistant (TA), and/or as the instructor of record for a course in counseling education.
- If you simply do not want to participate.

What will you be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire, which includes four questions to screen for eligibility. Once eligibility is determined you will be contacted by the researcher to schedule an interview. The interview will be conducted via HIPAA Zoom which will last approximately 60-90 minutes. While conducting the interview, you’re asked to be honest with your experience and beliefs as a counselor educator in training to questions.

What are the possible risks and discomforts?

To the best of our knowledge, what you will be doing will have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. One of the few potentials for harm to you for participating could be that you experience minor emotional discomfort as
this research requires an introspection about yourself. Though there is minimal risk from participating in this research, some participants may experience discomfort when reflecting on their experience with privilege and oppression. You may find some questions to be upsetting or stressful. If so, we can tell you about some people who can help you with these feelings.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You will not get any personal benefit from taking part in this research. Your willingness to take part; however, may, in the future, help society as a whole better understand this research topic.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE RESEARCH?

If you decide to take part in the research, it should be because you want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. However, you would no longer be eligible for compensation. You can stop at any time during the interview and keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in the survey.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

If you choose, you will receive a $25 gift card to Amazon.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

There may be concern about the anonymity of participants when asking for personal information. Requesting participants to answer questions regarding their multiple social locations (e.g., race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, (dis)abilities) could reasonably lead someone to believe they could be identified based on their response. To ensure anonymity, you will be asked to provide a pseudonym, or a pseudonym will be provided for you.

To ensure confidentiality, identifying information will be kept on a secure password-protected computer. We will make every effort to prevent anyone, not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what that information is. When I write about the research to share it with other researchers, you will not be personally identified in these written materials. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the research. Results will be reported in collective group terms to safeguard the confidentiality of participants.

CAN YOU WITHDRAW FROM THE RESEARCH EARLY?

This interview is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part in the research, you still have the right, at any time, that you no longer want to continue. You can withdraw from the interview by saying you wish to stop or logging off.
WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

If you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the research, you can contact the primary investigator, Tristan McKenzie, at tmckenz@memphis.edu or 901.626.4295 or her faculty advisor, Stephen Zanskas szanks@memphis.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705.

NO NEED TO SIGN – CONSENT WILL BE GATHERED AT LINK BELOW

_________________________________________________________          ____________________________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study                          Date

_________________________________________________________
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_________________________________________________________          ____________________________________________
Name of authorized person obtaining informed consent                          Date

After reading the informed consent, you may follow this link to the survey, where you will electronically sign:

https://memphis.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bPeMyiYSwmwMudU
Appendix C

Thematic Map 1

Awareness of Privilege and Marginalization

SES

Race & Ethnicity

Difference Across Settings
Appendix D

Thematic Map 2

Role of Intersectionality

Duality of Privilege & Marginalization

Changing Identities

Impact of Social Identities on One Another
Appendix E

Thematic Map 3

Professional Identity Development

- How One Identifies
- Other Factors Impacting PI
- Leadership & Service Identity Development
- Educator Identity Development
- Research Identity Development
Appendix F

Thematic Map 4

Privilege & Marginalization as a Motivator

Awareness Increases Empathy

Advocacy & Work with Others
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<td>- Racial privilege: assumptions by others</td>
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<td>- Racial disadvantage on educational experience</td>
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<td>Overarching white privilege</td>
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<td>Advantages of marginalized identity</td>
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# Appendix I

## Theme 3 and Corresponding Codes

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Appendix J

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| Codes | - Impact of awareness  
- SES disadvantage impact on working with others  
- Awareness motivator to continue school, research, etc. | - Experience addressing privilege  
- "Whiteness" motivator for advocacy  
- Advocacy on a micro level  
- Challenges of advocacy  
- Importance of advocacy on PI  
- Background impact on advocacy  
- Importance of privilege awareness  
- The good side of privilege |
Appendix K

Date: 7-15-2023

IRB #: PRO-FY2022-284
Title: Professional Identity Development Among Counselor Educators In-Training: The Impact of Privilege Awareness and Intersectionality of Social Identities
Creation Date: 1-16-2022
End Date: 
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Tristan McKenzie
Review Board: University of Memphis
Sponsor: American Counseling Association/ACES (ACA)

Study History

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Key Study Contacts

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