A Phenomenological Study Exploring the Experiences and Perceptions of Counselor Education Students Who Have Completed an Intensive Social Justice Retreat

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF COUNSELOR EDUCATION STUDENTS WHO HAVE COMPLETED AN INTENSIVE SOCIAL JUSTICE RETREAT

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

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College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
Department of Applied Psychology and Counselor Education
Counselor Education and Supervision

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This Dissertation by: Aaron James Henderson

Entitled: A Phenomenological Study Exploring the Experiences and Perceptions of Counselor Education Students Who Have Completed an Intensive Social Justice Retreat

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Department of Applied Psychology and Counselor Education

Accepted by the Doctoral Committee

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The intention of this phenomenology research study was to better understand the experiences and perceptions of counseling students who attend a weekend intensive social justice retreat. This examination may shed light on whether an intensive social justice experience is a valuable and worthy training modality to compliment the traditional classroom learning environment often found in counselor preparation programs. The data from two semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and research participant journals were utilized from 10 counseling students from CACREP accredited counseling programs in a mid-Western mountain state. Seven themes emerged from the data including: Increased Awareness, Desired for Prolonged Training, An Emotional Journey, Power in the Story, Admiration and Appreciation for Group Diversity, Making Connections and Building Trust in Community, and Advocacy and Action. In an addition to the seven themes, a subtheme emerged in connection with the theme An Emotional Journey titled Voice: Turn Up the Volume; or Stay Quiet. These themes captured the participants experience at a social justice retreat along with additional perceived benefits of engagement in social justice training. Results from this study have implications for counselor educators, students, faculty, counselors, and advocates for training, community engagement, and social justice advocacy. Findings revealed that a social justice retreat
was a transformational experience for participants. A social justice retreat may serve to both complement and enhance multicultural training that is offered in traditional classroom settings. The findings suggested that counselor educators may benefit from attending a social justice retreat.
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For to be free is not to merely cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way
that respects and enhances the freedom of others--Nelson Mandela

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could fill a dissertation with the thousands of ways I have been impacted by people who
have poured into my life. While I mention some of these individuals by name, please
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other end of the line. From the time I was a child, you had confidence in me and believed I could do things that even I did not. You are family. Not the victory but the action; Not the goal but the game; In the deed, the glory! Blackshirts!

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This study was guided by the researcher’s fundamental belief that counselor preparation programs are falling short of providing the experiences necessary to prepare counselors to work with clients who come from a cultural background that differs from their own. The multicultural counseling movement remains a focus of the counseling profession and in counselor preparation (B. Y. Cartwright, Daniels, & Zhang, 2008; Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016). Despite the prolonged attention multicultural counseling training (MCT) has received from counselor educators and the research calling for more robust MCT training in counselor preparation programs, most counselor education programs still rely on a single course as their primary training modality (Carter, 2003; Duan & Brown, 2016; Pieterse, Evans, Risner-Butner, Colins, & Mason, 2009; Ridley, Mendoza, & Kanitz, 1994). Often in counselor training programs, and more specifically in a single semester, counselor educators are charged with the task of inspiring and training counselors to increase their self-awareness, gain an understanding of personal biases and develop the knowledge and skills to work with individuals who have various life experiences and cultural backgrounds (Hipolito-Delgado, Cook, Avrus, & Bonham, 2011; C. C. Lee, 2019; M. Y. Lee & Greene, 2003). This is a challenging task considering that becoming a multicultural competent counselor is an ongoing lifelong process. It may be too ambitious to expect students to achieve cultural competence in a single semester course.
(B. Y. Cartwright et al., 2008; Ratts, 2011; Ratts et al., 2016). Carter (2003) specifically asserts that cultural competence cannot be acquired through a single course.

As the United States continues to grow more culturally diverse, so does the need for counselor educators to train counselors to meet the demands of their diverse clientele. Multicultural competence among counselors must continue to evolve alongside the changing face of our nation if we are to address the needs of our culturally diverse clients (Ratts et al., 2016). Projections indicate that by year 2020 the majority of school-age children will be those who identify as people of color coming from diverse cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds (Zalaquett, Foley, Tillotson, Dinsmore, & Hof, 2008).

There exists a call to action (Kaplan, Tarvydad, & Gladding, 2014; Ratts et al., 2016) for counselor educators to take a more critical and holistic look at the counseling related needs of the diverse individuals that form our communities and to assess whether or not counselors are being trained to meet these needs. One facet of multicultural counseling training that warrants attention is assessing the current training modalities for MCT and determining if there are, in fact, teaching methods available to enhance multicultural training that extend beyond the traditional classroom setting. Taylor (2007) states “there is a definitive need to explore other settings, particularly where the teaching contexts are more informal, less controlled by the instructor, and more susceptible to external influences” (p. 186). Experiential learning has been considered a vehicle to enhance the learning that takes place in the traditional classroom setting (Cantor, 1997; Cassidy, 2001; Dyce & O’wusu-Ansah, 2016; Lindsay & Ewert, 1999; Miettenen, 2000; Scarce, 1997; Seed, 2008; Wright, 2000).
History and Context

Experiential learning dates back to the 20th century and is rooted in the fundamental belief that the experience is the most important tool in learning (Lindsay & Ewert, 1999). Dewey (1938) defined experiential learning as learning that takes place through direct experience and being engaged in, and reflecting on, these experiences. Cantor (1997) defined experiential education as learning that engages the learner in the phenomena being studied. The emphasis of Cantor’s work is challenging students to engage with the material beyond the reading and discussions that take place in the traditional classroom setting. More specifically, experiential learning brings the learning that takes place in the classroom to life by providing students opportunities to move out of the classroom and into the field (Wright, 2000). Furthermore, experiential learning is frequently recognized for helping students connect to the depth of the subject matter that cannot be reached through books and lectures alone (Wright, 2000).

Many students and instructors alike have found experiential instruction to be effective in engaging a multitude of student learning styles, as it draws on concrete, abstract, and reflective learning (Cantor, 1997; Kolb, 1984; Miettinen, 2000). It is a learner-centered approach that embraces unique and individual learning styles (Miettinen, 2000). Experiential learning not only shows promise for the enhancement of student learning; faculty may benefit too. Scarce (1997) posited that faculty engaging with students in experiential learning activities can help to create closer and subsequently more meaningful relationships with students. Experiential learning activities have the potential to lead to transformational learning experiences for all parties involved.
Transformational learning theory, in connection with experiential learning activities, may play a key role in improving the current state of multicultural training in counselor training programs. Transformational learning can be described as learning that shifts assumptions and changes behaviors (Mezirow, 1997). Transformational learning calls for self-examination and a sharing of thoughts, which leads to exploring new relationships, and actions (Mezirow, 1997). Transformational learning opportunities may allow professional counseling students an opportunity to learn from the experiences of others while wrestling with their own beliefs and assumptions about others who come from backgrounds that differ from their own.

**Multicultural and Social Justice Paradigms**

Multicultural and social justice paradigms are well connected in the existing counselor education literature (Bhattacharrya, Ashy, & Goodman, 2014; Coker, Meyer, Smith, & Price, 2010; Crethar, Rivera, & Nash, 2008; Flores et al., 2014; Hoover & Morrow, 2016; Motulsky, Gere, Saleem, & Trantham, 2014; Pack-Brown, Thomas, & Seymour, 2008; Toporek & Worthington, 2014; Zucchero, Iwasaki, Lewis, Lee, & Robbins, 2014) as the terms multicultural and social justice are often paired together or used interchangeably. In the current research a social justice retreat is offered as a potential training pedagogy to enhance the current state of multicultural training in counselor education programs. It is important to discuss the relationship between multicultural and social justice paradigms.

Goodman et al. (2004) defined social justice as “the scholarship and professional action designed to change societal values, structures, policies, and practices, such that
disadvantaged, or marginalized groups gain increased access to these tools of self-
determination” (p. 795). Arredondo and Perez (2003) stated:

The evolution of the multicultural counseling competency development process
emerged] from social justice behavior evident throughout the Civil Rights era of
the 1950s and 1960s. Though often identified solely as a political movement
about social change, the Civil Rights era sparked action by psychologists,
counselors, and psychiatrists that led to the creation of ethnic/racial-specific
associations, such as the Association of Black Psychologists and the Association
of Non-White Concerns (ANWC) in the late 1960s and 1970s. (pp. 282-283)

Social justice and a social justice-informed approach to counseling has always
been at the forefront of the multicultural counseling competency movement (Arredondo
& Perez, 2003). Ratts (2009) posited that a social justice-informed approach to
counseling honors that the clients’ struggles are rooted in sociopolitical factors including
those of discrimination and oppression and the counselor is to serve in the role of an
advocate for the client.

Crethar et al. (2008) outlined the common threads that link multicultural, feminist,
and social justice paradigms in the counseling profession. All three paradigms are
committed to demolishing social injustices that adversely affect the mental health of
oppressed and marginalized groups in contemporary society. In order to do so
multicultural, feminist, and social justice counselors honor that helping clients who come
from marginalized backgrounds requires an understanding and awareness of the ways
that various forms of injustice, oppression, discrimination, marginalization, and socio-
cultural privileges adversely impact the lives of people in contemporary society
(Arredondo & Perez, 2003).

Crethar et al. (2008) captured additional common threads between multicultural
and social justice paradigms including the belief that both (a) promote socio-political-
environmental changes within the counseling context, (b) place emphasis on the
egalitarian relationship between the client and counselor, (c) honor the importance of
validating clients experiences of oppression and discrimination, and (d) reject the
“disease model” of counseling and therapy. An additional link that bonds the three
paradigms is the emphasis that each places on challenging counselors to adopt and
employ various roles and services in order to respond to the needs of clients whose
identities have been shaped by the experiences in their individual, group, and societal
contextual interactions and experiences (Crethar et al., 2008).

Although there are similarities between multicultural and social justice paradigms
there are subtle differences. These differences revolve mainly around where attention is
placed in the context of the counseling relationship. C. C. Lee (2019) defined
multicultural counseling as the “working alliance between counselor and client that takes
the personal dynamics of the counselor and client into consideration alongside the
dynamics found in cultures of both these individuals” (p. 5). Multicultural counseling
honors the individual experiences of diverse clients and how these experiences are shaped
by their cultural backgrounds in order to identify how their psychological needs might be
addressed through counseling (C. C. Lee, 2019). Social justice counseling “includes the
empowerment of the individual as well as active confrontation of injustice and inequality
in society because they affect clientele as well as those in their systemic contexts”
(Crethar et al., 2008, p. 270). Social justice counselors pay specific attention to the
promotion of four critical principles that guide their work: equity, access, participation,
and harmony (Crethar et al., 2008). While both multicultural and social justice counselors
are committed to empowering and advocating for clients, counselor operating from a
social justice paradigm may take a particular interest in serving those clients who come from historically marginalized cultural groups and settings. In order to prepare students to implement a social justice counseling approach where students are prepared to meet the needs of marginalized clients, counselor education programs must teach students how they can advocate with and on behalf of students who experience inequities, marginalization, and oppression (Crethar et al., 2008).

**Transformational Learning and Social Justice: A Natural Connection?**

Now that the relationship between multicultural and social justice paradigms has been discussed I will turn the focus on the connection between transformational learning and social justice principles. Throughout the history of counselor multicultural training it has been a challenge for counselor educators to provide transformational learning opportunities for students that extend beyond the classroom setting. Although experiential learning has been validated as a powerful training tool (Hoggan, 2015; Mezirow, 2003; Taylor, 2009), minimal literature exists on how to use this training modality to facilitate the development of cultural competence (Pernell-Arnold, Finley, Sands, Bourjolly, & Stanhope, 2012). This reality has contributed to a lack of institutional and faculty support for alternative learning platforms that extend beyond the traditional classroom setting (Hoshmand, 2004), such as a social justice retreat, to name just one modality. Furthermore, professionals in the counseling field struggle to agree on how multicultural education should be facilitated in counselor education programs. More specifically, counselor educators have differing opinions on which elements should take priority in multicultural counseling curriculum. Counselor educators often express differing opinions when discussing the content, sequence, methodology, length, schools
of thoughts, and the type of trainers that factor in to multicultural counseling curriculum (Pernell-Arnold et al., 2012; Ridley, Mendoza, Kanitz, Angermeir, & Zenk, 1994). At the heart of this disagreement is an observation by experts in the field that many faculty members and students remain unaware of their own racial and cultural privileges and are ignorant to the various forms of discrimination and prejudices that run rampant in public schools and mental health systems (Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002; Zalaquett et al., 2008). Faculty and students do not know how to respond to the inequities that are perpetuated in their communities and, subsequently, avoid taking action steps toward change. A consequence of these blind spots is highlighted in the fact that counseling programs fail to give multicultural training the proper attention, relying primarily on a single course design (Bemak & Chung, 2007). Junior faculty who may be better equipped and more motivated to teach social justice education often fail to gain the financial and emotional support from senior faculty who are reluctant to add an increased focus on social justice and multiculturalism to existing counseling curriculum (Ratts & Wood, 2011; Sue, 2011; Utsey, Gernat, & Hammar, 2005). Senior faculty may fear the loss of power that accompanies a change in curriculum and adopting alternative pedagogies. Furthermore, faculty are often unequipped with the experience and skills necessary to teach multicultural and social justice related counseling courses (Mitcham, Greenridge, & Smith, 2013). Research on multicultural related transformational learning experiences may serve to capture the attention and support of faculty who may be opposed to the idea of adding more requirements to an already full counseling curriculum.
Social justice education, the education often found at a social justice retreat, has been introduced into multicultural training in counselor education (Coker et al., 2010; Motulsky et al., 2014; Zalaquett et al., 2008) yet further researcher is needed to explore the experiences of counseling students in social justice training and how it may shape their awareness and advocacy development (Hoover & Morrow, 2016). For instance, social justice retreats offer variables that are difficult to find in the traditional classroom setting, including; trained large and small group facilitators, exposure to multiple people from various cultures, 2-3 days of intensive study, and a curriculum designed by experts in the field of social justice and multiculturalism, to name a few. One goal of social justice education is to bring people together to talk about similarities and differences, and learn how to embrace both (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). These components may serve to assist students learning experiences by introducing them to perspectives outside of their normal sphere of influence (A. D. Cartwright, Avent-Harris, Munsey, & Lloyd-Hazlett, 2018; Paitu & Hinton, 2003).

The foundational framework of social justice education appears to significantly overlap with the core characteristics of transformational learning. The framework for social justice education is:

1. Establish an equilibrium between the emotional and cognitive components of the learning process.

2. Acknowledge and support the personal and individual dimensions of experience, while making connections to and illuminating the systemic dimensions of social group interactions.

3. Pay explicit attention to social relations within the classroom.
4. Make conscious use of reflection and experience as tools for student-centered learning.

5. Reward changes in awareness, personal growth, and efforts toward change, understood as outcomes of the learning process (Adams, 2007).

Social justice retreats are often built on the assumption that in the process of learning, participants hold valuable knowledge and both peers and teachers can learn in the process (Adams et al., 2007; Mezirow, 2003; Taylor, 2009). Social justice retreat facilitators share control of the environment by inviting participants to take an active part in retreat activities. Social justice education invites students and facilitators alike to expand readings and classroom dialogue by providing opportunities for participants to connect in various discussion formats including whole group, small group, triads, pairs, and one-on-one (Adams et al., 2007). Furthermore, both social justice education and transformational learning place emphasis on the educational experience, highlighting the interpersonal and between group interactions (Adams et al., 2007; Taylor, 2009). It is through and within these interactions where learning and change take place.

The similarities that exist between the fundamental elements of transformational learning and social justice education may be used to enhance the current state of multicultural training in counselor training programs. The focus of the current research is to explore the experiences of counselors who attend a weekend intensive social justice retreat. The ultimate goal of the current research is to explore counselors’ perceptions and experiences in a social justice retreat setting. This exploration may shed light on whether or not a social justice retreat enhances the multicultural learning that takes place in traditional classroom settings. Therefore, it is important that the current research fully
explores the experiences of counselors who attend a social justice retreat. Experiential and transformational learning activities may serve as one avenue counselor educators can explore to enhance the current state of multicultural training often found in counselor training programs.

**Gap in the Literature**

Exposing students to multiple MCT training environments has been offered as a way to better prepare students to provide counseling to a diverse client population (Murphy, Wright, & Bellamy, 1995; Sevig & Etzkorn, 2001). A social justice retreat, rooted in social justice education, may serve as a platform to complement existing multicultural training in counseling programs. Although the multicultural counseling literature offers a multitude of suggestions for increasing cultural competence (Baluch, Bernabei, Robohm, & Sheehy, 2003; Chi-Ying Chung, Talleyrand, Jones, & Daquin, 2011; Constantine, 2001; Davis, 2012; Henriksen, 2006; Hunsaker, 2011) few studies have captured the experiences of counselors who attend a transformational learning experience such as a social justice retreat. Thus, a gap in the literature exists regarding the experiences of counselors who attend a social justice retreat and the specific dynamics of the retreat that may lead to impactful learning experiences for participants.

In order to more effectively train multicultural competent counselors, it is essential that counselor educators prepare future counselors to be efficient in developing a therapeutic process that is relevant to all clients, including racial and cultural minorities (Vontress & Jackson, 2004). Graduate programs are being challenged by faculty in the counseling profession to reshape counselor training programs to better prepare counselors to meet the needs of the clients they serve and equip students to intervene and respond to
social injustice on a broader level (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007). The pairing of social justice conversations and activities in counselor education curriculum is one avenue that could potentially enhance current multicultural training and shift the current structure of multicultural training in counselor education programs. Inviting students to share in the learning as active participants and engaging in activities and dialogue expanding far beyond what often takes place in the traditional classroom setting may serve as a catalyst in helping students discover hidden biases and assumptions. Additionally, students may reveal an undiscovered passion towards a social justice identity that could inspire advocacy efforts and continued social justice education opportunities as one navigates their journey as a counselor in the field.

Authors in counselor education posit that integrating conversations and activities involving social justice is one avenue to increase awareness of counseling professionals’ understanding of multicultural counseling competency (Constantine et al., 2007; M. Y. Lee & Greene, 2003). Although considerable attention centers on social justice in the counseling literature (Constantine et al., 2007; Ratts, D’Andrea, & Arredondo, 2004) minimal debate has been given to the experiences of counselors who attend a social justice retreat and, more specifically, the impact such experiences have on counselor’s beliefs about their ability to work with clients who come from a cultural background that differs from their own. If counselors aspire to both support and advocate for their clients moving forward, conversations around social justice and multiculturalism are to remain at the forefront of the counseling profession (Dollarhide et al., 2018; Ratts et al., 2016).
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of counseling students who attend a weekend intensive social justice retreat. The intent of this research was to gain insight and awareness about the experiences of counselors who attend a social justice retreat in order to explore the role that a social justice retreat may play on the perceived multicultural awareness of counselors in training who attend the retreat. This knowledge is important to both counselors in training and counselor educators alike as it may shed light on whether an intensive social justice experience is a valuable and worthy training modality to compliment the traditional classroom learning environment often found in many counselor preparation programs (Buckley & Foldy, 2010; Burton & Furr, 2014; Coker et al., 2010; Ridley, Mendoza, & Kanitz, 1994). This research also explored participant perceptions of the specific components of a social justice retreat that lead to perceived change in counselor attitudes and beliefs.

Exploration of the specific components of a social justice retreat that participants perceive as enhancing learning could help counselor educators and counselor training programs make informed decisions about what training environments are most beneficial to students as well as the specific curriculum components that make certain experiential activities more valuable than others. Discovering the social justice related activities, dialogues, and environments that counselors describe as most impactful may help guide counselor educators who are seeking to design and enhance the multicultural counseling training curriculum.

One primary guiding research question was developed to explore the impact on counselors perceived attitudes and beliefs after attending a social justice retreat.
Phenomenological methodology will be used as the framework (Creswell, 2007) to help the researcher explore the following guiding research question.

**Guiding Research Question**

Q1 What are the experiences and perceptions of counselor education students who have completed an intensive social justice retreat?

**Rationale for the Study**

Addressing the needs of culturally diverse clients, group, and communities through multicultural competent counseling has been a focal point of the field of counseling for decades (Ratts et al., 2016; Ridley, Espelage, & Rubenstein, 1997; Sue, 1997). Counselor educators have been tasked with preparing counseling students to address the needs of culturally diverse clients, groups and communities (Ratts et al., 2016). Moreover, the *ACA Code of Ethics* (American Counseling Association, 2014) stated that counselor educators are required to “infuse material related to multiculturalism/diversity into all courses and workshops for the development of professional counselors” (F.7.c). Despite the attention multicultural counseling has received, counselor educators continue to search for multicultural training models that prepare counseling students to meet the needs of the culturally diverse clients they are likely to serve.

In addition to infusing multiculturalism and diversity into counseling curriculum, counseling ethics require that counselor educators “train students to gain awareness, knowledge, and skills in the competencies of multicultural practice” (American Counseling Association, 2014). The current research closely examined the domain of counselor self-awareness. Multicultural and social justice competence begins with counselor self-awareness. Knowing oneself is a precursor to understanding others who
come from different cultural backgrounds (Ratts et al., 2016). Counselor education literature is void of research on how to enhance counselor self-awareness using transformational learning activities such as what is offered by a social justice retreat. It is time that the perceptions and experiences of counselors in training in a potentially transformative learning environment, outside of the traditional classroom setting, are captured and shared with counselor educators.

Educational experiences that take place outside the traditional classroom setting, such as a social justice retreat, may lead to transformational learning opportunities for students (Hoggan, 2015; Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2009) and serve as a compliment to the training often found in counselor preparatory programs. As previously stated, social justice retreats offer; trained large and small group facilitators, exposure to multiple people from various cultures, 2-3 days of intensive study, and a curriculum designed by experts in the field of social justice and multiculturalism. Exposure to various cultures not only enriches students learning experiences, it introduces them to perspectives outside of their normal sphere of influence (A. D. Cartwright et al., 2018; Paitu & Hinton, 2003). Therefore, the current state of multicultural counseling training, professional counseling ethics, and a potential to enhance the training often found in traditional classroom settings warrants exploration of the perceptions of counselors in training who attend an intensive experiential event, like a social justice retreat.

**Definition of Terms**

*Advocacy.* Public support for or recommendation for a particular cause (Adams, 2007; Ratts et al., 2016).

*Agency.* Taking back or exerting power in the subordinated identity (Adams, 2007).
Ally. A person who supports marginalized, silenced, or less privileged groups without actually being a member of the scripts. This person will often directly or indirectly confront systems of oppression (McAdams, Foster, & Ward, 2007; Ratts et al., 2016).

Counselor self-awareness. The process of knowing oneself. Specifically, becoming aware of one’s attitudes and beliefs as a precursor to being able to understand those who come from various identities, statuses, and groups (Ratts et al., 2016).

Diversity. The presence of difference between and among communities. This can include but is not limited to; social identities, race, gender, religion, etc., experiences; worldviews, values and beliefs (Adams, 2007; Adams et al., 2007).

Dominant and agent group. Memberships in a social identity group that provides access to privilege (Adams et al., 2007).

Dominant identity. Holding power, by virtue of identity (Adams et al., 2007).

Experiential learning. A process whereby participants learn through: (a) concrete experience, where students are invited to participate in a new experience; (b) reflective observation, where students are invited to gain a self-awareness of both their cognitive and affective response to the new experience; (c) abstract conceptualization, where students are invited to connect old knowledge and experiences to new thoughts, feelings, and experiences in hopes of forming new and thoughts and perspectives; (d) active experimentation, where students can apply their new ideas to life experiences (Kolb, 1984).

Identity. The fact of being whom or what a person or thing is (Adams, 2007; Adams et al., 2007).
Institutionalized oppression. Policies and practices of institutions that marginalized or subordinated (Adams, 2007).

Intersections of identity and intersectionality. The concept that our social identities do not exist independent of each other, instead, our various identities interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels to create unique experiences of both dominance and insubordination.

Internalized oppression. Members of subordinate groups believe or act on messages about their subordinate (also applies to treatment of people of similar identities). Also internalized superiority--beliefs that we are better based on dominant identities (Adams et al., 2007).


Multiculturalism. “A wide range of multiple groups without grading, comparing, or ranking them as better or worse than one another and without denying the very distinct and complementary or even contradictory perspectives that each group brings with it” (Pedersen, 1991, p. 4).

Multicultural awareness. The recognition of how one’s personal cultural beliefs and attitudes can affect the counseling relationship (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992).

Multicultural and social justice counseling competencies. Guidelines for the counseling profession to follow in order to support the needs of culturally diverse clients, groups, and communities. Build on the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) by offering (a) a more inclusive and broader understanding of culture and
diversity that encompasses the intersection of identities and (b) to better address the expanding role of professional counselors to include individual counseling and social justice advocacy (Ratts et al., 2016).

**Oppression.** Restricted access to resources and marginalization and isolation based on social group membership (Adams et al., 2007; C. C. Lee, 2019).

**Privilege.** An unearned benefit or right granted to the person based on a membership in a particular social group (Adams et al., 2007).

**Racism.** Systemic advantages given to a group on the basis of skin color (white), and it includes racial prejudice and racial discrimination (Carr, 1997).

**Socially constructed identity.** Created for the purposes of categorizing people; based on beliefs about groups of people, not biology. Including, but not limited to, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and religion (Adams, 2007).

**Social justice.** The distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within society. Due to the recent social justice movement counselors can no longer hide behind their understanding of the multicultural counseling competencies (Jun, 2010).

Goodman et al. (2004) further define social justice as “The scholarship and professional action designed to change societal values, structures, policies, and practices, such that disadvantaged, or marginalized groups gain increased access to these tools of self-determination” (p. 795).

**Subordinated or target group.** Membership in a group that exercises oppression over marginalization in mainstream society (C. C. Lee, 2019).

**Systems of oppression.** Structures that perpetuate limited access to power base in cultural norms, values, legal systems, and structural components of society; systems of
oppression center members of the dominant group (Adams, 2007; C. C. Lee, 2019; Ratts et al., 2016).

*Structural oppression.* Cumulative and compounding effects of social factors (Adams et al., 2007).

*Subordinated identity.* Holding less power, by virtue of identity (Adams et al., 2007).

*Transformational learning theory.* A process by which an individual encounter’s learning situations powerful enough to elicit a reflective response that encompasses understanding how sociocultural influences impact one’s worldview, thereby influencing the individual to challenge their personally dominant worldview (Chen & Martin, 2015; Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2009).

*Worldview.* A set of beliefs about humans and the world. Worldviews answer basic questions about what exists, how we know it, how things work, what is good and bad or right and wrong, and who we are (Bufford, 1997).

**Summary**

Although there is an abundance of literature describing the components of multiculturally competent counseling, surprisingly, very little is known about *how* to teach counselors in training to become multiculturally competent counselors (Kim & Lyons, 2003; Zeleke, Karayigit, & Myers-Brooks, 2018). Zeleke et al. (2018) stated that a gap in the counseling literature remains that captures teaching methods to increase cultural competency with counselors in training. A potential shortcoming in a lack of enhanced multicultural training methods is counseling programs risk graduating students who are not prepared to counsel clients who come from diverse backgrounds (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Buckley & Foldy, 2010; Burton & Furr, 2014; D’Andrea & Daniels,
Furthermore, Kim and Lyons (2003) stated, “the lack of strategies for teaching multicultural competencies that target the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of learning has been a shortcoming in the field of multicultural counseling training” (p. 402). A devastating consequence of this shortcoming is that many minority individuals tend to underutilize and make an early exit from counseling services (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1998; Cheung & Snowden, 1990; Kim & Lyons, 2003).

Teaching and learning multicultural competencies requires the affective domain of learning; learning that triggers one’s emotional state and thoughts regarding the subject being studied (Kim & Lyons, 2003). Subsequently, didactic learning; which is most common in counselor education programs and relies heavily on reading, writing, and discussion, may not be effective for the purpose of teaching counselors in training to move towards multicultural competence (Kim & Lyons, 2003). This study attempts to address what may be shortcoming in multicultural counseling training by exploring the experiences of counselors in training who attend a social justice retreat. The hope is to gain insight and awareness about the experiences of counselors who attend a social justice retreat in order to explore the role that a social justice retreat may play on the perceived multicultural awareness of counselors in training. This research also seeks to document the most influential elements of the social justice retreat and the participants experiences as expectations of the phenomena.

In this study, information was collected to better understand the experiences of counselors in training who attend a social justice retreat. Research participants were required to have attended a CACREP counseling program and successfully completed and passed their required multicultural counseling course. Participant interviews captured
participants transformative experiences in hopes of enhancing the current state of multicultural training in professional counseling programs.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of the literature review is to explore the history of multicultural counseling training and to provide an overview of both transformative and experiential learning. The counseling literature on the use of transformative and experiential learning to inform and enhance multicultural development, and specifically the multicultural counseling competencies, was minimal. This gives rise to the importance of the current research which seeks to explore experiential and transformative methods that can be used to complement and enhance the current MCT programs and curriculums found in professional counseling programs. The reader is provided a detailed overview of the past and current state of multicultural training in the field of counseling and, specifically, the Multicultural Counseling Competencies.

The counseling literature reveals the importance of self-awareness in the journey to becoming a more culturally competent counselor. For this reason, counselor self-awareness is defined and discussed in detail in relationship to becoming a more culturally competent counselor. Connections are made to the current research and the need to include activities and experiences in counselor education curriculum that inspire self-reflection and ultimately, self-awareness. Subsequently, A Path of Counselor Self-Awareness model is described in relationship to the research study and details the importance of self-reflection, which is an integral component of both counselor education and social justice education. Also, in this chapter, social justice is defined and its rise to
the “fifth” force in counseling is discussed in detail. The relationship between social justice and the multicultural counseling competencies is described. Finally, a description of social justice advocacy is outlined and connected to the everchanging counselor roles and responsibilities.

**Transformative Learning**

The review of the counseling literature begins with an examination of transformative learning practices in counselor education. To date few researchers have explored the transformative experiences of students in counseling related programs. Counselor education, and specifically multicultural training, remains in dire need for the implementation of transformative learning opportunities in counselor education curriculum (Hoshmand, 2004; Mitcham et al., 2013; Pernell-Arnold et al., 2012). More specifically, transformational learning theory and activities may play a key role in enhancing multicultural education in counselor training. Pernell-Arnold et al. (2012) suggested that “transformative learning theory provides multicultural training with a theoretical framework that promotes profound affective, cognitive, and structural change at both the individual worldview, group, and systems level” (p. 339). However, before counselor educators and their respective training programs can begin the process of implementing potentially transformative learning experiences for its students, it is essential to have a working understanding of the foundation of transformative learning. To date, minimal research exists that examines the use of transformational group learning as a platform for developing cultural competence (Lackey, 2010; Pernell-Arnold et al., 2012). Furthermore, after an extensive search no literature was found that captured the experiences of students at a social justice retreat.
Transformative learning extends from a constructivist framework where knowledge is constructed through and between those engaging in the experience (Candy, 1991; Cranton, 1994). Mezirow (2003) stated, “transformative learning involves critical reflection of assumptions that may occur either in group interaction or independently” (p. 61). Learning occurs when students draw on the unique life experiences of each individual or the collective experiences of the group to shape the meaning making process. The transformation process is one that seeks to shape frames of reference (Mezirow, 1997). Cranton and Carusetta (2004) explained:

People make meaning out of the world through experiences. What happens once, they expect to happen again. Through this process, people develop habits of mind and frames of reference for understanding the world, much of which is critically assimilated. When a person encounters something unexpected, he or she either rejects the information or begins to question the previously held assumptions. (p. 7)

Mezirow (1997) shared that, as one navigates the world, they develop a series of concepts, values, feelings, responses, and connections that culminate into life experience. Our frames of reference enable us to both understand and make sense of our experiences in this world. The goal of transformative learning is to alter an individual’s frame of reference through critical reflection of one’s habits of mind and points of view (Mezirow, 1997; Moore, 2005). The ultimate objective of transformative learning is to revise old assumptions and ways of interpreting experience through critical self-reflection (Cranton, 1996). This process of revising old assumptions and shifting frames of references could be particularly helpful in multicultural training as counselors are called to examine their own assumptions, biases, and worldviews and work towards shifting or changing those that may impede their work with clients.
The ability to take a look inside oneself and reflect on personal biases and assumptions is a vital component of transformative education. Through the process of critical self-reflection of biases and assumptions we can shift worldviews, reshape understanding and engage in transformative learning experiences (Cranton, 1994; Mezirow, 1997; Moore, 2005; Taylor, 2009). Furthermore, Mezirow (1997) believed that along with critical reflection there were four actions that supported the transformative experience for learners. First, expanding on existing points of view encourages learners to discover new information to support previously held ideas and beliefs. Second, people can learn by transforming their point of view. Intentionally reflecting on one’s beliefs and thoughts of others could be a catalyst for transformative change where new learning can take place. Third, individuals can learn by creating new points of view. Students can develop new frames of reference and create new meaning and interpretations of the world, culture, people, and others previously unknown through experiences. Last, individuals can reshape their habits of mind by examining their biases.

Transformative learning has evolved since its creation and now draws from many disciplines (Tisdell, 2012). Three important developments have been made to the theory which have resulted in a keen focus on social responsibility and collective action (Chen & Martin, 2015). The first change emphasizes the change from the focus on rational discourse to “reflective discourse” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 10). This change highlights the power of affective influences in critical reflection and allows for the development of consciousness that helps to uncover assumptions and biases. Second, critical theory is recognized and valued over the initial theory which was criticized for being predominantly Western, middle-class biased (Baumgartner, 2012; Tisdell, 2012).
Although Transformational Learning Theory views learning from both individual and social dimensions, critics argue that the core of Transformational Learning Theory fails in attempts to capture the social dimension (Flemming, 2018). The rejuvenated focus on critical theory brings back into focus the social dimensions of the theory. Critical theory is “an analysis of society intent on understanding how society is structured so that injustices and structural inequalities are understood as created and sustained by powerful people and systems” (Flemming, 2018, p. 2). Flemming (2018) posited the only way to understand oppression and injustices is through people’s willingness to analyze themselves and their surrounding social systems.

Lastly, Transformative Learning Theory has expanded its focus on cognition and now embraces discourse on the influence of power, race, gender, class and culture as well as the intersection between personal growth and societal responsibility (Chen & Martin, 2015, p. 89). Subsequently, Transformational Learning Theory is described as a “process by which an individual encounters learning situations powerful enough to elicit a reflective response that encompasses understanding how sociocultural influences impact one’s worldview, thereby influencing the individual to challenge their personally dominant worldview (Chen & Martin, 2015, p. 89).

Taylor (2009) reminded us that transformative learning, “involves the most significant learning in adulthood, that of communicative learning, which entails the identification of problematic ideas, beliefs, values, and feelings; critically assessing their underlying assumptions; testing their justification through rational discourse; and striving for decisions through consensus building” (p. 3). However, Hoggan (2015) warned that transformative learning theory is losing its credibility and is becoming problematic as it is
“increasingly being used to refer to almost any instance of learning” (p. 57). The most common and valid critique of Transformative Learning Theory is that has strayed from its theoretical foundations and therefore no longer serves as a coherent theory (Hoggan, 2015). One could argue that there are no known established parameters regarding what transformative learning is and what is not, leading to a lack of clarity and usefulness (Hoggan, 2015).

In response to the overuse of Transformative Learning Theory in research, Hoggan (2015) subscribed to a metatheory approach to transformative learning. Hoggan (2015) described a metatheory as an “overarching paradigm relative to a particular phenomenon or range of phenomena” (p. 63). Hoggan encouraged researchers to use prescriptive transformation to refer to Mezirow’s theory and transformative learning to refer to the broader range of similar phenomena (Hoggan, 2015). Transformative learning, therefore, is “the process[es] that result[s] in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world” (p. 71). In his research Hoggan (2015) wrote about the importance of the words “experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts” in his definition of transformative learning. He stated that these three words, respectively, are symbolized metaphorically by the heart, head, and hands. The first descriptor, experiences, symbolizes a person’s lived and felt experiences. The second, conceptualizes, referred to how a person interprets and makes sense of the world (Hoggan, 2015). The last, interacts, signifies the way transformation affects the way a person acts, to include the behaviors in which they choose to engage (Hoggan, 2015).
Hoggan (2015) urged scholars to take special care when conducting research to describe and justify the extent to which transformative learning is transformative. Depth, breadth, and relative stability should be considered when considering whether or not a particular set of learning outcome qualifies as transformative (Hoggan, 2015). Depth refers to degree to which change impacts or affects any particular outcome (Hoggan, 2015). If one experiences only minor changes in the way they experience, conceptualize, or interact with the world then caution should be taken to describe their experience as transformative.

Hoggan (2015) added that breadth was an additional factor to consider when determining whether or not one’s educational experience is transformative. Breadth refers to the number of contexts in which a change can manifest (Hoggan, 2015). When learning outcomes and takeaways are limited to one context of a person’s life, it should not count as a transformative experience (Hoggan, 2015). The change that takes place in a transformational learning experience should expand far beyond the context and environment where the learning took place.

Relative stability is the third and final factor that is worth noting when considering whether or not transformative learning has taken place. Hoggan (2015) argued that the concept of transformation implies that a permanent change has taken place, one that is “irreversible” (p. 71). The idea of permanent change does not discount the fact that old habits and beliefs are still in our system and likely to resurface and reappear from time to time. Furthermore, the emphasis on permanent change does not disregard the fact that one is likely to experience future changes (Hoggan, 2015). The
hallmark criterion of relative stability, however, does hold fast to the belief that “a temporary change is not adequate to be considered transformative (Hoggan, 2015).

Moore (2005) stated, “A growing number of academics are concerned with the current trends of society and call for a transformative shift in what universities teach and how universities create and regard knowledge production” (p. 79). Her research supported the belief that institutions may benefit from moving away from models that rely solely on the dissemination of information from the instructor to the students and, instead, adopt and more inclusive learning environment that invites the student to share in the creation of knowledge. Moore (2005) explained that although professors have the academic freedom to diversify their teaching methods, few pursue alternative teaching models that promote social change as a course outcome. Moore (2005) described her journey through graduate-level education as one that was highlighted by educators who supported the constructs of transformation and social change for the public outside the university setting. By helping counselor educators and policy makers to see the benefits of transformative learning, we may begin to embrace more opportunities to include transformative learning activities in counseling curriculum.

**Benefits of Transformative Learning**

There appeared to be many potential benefits for educators who were willing to embrace the challenge of incorporating transformative learning into the curriculum and the learning objectives (E. L. Brown, 2004; Chen & Martin, 2015; Mitcham et al., 2013; Pernell-Arnold et al., 2012). Transformational learning theory provides a detailed theoretical foundation for educators to follow (Chapman, 2005; Hoggan, 2015; Newman, 2012). Furthermore, Taylor (2007) suggested that an increase in self-confidence in new
roles and relationships, feelings of greater personal power and spiritual growth, increased compassion for others, and changes in discourse are expected positive consequences associated with transformative learning.

Although dated, E. L. Brown’s (2004) research on educational strategies while teaching cultural competence to two different groups of undergraduate students highlighted the impact of the key elements of transformational learning. E. L. Brown (2004) found support for a relationship between transformational instructional methods used in stand-alone cultural diversity courses and the increased cultural diversity awareness of students. Participants in this study were enrolled in a junior-level, three-credit-hour course. The course was broken into two segments, the first segment was a 10-week curriculum that concentrated on the diversity in learners (race, ethnicity, culture, class, gender, religion). The second six-week segment focused on the exceptional student (physical, mental, and behavioral). E. L. Brown’s (2004) research captured the diversity in learner’s components of the course. Of the 109 participants in the study 100 identified as Caucasian seven as African American, one Asian American, and one Native American. All participants had achieved junior standing at the midsized, urban, Midwestern university (E. L. Brown, 2004). It is important to note that both classes were held in a traditional classroom setting; the current research hopes to explore the impact of transformational learning outside of the traditional classroom setting.

Participants enrolled in one of four sections of the multicultural course. The four course sections were divided into two groups. The instructors in Group 1 adopted a unique pedagogy aimed at “reducing resistance, increasing cognizance of self and others, exploring the interlocking relationships between and within cultural groups, the effect of
prejudice on those links, and developing a sense of community” (E, L. Brown, 2004, p. 330). Whereas the instructors in Group 2 “followed the traditional course format” (E. L. Brown, 2004, p. 331) relying on videos, simulations, and readings. The major differences in instructional methods between the two groups included (a) course format, (b) course requirements and assignments, (c) and material selections, activities, and field experiences.

E. L. Brown (2004) used The Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) to assess students experience before and after the multicultural course. Additionally, reflective journals, field experience reports and research projects were examined to investigate incremental changes throughout the course (E. L. Brown, 2004). Although both courses demonstrated significant participant changes based on quantitative data, the course that employed transformational classroom activities completed their assignments at a higher level and expressed changes in their attitudes towards other cultures in qualitative data (E. L. Brown, 2004). E. L. Brown (2004) found that in the classroom where multicultural curriculum was aimed at reducing resistance and providing opportunities for self-examination (Group 1) increased student self-awareness was a common participant experience. Specifically, 95% of the participants in the group indicated that they needed to continue to engage training practices that enhance their multicultural awareness and sensitivity over the course of their career. Additionally, 74% of participants indicated a greater sensitivity for communication differences and acknowledged a need and willingness to use variations of standard English in the classroom in certain circumstances (E. L. Brown, 2004). Perhaps most important is the finding that 90% of participants indicated that they would “include a plan to use the
community’s diversity to enrich classroom instruction and as a resource for academic, economic, and administrative support” (E. L. Brown, 2004, p. 335).

Additionally, class participants were asked to engage in a series of cross-cultural field experiences while also participating in cross-cultural research. This afforded students the opportunity to experience the effects of minority status while gaining insight into their “assigned minority culture’s history, beliefs, and interactions with the dominant culture” (E. L. Brown, 2004, p. 336). E. L. Brown (2004) argued that, when students were passive observers, they may understand the message; however, they fail to connect to the content in meaningful ways. These findings appear to provide support for Mesirow’s belief that transformation occurs when one critically reflects on one’s assumptions and beliefs and makes changes to their worldview (Mezirow, 1997, 2003). Transformational learning pedagogies afford students opportunities to connect to the course content in ways that inspires motivation, cultural cognizance, sensitivity, and a commitment to social justice (E. L. Brown, 2004).

Mitcham et al. (2013) advocated for adopting a Transformational Multicultural Pedagogy when teaching multicultural counseling courses in counseling preparation programs. Mitcham et al. (2013) note that counselor educators are often expected to teach the multicultural counseling course with little to no training or support prior to being handed the responsibility of teaching an often emotionally charged course. Subsequently, both instructors and students often enter the classroom with an abundance of anxiety and ambivalence (Mitcham et al., 2013). A nontraditional approach to teaching the multicultural class is offered as a way to reduce anxieties, shed light on meaningful
aspects of multicultural counseling, and facilitate access to cross-cultural opportunities (Mitcham et al., 2013).

The Transformational Multicultural Pedagogy model builds on both narrative and transformational theories and incorporates experiential and transformational activities into the classroom (Mitcham et al., 2013). The professor is challenged to use creativity and activism to engage students and highlight key aspects of culture and identity. For instance, the professor may invite students to bond over food in the initial class sessions, encouraging students to try foods from different cultures. This activity can be followed up by similar activities that highlight cultural similarities and differences as the semester progresses. Because the course is intended to be built on active engagement, students may be asked to participate in individual and group interviews, presentations, as well as to engage in cultural immersions experiences (Mitcham et al., 2013). Additionally, students may view films throughout the semester, such as Malcolm X, and write self-reflection papers followed by process time in small and large groups. Simulations and games, exploring personal histories, and case studies are additional activities that counselor educators can draw on to incorporate in their multicultural counseling classroom.

Dyce and O’wusu-Ansah (2016) researched the impact of a semester-long Diverse Learners course offered to preservice teachers. The course design was focused on giving students the best opportunity for transformative learning to take place and included diversity in course content such as reading, cultural artifact presentations, critical reflections, and a cultural immersion assignment, to name a few. Students were exposed to over 53 articles related to issues of diversity in addition to the required multicultural
course text. In order to promote self-reflection, culturally relevant teaching, and transformative learning students took a trip to a local public school that serves only refugee and immigrant children (Dyce & O’wusu-Ansah, 2016).

Spradlin’s Diversity Knowledge Survey (DKS) was given on both the first and last day of class to assess the preservice teachers’ awareness and knowledge of diversity related terminology, issues, programs, laws, factors, multicultural teaching, cultural historical texts (Dyce & O’wusu-Ansah, 2016). Qualitative data was collected through individual interviews and a focus group. Findings revealed that students not only increased their understanding of diversity and culture, they also saw themselves as change agents. Participants reported an increase in awareness and knowledge related to diversity. The DKS validated that 74% of the change in awareness and knowledge of diversity was attributed to the diversity course (Dyce & O’wusu-Ansah, 2016).

Furthermore, students translated the knowledge they acquired in the classroom to their work in the community, describing their transformative learning experience as “a movement” that can be used to impact the world (Dyce & O’wusu-Ansah, 2016). One potential benefit of counselors engaging in transformational learning is the potential to take knowledge gained from classroom experiences to their work with clients. The self-reflective nature of transformative learning invites students to leave the comfort of their safe zones and explore biases and assumptions that have the potential to go unexamined in the traditional classroom setting. In the quest for multicultural competence where counselor self-awareness is of the utmost importance, it is important to engage students in a curriculum that invites them to examine their privileges, values, and worldviews in a supportive environment. Without this climate students may instead choose to negate the
process of critical self-reflection and instead focus on the knowledge and skills domains which, in large part, turns the attention to the lives of others (Sue & Sue, 1999).

Dyce and O’wusu-Ansah (2016) were certain transformative learning had taken place throughout the semester adding, “Transformative learning involves developing self-authorship toward advocacy for a better society. Transformational learning is making meaning with different dimensions of awareness and understanding.” Cranton and Carusetta (2004) offered support for the potential impact of transformative learning in their belief that those who embrace knowing self and work towards being authentic are also committed to becoming the teacher they intrinsically desire to be. Furthermore, teachers who articulate a good understanding of others as human beings are also able to recognize and understand the needs and characteristics of others, including: personality, motivation, and developmental stage (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004).

**Transformative Learning and Self-Awareness**

A significant component of growing towards multicultural counseling competence is counselor awareness (C. C. Lee, 2019; Ratts et al., 2004; Ratts et al., 2016; Ridley et al., 1997). Yet, as previously stated the counseling literature is limited in defining how to effectively support counselors to achieve the level of self-awareness required to grow towards multicultural counseling competence. Examination of the recent *Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies* (Ratts et al., 2016) offered the field of counseling counselor self-awareness competencies to support counselors in their journey to increased self-awareness. These competencies encourage potentially transformative interactions and, more specifically, those that encourage counselors to move beyond the traditional classroom setting and into their communities. For instance, Ratts et al. (2016)
write that “developing self-awareness is a life-long process involving a combination of professional development, self-reflection, critical analysis, readings, and immersion in one’s own community” (p. 38).

In addition to the support for transformational learning opportunities found in the awareness competencies detailed in *Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies* (Ratts et al., 2016) there appears to be other multicultural pioneers who support cross-cultural encounters. C. C. Lee (2019) developed a multicultural counseling competency conceptual framework that is composed of eight components organized under two dimensions: the foundational and cross-cultural dimensions. The components found under the foundational dimension are: (a) knowledge of counseling theoretical traditions, and (b) ethical knowledge and aspirations. The components that align under the cross-cultural dimension are: (a) self-awareness, (b) multicultural counseling theoretical knowledge, (c) cross-cultural encounters, (d) global literacy, (e) cross-cultural skill development, and (f) commitment to social justice (C. C. Lee, 2019). Regarding cross-cultural encounters C. C. Lee (2019) challenged counselors to embrace opportunities to interact with people who come from various cultural identities as a means of better understanding their “histories, customs, and values” (p. 9). C. C. Lee (2019) stated, “such knowledge must not be limited to books, classes, and workshops” (p. 9) but rather through “ongoing professional-and perhaps more important, personal encounters with people from diverse cultural backgrounds” (p. 9). These cross-cultural encounters allow counselors to grow beyond stereotypes and step outside of their cultural comfort zones while learning about self and others.
Additionally, counselors are encouraged to “immerse themselves in their communities to learn how power, privilege, and oppression influence their experiences” (p. 39). Counselors are challenged to engage in activities that will connect them with others in order to learn about areas of privilege, power, and oppression and the impact that the areas may play in and out of therapeutic relationships. As counselors learn more about themselves through these interactions with others they become more aware of both strengths and limitations around working with clients who come from culturally different backgrounds (Ratts et al., 2016).

**Experiential Learning**

Now that transformational learning has been described and discussed it important to turn our attention to experiential learning. Experiential learning is often paired with transformational learning and often functions as the action steps or activities in the creation of transformational experiences. As previously discussed, self-awareness is a critical component in counselor development. Carl Rogers (1957) posits that as self-awareness increases so does counselors ability to understand the client experience, leading to increased empathy. Kolb (1984) defined experiential learning as a “holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perspective, perception, cognition, and behavior” (p. 21). He described experiential learning as a process that is key to the development of self-awareness. The development of self-awareness is rooted in reflective practices and experiential learning provides a framework for learning through reflection taking place. Kolb (1984) broke experiential learning into four key areas: (a) concrete experience, where students are invited to participate in a new experience; (b) reflective observation, where students are invited to gain a self-awareness
of both their cognitive and affective response to the new experience; (c) abstract conceptualization, where students are invited to connect old knowledge and experiences to new thoughts, feelings, and experiences in hopes of forming new and thoughts and perspectives; (d) active experimentation, where students can apply their new ideas to life experiences.

Furthermore, Kolb (1984) further defined experiential learning by defining the six fundamental propositions that his model was built on: (a) learning is a process, not an outcome; (b) learning is a continuous process and is grounded in experience; (c) learning requires the “resolution of conflict between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world” (p. 29); (d) learning requires adaptation, fueled by reflection and action; (e) learning is created through the interactions between people and the environment; and (f) learning is the process whereby knowledge is created.

The infusion of experiential learning activities in counselor education programs and curriculum is a concept that has been around for decades. For instance, Torres, O’ttens, and Johnson (1997) found support for the use of various experiential learning activities to enhance multicultural counseling content. Torres et al. (1997) pioneered focus groups and interviews with counselor education faculty at three institutions and found support for the following activities: performing cross-cultural interviews, role-playing, using video to guide training, writing cultural autobiographies, learning a second language, and engaging in values clarification work. Research participants agreed that the experiential learning activities that were used were more engaging than the didactic activities and they encouraged the use of activities that challenged students to examine their values and restructure their perspectives (Torres et al., 1997).
The integration of experiential learning theory into counselor education curriculum has the potential to inspire creativity within students and ultimately “open the door to greater self-awareness (Bell, Limberg, Jacobson, & Super, 2014, p. 400). Yet, a review of the counseling literature revealed minimal sources that describe how experiential learning is used to enhance multicultural counseling curriculum. Similarly, Arthur and Achenbach (2002) noted difficulty finding attention devoted to the connection between experiential learning and multicultural counseling curriculum prior to their contributions to the counseling literature. Arthur and Achenbach (2002) argued that experiential learning can be a powerful tool in helping counseling students develop both empathy and empathic attitudes towards clients. However, careful consideration must be paid to the specific experiential learning used in the counseling curriculum. In addition, Arthur and Achenbach (2002) offered the following suggestions for the use of experiential learning in curriculum designed to foster the multicultural counseling competencies:

- Select experiential learning exercises to match specific learning goals in the domains of self-awareness, knowledge, and skills
- Audit experiential learning exercises to consider which values are reinforced and which values may be excluded or devalued
- Review ethical considerations, including competence of faculty, safety in the learning environment, student consent for voluntary participation, and sufficient time for debriefing.
- Be aware that exercises based on the simulation of oppression may lead to defensiveness and pose a barrier to student learning.
- Personalize learning exercises and encourage students to pay attention to feelings, thoughts, and behavior in exploring their worldviews.
- Encourage discussion in which contrasting points of view, values, and beliefs can help students experience cultural diversity with their peers.
- Structure debriefing so that students can be reflective about the implications of the personal learning in the multicultural domains of self-awareness, knowledge, and skills.
- Help students identify strategies beyond the experiential learning exercise to review and incorporate their learning into professional practice.
• Encourage students to continue the process of reflective practice beyond course work and in the professional work as multicultural counselors.
• Incorporate both process and outcome measures to evaluate the ways that students’ multicultural competencies are affected through experiential learning.
• Encourage faculty to gain expertise in using experiential learning through structured exercises developed specifically for cross-cultural training.
• Incorporate evaluation as an ongoing process of experiential learning. (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002, pp. 11-12)

McLeod (2013) detailed how experiential learning theory is used to structure the Communication and Decision Making in Groups undergraduate course. McLeod relied heavily on Kolb’s (1984) four tenets; (a) concrete experience, (b) reflective observation, (c) abstract conceptualization, and (d) active experimentation; in the design of the course curriculum. Students are asked to participate in in-class exercises that replicate published research about a given topic (McLeod, 2013). These exercises included group tasks, manipulating variables, and collecting and analyzing data. After participating in the exercise, students read the original research and additional materials that may support the topic of study. In a follow-up class, the next class meeting, students are “debriefed” (p. 360) and asked to examine class data and participate in a class discussion. This process was repeated throughout the entirety of the course (McLeod, 2013).

Qualitative data was collected to capture the experience of students in the course. One consistent theme that emerged was that students found the structure of the course made it easier to learn the conceptual materials. Students were able to “put into immediate practice the ideas that they learned in class” (McLeod, 2013, p. 372).

Additionally, students communicated their appreciation for the power in the exercises they engaged in. The format of the class gave space for a collection of voices to be heard. Students gained an appreciation for this sharing of communication and, “often express
dismay over how easily students in a class can be made to conform to the majority viewpoint, and they say that the course made them more sensitive to the issue” (p. 373).

McLeod (2013) presumed that a significant takeaway from the research findings is the revelation that students appeared to draw from the experience from the course years after the course was complete. While pooling data from class participants who had been removed from the course ranging from two to six years, students remarked that due to their engagement in the course they were more equipped to (a) understand the experiences of other; (b) be aware of when attention was focused on common information instead of shared information; (c) observe and recognize different leadership styles; (d) recognize how leadership styles impact a group; and (e) recognize how they interact in groups and the their in-and-out group strengths and weaknesses (McLeod, 2013).

Kim and Lyons (2003) described how experiential activities, games in particular, can be used to enhance multicultural competence in counselor in training. Researchers frame their research on the work of Crocker and Wrobelwski (1975) who posited that using games during counseling produced six helping functions:

(a) to sensitize a person to which he or she has been unaware; (b) to allow a person to confront feelings of powerlessness; (c) to offer opportunities to deal with rules of the game as an analogy to living by norms of society, norms that may be different from personal norms; (d) to allow childlike playfulness to emerge, which may lead to some forms of risk taking; (e) to create a safe and permissive climate to experiment with new behaviors and (f) to help a person learn effective coping behavior. (Kim & Lyons, 2003, p. 403)

Moreover, games have the ability to balance the power that exists between the course instructor and class participants (Kim & Lyons, 2003). This balance in power often leads to a greater sense of safety within the classroom, resulting in an increased
likelihood for participants to own their biases and work to eliminate them. Kim and Lyons (2003) rendered games that could be used in the classroom to address each of the core multicultural counseling competency areas; awareness, knowledge, and skills (Sue et al., 1992). When these experiential activities are used in conjunction with didactic methods often found in counseling training programs, counselors in training have the ability to practice the skills they have read about in the counseling literature and discussed in various training settings (Kim & Lyons, 2003).

Greene, Barden, Richardson, and Hall (2014) explored the use of film in a multicultural counseling class to see if it had an impact on students multicultural counseling competency and multicultural counseling self-efficacy. Films that were shown throughout the course were chosen intentionally and for the purpose of connecting students with specific multicultural counseling competencies (Greene, Barden, Richardson, & Hall, 2014). For example, the film *Crash* may be used for purpose of challenging stereotypes while the film *Real Women Have Curves* may depict the difference in cultural identities. Students who may have previously viewed a film were asked to think about the film from a 1perspective. Students were encouraged to take note on any diversity and multicultural issues they noticed as they viewed the film. Instructors facilitated a group discussion at the culmination of the film and at the beginning of the second class-session (Greene et al., 2014).

As an additional experiential component of the course students were asked to create their own film after they conducted an interview with a community member from a cultural background different from their own (Greene et al., 2014). The purpose of this assignment was to encourage students to learn about a cultural group that they knew little
about prior to entering the course, as this could be a source of bias or prejudice. Students were also asked to pay specific attention to their own reactions throughout the activity. Students were responsible for developing interview questions, and also creating process questions to further their own understanding and inspire reflective learning (Greene et al., 2014). Excerpts of the videos were presented to their classmates and students often expressed “discomfort and even shame” as they described the revelation of their blind spots and prejudice (Greene et al., 2014, p. 66).

To measure multicultural counseling self-efficacy (MCSE) class participants were given the *Multicultural Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale-Racial Diversity Form* and the *Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills Survey-Counselor Edition-Revised* was used to measure multicultural counseling competence (MCC). Students were given both assessments prior to the course starting and at the culmination of the course (Greene et al., 2014). Results suggest a statistically significant improvement in both MCSE and MCC over the course suggesting that the implementation of film use in the classroom appeared to have an impact. Greene et al. (2014) suggested that the use of film along with process and reflection may be a worthy pedagogical tool to engage students while also increasing counselor multicultural competency and multicultural counseling self-efficacy.

Bell et al. (2014) illustrated how experiential-learning play-based activities can be used in a play therapy course to inspire self-awareness through the process of self-reflection. Instructors designed a curriculum built on Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Theory as its foundational backbone. Students participated in a one-week intensive setting where they met for eight hours per day over the summer semester. Students participated in lecture, discussions, group activities, role-playing, and reflection,
demonstration, and experiential activities (Bell et al., 2014). The primary goals of the course was to introduce the meaning of play in children’s lives, introduce the stages of child development, and provide a review of child-centered play therapy and a variety of directional play modalities (Bell et al., 2014).

Students were given the opportunity to engage in multiple experiential learning activities over the development of the course. Each activity included lower-level processing; questions that are less threatening to the student, and higher-level processing; questions that require more depth of thought and intended to inspire more reaction and opportunities for personal growth (Bell et al., 2014). An example of an experiential activity offered in the course is the Mask Activity. In the Mask Activity students have the opportunity to reflect on perceptions of themselves and others. The goals of the activity are to (a) gain self-awareness, (b) gain self-awareness of how other perceive you, and (c) use creativity to demonstrate perceptions (Bell et al., 2014). Students are given Play-Doh or clay and asked to create a mask representing how they see themselves. After they have created their first mask, they are directed to create a second mask to symbolize how they believe others perceive them. Students build their masks independently and are asked not to destroy their first mask until they have created their second mask and have had an opportunity to compare the two (Bell et al., 2014).

After students had the opportunity to reflect on their masks, the instructor led the group through the lower and higher-level processing questions. Students were encouraged to reflect on the concept of masks, and what masks people put on in their daily lives. Additionally, students reflected on both the benefits and costs of wearing masks and the process of removing masks (Bell et al., 2014). Bell et al. (2014) concluded
that a result of the *Mask Activity* was increased group cohesiveness, group immediacy, greater self-awareness. Additionally, students became aware of the differences between their two masks and were encouraged to provide feedback to their peers regarding noted differences on perceptions they formed of each other.

As previously mentioned, there were several experiential activities that accompanied the *Mask Activity*. The play therapy course incorporated music collage activity, fear-painting activity, puppet activity, and group drawing activity (Bell et al., 2014). The results indicated an enhancement in the personal and academic classroom experience. Through data collected in journal entries students reported an increase in self-growth and self-awareness (Bell et al., 2014). Furthermore, students reported that the activities added fun and elements of excitement to the classroom, which are often missing in the traditional classroom setting. Bell et al. (2014) advocated for the use of experiential activities in various counseling courses and as well as in “individual, group, and family counseling, and counselor supervision” (pp. 411-412).

**Barriers to Incorporating Transformative and Experiential Learning**

Now that the components and benefits of transformative learning theory and experiential learning have been discussed at length it is important to consider the challenges that counselor educator and counselor education programs face when attempting to incorporate these two practices in the classroom. Engaging in transformative learning does not come without its unique set of challenges. Shifting one’s worldview often results in an awareness that some relationships are no longer healthy and may become damaging (Robertson, 1996). Additionally, transformative learning requires a level of maturity necessary for self-reflection and engagement and can become
awkward if students lack the skills necessary for these critical components (Cranton, 1994; Moore, 2005). Mezirow (1997) suggested that if learning is too comfortable for students, change in understanding is unlikely to occur and the transformation may do more harm than good. Furthermore, transformative learning is an intense process for students and educators alike. In order to be successful, institutional support structures have to be in place that allow time for both students and educators to engage in the process of self-examination (Robertson, 1996).

As previously mentioned, transformational learning process along with experiential activities is often and emotionally exhaustive process. Enthralling students to share and self-reflect can trigger strong emotions. Put simply, engaging students in dialogue about their personal-lived experience is likely to trigger strong thoughts, feelings, and reactions. Put simply, conversations centered around race, sexual orientation, class, gender, ability, religion and other diverse identities can create strong emotions within students and faculty (Adams et al., 2007). Moreover, classroom conversations with a focus on race, language, sexuality, or intersectionality can be challenging for students and educators alike (Dunn, Dotson, Ford, & Roberts, 2014). When students are provided with information that conflicts with their personal and familial knowledge base resistance may follow.

Hoshmand’s (2004) research captured the challenges present in embracing a transformative learning paradigm. She notes that transformative learning requires time, energy, and commitment to developing a relationship and a program culture to sustain a platform that both accepts and supports transformative education. Additionally, institutions must hire and train staff who are competent in facilitating transformative
learning. Often times facilitators must support conversations and navigate group
dynamics that can be difficult, to say the least (Hoshmand, 2004). It may be unsettling for
untrained professionals to question the long-held beliefs and assumptions of students.

Hoshmand (2004) also noted institutional shortcomings that serve as barriers to
the implementation of transformative learning in higher education. She pointed to the
cumbersome faculty workload and the lack of time for building community as common
pitfalls to the infusion of collaborative learning institutions of higher education. In order
for counseling departments to adopt a transformative education learning environment,
“there must be institutional support in every respect” (Hoshmand, 2004, p. 88).

Lastly, an important barrier to the commitment to transformational learning has to
do with how counselors view themselves as change agents. Some counseling students
hold on to traditional views of the role of the counselor, therefore limiting their capacity
to view themselves as being capable or willing to effect systemic change (Hoshmand,
2004). Thus, curricular changes may be vital to help students broaden their counselor
identities and widen their perspectives on how they might use their counselor roles to
impact social change and transformative, second-order change (Hoshmand, 2004).

Mitcham (2013) described difficulties that counselor educators face in teaching
the multicultural counseling course. More specifically counselor educators are often
required to teach at least one multicultural counseling course with little to no training on
how to effectively do so. This results in increased anxiety and ambivalence for both the
professor and the counselors in training (Mitcham et al., 2013). It was recommended that
professors have the opportunity to “do their own work” by engaging in specific
multicultural training that prepares them to facilitate difficult dialogue while holding a
safe place for students who are navigating the multicultural counseling course. It could be challenging, at best, for a counselor educator who is triggered in class by a student response and also attempting to single-handedly facilitate a safe space for students.

Mitcham’s (2013) work further highlighted the importance of exploring the current research, where counselors in training will attend a social justice retreat equipped with multiple trained social justice facilitators. Facilitators who have received professional training in order to facilitate difficult dialogue. These facilitators have also been participants in social justice retreats and are aware of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that may surface as triggers during their time serving in the facilitator role. A common belief for those who serve as facilitators at social justice retreats is that the participant experience is the most important experience, and the facilitator’s experience is not to interrupt or negatively impact the participants experience (Bettendorf, 2016). In order for the participant experience to be first, facilitators have to be in a healthy place in terms of their social justice and multicultural journey.

An additional barrier that exists in the classroom is the power difference that is present between the student and the teacher (Mitcham et al., 2013). Counselors in training are aware that there is a judgement and evaluation component regardless of the safety and security that is present in the classroom setting. Asking students to be vulnerable by engaging in the practice of disclosing culturally sensitive and vulnerable information in the company of peers and instructors can be a difficult task for students. There may be increased anxieties and ambivalence considering the evaluative nature of the classroom environment and also the pressure that students may feel knowing that they must return to the classroom in order to pass the course.
In the current research setting, a social justice retreat, participants are free to express their thoughts and feelings without fear of formal evaluation. Much time and attention is given to creating a judgement free environment where the voices of all participants are honored and embraced without judgment (Adams et al., 2007; Bettendorf, 2016). Given the logistics of the retreat, in a weekend intensive with multiple breaks between breakout sessions, participants are free to come and go, without penalty. While feedback was encouraged and embraced, facilitators were trained to teach and guide retreat participants how to give feedback that honors the stories of other participants.

In addition to the lack of counselor educator preparation to teach multicultural courses, there remains a lack of racial diversity reflected in institutions of higher education. Although the United States is becoming more racially diverse, racial minority groups continue to be disparate in higher level education (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Keels, 2013; Worthington, 2012). This was particularly an issue in counseling programs which placed great emphasis on multicultural competency and advocacy (Ratts et al., 2016). Although the counseling profession in largely dominated by individuals who identified as women, women of color were underrepresented in university settings, both as students and faculty when compared to the national representation (Zeligman, Prescod, & Greene, 2015). Furthermore, of the 160,000 faculty working at Research I and II institutions, only three percent identified as a racial minority (Alger, 1999; Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2002).

These facts bring to light the alarming truth that institutions of higher education, including counselor preparatory programs, fail to recruit and retain culturally diverse students and faculty. As one can imagine, this failure has resulted in various destructive
outcomes. Specific to the current research, failure to recruit and retain diverse faculty has led to minimal cultural exposure for counselors in training and minimal advances in multicultural training and subsequently, the counseling literature related to multicultural training. Clients, students, faculty, and the field of counseling deserve the exploration of nontraditional approaches to multicultural training, where students and faculty have the opportunity to interact with individuals who come from all walks of life. Until the student body and faculty at institutions of higher education reflect the racially diverse communities we live in, nontraditional approaches to multicultural training that allow for students to interact with a diverse body of participants are worthy of exploration.

**Multicultural Counseling Competencies: Characteristics and Dimensions**

Now that we have taken a closer look at transformational and experiential learning it is important to direct attention to the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC). The MCC’s remain the gold standard in the counseling profession for outlining the awareness, knowledge, and skills counselors must possess in order to effectively work with clients from all cultural backgrounds (Ratts et al., 2016). As the United States became more diverse during the 1980s, Sue et al. (1992) issued a call to the counseling profession highlighting the need for multicultural competence across all counseling practice and education (Ratts & Wayman, 2015). In 1991 the *Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD)* approved the Multicultural Counseling Competencies; a document, developed by Sue et al. (1992). In this document, authors outlined the need and described a rationale for a multicultural perspective in counseling (Ratts & Wayman, 2015; Ratts & Wood, 2011; Sue et al., 1992). The development of the MCCs is considered one of the most significant contributions to the
counseling literature and, in fact, was published in both the *Journal of Counseling and Development* and the *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* in 1992 (Ratts & Wayman, 2015).

Sue et al. (1992) development of the MCCs was inspired by hopes of moving the counseling profession away from the universal assumptions often found within counselor training models that bury clients in commonplace attitudes concerning issues of diversity. Sue (1997) described these attitudes and universal assumptions as follows: (a) people are just “people” regardless of race, ethnicity, culture and gender; (b) theories and methods of counseling are universal and culture-free and can be implemented for any client; and (c) the skills, therapeutic techniques, and other (Ratts & Wayman, 2015) strategies utilized in therapy are considered “good counseling” for everyone (Sue, 1997). Authors were passionate about inclusivity, providing a blueprint that counselors could use to engage clients from all cultural backgrounds. A description of the specific characteristic and components of this blueprint is provided in the next section.

The MCC’s highlight three key characteristics for obtaining cultural competence: (a) counselors’ awareness of their own assumptions, values, and biases; (b) an understanding of the worldviews of culturally diverse clients; and (c) the ability to choose and implement culturally appropriate intervention strategies and techniques (Sue et al., 1992). These three characteristics will be expanded on in a later section as they have been substantially revised in the updated version of the multicultural and counseling competencies (Ratts et al., 2016). In addition to these three key characteristics, Sue et al. (1992) added three key dimensions to further detail the process for obtaining multicultural competence. The three dimensions include (a) beliefs and attitudes, (b)
knowledge, and (c) skills. In the 2016 Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies a fourth dimension, action, encouraged counselors to take action by operationalizing the AKS model (Ratts et al., 2016). The three characteristics and three dimensions led to the creation of a 3 (Characteristics) x 3 (Dimensions) matrix where each cross-cultural skill could be developed or examined.

The first dimension, counselor attitudes and beliefs, challenges counselors to check their biases and stereotypes and to develop a positive orientation about multiculturalism (Sue et al., 1992). Additionally, counselors are challenged to consider how their own values and biases may hinder their ability to provide effective cross-cultural counseling (Sue et al., 1992). The second dimension assumes that a culturally skilled counselor has a working knowledge and understanding of their own worldview and has specific knowledge of the cultural groups they work with while also understanding sociopolitical influences (Sue et al., 1992). Last, the culturally skilled counselor understands the specific skills, interventions, techniques, and strategies required to work effectively with minority groups (Sue et al., 1992).

Sue et al. (1992) advocated for the integration of the MCCs in all areas of the counseling profession including research, assessment, practice and training. Their requests aligned with the multicultural vision of the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the AMCD who charged counselors with the responsibility of “defending human civil rights . . . and encourages changing attitudes and enhancing understanding of cultural diversity” (p. 1). Furthermore, Sue et al. (1992) cautioned that a multicultural perspective was not only warranted in the counseling profession, but also in the greater society.
Considering the changing face of our communities and the complexities that accompany a continually changing society, it remains clear that multicultural competence is still an important factor in navigating an effective counseling relationship (Ratts & Wayman, 2015). The demographics in the United States are shifting and the once marginalized and underrepresented groups are growing into the majority. As this shift takes place it becomes all the more important that counselors are prepared to interact with clients from a place of understanding and respect (B. Y. Cartwright et al., 2008; Ratts & Wayman, 2015; Sue et al., 1992). As stated by Ratts et al. (2016), the MCCs “have been instrumental in helping counselors, psychologists, and other mental health professionals address the needs of culturally diverse clients, groups, and communities” (p. 28). The MCCs outline the framework for creating a successful cultural climate for a safe and supportive relationship to take place between client and counselor.

In April of 1991 the Professional Standards committee, through the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD), introduced to the field of counseling 31 multicultural counseling competencies (Sue et al., 1992). Through this, multicultural awareness emerged as one of several key factors in the pursuit of becoming a multicultural competent counselor. Multicultural awareness is defined as the recognition of how one’s cultural beliefs and attitudes affect the counseling relationship (Sue et al., 1992). Furthermore, Sue and colleagues (1992) challenged counselors to become aware of their personal biases and stereotypes and to reshape these towards a multicultural perspective.

In the recent publication of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC): Guidelines for the Counseling Profession (Ratts et al., 2016)
professionals were introduced to the conceptual framework from which the new competencies were built. This framework consists of four quadrants: (a) privileged counselor-marginalized client quadrant, (b) privileged counselor-privileged client quadrant, (c) marginalized counselor-privileged client quadrant, and (d) marginalized counselor-marginalized client quadrant. Within each quadrant are domains that aid multicultural and social justice practice: (a) the counselor self-awareness, (b) client worldview, (c) the counseling relationship, and (d) counseling and advocacy interventions (Ratts et al., 2016). This sequence of domains was created on the premise that “multicultural and social justice competence must first begin internally within the counselor” (Ratts et al., 2016). Since the current research explores a nontraditional approach to multicultural training that may impact counselor self-awareness, self-awareness is explored in detail in the next section. The remaining domains are followed by an explanation and a summary of their connection in the development of counselor self-awareness.

### Counselor Self-Awareness

It would be imperative for counselors to know who they are. More specifically, counselors are responsible for being aware of their actions, intentions, motives, emotions, thoughts, and feelings (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014). Counselors hold a responsibility to themselves, their clients, and the profession to engage in practices that increase counselor awareness (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014). Furthermore, counselor self-awareness was a vital component in counselor development and counseling efficacy (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014; Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010). The importance of counselor self-awareness was captured in the *ACA Code of Ethics* (American Counseling Association, 2014) as
self-awareness is referenced in some capacity in multiple sections including counseling relationship, counselor roles, professional responsibility, counselor education and supervision, and professional responsibility and competence. Although self-awareness is a term commonly used in counseling and in counselor preparation it is one that is not well defined in the literature (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014). In the counseling context, general characteristics of self-awareness include a counselor’s ability to recognize thoughts, feelings, and behaviors while engaged in the counseling relationship (Oden, Miner-Holden, & Balkin, 2009; Pompeo & Levitt, 2014; Richards et al., 2010; Williams, 2008).

Fundamental to the multicultural and social justice counseling competencies is counselor self-awareness. Ratts and colleagues (2016) implicitly stated their belief that multicultural and social justice competence begins with counselor self-awareness. Then, and only then, does this awareness extend to clients, the counseling relationship, and to counseling and advocacy interventions and strategies. Moreover, although knowledge and skills are also important factors in multicultural competence, if the focus remains solely on these characteristics students may run the risk of distancing themselves from cultural issues by focusing on the lives of other in place of their own lives (Sue & Sue, 1999). Becoming a counselor who is self-aware requires knowing one’s attitudes, beliefs, and biases. This is an important precursor in understanding others social group identities, marginalized and privileged group statuses, power and privilege, limitations, strengths, assumptions, values, and biases (Ratts et al., 2016). Achieving self-awareness requires counselor’s willingness to first take record of his or her own values, beliefs, and assumptions.
Multicultural and social justice competent counselors are not only aware of their values, beliefs, and biases; they are equally aware of the various statuses they hold as members of both marginalized and privileged groups (Ratts et al., 2016). Counselors were encouraged to take notice of the privilege and power they hold in society and how this privilege and power, or lack thereof, may influence their worldview. This awareness, in particular, may be useful in helping counselors to assess their strengths and limitations when working with clients who come from privileged and oppressed groups or identities (Ratts et al., 2016). Counselors who were self-aware were able to ascertain the degree to which their group statuses, both marginalized and privileged, may influence their personal and professional experiences.

Self-awareness is a process that involves taking action and counselors are challenged to seek out professional development opportunities to expand on their knowledge and learn more about themselves and their privileged and marginalized group identities (Ratts et al., 2016). Counselors, as well as students in training, bring their personal lives to the profession, which includes their racial, cultural, and social beliefs as a member of various marginalized and privileged groups (Carter, 2003). These factors highlight the importance of counselors seeking opportunities beyond the traditional learning environment to learn more about themselves and how their attitudes, values, and beliefs are being shaped and influenced by the ever-changing environments in which we live. Counselors who are able to achieve competence in the area of self-awareness gain the ability to develop competence in the other domains as well as translate their learning into professional practice (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Ridley et al., 1997).
The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) is the accrediting body for counselor training programs. The 2016 CACREP Standards outline eight core areas that represent the foundational knowledge required of all entry-level counselor education graduates (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2016). These core content areas include (a) professional counseling orientation and ethical practice, (b) social and cultural diversity, (c) human growth and diversity, (d) counseling and helping relationships, (e) career development, (f) counseling and helping relationships, (g) group and counseling work, (h) assessment and testing, and (i) research and program evaluation (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2016).

Furthermore, the CACREP Standards (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2016) break down each core content area into standards that provide direction for counselor educators who are preparing counseling students to meet the needs of their clients. Upon close examination of the social and cultural diversity core content area, self-awareness arises as a learning emphasis. Of the eight CACREP Standards listed under the social and cultural diversity, half make reference to the counselor’s awareness of their own identities, beliefs, worldviews, and prejudices and experiences and their potential impact on the client and the client/counselor relationship. For example, standard 2(d) under social and cultural diversity states that a counselor understands the “impact of heritage, attitudes, beliefs, understandings, and acculturative experiences on an individual’s view of others”
Similarly, standard 2(g) stated that counselors were aware of “the impact of spiritual beliefs on clients’ and counselors’ worldviews” (Council for the Accredidation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2016, p. 10).

It is well documented that becoming a multicultural competent counselor is not an easy task (Abreu, 2001; Atkins, Fitzpatrick, Poolokasingham, Lanbeau, & Spanierman, 2017; Carter, 2003; Ratts et al., 2016; Sue et al., 1992) and is an ongoing process (B. Y. Cartwright et al., 2008; Ratts et al., 2016). The road to acquiring multicultural awareness is often accompanied with feelings of discomfort, fear, anxiety, ambivalence, and anger (Abreu, 2001). These feelings may serve as barriers for students who have desire to gain more understanding around sensitive topics discussed but do not feel safe in the traditional classroom setting, which is the primary format for most multicultural counseling courses. These feelings can lead to student disengagement and ultimately result in a lack of critical self-awareness along with an inflated sense of competence (B. Y. Cartwright et al., 2008). As previously mentioned, although counselor self-awareness is the heart of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies there remain several factors to consider when striving for multicultural competency. Counselor self-awareness is one developmental domain and next section is a brief introduction to the remaining domains; client worldview, counseling relationship, and counseling and advocacy interventions.

**Client Worldview and Self-Awareness**

It is imperative that counselors possess an understanding and awareness of their values, beliefs and biases and are attuned to the clients’ worldviews and experiences.
(Ratts et al., 2016). Counselors' ability to understand how power and privilege suppress the growth and development of both marginalized and privileged clients can help in understanding how marginalized and privileged clients hold certain values, beliefs, and biases (Ratts et al., 2016). In order to become aware of the client’s worldview, it is important for counselors to possess a genuine interest and curiosity about the lives of their clients. Counselors understand that learning about the lives of their clients is not always a familiar or comfortable experience. Learning about clients' marginalized and privileged statuses is a lifelong journey that requires a lifelong commitment (Ratts et al., 2016); many undesirable thoughts and feelings may arise along the way. However, these reactions may help counselors understand both their limitations and areas of growth as they begin to explore working with different populations (Ratts et al., 2016).

Multicultural and social justice competent counselors possess knowledge about theories and concepts related to the worldviews of oppressed and privileged clients (Ratts et al., 2016). This knowledge allowed them to understand the key issues and injustices taking place in the communities and environments where their clients reside. Counselors are also knowledgeable about the impact that stereotypes, discrimination, power, privilege, and oppression have on marginalized and privileged clients (Ratts et al., 2016). In order to serve clients well, it would be important for counselors to advocate for clients by voicing concerns and raising awareness. Reflective and critical thinking skills allow counselors to explain to others how marginalized and privileged identities influence the worldviews and life experiences of the clients they serve. The hope was that by raising awareness and voicing concerns not only will historically oppressed clients see counselors as agents of change extending beyond the counseling room, but additionally
community partners will follow suit and become allies in fighting the inequalities plaguing our communities.

**Counselor Self-Awareness and the Counseling Relationship**

When counselors acquire self-awareness along with an understanding of the clients’ worldview, it allows them to have more complete understanding of the client-counselor relationship and, more specifically, how the counselors’ and clients’ identities have an influence on the counseling relationship (Ratts et al., 2016). Counselors are aware of how power and privilege can hinder or enhance the counseling relationship depending on the identities and experiences of both the counselor and the client. Not only are multicultural and social justice competent counselors aware when their privileged and marginalized statuses are present in the counseling relationship, they also are aware of how these dynamics may change with each client depending on the counselors’ and clients’ marginalized and privileged statuses.

Counselors possess knowledge of theories and concepts that detail how counselors’ and clients’ privileged and marginalized identities influence the counseling relationship depending on the marginalized or privileged statuses of both the counselor and the client (Ratts et al., 2016). Equally important is knowledge of how culture, power, privilege, oppression, and identity development may serve to enhance or breakdown the client-counselor relationship (Ratts et al., 2016). Multicultural and social justice competent counselors know when to initiate discussions with clients when they determine that issues relating to stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, power, privilege, and oppression may be influencing the client-counselor relationship. Counselors are comfortable utilizing their cross-cultural communication skills, analytical skills, along
with their knowledge of the clients worldview and lived experience to facilitate a conversation around what may be impacting the client-counselor relationship (Ratts et al., 2016). Through these interactions and dialogue counselors may be able to gain a more holistic understating of the degree to which stereotypes, prejudice, and biases impact the lives of clients.

The four domains in the multicultural counseling competencies have been described, and specifically, in connection to counselor self-awareness. Ratts et al. (2016) reminded us that the MCC’s began and ended with the ability of the counselor to know oneself. Although there are is no one clear-cut method to developing self-awareness, it is important to for counselor educators to have an understanding of how a counselor might journey towards self-awareness. The following section provides a model, the Path of Counselor Self Awareness model, which provides an example of how counselors in training may reach a point of self-discovery through the use of transformational, or experiential activities.

**A Path of Counselor Self-Awareness**

Pompeo and Levitt (2014) offered the field of counseling a model, the Path of Counselor Self-Awareness, to aid in achieving self-awareness. The model was based on the belief that, “students and beginning counselors may enter the profession having discussed self-awareness and its importance, but the actual process of achieving it may not be introduced until the action is taking place” (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014, p. 82). Authors offer a three-phase model that is grounded in self-reflection. Self-reflection is described as, “the counselor’s awareness of feelings thoughts, reactions, and personal values in the context of the counseling relationship” (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014, p. 82).
Each of the three phases are briefly described for the purpose of providing context in relation to the current research.

The *Path of Counselor Self Awareness* begins with the first phase, *Counselor Self-Reflection and Stagnation*. This phase is triggered when a counselor experiences a problem or dilemma. Authors described this counseling dilemma as a “triggering event” (Holloway, 1982), a term used to describe events that take place which provide new information to the practitioner and presents the practitioner with an opportunity to engage the self-reflective process (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014). After the “triggering event” and depending on a number of factors such as the counselor’s environment, readiness to learn, counselor’s personality and cognitive capacity, the counselor will decide to engage in self-reflection or navigate the path of stagnation (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014). Several variables may lead to counselors choosing to steer away from reflection such as countertransference, or personal biases.

Skovholt and McCarthy (1988) further described “trigger events” as having the potential to become critical incidents depending on whether or not the event becomes a catalyst for counselor development. Counselors who choose to navigate the process of self-reflection have the potential to turn “triggering events” into “critical events” (Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988). When conditions are adequate for the counselor to engage the process of self-reflection, and the triggering events are reflected on, they become “critical incidents” and self-reflection may begin and the counselor begins to move towards self-awareness (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014).

Phase II in the Path of Counselor Self Awareness model is labeled the Self-Awareness Process. This stage is highlighted by the intersection of the counselors ethical
decision-making process and the counselors personal experience. The *ACA Code of Ethics* (American Counseling Association, 2014) references counselor awareness in several sections (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014). However, the guidance of the ACA Code of Ethics alone may not be sufficient in supporting counselors who often handle difficult and complex ethical dilemmas (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014). It is presumed when counselors are tasked with making decisions on how to navigate difficult ethical dilemmas they often result to using their own personal values and perspectives (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014).

Through the process of self-reflection counselor’s gain awareness into their actions, intentions, motives, emotions, thoughts, and feelings which aid in the ethical decision-making process (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014). Additionally, the process of self-reflection can support the therapeutic relationship by helping counselors formulate clear directions and outcomes. Authors Pompeo and Levitt (2014) provided an example of how a counselor may benefit from self-reflection. In this example a counselor who is personally challenged by a client’s disclosure of infidelity with an HIV-positive partner chooses to engage the process of self-reflection. As a result the self-awareness may serve as the impetus for the counselor to encourage the client to disclose to their partner, recommend couples counseling, or acknowledge the ethical and legal need to report potential harm to a third party (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014).

Environment plays an important role in counselor development. Relationships with colleagues, supervisors, friends, and other trusted individuals and groups form the basis for self-awareness to occur (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Having colleagues and peers who are supportive and available are critical for self-awareness to occur (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014). To that end, individuals must actively seek out opportunities for self-
reflection and also be open to the possibility of changing one’s original idea. As previously mentioned, the current research seeks to explore the impact of a social justice retreat. A social justice retreat supports phase II of the Path to Counselor Self-Awareness Model. Adams (2007) described one vital element of social justice education as being able to make conscious use of reflection and experiences as tools for students learning. The significance and importance of self-reflection is captured in the goals of social justice education and in the Path of Counselor Self-Awareness Model.

Pompeo and Levitt (2014) expressed the importance for counselors to be open to the change process and, specifically, being willing to have their original ideas challenged and changed. These factors are in line with the goals of social justice education. One goal of social justice education, in particular, was to reward awareness, personal growth, and efforts towards change (Adams et al., 2007). Social justice education principles, those often used to design social justice retreat curriculum, are built with the ultimate goal of increasing participant awareness in a safe and supportive environment (Adams, 2007). The key elements of social justice education appear to align closely with the supportive work environment and openness to change described by Pompeo and Levitt (2014) in phase II in the Path to Counselor Self-Awareness Model.

The third and final phase of the Path to Counselor Self-Awareness Model was titled Achieving Counselor Self Awareness. In this final step the counselors have engaged the self-reflection process to the point where a new awareness of self and others is a possibility (Pompeo & Levitt, 2014). This new awareness may help counselors have better understanding of clients presenting concerns (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2011). Additionally, self-awareness has been shown to facilitate cultural empathy in counseling
(Ratts et al., 2016; Ridley & Lingle, 1996). The master counselor maintains a commitment to self-awareness by constantly seeking out opportunities to engage in opportunities that foster self-reflection and personal and professional development. Master counselors are aware of their personal unresolved issues that may affect the therapeutic relationship and ultimately the process of therapy (Jennings, Sovereign, Bottorff, Mussell, & Vye, 2005; Pompeo & Levitt, 2014).

**Social Justice: The “Fifth” Force in Counseling**

Now that self-awareness has been defined and connected back to the MCC’s, it was essential to revisit the most notable change to the updated multicultural counseling competencies, the addition of social justice (Ratts et al., 2016). In 2004, social justice was introduced as the “fifth” force in the counseling profession (Ratts et al., 2004) in response to the attention multiculturalism and social justice received as the diversity in the United States increased along with the needs of the clients who accessed mental health services across the country. Professional counselors were challenged to step outside of their office settings and into their communities to advocate for the clients they served. This was not the first time; however, counselors and counselor educators were called on to respond to the changing needs of our nation. Social justice has been a conversation in the counseling profession for decades (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). For many years counselors have been challenged to expand their counselor identities and draw on advocacy skills to address oppressive systems and become agents of change. Furthermore, counselor-training programs are called on to equip students with the skills required to walk beside clients as they address the social injustices they are likely to encounter (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001; Ratts et al., 2004). Ratts and Woods (2011) suggested that “if social
justice is to gain traction and be a sustainable force in the counseling profession, the process needs to begin with counselor education programs” (p. 222).

Social justice has been defined as efforts to foster equitable access to resources and opportunities for marginalized populations; to decrease disparities that are lower for oppressed populations; and expand the role identity of counselors to include advocate, educator, consultant, and change agent (Sue & Sue, 2013). Furthermore, social justice includes a valuing of fairness and equity in resources, rights, and the treatment for marginalized individuals and groups of people who do not share equal power in society because of their identification with their immigration, racial, ethnic, age, socioeconomic, religious heritage, physical ability, or sexual orientation status groups (Fondacaro & Weinberg, 2002; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2003). In an academic setting, social justice can include teaching, research, and service around social justice issues so that the counselor educator is teaching counselors in training about the tenets and outcomes of social justice (Dollarhide, Clevenger, Dogan, & Edwards, 2016).

Over the years the field of counseling has been guided by various multicultural and social justice advocates who have worked collectively to publish competencies for counselors to reference (Constantine et al., 2007; Ratts et al., 2016; Sue et al., 1992). Constantine et al. (2007) offered the field of counseling a set of nine specific social justice competencies to guide counselors and counseling psychologists in their work in supporting an increasingly diverse population. These competencies offered were as followed (Constantine et al., 2007):

1. Become knowledgeable about the various ways oppression and social inequities can be manifested at the individual, cultural, and societal levels, along with the
ways such inequities might be experienced by various individuals, groups organizations, and macrosystems.

2. Participate in ongoing critical reflection on issues of race, ethnicity, oppression, power, and privilege in your own life,

3. Maintain an ongoing awareness of how your own positions of power or privilege might inadvertently replicate experiences of injustices and oppression in interacting with stake holding groups (e.g., clients, community organizations, and research participants).

4. Question and challenge therapeutic or other intervention practices that appear inappropriate or exploitative and intervene preemptively, or as early as feasible, to promote the positive well-being of individuals or groups who might be affected.

5. Possess knowledge about indigenous models of health and healing and actively collaborate with such entities, when appropriate, in order to conceptualize and implement culturally relevant and holistic interventions.

6. Cultivate an ongoing awareness of the various types of social injustices that occur within international contexts; such injustices frequently have global implications.

7. Conceptualize, implement, and evaluate comprehensive preventative and remedial mental health intervention programs that are aimed at addressing the needs of marginalized populations.

8. Collaborate with community organizations in democratic partnerships to promote trust, minimize perceived power differentials, and provide culturally relevant services to identified groups.
9. Develop system intervention and advocacy skills to promote social change processes within institutional settings, neighborhoods, and communities (Constantine et al., 2007).

The social justice competencies not only offer guidance to the field of counseling, they also provide support for the current research. The first three competencies listed highlight the importance for counselors to possess the skill sets to both be aware of the social inequities that exist in our communities while also engaging in the process of self-reflection to avoid the potential for personal biases, assumptions, and worldviews to impact relationships with clients, community partners, and research participants. In short, knowing oneself and knowing the people around you are a vital part of social work. Having a better understanding of self and a better understanding of others is a key objective of social justice education (Adams et al., 2007; Hooks, 1994), such as the education objectives often found at a social justice retreat. Additionally, the social justice competencies (Constantine et al., 2007), and specifically competencies eight and nine, illustrate the importance of forming partnerships and community specific interventions to advocate on behalf of historically marginalized populations. Social justice platforms, such as a social justice retreat, may be used to inspire counseling students and professionals to use their power and privilege to intervene in the many places where social injustices continue to run rampant. Furthermore, it is in this space where these same counseling students and professionals may begin to build a network of allies that they can call on as they charge forward in fighting injustice.

As previously mentioned the Social and Cultural Diversity section of the CACREP Standards (Council for the Accredidation of Counseling and Related
Educational Programs, 2016) mention several of the key characteristics connecting social justice and counseling. However, the field of counseling may benefit from more scholarly literature that more clearly connects how social justice can be integrated into the eight core content areas (Ratts & Wood, 2011). Ratts and Woods (2011) suggested adding a ninth CACREP curricular area to emphasize the importance of having a social justice knowledge base in order to be effective helping professionals. Their belief is that infusing and integrating social justice into the CACREP curricular areas would elevate social justice as more of a backbone in counseling (Ratts & Wood, 2011).

**Social Justice in Counselor Education**

Despite the lack of evidence present in the literature showing an integration of social justice principles in counselor training programs, there are universities that have included social justice in their education experience. Take for example, Boston College who has designed a first-year experience (FYE) for their doctoral students which requires each first-year doctoral student to spend six hours a week working in an urban community setting. During the time spent in the community students develop advocacy skills and build partnerships with key figures throughout the city. These interactions have the potential to aid in facilitating change for historically marginalized communities. The first-year experience curriculum designed for Boston College students is grounded in the six social justice principles offered by Goodman et al. (2004). These six principles include ongoing self-examination, sharing power, giving voice, facilitating consciousness raising, building on strengths, and leaving clients with tools for social change (Goodman et al., 2004). Through participation in FYE doctoral students have the opportunity to apply these six principles of social justice (Singh et al., 2010).
Through participation in the first-year experience students are asked to engage, experience, and apply the six principle of social justice (Singh et al., 2010). Furthermore, students are asked to reflect on their time spent serving their community and engage in intentional dialogue with both peers and faculty. For example, ongoing self-examination, the first principle, is when students are asked to develop an awareness of the different power dynamics that exist among community members and to take a closer look at their assumptions and values towards the communities they hope to serve, along with the goals they hope to achieve in their community (Goodman et al., 2004; Singh et al., 2010). White students in the first-year experience working in urban high school settings were challenged to examine their personal worldviews, biases, assumptions, and areas of privileges in relationship to working with students of color. Self-disclosure is not only welcome, but is an expected outcome of the first year experience (Singh et al., 2010).

The first-year experience offered by Boston College to its doctoral counseling psychology students was exemplary in many ways. Goodman et al. (2004) described how the program was grounded in the six principles of social justice and how each principle was operationalized. Perhaps the greatest gift of the Boston College FYE was that it was designed so that everyone involved benefitted, the end goal being that, when the work of the students had reached its culmination, clients and communities were left with both the tools and the resources to continue the work long after the professionals leave (Singh et al., 2010).

Educators have been challenged to show their commitment to a social justice perspective through the training of the next generation of counseling professionals (Vera & Speight, 2003). Providing students opportunities to be active participants in their
education, which is rooted in transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997, 2003; Taylor, 2009), is one avenue counseling educators can infuse social justice into counseling curriculum (Hooks, 1994). Bell Hooks (1994) posited that educators could accomplish this task by including students in the learning process, sharing responsibility for the learning process with the learner. The professor served as the leader of the experience while the students created the environment and the context from which the learning occurred (Hooks, 1994). This approach to learning empowers students to take charge of their learning and places them in the driver’s seat in determining the quality of their education (Vera & Speight, 2003).

In addition to including students in the learning process counselor education programs need to recruit and retain diverse faculty members if they hope to adopt a social justice perspective (Dollarhide et al., 2018). It is important for counseling students to learn from faculty who have diverse backgrounds and are passionate about the issues that plague disenfranchised communities. Yet there remains a lack of racial and gender diversity in the field of counselor education (Brooks & Steen, 2010). To this point, Johnson, Bradley, Knight, and Bradshaw (2007) found that less than 1% of doctoral students enrolled in a doctoral program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs identified as African American men (Johnson, Bradley, Knight, & Bradshaw, 2007).

A recent article published in the journal Counselor Education and Supervision Dollarhide et al. (2018) captured the experiences of four African American men serving as faculty in Counselor Education. Resistance from the profession, limited publication of social justice-related manuscripts, and lack of faculty and institutional support were
voiced as variables that made it challenging to charge forward in their work as advocates for social justice as well as persisting as faculty of color in the field of higher education (Dollarhide et al., 2018). All participants reported feeling pressure to publish, however, each found that outlets to publish their work on social justice were minimal.

Dollarhide et al. (2018) offered recommendations for faculty and counseling programs in order to increase the resilience and retention of faculty of color. Counselor educators can support their diverse colleagues by making it clear that they are allies, using their privileged identities to advocate for and collaborate with faculty of color (Dollarhide et al., 2018). Support can also take the form of advocating for tenure for faculty who adopt a social justice lens and articulating the value of service and diverse publication outlets. Faculty can commit to taking a stand against discrimination, bias, and microaggressions that are directed at a colleague or any diverse person (Dollarhide et al., 2018). As a profession, Dollarhide et al. (2018) posited that we could take steps forward by engaging in conversations about social justice at conferences and in journals. Additionally, recruiting and retaining faculty of color as well as targeting counselors with a high commitment to social justice may be additional avenues to explore.

**Social Justice Advocacy Interventions**

Multicultural and social justice competent counselors understand the importance of integrating culturally responsive counseling with social justice advocacy. Advocacy efforts may include activities such as encouraging clients to reflect on the ways internalized oppression may have impacted their own actions (Ratts et al., 2016); the ways that local and government policies influence them; and the ways their culture,
ethnicity, or family of origin may impact their circumstances and the actions that can be taken to change them.

When counselors are attuned to their values and beliefs; when they are sensitive to the worldviews and cultural experiences of clients; and when they understand the different ways that power, privilege, oppression, and social group statuses shape the counseling relationship, they gain insight into what multicultural and social justice approaches are necessary (Ratts et al., 2016).

C. C. Lee (2019) argued that the role of the counselor has shifted, and counselors are called to “intervene with, and on behalf of, clients at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, public policy, and global levels” (p. 274). C. C. Lee (2019) challenged counselors to act as agents of social justice by engaging in the following types of activities:

- Assisting client in developing critical consciousness by understanding their situation in the context of living with societal challenges
- Assessing the degree to which historical events, current issues, power, privilege, and oppression may contribute to the presenting problems expressed by clients
- Working in communities to better understand the attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, and biases that affect client well-being
- Using quantitative and qualitative research to highlight inequities present in the current counseling literature and practices to advocate for systemic changes to the profession
- Examining the relationships that clients have with family, friends, and peer networks that may be sources of support or isolation. (p. 274)

It is important to mention that the current research study responds to C. C. Lee’s (2019) challenge. Qualitative research is used to highlight inequities in the current counseling literature in hopes of improving the current state of multicultural training across the board in counselor education training programs. The current research is rooted in a social justice advocacy effort to improve and enrich multicultural training, so
counselors are better prepared to work with clients who come from all cultural backgrounds. If successful, all individuals, including those who come from historically marginalized and oppressed identities, may feel more comfortable engaging in the counseling process in times of need.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies were introduced in connection to the current state of multicultural counseling training in counselor preparation programs. A review of the literature established a need for research that explores ways that counselor educators can support students multicultural counseling competence using experiential and transformational approaches. Subsequently, in conducting this research I explored the overarching and guiding research question:

Q1 What are the experiences and perceptions of counselor education students who have completed an intensive social justice retreat?

Qualitative methodology was used in this study to examine the potentially transformative experiences of counselors in training who attended a weekend intensive social justice retreat. Merriam (2009) wrote, “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). Through this research, the goal was to explore the experiences of and give voice to counseling students who attend a weekend intensive social justice retreat. In this chapter, I provide a detailed overview of the qualitative methodology used in this research study to better understand the experiences of counselors in training who engage in experiential and potentially transformational multicultural training.
Research Paradigm: Qualitative

The methodological approach used in this study is qualitative. Merriam (1998) wrote that “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 6). Furthermore, Creswell (2007) added, “researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs to the research project, and these inform the conduct and the writing of the qualitative study” (p. 15). Qualitative research seeks to understand the worldview and lived experience of each participant (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). In order for the individual and unique experience of each participant to be capture, the researchers must: (a) seek an understanding of the participants’ insider perspective, (b) honor the researcher as the primary instrument, (c) conduct fieldwork, (d) employ inductive research strategies, and (e) produce a product that is richly descriptive (Merriam, 1998).

As the researcher in this study my goal was to better understand the experiences of each participant who attended a weekend intensive social justice retreat. Trusty (2011) described the emic or having an insider’s perspective of the participant experience. A primary goal of the current research was to garnish an insider’s perspective of the participants’ experience. In order to better understand the insider perspective of counselors in training who attend a social justice retreat, I served as the researcher and also the main tool for collecting, analyzing, and providing rich description of the data collected (Crotty, 1998; Merriam, 2009). “So, what is expected in phenomenology is the (problematic) task of an unveiling and disclosing of the “essence” of consciousness; in other words, the meaning of a phenomenon” (Lared, de Oliveira, & Payne, 2016, p. 194).
In order to best capture the perceptions and perceived multicultural competence of participants while attending a social justice retreat, a qualitative methodological approach was used in this study.

**Research Design**

In the previous section qualitative research was introduced and described as the foundation for the current research study. Crotty (1998) introduced four elements; methods, methodology, theoretical perspective, and epistemology to be used to help guide qualitative researchers in developing a research proposal. Moreover, Crotty (1998) recommended exploring the following questions for the purpose of providing clarity and justification for selecting specific research methods and methodologies:

1. What methods do you propose to use?
2. What methodology governs your choice and use of methods?
3. What theoretical perspectives lies behind the methodology in question?
4. What epistemology informs this theoretical perspective? (p. 2)

Crotty (1998) noted the importance of taking time to describe each of the four elements as they relate to the study. Researchers are to avoid lumping each core element together, as they hold their unique place and importance relative to the topic of study (Crotty, 1998). Creswell (2007) reminded us that “the topics about which we write are emotion laden, close to people, and practical” (p. 43). Thus, it is important to pay great attention to the design of the research. The epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods, of the current research are discussed in the following sections.

**Epistemology.** Crotty (1998) posited epistemology describes how different types of knowledge came into existence. To be specific, epistemology is defined as “the theory of knowledge embedded in theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology”
The epistemology provides a philosophical grounding backbone for determining what kinds of knowledge are possible and how the researcher can trust that the knowledge is accurate and thoroughly communicated (Crotty, 1998).

This study adopted a epistemological stance of constructionism, or the belief that meaning is not discovered, but constructed (Crotty, 1998). The core assumption guiding this paradigm is that reality is not discovered, but rather constructed and shaped by individuals interacting with the world and objects in the world (Crotty, 1998; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Furthermore, people construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon, and there is no objective truth waiting to be discovered (Crotty, 1998). Crotty (1998) explained that people have to connect with their world in order to make meaning. He added, “before there were consciousness on earth capable of interpreting the world, the world had no meaning” (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). We have to work with the world and those objects in the world in order to find and make meaning (Crotty, 1998).

It is important to clearly separate the terms constructionism and constructivism, which, at times, are used interchangeably. Constructionism has been previously defined as the collective generation and transmission of meaning (Crotty, 1998). In contrast, constructivism views knowledge and being “the meaning-making activity of the individual mind” (Crotty, 1998, p. 58) rather than being discovered. The key feature in constructivism epistemology is the idea that individuals build their truths from their experiences regardless of context and social factors that may weigh in on their interpretations (Crotty, 1998).
During this research study, while engaged in both interviews and the focus group, participants were asked to share stories and to make meaning of their shared experiences at a social justice retreat. Both the transformative and experiential components of this study align with a constructionism epistemological perspective because, similar to constructionism theory, often these transformative and experiential experiences are unique to the individual, subjective, and meaning is constructed in different ways.

**Theoretical perspective.** In addition to outlining the epistemology in the study, it is also important to discuss the theory that underlines the research. The theoretical stance provides the foundation for the methodology to be used in a study (Crotty, 1998). Creswell (2016) reminds the reader of the importance of using theories in qualitative research “in short, it begins the study and helps shape the questions asked and the results obtained” (p. 43). In this study, the theoretical approach used by the researcher was transformational learning theory.

Transformational learning theory is a process by which an individual encounters learning situations powerful enough to elicit a reflective response that encompasses understanding how sociocultural influences impact one’s worldview, thereby influencing the individual to challenge their personally dominant worldview (Chen & Martin, 2015; Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2009). The overarching goal of transformative learning being to alter an individual’s frame of reference through the process of critical reflection of one’s habits of mind and worldview (Mezirow, 1997; Moore, 2005). Through the process of self-reflection, old assumptions and ways of interpreting the world are challenged, revised, and replaced with new beliefs and actions (Cranton, 1994). Transformative
learning theory has evolved over the years and now embraces discourse on the influence of power, race, gender, class, and culture (Chen & Martin, 2015).

Transformative learning aligns closely with the epistemology of the study as it extends from a constructivist framework where knowledge is constructed through and between those engaging in the experience (Candy, 1991; Cranton, 1994). Two sets of assumptions form the basis of transformational learning. First, there are humanistic and constructivist beliefs that highlight the individual as the unit of analysis (Flemming, 2018). The second set of assumptions is rooted in the belief that a focus on the social is also a key unit of analysis (Flemming, 2018). Constructionism, the epistemological lens of the study, shares the same belief that meaning is not discovered, but constructed, and often times in connection with others (Creswell, 2016).

In the previous chapters I discussed the role of social justice in both counseling and in the current research. With this said, the mission of social justice education and tenets of transformational learning theory appear to align closely. I discuss this natural connection in Chapter II, however; I remind the reader that complementary to transformational learning, social justice education is built on the assumption that in the process of learning, students hold valuable knowledge and both peers and teachers can learn in the process (Adams et al., 2007; Mezirow, 2003; Taylor, 2009).

**Role of the researcher.** In qualitative research the researcher is the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Merriam, 2009). Researchers utilizing qualitative methodology do not have the freedom to turn to various instruments for the purpose of collecting and analyzing data. Thus, I trust it is important to honor and disclose my potential bias in order to provide transparency and
trustworthiness to the study. Later in this chapter I describe the technique of bridling, which also calls for researchers to both own and acknowledge their assumptions and biases (Vagle, 2009). In the following section, researcher stance, I disclose my personal experience with the topic of social justice as well as give insight to my time as a counselor and counselor in training as it relates to multicultural training.

**Researcher stance.** The term *social justice* and the terminology commonly used by those who dedicate much time and attention to the mission of achieving a more socially just world wasn’t frequently used in the household where I grew up. My childhood was not spent attending social justice events or community rallies. However, I was aware from a young age that I was surrounded by proud “Black folk” who were dead set on dedicating their lives to advancing the missions of the African American community and those groups who had been marginalized and oppressed. Through the sharing of stories, passed from one generation to the next; one cousin to another, I learned about the decades of discrimination and prejudice my family endured as a result of being black and navigating predominantly white communities. I learned that despite the horrific trials and tribulations Black women experienced at the start of the 20th century, my grandmother persevered through the struggle and subsequently became the first Black woman in the city of Chicago to achieve executive administration status. I vividly recall walking down the streets of inner-city Chicago with my grandmother as a young boy, fascinated by the mere fact that folks of all races, genders, and status would stop and greet her and thank her for helping to break down the gender and racial divide that was ever present at the time. I recall thinking that I, too, wanted to have that impact on a community someday.
Grandma was not the only one in the family who devoted her life to advancing “her” people while tackling injustice. My grandfather served as one of the few black airmen in World War II, my father, a deacon in the church, was the first Black man to reach supervisory level as a consulting lawyer, and my mother continues to operate one of the few Black and women owned counseling agencies in the state of Colorado. Having a servant heart, improving the lives of others, while burning down cultural barriers are traits that have been a part of my family since its existence, or so I’ve been told. The elders in the family often remind our youth that the primary goal in life is to leave this world better than you found it.

As previously mentioned, I did not gain a clear understanding of social justice work until I was well into my graduate studies. It was during graduate school, where I began to gain an understanding of how experiences that take place outside of the classroom can enhance cultural competence. I served as an Academic Advisor for the Center for Human Enrichment (CHE) at the University of Northern Colorado. I had the pleasure of mentoring first generation college students throughout their first year on campus. The students I served in CHE were diverse in racial identity and most came from lower income families. As such, my conversations with students mirrored more of what you would expect to find in a counseling office as opposed to an academic advising office. We processed the struggles that often come with being a minority on a predominantly white campus, fears about not being able to pay for school, feelings of guilt stemming from leaving home and not being able to help the family, as well as other struggles common to first generation students.
While employed at the Center for Human Enrichment, I worked alongside a talented team of advisors who were equally passionate about advocating for our racially and socioeconomically underrepresented group of students. We engaged in conversations regarding student’s race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, as well as other identities on a daily basis. These conversations lit a fire in me. I learned quickly that my heart was bent towards supporting those that were experiencing, or had experienced, suffering due to oppression and marginalization. I became acutely aware of just how privileged I am, I do not own many subordinate identities. As a result of my conversations with both staff and students I began to develop words, my own narrative, to describe the experiences I had encountered throughout my life. This new narrative provided both context and clarity to the stories that were shared with me by my family. Specifically, my words now highlighted the struggles my family experienced as they as they journeyed through unsafe territories. As I engaged in conversations with students and staff I began to reflect on my time as a counselor in training. I realized that counselor training was void of many of the difficult, yet important conversations about race, religion, sexual orientation and other identities. Sure, these topics were briefly discussed in my multicultural counseling course and in various conversations with peers and professors in the program, but not to the same depth and not with the same level of safety that was present in my conversations with peers while working in CHE. The difference in my experience between my time working in CHE versus my time in my multicultural counseling course is, in part, what inspired the current research.

In addition to ongoing conversations with students and staff while employed in CHE, attending Catalyst, a social justice retreat, was paramount in my quest to enhance
the current state of multicultural training in counselor education. I attended Catalyst for
the first time during my first year of employment at the Center for Human Enrichment.

During my time as a participant in this social justice retreat, I gained first-hand
experience of the power of participating in conversations about identity outside of the
traditional classroom environment and away in an inclusive setting. Catalyst is a three-
day, two-night retreat held in the mountains of Colorado, at a resort in Estes Park. Over
this 3-day period, I learned more about myself than I thought was possible. More
specifically, I gained a new awareness of my privileged identities and how I could
leverage my privilege to support those who may have less access to resources. I gained
new insight into my biases and assumptions and was both challenged and affirmed by
peers and trained facilitators who were equally skilled at navigating difficult dialogue.
Additionally, and most important, I learned that people from various walks of life could
come together and engage in emotionally charged conversations and feel safe and
supported while doing so. My initial social justice experience inspired me to come back
for a second and third time, serving in the role of a small group facilitator.

In an addition to attending Catalyst, my time spent supervising counselors in
training has fueled my desire to see change in how counselors are trained to work with
clients who come from cultural backgrounds that are different from their own. Although I
could talk at length about experiences that have formed my assumptions, beliefs, and
perspectives around this issue, one experience surfaces in my memory more frequently
than others. During one spring in my doctoral training, I had the pleasure of supervising a
masters level counseling student as she was nearing the end of her internship experience.
She was serving as a counselor intern in a local middle school that attracted a racially
diverse student body. As we began our weekly supervision session, I could sense that she was excited to share with me what she considered to be “good news.” I sensed her excitement; then, she shared with me that she was, “ecstatic that [she] was chosen to head up tolerance training week for the school.” I asked my supervisee what she meant by “tolerance” training and her response was one I will never forget. She stated, “it’s where students and staff learn how to tolerate each other better. We learn to tolerate being from different cultures and tolerate living and learning together.”

To this day I have no recollection of my response in that moment. I do remember, however, how I felt. I still recall the feelings of anger and disappointment that circulated through my body. I wasn’t angry or disappointed in my fellow counselor, but rather by the mere fact that we live in a society with people who not only accept social injustice, we actively promote it. To tolerate someone is to put up with, to deal with, to endure someone or a group of people that you don’t necessarily want to be around. How can we, as counselors and counselor educators who are called to be agents of social justice promote a campaign that teaches children to tolerate one another? This supervision session, more than any other, validated that my calling in the field of counselor education is to help reshape and redefine the manner in which counselors are prepared to work with clients who come from all different cultural backgrounds. It is my hope that through a transformation of multicultural training counselors, counselor educators and clients alike will pursue an agenda where cultural difference is not merely accepted, but also honored, recognized and embraced.
Methodology

The epistemological and theoretical perspectives have been addressed and the methodology which guides the research can now be introduced. Crotty (1998) defined methodology as “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes” (p. 3). Phenomenology was chosen as the methodology for the current research. Phenomenological research explores the understanding about the essence and the underlying framework of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998).

Phenomenology started as a philosophical movement established by Edmund Husserl (Gall et al., 2003). Husserl (1931) described the concept of intentionality; the idea that being conscious of objects is always intentional, which sits at the heart of both phenomenology and constructionism. Phenomenology challenges the researcher to closely examine the phenomena of interest, in the immediate experience, so that possibilities for new meanings may emerge and also opportunities to enhance and expand on former meanings may exist (Crotty, 1998).

Within the realms of phenomenological research there are several different approaches and ‘schools of thought’ in approaching research. The different approaches included existential, transcendental, ethical, hermeneutic, and linguistic phenomenology. The current research employed Heidegger’s (1967) hermeneutic phenomenology. The literature review highlighted the need for counselor educators to both expand and enhance the current state of multicultural counseling competence training in counselor preparation programs. To review, one potential avenue for developing multicultural training practices is to move away from traditional classroom practices, which includes
readings and classroom discussions, and to introduce experiential and transformational components to the multicultural training curriculum. Hermeneutic phenomenology aligns with the idea of moving away from relying heavily on texts and discussion to create meaning. Crotty (1998) stated, “for a start, it can be said that, in one way or another, hermeneutics views texts as strange and far off” (p. 90). Texts have been simply viewed as a vehicle to transmit meaning, experiences, beliefs, and values from one community to another. Instead, the researcher was oriented towards interpreting the “text” of life and lived experience (Crotty, 1998).

The goal of hermeneutics is a sharing of meaning between communities and to communicate how text can and should be applied (Crotty, 1998). Lared et al. (2016) added “if we are in the world and we know that we are in the world, we have a perception of this world even if it is thoughtless awareness” (p. 194). Thus, the individual experience interacts with the world, objects in the world, through language to create knowledge and meaning (Lared et al., 2016). Heidegger focused his studies on the nature of human being, which he referred to as daisen (Crotty, 1998; Tan, Wilson, & Olver, 2009). He further defined daisen as, “a term denoting the essential nature of the human being, which includes the ability to inquire in the nature of and possibilities of Being” (Tan et al., 2009). From Heidegger’s perspective, one could not escape being both in and of the world. Being in the world is not something that “we can eliminate or bracket” (Tan et al., 2009, p. 4). Therefore, as the primary researcher, I did not attempt to eliminate my role in the current research but rather honored that I was a part of the world and subsequently part of the phenomena under study. I served as a facilitator during the social justice
retreat and also as the primary researcher. My roles throughout the research are discussed more in depth later in this chapter.

Heidegger suggested that a person could not experience the world without acts of interpretation and reference their background and preunderstandings (Tan et al., 2009). The way in which an individual interacts with and comes to know and understand the world was a key focus to Heidegger. It fits that at the heart of Heidegger’s Hermeneutic methodology “is the prospect of gaining an understanding of the text that is deeper or goes further than the authors own understanding” (Merriam, 2009, p. 91). Moreover, researchers that exhibit skilled hermeneutic inquiry have the ability to, essentially, uncover meanings and intentions that are often hidden in the text. Merriam (2009) stated, “interpreters may end up with an explicit awareness of meanings, and especially assumptions, that the authors themselves would have been unable to articulate” (Merriam, 2009, p. 91). Heidegger added that we must rid ourselves of our tendency to immediately interpret. He challenges the individuals to embrace the process of both giving more thought as well as withholding from jumping too quickly to forming our perspectives (Merriam, 2009).

Methods

Now that Hermeneutic phenomenology has been described as the methodology for the study, the methods are described in order to explain how I explored counseling students’ experiences and perceptions who attend an intensive social justice retreat. Crotty (1998) defined methods as “techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research question or hypothesis” (p. 3). A qualitative researcher conceptualizes the research process in an intentional and specific way and relies on the
views of participants to inductively develop ideas from particulars to abstraction (Creswell, 2007).

There are many ways to collect data when engaging qualitative research. Questionnaires, interviews, measurement and scaling, focus groups, and direct observation are commonly used to collect data by qualitative researchers (Crotty, 1998; Gall et al., 2003). Interviewing is the most popular form of data collection and “is sometimes the only way to get data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 88). In phenomenological research in-depth interviews are considered the recommended and most appropriate means to gather data from participants (Creswell, 2014). Semi-structured interviews are open-ended, and flexible in nature. This flexibility allows the researcher to make adjustments to questions and respond to the participants experience, making space for the researcher to fully explore new knowledge and meaning (Merriam, 2009). The semi-structured questions were created with the support of the chair of my committee. Semi-structured interview questions were created and used for the purpose of data collection and, ultimately, to explore the guiding research question (see Appendix A).

Procedures

Prior to moving forward with data collection it is imperative to have an accurate understanding of the phenomena under study and who, specifically, is being researched (Gall et al., 2003). The phenomena investigated was the experiences and perceptions of counselor education students who attended a social justice retreat. Participants in this study met the following criteria: (a) were actively enrolled as a counseling student in a CACREP-accredited institution; and (b) had taken and passed their required multicultural counseling course (or equivalent) for their counseling program.
Participants. Once I received approval from the University of Northern Colorado’s Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B), I began recruiting participants. The participants for this study included counselors in training who attended a social justice leadership retreat. I accessed the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) website to review counseling programs across the state of Colorado to generate a list of counselor training programs who may have students who meet the participation requirements. I contacted the identified counselor training programs to request that information be sent out to students that contained (a) information about the upcoming social justice retreat, and (b) detailed information about the current research study. The materials also include the social justice retreat application (see Appendix C), the social justice retreat flyer (see Appendix D), and a copy of the Informed Consent (see Appendix E).

Potential research participants completed an application to attend the Social Justice Retreat. They returned their application through JotForm, a web-based tracking service. This application served as the screening tool that the social justice retreat facilitators used to determine whether or not potential participants were candidates to attend the social justice retreat and, secondarily, if they met requirements to take part in the current research. On the social justice retreat application potential participants were asked to share both a personal and work-related history and also had the option of sharing demographic information pertaining to their unique cultural identities. Participant demographic information will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter IV and also included in the Participant Demographics table (see Appendix F). Candidates were asked to document their social justice knowledge and experience and to list their hopes and
fears about attending the social justice leadership retreat. Candidates could share experiences they had with social justice education along with any additional information they would like to include that connected to their unique cultural identities.

The team of retreat facilitators and I reviewed participant applications to determine whether or not each participant was an appropriate candidate to attend the social justice retreat. Candidates were deemed inappropriate if it is determined that the candidate expressed thoughts, feelings, or behaviors that may be harmful to the overall objectives of the retreat. One candidate was removed from the retreat after the committee was made aware that the individual expressed insensitive views that would be harmful and potentially dangerous to other retreat participants.

A screening process is standard in the design and implementation of a social justice retreat. The facilitator committee is focused on securing a heterogenous participant pool that is committed to creating a safe environment for all attendees. While confidentiality and safety can never be guaranteed, the committee was focused on determining whether or not applicants’ language and beliefs embodied respect, care, and concern for all people and the mission of social justice work. Consequently, applicants who expressed harmful, degrading, or derogatory language or beliefs in their application were inappropriate for retreat participation. Applicants who failed to explicitly state what they hoped to gain by attending the retreat were determined to be inappropriate for participation.

In addition to achieving an invested and safe workshop participant pool, it was equally important to achieve a diverse research participant pool. Selecting a heterogenous group of participants was considered when selecting participants for the retreat and was
taken into consideration when reviewing applications. There was space on the retreat application for potential research participants to indicate that they were, in fact, counselors in training and were interested in (a) attending the social justice leadership retreat, and (b) participating in the research study. Furthermore, potential research participants were expected to indicate that they met the following criterion for participation in the research study: (a) were actively enrolled as a counseling student in a CACREP-accredited institution; and (b) had taken and passed the required multicultural counseling course (or equivalent) for their counseling program. Each potential participant had space on the retreat application to note whether or not they meet both criterion and were willing to engage in the study. It is important to note, however, that potential research candidates had to meet prescreening requirements for the retreat before they were considered appropriate to also take part in the current research. A total of 18 potential participants inquired about participating in the study, and 10 participants met full criteria and participated in the study. Most participants who were screened out of the research portion of study had not yet taken their required multicultural counseling course. All participants were still invited to attend the social justice retreat, although not all attended.

Retreat facilitators notified participants, via telephone and e-mail, that they were accepted and invited participants to participate in the research. I went over informed consent in detail, in person, on the first day of the social justice retreat. A designated retreat facilitator, other than me, collected informed consent prior to the start of the retreat. I did not know who chose to participate in the research until the retreat had concluded and had connected with research participants to schedule interviews. In order
to provide participants with a thorough understanding of the research and their role in the study. Participants were provided a copy of the consent form. I went over the informed consent and answered any questions that the participants had about the research. Additionally, the consent form informed participants that they had the right to discontinue the interview process at any time at no penalty or cost.

Merriam (1998) asserted in a phenomenological study there is no golden number in terms of the number of participants needed to adequately capture the depth and breadth of participant’s experiences. In qualitative research, sample sizes can range from one participant up to and even beyond 25 participants. For this research I hoped to recruit between 5 to 10 participants to participate in the study. As previously mentioned, 10 participants participated in this research study. The goal of the retreat facilitators was to create a heterogenous research participant pool. With this in mind the facilitator team sought to include all cultural identities when looking to create a heterogenous pool. Consistent with social justice principles the facilitator team hoped to attract applicants from a wide range of identities, however, how heterogenous the final applicant pool was depended on the identities of the individuals who volunteered to participate. I trust that capturing 5 to 10 participant’s experience through interviews and a focus group allowed me to reach what Creswell (2007) called saturation. Saturation is present when the researcher examines the text and various sources of data and determines that the categories among the data begin to replicate and no longer contribute to the themes from the data (Creswell, 2014).

In addition to identifying the number of participants best suited for the research being conducted, it is imperative to give thought to which sampling method is best suited
for the research design. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants and was identified as the best sampling strategy in phenomenological research as it provides trust that all participants have experienced the phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2014, 2016). This sampling method allows the researcher to discover, understand, and gain insight into the phenomena (Gall et al., 2003; Merriam, 2009). The phenomena under study was the experiences and perceptions of counselor education students who have completed an intensive social justice retreat.

Merriam (2009) stated, “to begin purposive sampling, you must first determine what selection criteria are essential in choosing the people or sites to be studied” (p. 77). The criteria for participation in the current study was that students: (a) were actively enrolled as a counseling student in a CACREP-accredited institution; and (b) had taken and passed the required multicultural counseling course (or equivalent) for their counseling program. Merriam (2009) reminded the researcher that it is not enough to define the criteria, one must also include why the criteria is important.

The gap in the counseling literature was evidence that how to train counselors to work with client from different cultural backgrounds remained in dire need of attention. The current study was designed in hopes of enhancing the current state of multicultural training in counselor preparation programs and, ultimately, shrinking the gap in the literature. The literature review outlines counselor educators, counselors in training, and clients as potential beneficiaries of enhanced multicultural training. With this is mind, I believed that counselors in training (Criterion A) are the best fit to serve as the focal point of the current research. Not only are they the bridge between the counselor education and the client experience; they are also able to give voice to the current state of multicultural
training as well as the experiential and potentially transformative experiences they may serve to enhance multicultural counseling training.

Criterion B was required as I felt that, given the focus of the guiding research question, that all participants had some background knowledge of the multicultural counseling competencies and multicultural training. As outlined in the literature review, the CACREP Standards (Council for the Accredidation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2016) outline requirements for counseling programs regarding what must be included in the multicultural training curriculum as well as overall program requirements as they relate to developing multiculturally competent counselors. Furthermore, the CACREP Standards provide a level of consistency, ensuring that research participants have been exposed to curriculum that meets the same standard guidelines, independent of how the curriculum was delivered. It was anticipated that research participants would enter the social justice retreat with their own life experiences and understanding of multicultural and social justice related issues. However, it was my hope that participation in their counseling programs multicultural counseling course would provide a foundation of understanding to various multicultural terminology and social justice issues impacting their communities. Criterion B allowed the current research to capture the essence of the experiences of counseling students’ completion of the social justice retreat and reduced the chance that some participants may respond primarily to their limited interactions with social justice and multicultural training.

**Setting.** A social justice retreat served as the setting for this study. The retreat took place at an event center in a major metro area in Colorado, which is within close proximity to at least nine CACREP accredited programs in the state of Colorado. The
format of the retreat followed a two-day, twelve-hour, weekend intensive format. Approximately 100 participants from across the state of Colorado attended the social justice retreat. The diversity representation of the social justice retreat participant group was significantly more diverse than the research participant group. Racial minorities were the most represented cultural group at the social justice retreat and other cultural identities including, gender, religion, and affectional orientation were also well represented. Facilitators for the social justice retreat were me and one lead facilitator who had extensive experience in facilitating social justice retreats at both the state and national level and me. Six small group facilitators were select by the lead facilitators and participated in the retreat by facilitating small group discussions. I selected Small group facilitators and each had (a) knowledge of social justice education and principles , (b) previous facilitation experience, (c) an understanding of personal identities (race, SES, etc.), (d) an open-mind to the process of identity development, (e) a personal social justice journey toward self-exploration, and (f) an ability to speak to an understanding of an area of privilege. As previously mentioned, I had been a participant and served in the role of group facilitator at several social justice retreats. In addition, I had coordinated social justice events and activities for middle school, high school, and collegiate athletic teams. Most recently I had taught multicultural courses for the masters counseling program at Palo Alto University. I trust these experiences prepared me to serve as a co-facilitator for the social justice retreat. Since I served in dual-roles, lead researcher and facilitator, I restricted my range of interaction with participants during the social justice retreat. My facilitator role primarily consisted of disseminating information and I relied
heavily on the main lead facilitator to lead participants through the processing of large group activities.

The social justice retreat developed for this study was rooted in the work of Bettendorf (2016) who developed his own social justice leadership retreat for his dissertation that explored how attending a social justice retreat impacts the ways students make meaning of racial issues, students beliefs about their capacity for leadership and democratic action, and behavior as it relates to social justice action. Bettendorf (2016) designed his retreat after Colorado State University’s “Multicultural Leadership Retreat” and The University of Vermont’s, “The Next Step” program. The Social Justice Leadership Retreat developed by Bettendorf (2016) was:

- Designed to help educate students about the concepts of social justice and community leadership through exploration of their own stories, the stories of others, explore issues of oppression and privilege, develop contacts and support networks across campus, and develop skills to be an ally to many different groups. (p. 85)

Bettendorf (2016) stated that through exposure to social justice education and experiential learning activities students will gain new knowledge of social justice issues, sharpen their self-awareness skills, and learn how to apply what they have learned. I adopted and amended Bettendorf’s (2016) Social Justice Leadership Retreat program overview (see Appendix G) to align closely with the participants and the objectives of the current study. Specifically, Bettendorf’s (2016) social justice retreat was developed for students, primarily undergraduate students. The social justice retreat used in this study attracted participants from all demographic backgrounds, including working professionals. With that said, minor adjustments were made to the program philosophy
(see Appendix H) and to the retreat activities to reflect engaging a more diverse participant pool.

In addition to Bettendorf’s (2016) model, I drew from my time at Catalyst, UNC’s social justice retreat, in developing the social justice retreat for the current study. The Catalyst program was developed to afford students, faculty, and staff the opportunity to engage in conversations around issues of inclusion and social justice. Participants and facilitators examined their personal identities; the dynamics of oppression on an individual, systemic, and institutional level; as well as work on ally development. The ultimate goal of Catalyst is to arm students with tools and skills to act on the issues and causes they are most passionate about. The Catalyst retreat is designed to be a transformational experience for all participants. Specifically, the participant objectives are as follows:

- Catalyst participants will explore personal and social identities and how those identities interact and relate power and privilege in the U.S.
- Catalyst participants will learn how their social identities impact perceptions of others and how others are perceived
- Catalyst participants will explore the definition of an ally and what it means to be an ally to a community
- Catalyst participants will create a personal definition of social justice
- Catalyst will learn skill to communicate understanding to others

The work of Bettendorf (2016), Catalyst, and the current social justice retreat all developed out of Adams et al.’s (2007) book *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*. This text provided much of the theoretical underpinnings for these social justice
leadership retreats. As noted in Chapter I, Adams et al. (2007) outline the core tenets of social justice education as well as define key terms such as oppression, identity, privilege, and marginalization. These terms and concepts were defined and discussed in the current social justice retreat, giving space for participants to talk about how each have played a role in their lives.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

At the conclusion of the social justice retreat I contacted each participant within fourteen days, via telephone, to setup an initial interview. Once participants had agreed to participate in the study, I scheduled a time to conduct a semi-structured interview that took approximately 60 to 90 minutes depending on participant responses. The first interview took place following the completion of the social justice retreat which focused on participants experiences and perceptions throughout their time engaged in the retreat (see Appendix A).

After all data had been collected and analyzed a second, 45 to 90-minute interview was scheduled with each participant. Second interviews began four weeks after completing the initial interview process. The focus of the second interview was be to follow-up with participants to determine if any new insights or meaning were created after having time to reflect on their experiences in the social justice retreat. Questions were developed to capture new insights or meaning acquired as it related to participating in the social justice training (see Appendix I). I transcribed all individual interviews. Otter, transcription software, was used to aid in the transcription process. A transcription service, Scribie, was contracted to transcribe the focus group. Upon completion of the interview transcripts, participants received an electronic copy of their interview transcript.
prior to engaging in the second interview. The intent was to allow participants time to reflect on their initial responses and to also stay connected to their experience at the social justice retreat. Interviews were semi-structured and questions were open-ended, allowing participants to share their thoughts and feelings freely (Merriam, 2009).

After all data was transcribed and analyzed, participants were invited to take part in a follow-up, 90-minute focus group. Three participants attended the focus group. Again, all participants received an electronic copy of their second interview transcription prior to participating in the focus group. The focus group was scheduled approximately four weeks after second interviews had taken place. The focus group participants consisted of the same individuals who participated in the individual interviews. Focus group questions were created based on the themes that arose from the data collected in the individual interviews (see Appendix J). I conducted each individual interview as well as served as the lead and sole facilitator of the focus group.

Participants were given opportunities to ask questions and/or ask for clarification of points that were confusing. When participants granted permission to be interviewed (validated by signing the consent form), the researcher turned on the recording device and the interview began. Given the nature of semi-structured interviews, prompts and questions that clarified the participants experience were used to illicit a richer description of their experience. Statements such as “say more about that” and “what does that mean for you” were utilized throughout the interview.

For research participants, the risks inherent in this study were presumed to be no greater than those during regular classroom participation. However, participants may have experienced some discomfort when describing emotional experiences they engaged
in while participating in the social justice retreat or those related to specific cultural identities. Additionally, participants may have experienced discomfort from having their views challenged by other participants during the focus group. To address this potential risk, I was available to debrief after all interviews and the focus group. Participants did not reach out for additional support or processing after the individual or group interview. A mental health referral list was provided to each participant. Additionally, participants were reminded that they were free to leave the study at any time.

Research may have benefits to those who serve as participants. A potential benefit to participants in the current research was that they may have found that processing their feelings in the social justice retreat along with the individual interviews and focus group may have allowed them to explore their feelings; it may have been healing. An indirect benefit to participants is that this research may help counselor educators and counseling programs improve and enhance multicultural training in counselor education. In this way, participants may receive an indirect benefit in knowing that they are helping future professional counselors.

Interviews were conducted in person, through telephone, and through video conference. Arrangements were made to connect via telephone or using the GoToMeeting platform when participants were unable to meet in person. Time restraints, finances, geographical limitations, and unforeseen circumstances were factors that dictated whether or not face-to-face interviews were possible.

Compensation

Throughout the research process I provided compensation for those who participated in the study. Participants received a $25.00 Visa gift card for each individual
interview they participated in. Those who participated in the focus group received pizza
and a soft drink.

**Artifacts**

Artifacts can help establish a thorough and comprehensive understanding of what
is being studied (Merriam, 2009). In order to better capture the participant experience
while attending the social justice retreat, each participant received a journal that they used
for reflections throughout their time at the retreat. Participants were prompted to write in
their reflection journals prior to the start of each day of attending the social justice retreat,
midday of the retreat, and after the retreat has culminated each day. Journals had written
prompting questions, developed by the researcher. However, participants were also
encouraged to free write if they choose not to respond to the prompt questions. Journals
were collected on the last day of the social justice retreat after participants had time to
submit their final entry. The rationale for including artifacts was to increase the
understanding of the participant experience while they were attending the social justice
retreat. As such, participant journals were reviewed, and the data was transcribed and
analyzed using the same data analysis process employed for analyzing participant
interviews. Participant journal entries were used to capture both textural and structural
descriptions of the social justice leadership retreat. I found that the participant journals
added rich descriptions to the data regarding their time spent engaged in the social justice
retreat.

**Data Handling Procedures**

All interviews were recorded using a digital recording device. After completion of
the interviews, the files were uploaded and stored on a hard drive, and then placed in a
locked file on a password protected computer. All information stored on the digital recording device were erased after the information was uploaded. All hard copies, including the consent forms were stored in a locking file storage container, and transported to the University of Northern Colorado by vehicle, and stored in the office of my advisor in McKee Hall. Each participant chose a pseudonym, so that any identifying information was not connected specifically to them. Once I transcribed interviews, all identifying information (such as names, address, work location) was removed in order to protect the confidentiality of the participant. Participants for this study were voluntary adults, counseling students, over the age of 21.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Establishing and maintaining trustworthiness in qualitative research is of utmost importance. Trustworthiness, is a term that refers to the overall quality of a qualitative research endeavor (Creswell, 2007). The terms trustworthiness and rigor are synonymous with the terms validity and reliability in quantitative research (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) added, “being able to able to trust research results is especially important in applied fields because practitioners intervene in people’s lives” (p. 209).

Crotty (1998) posited that rigor was present in qualitative research when extensive data collection occurred, multiple levels of data analysis was present, and when the researcher validated the accuracy of themes using one or more procedures for validation. In general, the four key components that were necessary to establish rigor were credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Shenton, 2004). I have included a detailed summary of how my research addressed each of these areas to assure that this study upheld the standards of excellence in qualitative research.
Credibility

In qualitative research, credibility refers to the extent that the findings represent the multiple realities present in the study. Credibility is synonymous to the internal validity in a quantitative study, which challenges the researcher to explore whether or not the ‘thing’ being studied was accurately captured in the data (Merriam, 2009). In this study, member checks, an audit trail, auditors, and triangulation were used to establish credibility (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998).

**Member checks.** Three member checks were conducted with each participant in order to increase the credibility of the research study. Each participant received a copy of their transcript from both the first and second interviews. They were asked to confirm the accuracy of the transcriptions as well as discuss inaccuracies. Once a list of themes was developed, participants were provided a list of themes and relating summary to, again, check for accuracy and ensure that the data captured their perceptions of multicultural counseling competence and their experience at the social justice retreat. Guba and Lincoln (1989) indicated that a member check is, perhaps, the most important tool a researcher can use to establish credibility. In addition to checking for accuracy, member checks are meant to allow participants to reflect on their narratives and ensure that they are well represented (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

**Audit trail.** According to Merriam (2009), an audit trail can be used to increase the credibility of a qualitative research study. An audit trail describes in detail how data was collected, categories were derived, and how decisions were made (Merriam, 2009). A researcher must keep a detailed journal or record of memos on the steps that are taken throughout the process of conducting research. I kept a journal that outlined my thoughts,
feelings, and behaviors as I navigated the research process. Additionally, I documented questions and concerns that arose as I journeyed through the research process. I noted specific times, dates, and places of my attendance in each journal entry. The audit trail strategy is a reliable method for obtaining consistent and dependable data (Creswell, 2007). The information contained in the audit trail is essential in the event that consumers of the current research are interested in knowing how arrived at my results. The audit trail tells the history of how the research arrived at these results (Creswell, 2014).

In addition to providing credibility to the research, there exists additional motivation to self-reflect throughout the entirety of the current research. In traditional phenomenological qualitative research the researcher is often challenged to set aside beliefs and assumptions in order to reduce oneself to bring to life the phenomena under exploration (Crotty, 1998; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Moustakas (1994) referred to the practice of the researcher setting aside their interpretations of a phenomenon to take on a fresh perspective, as bracketing. However, the current study adopted a hermeneutic methodology, which both honors and includes the researchers prior and current experiences. “Bridling does not remove, set aside, or render the researcher non-influential as bracketing implies, but animates and illuminates the researcher more fully in his or her intentional relationship with the phenomenon” (Vagle, 2009, p. 592).

As outlined earlier in my research stance, I am not just a researcher with little to no relationship to the topic of study. I am a counselor, counselor educator, and connect closely to living as a person of color in a predominantly white community. For this reason, it was imperative to include myself in the research by making participants aware of my assumptions and biases. In order to do so accurately, I was consciously aware of
my assumptions and biases as I navigated the research process. The researcher journal is one tool I used to hold myself accountable by increasing my self-awareness.

I began the process of bridling by providing participants with a copy of my researcher’s stance. If I became aware of additional assumptions and biases, I made participants aware through direct communication in our time together in individual interviews and the focus group. Lastly, I journaled after every interview I conducted with research participants. My researcher’s journal was available to my auditors for peer review to serve as an additional layer of accountability.

Auditors. Two auditors were used to increase the overall credibility of the study. Each auditor independently reviewed the data collected throughout the study. Each auditor reviewed all data from three research participants. Each auditor chose to randomly select two participant’s data to review and were assigned the same third participant to check for consistency in feedback. Auditors were recruited by me, the primary researcher, and each had experience teaching in CACREP accredited counselor training programs, therefore familiar with the current landscape of multicultural training. Furthermore, auditors had experience teaching or facilitating multicultural counseling courses in counseling programs. I met with each auditor to discuss discrepancies and potential blind spots or areas of bias.

Auditors were asked to provide feedback on whether coding was consistent and accurate throughout all data. They were challenged to look for both over representation, under representation of coding along with themes that may not be present in the data. Auditors were asked to read through the researcher’s journal and provide feedback on biases of potential blind spots. Lastly, a potential theme of Influence of Previous
Multicultural Training emerged from my time interviewing participants. I asked auditors to provide feedback on whether or not they thought this theme should remain as a theme or if this data should be captured in participant introductions. Ultimately, one suggested to keep the theme and the other suggested to move the data to participant introduction. I opted to move the data to participant introductions as I believe the theme did not directly answer the research question yet provided an important component to the current research.

Selecting appropriate auditors for a study requires careful consideration and attention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Auditors should be considered well versed in qualitative methodology and also regarded as experts in the topic under study. With this in mind, auditors had experience conducting qualitative research in counselor education. Additionally, auditors had experience teaching multicultural counseling courses in counselor preparation programs and had extensive experience facilitating social justice education curriculum. Along with the support of my chair, I developed a protocol for the auditors to follow in order to familiarize them with the current research and outline expectations for them as the auditors (see Appendix K).

**Triangulation.** Triangulation is “probably the most well-known strategy to shore up the internal validity of a study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 215). In this study, multiple methods were used in order to establish credibility. These methods include; two interviews with each participant, focus group, researcher’s journal, participant’s journal, member checks, an audit trail, and auditors.
Dependability

In qualitative research, dependability is the process of examining the product and process of the research in order to ensure consistency. Dependability is closely related to reliability in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Whereas quantitative research is focused on whether or not results indicate true scores and are reciprocated in succeeding research, qualitative research examines whether or not the data would be stable over time (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To maximize dependability, the researcher must provide a blueprint detailing the steps that were taken to complete the study in the event that future researchers wish to replicate the study. In the present study, each step of the research process was documented in order to strengthen the dependability.

Confirmability

To establish confirmability researchers want to take steps to ensure that their assumptions and biases are not overwhelming data collection or the manner in which the date is presented (Shenton, 2004). Although qualitative research embraces subjectivity in results, researchers are expected to show how they arrived at their conclusions beyond personal bias and assumptions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended using the audit trail procedure as a means to establish both dependability and conformability in the research process. As previously mentioned in the credibility section, I made use of a researcher’s journal to document my thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and the steps taken throughout the interview and data analysis process.

Transferability

Transferability is analogous to external validity in quantitative studies. External validity refers to the extent one can generalize findings from one setting to the next
Creswell (1998) suggested that most qualitative scholars question the utility of being able to generalize information across settings. It is important to note that generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research but rather contributing knowledge to the field that is believable and trustworthy. Creswell (1998) notes that the concept of generalizability has plagued qualitative investigators for decades for the mere fact that, from a statistical sense, it cannot occur in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the process of transferability in qualitative research where “the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere” (p. 224). Since the researcher does not know the specific sites to which transferability may be sought, it is up to the researcher to provide rich and descriptive data to make transferability possible (Merriam, 2009). Establishing transferability can also be shown in the data collection methods, time period of data collected, and the number of participants in the study. In this study I relied heavily on thick, rich description of data to contribute to transferability (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, the researcher hopes to demonstrate transferability by adding to and enhancing the current state of multicultural training in counselor education programs.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a key element in all research design. Simply put, in research the data must be analyzed. As previously mentioned, I transcribed recordings from the interviews. Once the transcription process was complete, I began the data analysis process. Moreover, data collected from participant’s journals was used throughout the data analysis process. The rationale for including artifacts was to increase the understanding of the participant experience while they were attending the social justice
retreat. As such, participant journals were reviewed, and the data was analyzed using the same data analysis process employed for analyzing participant interviews. Merriam (2009) indicates that data analysis is, perhaps, the only facet in qualitative research in which there is a preferred way of completing the task. I began the data analysis process by using coding, a system for organizing and managing the data (Merriam, 2009). I used words and colors to identify important information in the data.

Moustakas (1994) outlined techniques for researchers to utilize when analyzing data under a heuristic phenomenology lens. Horizontalizing, clustering horizons, and textural and structural description are suggested techniques for researchers to follow. I provided a description below of how used each of these techniques in the current research design.

The term horizontalization is the idea that analyzing data can be a never ending process, and the researcher can discover something new each time they read the data (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2007) encouraged the researcher to find significant statements in the data and list each statement giving each equal worth. While doing so it is important that the researcher “develop a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements” (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). I used my researcher’s journal to reflect on my thoughts and feelings as I read through the transcripts. Specifically, I reflected on those statements that I found impactful. I then reread each transcript, making note of those statements that I found to be especially impactful. Once I had completed the task of coding each transcript, I began grouping the coded statements into similar themes. I adopted Creswell’s (2016) model for grouping data into themes. I read through all the initial data, interview transcripts, in their entirety. Then, I divided the text into many
segments of information. Next, I assigned coded labels to each of the various information segments. It is common to have 30-40 codes at this point in data analysis (Creswell, 2016). I had approximately 30 codes at this point. I reread the data looking, specifically to reduce any overlapping and redundancy of codes. I attempted to reduce the number of codes to 20 or less. This process of putting data into groups is often referred to as clustering horizons (Moustakas, 1994). After the data is broken into larger clusters, I again reviewed the data looking for repetitive and overlapping segments (Creswell, 2014, 2016). The final stage in the coding process involves collapsing the codes into themes. It is common to have five to seven themes once the coding process is complete (Creswell, 2016). When coding was complete, seven themes had emerged from the data.

Next, I created textural descriptions based on both the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. Textural descriptions provide a detailed description of what happened in the study from the participant perspective (Creswell, 2007). I trust that that the phenomenon being studied was brought to light through these textural descriptions (Gall et al., 2003). As previously mentioned, auditors were used to verify and ensure trustworthiness and credibility.

To complete the data analysis process, I provided a structural description to detail how the experience happened (Creswell, 2014; Gall et al., 2007). To provide this description, I reflected on the participants experience at the social justice retreat. In providing both a textural and structural description of the phenomenon I sought to capture the “essence” of the study (Creswell, 2007). The essence of the experience, as Creswell (2007) stated, “represents the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study” (p. 159).
Ethics

The research procedures and methodology in the current study reflect my desire to uphold and maintain the ethical principles related to conducting quality research as outlined in Section G: Research and Publication of the American Counseling Association’s (2014) Code of Ethics. Merriam (2009) stated, “it is ultimately up to the individual researcher to proceed in as ethically a manner as possible.” To this end, I remained committed to practicing ethical research, upholding the morals, values, and standards that has guided counseling and social justice initiatives for decades. I trust my integrity, the research design, along with the auditor’s involvement throughout the research process ensured that this study reflects the scholarly rigor required to enhance multicultural training in counselor education programs.

Summary

In this chapter, I have detailed the research procedures and methodology for this study. The epistemology, theoretical orientation, methodology, and methods were identified and described in detail. Additionally, the role of the researcher, and the researcher’s stance is examined. The researcher’s stance was provided to participants to create trustworthiness and rigor as well as to establish rapport. Lastly, a description of how the data was collected and analyzed utilizing a phenomenological research design was provided.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings from this research. I began by providing information about each participant, including collective demographic information and individual biographies. Due to the topic of study and specifically the significance of identity throughout the research, participant demographics are included in their individual biographies. I follow-up participant biographies with a description of the seven themes and one subtheme that emerged from the data. A summary of each theme is discussed, and textural and structural participant descriptions are provided in support of each emerging theme.

Participant Demographics

The participants in this study included 10 counselors in training (CIT) who were pursuing degrees from CACREP accredited counseling programs. As a requirement for participation in the research, all 10 research participants had completed the required multicultural counseling course for their program. Additionally, all participants confirmed that they were nearing degree completion and were in the internship stage of the program. Each participant attended the entirety of the social justice retreat, completed the reflection journal, and participated in the first and second interviews. Three participants participated in the focus group.
Out of the 10 participants, 9 identified as female and 1 as male. None of the participants indicated that had physical, emotional, or learning disabilities. Regarding race and ethnicity, one participant identified as African American, one as Hispanic, and one participant as biracial (Mexican and Caucasian). The remaining seven participants identified as Caucasian. The age range of participants was 25-47 years old with a mean age of 32-years-old. Regarding affectional orientation, seven participants identified as heterosexual, one participant identified as bisexual, one participant identified as gay, and one participant identified as queer. Participants varied in regard to their faith and religious backgrounds. Three participants identified a Christian belief system, one participant reported being Atheist, one was Agnostic, one was a “Believer,” one was Do No Harm, one was New Thought, one was Post-Evangelical, and one was unsure about her faith. A detailed summary of participant demographics is included in Appendix F.

**Participant Biographies**

Interviews were completed and a social justice retreat participant journal was collected from a total of 10 participants. In order for the reader to better understand each participants’ perspective and personal viewpoint, a biography is provided for each participant. Basic demographic information as well as each participant’s personal definition of social justice along with what they hoped to gain through participation in the social justice retreat is included below. The participants are referred to by their chosen pseudonym.

**Rosie**

Rosie was finishing her degree from a counseling seminary program in the community where she resided. During the first interview, she talked about her desire to
join the counseling profession and expressed an urge to walk alongside people in their journey of healing. Rosie shared that she was 28 years old and identified as a heterosexual, black woman and added that her faith and belief in God served as her backbone. She described having a “cultural awakening” when she left home and enrolled in college “six hours away” from home. It was during her undergraduate experience where she interacted with black people who came from all walks of life and met people who, like her, were artists, intellectuals, and Christians. Rosie also came face-to-face with the reality that living life in black skin comes with unique challenges. She described the impact of being a Black woman navigating a predominantly White environment:

At that time, I discovered that Black women were least regarded in society. I became informed that not only were they oppressed by men and sexualized, they were also considered lower than White women and other women of color. We are least likely to marry at all, let alone outside of our race. I grew up with the luxury of public, integrated schools and, while issues like Blackface at fraternity parties and racial slurs written on campus buildings happened more often than they should have, I attempted to grieve, while also trying to remain unaffected. Even as I discovered these realities, I refused to believe that they were a part of my story. I always knew that I was a black woman, yet somehow tried to protect myself from the pain of oppression’s realities by becoming a distant and silent observer.

Rosie described being “convicted” when thinking about social justice related issues that she is passionate about in her local community. She added, “My heart aches when I think and hear about the injustices that people experience, but I am convicted because I know that social justice is more than just a bleeding heart. It requires action.” Rosie shared that she currently volunteers for a program that develops Christian college students into urban leaders in her local community. When Rosie was asked for her personal definition of social justice, she provided the following definition:
I would say that social justice involves the advocacy for the basic human rights of individuals and various people groups. These individuals might possess a number of identities and statuses (religious, sexual, gender, economic, ability, race/ethnic, etc.). Not only are basic rights fought for, but social justice actively seeks to combat present injustices.

Rosie stated that prior to attending the social justice retreat her most extensive social justice training stemmed from her multicultural class in her counseling program. She described having a close connection with her professor and shared that he “holds space so well” which allowed for her voice and the voices of others to be heard. When asked to describe what she hoped to gain from participating in the social justice retreat, Rosie shared:

I recently took (participant’s professor) course on social and cultural considerations in counseling and I believe this retreat would be a great addition to my previous experiences. I’m hoping to gain greater insight from peers outside of (participants institution) and further training in what it looks like to engage more deeply in social justice. I found the experiential aspects of my course to be anxiety provoking at times, yet incredibly enriching and rewarding. As these topics are revisited in the retreat, I hope for an equally rewarding experience.

Yeah, so training wise, this is probably the first kind of training like that was in this capacity. Um, I took, a semester with Dr. X. I took the social and cultural foundations of counseling course. So that’s where part of that started, and then in undergrad, part of the ministry that I was a part of had some elements of what it looks like to engage cross culturally. Specifically, in a ministry context, specifically, in regard to evangelism. What it looks like to serve our campus ministries that were comprised of a diversity of students. So those conversations first started happening for me, probably in college. So I did some justice and missions themed programs . . . but in regard to counseling, and multicultural training, I’d say I can’t remember in college being that thorough, and I think after our social justice class this year . . . our counseling class . . . that’s when it started to get a lot deeper.

**Rosa**

Rosa was pursuing a degree in school counseling. She referenced her burning desire to support kids who come from all over the world. During the second interview she talked about her time working in a local middle school during her internship. More
specifically, she described volunteering to provide counseling services to kids who identified as LGBTQQI because her colleagues did not have experience working with these youth or they did not share her same desire to sit with students who were struggling with issues around their sexual affection.

Rosa disclosed that she was 44 years old and identified as a “believer.” She described herself as a heterosexual, Hispanic woman who was also an immigrant from Peru. She added, “I am an immigrant from Peru, and as a Spanish speaker, it was a struggle at the beginning, being the oldest of six children I did not go to high school in the United States and learning not only the language, but the way society is in United States was difficult. I identify myself as a mix of Peruvian culture as well as the United States culture.” Rosa shared that she has a desire to serve as an advocate for people around her. “I try to be an advocate for people around me, especially individuals or people from ethnic backgrounds and different sexual orientations.”

Rosa shared that her social justice and multicultural training started when she was living in Peru. She stated:

Well, it started back when I was in the education program back in Peru . . . I had training and so my, my culture, my Latin culture is very much like a melting pot . . . I came across different people, from different backgrounds, from different socio-economic levels when I was back in Peru. But when I came here to the United States, it was a little different because my Latino population was small when I came into the area that I used to live.

She stated that her multicultural class in her counseling program also played a role in increasing her multicultural awareness. She explained:
It was a very open-minded type of class. It opened my eyes to the different issues that they have here in the United States and how the different cultures always have to fight for every inch of the stuff they have. So that was a little shocking for me, because when I was younger, you could see the difference in Peru, but they weren’t as prevalent as they are here. Or maybe I didn’t see them.

When asked to describe what she hopes to gain from participating in the social justice retreat, Rosa stated, “I would like to expand my knowledge and awareness of the many issues of our society, especially in reference to unconscious bias.” She defined social justice as “The distribution of wealth and opportunities within society. The access and freedom individuals have to become who they want.”

Nicole

During our second interview Nicole shared that she had just completed her Mental Health Counseling degree. Nicole reported that she was 25 years old and identified as an able-bodied, biracial and bisexual woman. During her first and second interview she talked about the complexity of being “Mexican and White” and also identifying as bisexual and navigating predominantly White spaces. She explained, “I suppose the first thing that comes to mind is that many of my identities do not fit into one box, and because of this, I have struggled to find my voice in conversations surrounding social justice and knowing when and where to take up space and where to provide space for others.” She added, “I suppose I’ve been exploring how my bi/multi categorical identities have impacted the way I show up in conversations surrounding social justice topics.”

Nicole described how her light skin tone has afforded her opportunities that others who identify as multiracial may not have the privilege to experience. She shared that she is often able to “pass” due to her light skin tone. During her time in education Nicole
worked on campus and it was during this time that she was able to make a difference in her community.

Although all areas of identity are important in social justice work, I have found myself most passionate about social justice causes related to socioeconomic status, race, and cultural concerns as well as gender and sexuality expression and their intersections. For me, I have found that my journey so far has included involving myself in social justice conversations and training on my campus and in my work. Considering most of my work has been at a university setting, most of my involvement has been advocating for change.

Nicole shared that it was in her junior year of undergraduate when she first learned about multiculturalism. She explained:

I would say that the first time I ever started to talk about identities or anything like that was my, I think, my junior year of college . . . we had read The Autobiography of Malcolm X and like I was blown away, I like love that book . . . I think it was just like, really impactful, like, nothing I had ever really thought about before . . . I took another psych and law class, which oddly, like, it makes a lot of sense, but I don’t think I expected to talk a lot about identities and the impacts of like law, and the way that people think, but we talked a lot about it in there, and one of the professors there also liked it, a lot. He was one of the leaders for Catalyst in the past too, so he talked a lot about that . . . I had my multicultural, or my diversity class through my program too, which is also structured . . . I had heard some rough experiences in those types of classes, and my professor was really amazing in the way that she did it, and it was very like, I don’t know, not like statistics about each group of people. It was very, like, we’re talking about the systems and how these systems impact every identity, and then we would kind of focus a little bit in each morning and afternoon on different types of identities and things like that.

When asked to provide a personal definition of social justice, Nicole shared: “I would define social justice as having two parts; one being the general belief that people should be treated equitably as well as the active participation in challenging systems of oppression, specifically related to identity.” Nicole shared a summary of what she hopes to gain from participating in the social justice retreat, “I hope to gain deeper awareness around my identities and how they impact my worldview and others that I engage with. I hope to further my knowledge on social justice topics so that I can feel more confident in
engaging more actively in social justice work and serve as a better, more inclusive clinician for my clients.”

Michelle

Throughout my time connecting with Michelle in both interviews she described her passion for supporting individuals who are struggling with body image and living in their skin. She introduced the concept of thin privilege; the privileges people have access to as a result of living in a thin body. She explained, “I’m passionate about breaking down barriers faced by individuals in higher weight bodies. It’s one of the last things society is looking at with regard to treating people equally and fairly. Fat phobia and weight stigma is still ‘accepted’ both socially and in the media.” Michelle, a Registered Dietician, focused much of her time working with those who have an eating disorder. Additionally, she described supporting clients to adopt an active and healthy lifestyle. Michelle and her partner own a CrossFit gym.

Michelle described herself as a 32-year-old, able bodied, heterosexual, Caucasian woman. She reported that her faith expression was “New Thought.” Michelle discussed how her personal identities have developed over the years. She explained:

My personal identity has been shaped and impacted in every stage of my life. I’m continuing to learn and grow every year and believe that personal identity has givens as well as facets that are continually in a state of flux. I’ve only just begun to scratch the surface of how my privilege, race, socio-economic status, and ancestral story have impacted my life experience.

She was completing the internship portion of her Clinical Counseling degree. Throughout the first and second interviews Michelle described her passion for social justice and defined the term social justice as “fair and equal opportunity for all.” Michelle stated that she had “minimal” social justice or multicultural training prior to attending the
social justice retreat. She shared that her training was limited to her multicultural
counseling course in her graduate program, which she described as a painful experience.

She talked about her experience in her class during her first interview.

I mean, that’s what was most shocking to me, I think was that class in [content removed] was the first time I had ever been exposed to any sort of multicultural training, even in my own field in nutrition through my entire undergraduate program. And even just in more like personal realms, it’s just something I had not been exposed to. . . . The class at [content removed] was just one class, one semester. And they do try and incorporate multicultural concepts into a lot of different classes. But it’s very much a side kind of thing. So it was just the one class and I, um, felt that in the online platform, it was just really challenging for the students to get any real meaning and depth out of it. And it was hard for the teacher to navigate when challenges did arise. If there was conflict or hurt feelings, or misunderstandings, there wasn’t a lot of opportunity for those things to get cleared up just because of the platform and doing it all through a computer.

Throughout the research Michelle talked about her experience in her multicultural class and the pain that it caused her. Michelle indicated that she had a peer who was also in the class and had expressed frustration and tension around her subordinate identities not being recognized. Sadly, this peer ended up taking her life. Michelle described feeling that there was more that both faculty and students could have done to support this student. Michelle talked about her frustration that built up over the course of the semester:

The instructor was young, white, and pretty much said her background was just her having taken the class herself. . . . I just feel like some things came up that she felt uncomfortable addressing or felt like she didn’t know how to address. So it just went unaddressed. And some of the things that were coming up, were just, I think, problems stemming from the limitations of language, where if all you’re seeing is what’s typed, and you’re not actually having a dialogue with somebody, or seeing their body language, a lot of things can get easily misconstrued with what’s said. . . . It was just misunderstandings between students or things that were said wrong, and someone would challenge it, and then it was taken the wrong way. And there was a lot of defensiveness. People were dropping out of the class because a lot was going on, on social media, behind the class, about the class and people just getting super-heated and nothing was ever productively resolved.
or handled in a way that inspired any growth. It was just students against students now, and nothing ever came of it.

It was a tough class for me, like I said, it was the first time that I was coming face to face with these concepts. Looking back, it should be like things that you hear about and learn about throughout the lifespan. . . . Looking at privilege, and looking at micro aggressions, and looking at just all the terminology that goes on in the ways of looking at things that I had not been faced with before. And I was one of the ones that felt very defensive. And I think it would have been helpful to have somebody who knew how to navigate those feelings, so that it wasn’t such a painful experience. And instead, it was uncomfortable, but growth inspiring, and for me, if I hadn’t looked at it after the class and done my own research and continued the process, which I know like a lot of students I know, didn’t . . . they were just totally turned off by it completely, that I wouldn’t have gotten anything out of it.

When asked what she hoped to gain from participating in the social justice retreat, she answered:

I would like to broaden my awareness and understanding of the social justice issues we continue to face as a society today and learn how to best use that information to benefit my clients moving forward . . . I’m super passionate about working with food and body challenges, and I have been working in that field as a dietitian for the last six years and realized that my training was super limited as far as where I could get with people and exploring what got them to where they are with those challenges. So that’s pretty much what inspired me to go back to school for counseling instead of nutrition . . . because I knew I wanted to go back to grad school, and it was a good decision.

Lorraine

Lorraine introduced herself as a 27-year-old, able-bodied, heterosexual, European-American. She endorsed a post-Evangelical faith expression. However, she described having a fractured relationship with her faith due to being hurt by the church and people in her family who are believers. Lorraine was currently working as a School Counselor at a high school that provided programming for at risk youth. She described having a passion for working with marginalized youth as it aligned closely with her passion for social justice. She explained:
I work for a local charter school as a school counselor, serving at-risk high school students and their families. Our school works to remove barriers to education through community partnerships, connecting families to resources and providing opportunities to students who have been otherwise under-served in traditional educational settings.

Throughout my time with Lorraine she described how her experiences as a woman has shaped who she is today and her desire to work in the field of social justice. She summarized her experience as a woman navigating her environment.

I am a cis-gender female and experience sexism on a regular basis in my workplace and local community. People often make assumptions about my strength, my interests, my role in my partnership with my husband, my intellect . . . that are demeaning in nature and cause me to have to work harder to prove myself than my male counterparts.

Lorraine shared that leading up to the social justice retreat most of her social justice and multicultural training had taken place through her counseling program and, specifically, in her multicultural counseling course. She stated:

I would say primarily, it was my multicultural counseling course that I took last summer with (participant’s professor) she’s really good with experiential education and . . . leading. It was very activity based. We did like, the privilege walk . . . kind of like the links, where they’re reading statements, and we step forward and back and process that . . . (visiting professor) came in the first weekend, and she does spoken word poetry . . . she’s also a woman of color and kind of spoke to that and her experience in higher ed as a woman of color, and so that was really cool . . . (participant’s professor) is a white woman, and while I’m a white woman and I think we should all be part of the conversation, I think bringing more voices and . . . people into those spaces where we can have conversations with all different paths . . . my cohort are predominantly white as well and so that can be an echo chamber at some point where we all kind of feel like we’re super woke, but we’re not inviting anyone else to add to the conversation. . . . I feel like it was the best thing I had had yet . . . I’m learning more, it definitely could be more expansive. We touched on, it was kind of like a, like a crash course.

So it was a six-day class, like intensive style. And we had a day where we were talking about racism, we talked about sexism, watched some documentaries around that, which was pretty cool. I feel like I gained a lot of resources and things that I could show people to give them another perspective than just my own, which was awesome. We talked about gender and sexuality . . . I feel like we covered the gamut of social justice issues, but it felt like, you know, we went a
mile wide and an inch deep . . . it left me wanting more and wishing, almost wishing that was an emphasis like that multicultural counseling would be a track in the program. Yeah, but then also that that’s infused into any track in the program, so.

Lorraine defined social justice as, “Working toward equity instead of settling for equality, this means making access to opportunity equal for all individuals within a society to participate fully in that society and be honored as a whole person.” When asked what she hopes to gain from participating in the social justice retreat she shared:

I hope to gain a deeper understanding of social justice, specifically its landscape in Colorado Springs, and how I can engage with more intention. I hope to bring what I learn into my work community with coworkers, students, and their families. I hope it informs my continued counseling studies and further shifts my perspective.

**Kayla**

Kayla stated that she was 27 years old and described herself as an able-bodied, straight, White, Atheist. She stated that she entered into the research with an abundance of social justice training and experience. She shared that she was pursuing a counseling degree in a program that placed strong emphasis on social justice and multicultural competency and she had the pleasure of learning from professors who were devoted to making a difference in these areas. Kayla defined social justice as, “A just society that provides truly equitable opportunity to all citizens, regardless of identity factors. Nobody is singled out and excluded (or included) from opportunities due to a held identity. People in a socially just society are allowed autonomy over their lives. Past injustices are recognized, acknowledged, and repaired in a way that is acceptable to the victims.”

Kayla was employed as a Library Technician while she worked to finish her counseling degree. In both the first and second interview she talked about her desire to facilitate social justice trainings in the future. She explained:
In my private and professional life, I have integrated more inclusive language into my vocabulary like using “partner” instead of “boyfriend” and stopped using excluding language like “you guys.” I am getting more comfortable challenging others about their use of such language in a way that doesn’t result in defensiveness and shutting down. When people are open to it, I really enjoy having debates and discussions about identity issues and “Political Correctness.” I think I would like to become a trainer on this topic and teach workshops like this one (the social justice retreat) someday. I am on the multicultural track in my counseling program, and all topics of multiculturalism and oppression are of great interest to me.

Training played a pivotal role in the development of Kayla’s identity and who she is in relationship to others. In an interview she described how difficult it was for her to have her biases confronted in a training setting.

In May 2014, I participated in a 44-hour training from [content removed]. The training was intensive and very uncomfortable, as I had not been so bluntly confronted with my racism, sexism, and classism, before. I had no idea what I had signed up for until it was halfway over. I really struggled to accept what they taught me at first but did complete the training. I felt attacked and misunderstood. It was not until months later that I was able to reflect back and absorb the message they were trying to convey. I saw that their goal was not to make me feel like a bad person, but to show me where I fit in to society based on my different identities. I came to see that in some ways, I am oppressed, and in many ways, I am privileged.

Kayla shared that she had participated in several social justice trainings prior to attending the social justice retreat. She described being intentional in seeking out counseling programs that focused on social justice issues. She explained:

So, I was looking at masters programs and the one at [content removed] was super on top of social justice issues . . . I don’t know if you’ve heard about the program, but like, it’s pretty good, in my opinion . . . besides talking about it a lot in classes I’m in the multicultural track. So there’s like additional cultural sensitivity training. And so like, all the classes really incorporate social justice issues.

When asked what she was hoping to gain from participating in the social justice retreat, Kayla responded:

There is always more to learn about social justice, and I have come to somewhat enjoy the discomfort of being confronted with my privileges and oppressions.
Almost like taking a vitamin, it may be unpleasant, but I know it’s good for me and helping me grow. The more repetition with which I learn it, the better it will stick in my mind. I hope to learn more ways of communicating messages of social justice without turning people off. If I was able to learn it, I am confident that others can, too. I have benefited greatly from my education on social justice and would like to help bring that knowledge to others.

**Jocelyn**

Jocelyn, 38, identified as an able-bodied and able-minded, pansexual and queer, cisgender, White woman. Regarding her faith expression, she expressed that her desire is to “Do No Harm.” Throughout my time with Jocelyn, she articulated the challenges that often surface for her, living as a woman who identifies as queer and pansexual. She explained,

> As a femme, cis-woman, people often assume I am heterosexual, which affords me a lot of privilege in society, and also puts me in the position of having to choose whether I want to constantly ‘come out.’ I often feel judged and/or invisible in the queer community and most people in my family don’t understand why I would ‘choose to date women’ because I seem straight.

Jocelyn worked as a school counselor in a public high school while working to complete her counseling degree. She described being passionate about working in her community to challenge the status quo and educating both students and professionals on how to celebrate difference. She explained:

> I try to make a difference in my communities by actively engaging in conversations about privilege, oppression, and interpersonal and systemic power differentials with friends, acquaintances, family members, and coworkers. I work as a therapist in a public high school and support students in thinking critically about the language they use, their identities and social locations, and looking at their personal struggles through a larger social/political lens. I have past experience facilitating workshops and trainings on inclusivity with regard to race, ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation. I try to model humility and accountability, as well as continue educating myself and learning from others with every opportunity.
During the first interview, Jocelyn spoke about her various experiences in social justice trainings that have helped to grow her desire to make a difference in her community in the social justice arena. She defined the term social justice as “A value system based on human rights. Fundamental principles are inclusivity and diversity, an awareness of privilege and oppression, an understanding of individual and structural power differentials, and an effort to equalize access and opportunity for everyone, particularly marginalized and underserved communities.”

Jocelyn entered the social justice retreat with an abundance of social justice and multicultural training experience. She talked about her training experience:

I got my undergraduate degree in social justice issues, and multiculturalism specifically . . . I had a lot of experience . . . back in like, 2009, 2010. And then I moved to [content removed] for the art therapy master’s program and in that master’s program there was only one class there. I think it was called Cultural Foundations . . . it was just like basic understanding of how to provide therapy cross culturally. But it was lacking in a lot of ways . . . it wasn’t the first exposure that I had personally. But most of the people in my class that was the first time they’ve ever had those conversations or even thought about privilege and oppression at all . . . so for me it was . . . more like a refresher.

Then the organization where I did my internship and later became the children youth counselor . . . they identify as a social justice organization . . . I participated in trainings, I facilitated trainings, I was in constant conversation, and kind of a culture of accountability there to keep and stay fresh on these issues, and be able to grow the conversation with residents, clients, staff and everybody. . . . Before the (social justice) retreat I had quite a bit of training and experience I think.

When asked what she hoped to gain from participating in the social justice retreat she stated, “As always, I hope to deepen my understanding of social justice, multiculturalism and intersectionality. It’s important to me to seek and engage in opportunities for personal learning and growth, through often uncomfortable conversations. I also feel excited by the idea of participating in the research portion of
this retreat, which will hopefully positively contribute to the future of the counseling profession and improve my communities.”

Hop disclosed that she is an able-bodied, heterosexual, White, Christian, 47-year-old woman. At the time of the second interview she had received a job offer to work as a school counselor in a middle school. Prior to receiving her job offer, she was completing her internship hours at a local hospice agency and a public middle school to fulfill requirements for her school counseling and clinical mental health counseling tracks. She reported that prior to joining her counseling program she had minimal experience in diversity or multicultural training. She explained, “I am sad to admit that prior to my grad program’s diversity class I never really considered my personal identity and my privilege. Since that time, I consider my identity in most of my interpersonal interactions, remembering that my understanding of a situation may be very different from someone else based on my race, gender, SES, life experiences, etc.” She added:

We had a professor who wasn’t well liked. In fact, I don’t know that she’s actually teaching for the program anymore. There was some issues not with just our cohort in our class, but with other classes as well. So there was some . . . head butting within the class . . . that was a little uncomfortable . . . it also made some of us a little more uncomfortable, I think, to share. But it was also really eye opening and powerful for me to start recognizing Native Americans . . . I had never really thought about Native Americans and how when I thought of diversity, I thought of African Americans, or I thought of Hispanic or Latino growing up in Southern California, you know, where I lived. It was always white people and Mexicans that had issues . . . I had never thought about an American Indian . . . we did a whole thing on that and it was very powerful for me.

We have a Native American person in our cohort, and I’ve been so impacted with what she shares . . . that was huge for me. . . . It was a very powerful class . . . I think it definitely ignited a passion for me to want to be an advocate for every single kid and help them with equity and equality and all of those things . . . I’m kind of glad that there was some conflict in there as well, because I feel like I
need to make sure that that’s not going to silence me. Yes, because that’s going to happen, and I need to be strong enough in my convictions to stand up against those kinds of things.

Since the diversity class in her graduate program Hop has expressed a desire to be an active consumer of diversity and multicultural training. In both interviews, she talked about her passion to work with children, now that passion includes working with them to become more inclusive and more aware of how what they say and what they do impacts others. She stated:

A small step will be educating myself about diversity and equality, as well as using that education to influence family and friends. I am passionate about helping children embrace their differences AND recognize that we are all one humanity, entitled to the same rights and freedoms, regardless of our differences. I plan to support and advocate for inclusion, acceptance and understanding for all of my clients and students as I begin counseling in internship and in my counseling career.

Hop described the term social justice as “Advocacy for all people to be treated with the same dignity, respect, and equality in every situation, in all levels of society, regardless of similarities or differences.” When asked to describe what she hoped to gain from participating in the social justice retreat she stated, “Knowledge and confidence that I am prepared to advocate for and serve all children, regardless of faith, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, or SES.”

Cady

Cady, 28, described herself as an able-bodied, White woman. She shared that she was “unsure” about her current faith expression. At the time of the second interview, Cady had just finished her community counseling degree and was accepted into a Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral program. Also, she shared that she had secured a new job in a community mental health agency to help her gain more experience
working with various clients, especially those who are struggling with substance abuse and addictions. Cady expressed a desire to use her knowledge and abilities to advocate for her clients. She shared that she would like to see a world where more people have access to healthcare, especially counseling services. Cady explained:

I am passionate about access to healthcare—especially mental healthcare. Accessibility means affordable, competent, and available, in rural, urban, suburban communities. Allowing all individuals to live more intentional, reflective, and meaningful life will help progress our society. I am also passionate about advocating for families and children in the foster care system who are many times misunderstood due to their social class, ethnicity, family structure and system. Working with younger females as clients I am interested in helping the community learn how to understand and minimize violence towards women including domestic violence, financial abuse, and sexual abuse. Disability, including invisible disability, is close to my heart due to experience with “disabled” clients and I hope to de-pathologize, an empower those who are kept out of the mainstream of society and promote a more inclusive society through education, architecture, resources, etc.

Cady stated that prior to the social justice retreat her multicultural counseling class in her counseling program was the most extensive social justice or multicultural training she had engaged in. She explained:

My diversity class in my master’s program, that was really impactful because it was a lot of reading and it was very broad, but it taught us how to think about these topics and how to broach these topics with clients . . . and more of like, the big picture was much more powerful than learning and memorizing the facts that were gathered about these populations. Then also because we learned language, like we learned certain types of language, it’s hard to define, but ways that we could start feeling comfortable using these terms to be able to talk to others that were different than us. It’s been infused in my classes for my master’s programs. Every class had a bit of a spin on diversity or connected the topic to diversity and cultural issues . . . then we had a class that focused just on diversity and cultural issues and multicultural counseling. . . . In undergrad, I had more of a curriculum where we talked about different populations and gave statistics and facts . . . it was very different than the training I got in my master’s program, which was more about how to think about these issues, rather than looking at . . . what people in a certain population are like, statistically.
Working with minorities, especially youth, is a passion that Cady has held for years. In her second interview she described the challenges of coming from a privileged background and seeking to understand and support those who come from marginalized backgrounds. Cady spoke about having the privilege of growing up as a middle class, educated, White woman. She stated:

I have always been able to “pass” in mainstream society since I identify as Caucasian, middle class, and educated. My identity as a cisgender woman and a liberal growing up in a highly conservative and patriarchal culture shaped my understanding and helped me see into the window of the suffering of others—especially violence against women, racism, sexism, and classism. . . . I was fortunate because I could hide my propensity for education and stay silent on my liberal ideals which allowed no one to know who I truly was. Others could not hide the color of their skin, the fact they were poor, or both.

Cady defined social justice as, “Access to what I believe are human rights: healthcare, education, ability to work, the right to love and marry whom you chose, and physical/psychological/emotional safety. For childhood I believe every child has a right to play, learn, and socialize in a safe environment.” When asked to describe what she hopes to gain from participating in the social justice retreat, she stated:

I feel I have a foundational understanding of diversity from classes, but want to increase my knowledge, comfort, and competency to be able to understand the context of the lives of the clients I work with. I want to continue being exposed to new ideas, broaching these topics, and handling difficult conversations. I think as a counselor in training it is always a good idea to take advantage of trainings and continue the process of self-reflection.

Bob

Bob, 28, identified as an able-bodied, gay, White man. He described having a Christian belief system. He was completing his internship and final courses at a seminary-based counseling program. Bob reported that he enjoyed working in
organizations who support the LGBTQQI community, especially as it relates to their faith and sexuality. He elaborated:

I am being trained to be a counselor and a safe place for those who are hurting and looking for help. The CACREP accredited program I am in takes up most of my time and energy, but I look forward to when I will be a helper and advocate as my profession. In my life today, I have been involved in an organization that helps people who are wrestling with their faith and sexuality. In the past, I volunteered with . . .organizations (who) work with the homeless, the materially poor, and the LGBT communities.

In my time interviewing Bob and learning about his past experiences, he shared thoughts and feelings that derived from his intersecting identities. Specifically, he talked about navigating the world as a gay, White man. He explained:

As a White, gay man, there are times where I experience privilege and times I have felt marginalized. I have never experienced racism or sexism towards me, but I do know what it is like to be othered. This has allowed me to empathize with people along the spectrum of privilege. For much of my life, I internalized homophobia and oppressed myself into silence. It was not until I made friends who advocated for me and helped me find my voice that I realized how painful it is to be silenced. I desire to help people find their voices and recognize their experiences as legitimate and important like those in my life that did that for me.

Bob acknowledged that living as a gay man has enhanced his desire to advocate for his clients and to take action in his community. He described his desire to help clients find their voice in his definition of social justice:

Social justice occurs when every person has the opportunity to speak and his or her voice is heard and respected. Where voices are silenced or ignored, there cannot be social justice. It also requires action to change injustice. Social justice without action is like seeing someone’s house on fire and not calling the fire department. One cannot see something wrong and hope for change without taking a step out to make the change happen.

Bob talked about his experience in his multicultural counseling course as being a powerful experience. He stated:
It was with (participant’s professor) and his social cultural class . . . we looked at a lot of different marginalized groups and things that are significant to them. . . . Several guest speakers were invited to a class to talk about where they come from, and their like, work in therapy with clients from different populations. And then we did a big immersion experience where we spent 30 hours in a community that we weren’t very familiar with . . . I worked with Chicanos, Mexican Americans, and partially because in this time in our history, in America, with our leaders, and what’s going on with the media and things just going on at the border it just seems really interesting to think about . . . What does it feel like to be Mexican in America right now, at this point in time? Denver has a really rich Mexican American civil rights history that I learned about in my experience with talking to people, going to plays, and reading books, it is really interesting.

In addition to the multicultural counseling course, Bob talked about his personal relationship with his multicultural counseling course professor and the influence that he had on his development. He said:

I’m so thankful for (participants professor) . . . his presence and counsel in my life. So, he’s just, he’s a guy that I’m really thankful for . . . I’ve had class with him, and he just provides a lot of opportunities to engage with him. . . . He’ll just walk around campus like, looking for somebody to interact with. But really in class, he really pulled me out to give me an opportunity to talk and to hear my voice. . . . Even just watching him as a professor . . . I could tell he worked hard not to miss an opportunity for someone to share their voice. . . . He’s just very in tuned, somebody would share something, and he would ask them to expound upon it. And it just turned into this really impactful conversation for them and for the rest of the class. And he didn’t leave things like, without closure. Even if it wasn’t resolved . . . there was closure for that person and the rest of the class . . . I just really appreciated him modeling that consistently, like inside and outside the classroom. . . . A really good guy.

When asked what he hoped to gain through participating in the social justice retreat Bob stated, “I hope to gain more understanding of the experiences of people who have had their voices silenced or ignored and how a counselor can facilitate a different experience for them in the counseling room. I also want to grow in knowing the actions a therapist can make to advocate for their clients outside their sessions. I hope to gain more resources to be better equipped to work with my future clients.”
The central goal of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of counselor education students who had completed an intensive social justice retreat. The guiding research question was as follows:

Q1 What are the experiences and perceptions of counselor education students who have completed an intensive social justice retreat?

To achieve this goal, all of the interviews and the participants’ journals were carefully transcribed, coded, and analyzed. The following eight themes emerged as a result of participant interviews and journal entries: (a) Increased Awareness, (b) Desire for Prolonged and Advanced Social Justice Training, (c) An Emotional Journey, (d) Power in the Story, (e) Admiration and Appreciation for Group Diversity, (f) Making Connections and Building Trust in Community, and (g) Advocacy and Action. Additionally, under the theme An Emotional Journey, participants endorsed a subtheme, Voice: Turn Up the Volume, Or Stay Quiet?

A detailed description of each theme is provided along with participant quotes as support for each theme. Participants’ words are used as frequently as possible in order to capture the essence of what was communicated across interviews. In addition, Table 1 is provided below in order to summarize which participants endorsed each of the seven themes.
### Table 1

**Participant Endorsement Across Themes**

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<tr>
<th>Research Participant</th>
<th>Increased Awareness</th>
<th>Desire Training</th>
<th>Emotional Journey</th>
<th>Power Story</th>
<th>Group Diversity</th>
<th>Connection &amp; Trust</th>
<th>Advocacy &amp; Action</th>
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#### Themes

**Increased Awareness**

I thought I was awake, and that I knew about all of these issues, but after I heard you guys talking and I listened, and the activities, and everybody was like, “Oh, I don’t have it all,” I now know that I have so much more to learn. So, it was an awakening. (Rosa)

All participants endorsed the theme Increased Awareness. They described leaving the retreat with more knowledge of the struggles members of their community are facing along with things that they can do to advocate for these same individuals. Participants shared that they came face-to-face with their biases and were given opportunities to both explore and confront their biases in a safe and supportive environment. They described leaving the retreat with increased awareness of places where personal growth is
warranted, and also validation that they continue to push towards the mark of becoming more multiculturally competent counselors.

After engaging in the Privilege Link Activity (see Appendix G), Rosie took time to reflect and write in her research participant journal. She described how the activity helped shed light on her Christian privilege, privilege she has taken for granted. She wrote:

The privilege link was an insightful exercise. There are so many privileges that I have that I just don’t think about, that I don’t know I have to think about. I’ve come to empathize a bit more with my white brothers and sisters who experienced guilt. I don’t think we should remain in a state of feeling guilty and becoming paralyzed, but to sort of understand the weight that comes with guilt once we are awaken to the pain and struggles of other people. As a Christian woman, I felt guilty because I know many of my brothers and sisters who have been hurt and oppressed by well-intentioned Christians. The hurt that my brothers and sisters have experienced because of gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, etc. breaks my heart. Even more so when I find out that people have been burned by people who claim a religion that I identify with. I know for many; Christians aren’t a place of safety. I felt guilt, even though I haven’t directly caused that pain.

Rosie shared that it was important for her to be reminded of the privileges that she holds. She recalled an interaction that took place at the retreat between the lead facilitator and a retreat participant. She described the interaction as having a lasting impact on her and also one that may help her in her time serving as a counselor. She described the interaction:

[Lead Facilitator] was sharing about how, yeah, she doesn’t feel safe in Chick-fil-A. And I think someone might have said something like, “I really don’t agree with that. “And she responded, like, “But I get to say that I don’t feel safe here.” You know, that’s part of her lived experience. . . . She gets to say that, you know. And so that was a really powerful moment for me, because I think people from different cultural backgrounds, whatever that may be, you know, ethnic, gender, sex, ability, status, whatever, like, their experiences are real. And so if I’m, if I’m going to approach a client or a person in any way, I need to recognize that their experiences are valid, and I might hold my own prejudices and biases or whatever, I need to know what those are. But I also need to know, and I need to
push those out the door for the sake of caring and sitting with another person and establishing rapport and all that, too.

In addition to the interaction between the lead facilitator and another retreat participant, Rosie indicated that she benefited greatly from having conversations from folks who identified as non-Christians or who were non-believers. She disclosed that she struggled to understand those who are non-Christian and subsequently she has come to believe that these same people have a dislike for believers. Rosie described her struggle:

And so usually, for me, the population that is often most difficult to understand is probably those who are non-Christian. So, I think it was so good for me to connect with people who have different spiritual and religious beliefs. Yeah, not necessarily, because I don’t think that I approach people from different religious backgrounds with a judgmental mindset, but I think that there’s just on my part, so much ignorance there, so much lack of understanding on my part. . . . So it was such a blessing for me to be around people who had different beliefs, and to be reminded that, hey, we’re all human.

Rosie shared that in her small group she learned that there were people who were both believers and also a few who were non-believers. Through facilitated activities and dialogue, she engaged in conversation about their differences. She recalled their conversation:

But in regard to two conversations I had, I can’t recall who it was with, but two different women who identified as queer . . . they weren’t Christian so had different faith backgrounds. And so to be able to have an in-depth conversation with them, on two separate occasions, about their journeys, unfortunately, the ways in which they’ve been hurt by the church. Yeah, that was just, I just haven’t had opportunities to connect one-on-one in those ways in a really long time. And I think unfortunately, like, I’ve approached people who hold different cultural identities with fear. So, with non-Christians, it’s a fear that they’ll assume that I’m this like, Christian who’s going to slap my Bible across their face. And so I’ve just not been one to talk much about my faith with people who don’t believe or with people who don’t identify as cisgender, or heterosexual.

I think that there’s an assumption that I had, that they, once they find out, I’m a Christian, they, they think that I hate them, they think that I want them to go to hell, you know . . . I just approach people from these populations, fearfully, assuming that they’ll see me as someone that I don’t believe that I am. . . . A couple weekends ago, yeah, I just, I was able to kind of exhale and be honest
about who I am, and what I believe, but also be able to hear and feel with them as they shared who they are, too. So it was rewarding.

Rosie stated that she left the retreat with a “hyperawareness.” She shared that she had a “hyper awareness of like, the identities I hold in those spaces that I’m in.” She added, “Awareness of the privileges I lack, but also those that I hold. And so, I think that, I start internship in the fall, and I’m expecting that awareness, I mean it’s something that I have to continue to strive for and continue to develop, but I’m expecting the retreat to influence how I sit with clients.”

Over the course of the interviews Rosa, an immigrant from Peru, described her transition to the United States. She described the language barrier and finding work as a woman being two hurdles she had to navigate right away. Like Rosie, Rosa was greatly moved by the Privilege Link Activity. She stated:

I’m very conscious of all the privilege I have . . . coming here and the privilege that I grew up with . . . it was really challenging it was hard. It was interesting for me to see. . . . Some of them . . . their links were like super long, and so the small things that I thought where I would have privilege, I didn’t. It was kind of like eye opening for me. From the outside, you see a white, middle class woman, fairly educated, I don’t have all this, you know, privilege, the privilege that people think I may have. People that I think they don’t have privilege, they do.

Rosa shared that prior to attending the retreat she held an assumption that elderly people have it all together and do not share the same struggles as those who are more youthful. She explained:

I think . . . all this stuff that I have going on, I’m too sucked and into what I’m doing, that I forgot how hard it is for other populations. Especially like the elderly, or people that are . . . getting up in age. I thought, you know, they (elderly) have everything together and retirement coming, and all this stuff coming up, and they don’t. They are still struggling and they still . . . are fighting for every inch of acceptance everywhere they go. I see people getting up in age . . . some of them are struggling and some of them are still fighting for every step they take.
Rosa described being “enlightened” to learn that the elderly “do have an open mind, even though they are a little older than me.”

Rosa acknowledged that she was inspired to attend the social justice retreat to learn more about the LGBTQI community. She had minimal exposure to people in the LGBTQI community or the issues and struggles specific to those that are a part of the community. She stated:

Um, something I’m not too familiar with, and that’s also one of the reasons I went to the social justice retreat is the transgender, lesbian, gay, and bisexual community. I have a couple of friends, I came across some of those people, but because I’m not involved in that community I’m not very familiar with maybe the terminology and or the way you should approach people . . . that’s also because of my culture and the English barrier.

She shared that, working in the school setting, she wanted to be prepared to meet the needs of her students who identified with the LGBTQI Community. She stated, “So for me, it is important to first learn the basics. How you should call them and approach them. And, you know, even though I consider myself very open minded, I’m not an expert on that. So, for me, it was really important to learn more about it.” Rosa shared that she appreciated the components of the social justice retreat that focused on terminology and inclusive language.

Um, for example, I didn’t know . . . exactly how you’re supposed to talk to that type of person. Like, the he, she, we, all that terminology wasn’t clear to me. And how different it is . . . when they come across to other sexes or to other populations; such as high class, middle class, lower class. So it was very instructive for me.

In her first interview Rosa described leaving the retreat feeling like a better counselor. She disclosed that she entered the retreat believing that she was “aware” of her personal biases and the struggles that other cultural groups face, but she was not aware of what she did not know. She explained, “I thought I was very open and aware, but
apparently I had some things in there, and there were people, like you and other
facilitators, that have so much more knowledge about the topic and things that we don’t
even think about, because we don’t come across it.” When describing her time interacting
in the retreat activities she stated, “I think everything moved something in me and it
opened my eyes more and more.” She added, “So throughout the retreat that is something
that I took away; approach everybody with care because you don’t know. Just like I have
my stuff, they may have their stuff.”

Nicole shared that she was most impacted by leaving the social justice retreat with
increased awareness. She stated:

I think, like more awareness, even though I kind of knew like the academic
language . . . I think just in the way that I learned, I think it kind of highlighted
that some of what I was speaking to. Because I think I’ve played on both parts
being like a shamer and being shamed . . . I think that anytime that we’re kind of
made more, well, I guess it’s not true for anybody, just speaking for myself,
anytime that you become more aware of your bias, or kind of spots that you
haven’t ever like seen before, I think that changes your interactions and changes
the way that you like, think.

Throughout the social justice retreat Nicole wrestled with what she described as
her “complicated identities.” Identifying as biracial and bisexual, she found herself
struggling to acknowledge her areas of privilege while also honoring that she has many
painful memories attached to her subordinate identities. She reflected on a conversation
that took place in one of the small caucus groups at the retreat:

I think the discussion or when we are doing the links thing, and we got into those
small groups there was only like two or maybe three other people in the group I
was in, like the lowest amount of links group. . . . There was only two or three
other people in that group. I think something that I was thinking about during that
time was how complicated identities and their intersectionality is . . . I think when
it comes to me and my identities . . . I find that I have a lot of a . . . like double
consciousness thing. Being bisexual, being biracial, I grew up really, really poor,
and now my family’s like, probably more like middle class. I mean, enough that I
can go to college, but a good bit of it has been funded by . . . scholarships and
things like that . . . I’ve had a lot of experiences where like maybe in my early years, I experienced a lot more marginalization than I ever had.

Nicole shared that she became keenly aware of how difficult it was for her to talk about her marginalized identities as she interacted with retreat participants. She stated, “I still . . . I struggled to talk about my marginalized identities more I think, than anything.” She indicated that her struggles to talk openly about her marginalized identities was, perhaps, a sign that she needed more healing in these areas where she had been hurt in the past.

In her journal Michelle reflected on becoming more aware of her privilege, “I knew I had privilege, but I had not fully considered its breath. I had not fully reflected on the many categories I can find my privilege. I rarely give thought to the fact that I’m able bodied. I don’t turn much attention to my cisgender privilege or how much has been handed to me.” She described sitting in the Privilege Link Activity and adding links to her wrist and becoming increasing aware of her privilege. She added, “The biggest thing I learned was that I’m not even halfway there. I’m thinking a lot more. I’m seeing a lot more and knowing and feeling and reflecting, but I’m not doing a lot more. The next phase of my growth lies in finding my voice.”

Michelle found the technique of PANNING (see Appendix G), a technique used to bring awareness to the information that is present in an environment, instrumental in increasing her awareness. During her second interview she described how she had implemented the technique of PANNING in her counseling practice:

I think I’m just a little more aware of . . . like just not assuming that I know who’s sitting in front of me . . . that should be obvious for counselors, but it’s just a little more heightened. And then the other thing, too, is the whole PANNING thing that was talked about at the retreat. I feel like I do that everywhere now . . . I went to the NAMI breakfast . . . that was an interesting PAN. Right, like just a sea of white people. . . . Their video was all, like the video for the last two years was all just interviewing white males in mental health. So I feel like they’re not
representing who mental health effects. There’s no diversity. . . . I thought about writing to them because I noticed that for the past two years, but I don’t know if it’s just where we live, or I think that has a little something to do with it. But I’m just noticing it more in TV shows and ceremonies.

Lorraine also described how she has increased her awareness and has incorporated the techniques in her counseling practice. She said:

I think I am much more observant of myself and the things around me in that PANNING kind of way, which isn’t a term I had access to before the retreat and I think it’s a very powerful tool. Because people talk about don’t judge, don’t judge and that’s a really hard thing to understand. Because as humans, we’re inherently judging everything, as a way to biologically keep ourselves safe. . . . So what does it look like to observe things around you and be aware of what’s observing facts and reality versus throwing judgments. I think it just made it a lot more down to earth and accessible, at least for me.

PANNING the room at (a local community college) counselor gatherings there’s so few nonwhite individuals. Same with, oh where was I the other day? I just looked around, and I was like, “Oh, my gosh, it’s a sea of whiteness.” Like, where are the other voices? And why, why aren’t they here?

Jocelyn reflected on how PANNING has helped to increase her awareness when she is interacting with others in her community. She captured her thoughts in her journal:

No matter how much I engage in this work and in these conversations, I’m always learning and sometimes it’s in the most unexpected ways and unexpected lessons. Importance of objectivity and PANNING is a great practice. Just because I know some things about the experience of being trans, or male, in this country, doesn’t mean I know what it’s like or should tell them what it’s like.

Michelle, a Registered Dietician and owner of a private counseling practice, disclosed that she left the social justice retreat inspired to think about how her practice impacted clients who come from different cultural backgrounds. She expressed a desire to consider all the details of her practice, from access to her office décor. She said:

I’m going back into my practice, and I guess, as far as a plan goes, I’m just very, again, hyper aware now of everything that my business is projecting. So like my business partner and I made sure we found a building that was easy to access and had an elevator and, you know, we bought furniture that is welcoming for diverse body sizes, and like, we just are going to make sure that the language on our site is inclusive and even colors and just kind of images that we use are diverse . . . I
think, like I owe all of that to the retreat, because even though I had been introduced to it through the class, again, it was just a more in my face, way of just instilling like the importance of that.

When Michelle was asked what took place at the retreat that motivated her to reflect on her practice and make changes, she responded:

I think it was like, any little moment where I saw an emotional escalation in somebody. Like, I get emotionally escalated, and sensitive to very specific things too based on like, how I feel I’ve been affected or impacted by marginalization or whatever. . . . Whenever I see that emotion, like I saw with our group leader. I saw it with [lead facilitator] at certain times, where like a small comment is made and there’s an immediate emotional escalation. That’s what impacts me the most when I see how, how hurt people are by how this is all affecting them, and that it doesn’t take very much. . . . Obviously, it’s been the whole life experience that has made them hurt and sensitive. But, because of that, it doesn’t take very much now for that all to just come back to them, the unfairness or the injustice of something . . . I noticed that throughout the retreat in the groups and the games, when [Lead Facilitator] was speaking. And I don’t know why, but that impacts me the most, because I’m sensitive to that, that like I have to make sure there’s not one sentence anywhere in my work or my writing that someone would read and be impacted by in a negative way and say, ah, there it is, again, another hurtful or misguided, you know, way of saying something. So, I think that’s what I picked up on at the retreat.

For Lorraine, her biases were uncovered shortly after entering the social justice retreat. She described walking into the room for the first time and noticing the diversity present in the room. She stated, “I think, right away, my biases became very apparent to me. And so, I thought the setup did well with that, I don’t know if that was everyone’s experience. But I was very aware of the room and myself pretty quickly.” Lorraine noticed that she was having a reaction to voices of white men who were showing up in the large group. Lorraine explained:

So interestingly, I’ve discovered that I have the toughest time with older white males . . . in my personal experience with like my grandfather, my uncle, even my dad and brother, sometimes they can be the most offensive about social justice. And even just some stubbornness and maybe unwillingness to have the conversation at all, there’s an immediate defensiveness that comes up . . . I think I just feel irritated by that. I think in the context of my family, my voice as a
woman wasn’t really valued. And so to know, like, no, I have important things to say, you don’t want to talk about diversity, and you’re shutting me down right now, because I’m a woman, you know.

So like, those power dynamics and everything, I’ve discovered a defensiveness in myself with, like [with] most white men, which has been surprising because I was raised by a, you know, a white family with a white father, and I’m very close with my dad. But those dynamics are definitely some deep wounds for me. And I would, I think, probably prefer to not have them be part of the conversation, which is definitely something I need to check, because they’re a big part of our culture and population. . . . Some might say, even very important figures in getting this conversation to move.

Lorraine described her experience at the social justice retreat moving from the large group setting to her small group and learning that her group was comprised of mostly white men. She described her experience interacting with the white men in her group.

I was just noticing some things right off the bat, as far as their posture coming in, and some of the language that they were using that I just felt like, I did not want to have conversations with them. And as the universe likes to do, they put two of the three members in my small group…Which is awesome. I think it’s really cool how that works out, usually when you need to learn a lesson that’s going to keep showing up . . . I definitely was excited to hear from voices that haven’t been prevalent in my life . . . I think have an urge to shut down the voices that have, including my own sometimes.

Kayla shared that the Privilege Link Activity (see Appendix G) dug up many thoughts and feelings for her. She described being fearful that people would only see her as a White woman and wondering why she was not adding privilege links to her chain.

She explained:

During the privilege link activity, I worried people would see me not putting on links and wondering why I wasn’t adding them. For instance, I’m white, but I have a Hebrew name, [content removed], that I have had to simplify for others to be able to pronounce it. I worried some people, especially people of color, would think I was lying or trying to look less privileged than I am. Despite my whiteness, I have a pretty rough background which is not apparent by looking at me. Sometimes I feel a sense of affinity with oppressed groups, but at the same time, fear of rejection by those groups because I’m white.
Kayla acknowledged being “surprised” by how much she cared about how she was perceived by other cultural groups, especially minorities. Like, Lorraine, Kayla also shared that she struggled with white men who attended the social justice retreat. She wrote about one white man, John (pseudonym used to protect his confidentiality), she interacted with at the retreat.

He just didn’t seem interested, engaged or brought up anything we were talking about and had a demeanor of anger, shut down the whole time. John does not define my experience here. But he did make me hyper-aware of my biases towards white men.

Kayla disclosed that she had spent time reflecting and journaling about her interactions with John at the social justice retreat. In the second interview, she shared that she wrote about her experience with John in her small group for a paper in one of her counseling courses. She reflected on her interactions with John:

I think part of why it was uncomfortable was because it reminded me of maybe, like, myself when I did that first training and was like, really uncomfortable with it. . . . Maybe I was like, kind of seeing myself in this person. And like, “Oh, my God, like, is that what I looked like, when I was in this training?” Because, wow, like, I don’t know, it made me proud of that I have come a long way.

I think I gained some patience and empathy, just really for where people are at, instead of expecting them to be like, where I’m at. I think that might have been my biggest takeaway from this is like, yeah, like meet people where they’re at. And like, where they’re at is okay, and where I’m at isn’t necessarily like better than where they’re at. And, yeah, I hope that does translate into my work with clients just being more patient with people and just accepting, like, where they’re at.

As a woman who identifies as queer, Jocelyn shared stories about being turned away and hurt by both family members and the church community. She explained that she has struggled to find spaces that have felt accepting, and people to embrace her fully. She described becoming aware of just how badly she was hurt by the church community
as she navigated the social justice retreat and interacted with people who shared their faith. She described her experience:

The social justice retreat brought up a lot, it cracked me open in a way that I wasn’t expecting in regard to the church. I don’t know if that was the intent of all of the exercises and everything that we did, but for me, being with people who are so, you know, whether it was multiple generations of the same family doing the retreat together and couples doing the retreat together and people in the church. I’ve been really hurt by the church and by my family, so the retreat brought up a lot for me of like how it’s possible, that all church isn’t like that and all families aren’t like that. So, it was reparative, actually, and healing in a lot of ways, that was completely unexpected. I kind of thought about that the whole way home and was thinking about reaching out and asking like what church you go to. It felt so good to be in conversations with folks who share the same faith.

She shared that the seeing people from different cultural backgrounds come together and talk about differences and being open to hearing and understanding each other provided her a sense of hope. She said:

We have a lot of divisiveness happening everywhere in our country, in our society, in our communities. And when what I experienced at the retreat was the opposite of that, you know which kind of direct contradiction to what I see in the world. You know, with people of color and black people and young people and old people and queer people and straight people, right? There’s a ton of divisiveness and the retreat felt like the opposite of that.

Hop wrote in her journal that she walked away from the retreat with an awareness that she has more to learn on her journey to becoming a multiculturally competent counselor. She shared her thoughts after hearing a quote from Andrea Gibson which closed out the last day of the social justice retreat. She wrote:

The final quote might be the most impactful thing I experienced this weekend. I looked at this experience as a way to learn about diversity so I could go out and advocate for my students and teach others about the need for acceptance and change. I still feel that needs to be done, but the quote helped me recognize that change is not needed not just for those oppressed in society. Change is needed for all us. I am not in a place to go out and change things for someone. I am in a place to make changes with someone, making changes are just as much for me in my life. We all owe it to each other.
Hop continued by adding that she left the retreat a better counselor. She explained, “I think it’s made me a better counselor. I just I think so because I think it’s made me a better person, which also makes me a better counselor.” She spoke specifically about the Privilege Link Activity and becoming aware of her privileges she holds that she does not give much time and attention. She stated:

I knew mine was going to be long . . . it didn’t surprise me at all. But it was so nice to see, you know, that we all had so many things to put on there. Because I love when people share their happiness in their goals and the things that they’ve achieved in their lives. And I love to see that, but I also really enjoyed the parts where I thought that I never thought of myself as privileged because I don’t need a wheelchair or have to have the curb cuts. As I thought about every link I added to my chain, I became more and more thankful for my privilege. I also focused on my obligation to recognize my privilege and be an agent of change because of it. Otherwise, I am just a part of this society and comfortable with the status quo.

In her first interview, Cady, a white woman, shared that she was “embarrassed” to own that she entered the retreat with the assumption that all minorities were familiar with and understood the experiences and struggles of other minority groups. She was surprised to learn that this was not the case when she saw minorities at the retreat struggling to understand the experiences of other minorities. She explained:

Okay, so I was talking to, I went to the retreat with a friend, and we were talking about this afterwards. How this is embarrassing for me to say, but how I go into a situation with a bunch of diverse populations, and I believe that if you’re any minority status, you know everything about other minority statuses. I don’t know why I had that assumption. But I was like, if you are a minority race, you’re going to know everything about those that identify with a minority sexual orientation, which is totally not true. And like, through the retreat, I was like, wait, these are two totally different identities and they don’t know about each other, they have two totally separate experiences. Like, I don’t know why I got the impression that if you’re a minority of any status, you know, everything about all minorities. Looking back on it, it seems silly, but it didn’t occur to me until that retreat, that lived true.

Cady stated that she hoped to take her experience at the retreat and increased awareness with her into her counseling practice. She stated:
That’s something I’m definitely going to take with me when working with clients. That could be from using an example from the retreat, like there was an African American family who was struggling with understanding different language and different things about their children’s sexual orientation, or their children’s friends’ sexual orientation, or how to deal with it and handle it. And that was shocking to me, because I’m like, they didn’t know about that they didn’t know about another person who could also identify with living in this world as a minority.

In addition to having her beliefs around minority identities challenged, Cady indicated that she was surprised to learn that she became easily frustrated when she interacted with people at the retreat who did not share her same level of social justice knowledge.

I think I definitely found that there are things were brought to my attention that surprised me . . . I learned a lot about myself, I learned that I get kind of frustrated when people aren’t at the same level of their development as I am . . . That shouldn’t frustrate me. That’s ridiculous. So that’s something I’ll have to work on . . . I think that’s part of us being counselors . . . we get exposed to this stuff with the language and the theories earlier in our lives and the abilities to talk about it a certain way, and we get frustrated when others just aren’t there.

During an opening activity of the social justice retreat participants engaged in introductions and were introduced to the concept of preferred pronouns (see Appendix G). Participants were asked to include their preferred pronouns in their initial introduction to the large group. Bob described how the activity made him aware of how exhausting the experience of being misidentified or misgendered can be for marginalized groups. He stated:

The activity where we introduce ourselves with our preferred pronoun makes me just, as I meet somebody else, not feel like they should assume mine, or I should assume their preferred pronouns. . . . Thinking about what the experience is like, for trans people to like, to be like, in a way, dismissed and disrespected. Constantly like, people just you know, even if they are presenting as the gender that they would prefer to be but still be called the gender that they don’t want to be called, like, just how exhausting that can be.
Likewise, Bob described the Sociogram activity (see Appendix G) as a real “eye-opener.”

Like most participants, he was surprised to learn that the people who have influenced his life the most shared his same or similar identities. He elaborated:

The Sociogram, that’s it! And then looking at their characteristics and the groups that they’re from, like, dang most of the voices in my life that impacted my life are people that look a lot like me. . . . So that was an eye opener for sure and one that I was surprised by. I want some other voices in my life . . . how can I talk about certain issues without people from those groups speaking into my life? If I want to know who God is more and what he created man to be, or humanity to be, how can I know that fully without having significant voices in my life from people who are in groups that are different than mine?

Bob expressed gratitude for his time at the social justice retreat, and specifically, helping him to uncover his biases while challenging him to continue to work towards multicultural competency. He stated, “Yeah, I definitely think that um, that’s one thing I, I want to continue working on, but I appreciate the retreat helping me like, open my eyes to more of my biases. And realizing that like, just because I’ve gone through this training, in a counseling program, that I’m not bias free, and I am not like totally free from all biases that I’ve had. So yeah, I think it’s a constant work and a process to be working against.”

Desire for Prolonged and Advanced Social Justice Training

“Make it longer! Longer! We all . . . still had stuff we wanted to say, and hear, and do and I think you guys did too, as facilitators” (Hop).

Participants endorsed the theme Desire for Prolonged and Advanced Social Justice Training. Each participant expressed a desire for the retreat to be longer. Simply put, a two-day retreat was not long enough for participants to engage their peers at the level they desired. Participants shared that they wanted more time to take their dialogue
to the next level while having opportunities to dive deeper into meaningful conversations. They shared that due to the limitation on time, they started to take their conversations to the next level but would have to move on to the next discussion or activity.

In addition to adding more time to the social justice retreat, participants shared that they would like to engage in more advanced social justice training. Some participants shared that the retreat was a welcome refresher and served as a reminder of what they were taught in previous trainings while others acknowledged that the materials were new, and they are ready to engage in a more intensive social justice training. Participants shared that they would like to spend more time in conversation and connection with others, discussing both similarities and differences, and working together to see if they could work towards implementing change at both the interpersonal and systemic level.

In her journal, Rosie documented her desire for the retreat to be longer. She wrote, “I felt a bit overwhelmed because there’s so much to unpack. Part of me wants this retreat to be longer. I wish there was more time for the education piece and also the processing piece.” In her first interview she described wanting more time to sit in conversation with other social justice retreat participants while also leaning into the emotions that surfaced. She shared that she had minimal experience interacting with people with different faith expressions. She indicated that longer training would allow her the time to interact with people who have and hold different religious backgrounds and who have had various experiences with the church. She said:

There were just moments where I felt like it was cut short. . . . Maybe it sounds kind of weird, but even time to just like, sit in all of that. So just process, even if some of that was silent. Not necessarily like filling space with a lot more curriculum, but just like this space to ponder what is happening in us in the immediate moment, or what’s coming to mind . . . I came across a few people who had been hurt by the church. So, I think I would love to have connected with
some of those people more intimately to hear more about what those experiences were like, and also what they needed from those people, or whoever, who had brought them pain.

When describing her time at the social justice retreat Rosa mentioned that “these conversations are important” and added that “they need to happen more often, with different populations.” She expressed a desire to “go deeper” in conversation with her peers, especially when disagreements arise and trying to work towards a resolution. She explained, “And I would like to go a little deeper into like, well, let’s agree or disagree, and what does that mean? So, in order to complete these goals of what we want there’s going to be times when we’re going to disagree about these smaller aspects. Is that okay?” She described times throughout the training where her small group was getting into rich conversation but were forced to move on due to time constraints. “There were sometimes when we were really getting into the nit and grit and, you know, for time we had to move on.” Like other participants, Rosa believed that more time in conversation would allow for deeper and, perhaps, more meaningful dialogue.

Similarly, Nicole desired more time to process with her peers. She stated, “I wish we had more time in small group to go deeper and process more on an emotional level.” While she found that each of the utilities added to the retreat, she was conflicted because the number of activities may have taken away from time she could have used to process with her peers. Nicole talked about her desire to spend more time processing with her peers. She said:

Um, well, I think that I always want more time . . . I think the only thing is, I almost wish we had less activities so that we had more time to process. I think, with some of them, it was like, we’re wrapping up really quick. And I was like, ooh, we’re kind of missing this, like, connecting piece, um, and the process piece after. So I think, I don’t know, but then I get torn because I’m like, oh, well, each
of these bring up different things. Um, so I get torn with like, totally saying that, but I think if anything, just having more time to process after each activity.

Jocelyn described being overwhelmed by the sense of community she experienced over the course of the two-day retreat. She described entering the space nervous and unsure of what to expect and leaving with a renewed sense of hope and a group of people she can now call her friends. Jocelyn wanted one more day to spend with her community to “go deeper” and to connect with her peers. She explained:

I think we could have used another day. One more day . . . the Friday night portion was really great for ice breakers. But, you know, we were taking it kind of slow, slow and easy, and then things got real on Saturday . . . I just felt so cracked open and I felt held, I felt connected to everybody. And then we just dispersed. And I imagine that’s because most people did know each other . . . they’re going to continue to have these conversations. For me, I just wanted one more day to like, make it go even deeper. And even more.

She indicated that she would not change the format of the retreat but would do “more of what was already on the table.” She added, I think that if there was more time to get into those activities more thoroughly to the point of completion, and then allow things, allow the space for things to go deeper, deeper, and deeper, and deeper. I don’t know that I have more questions or more needs, more ideas for different things that could be done, except just having more time for the things that were already there.”

Along with more time, participants described wanting to take the next step in social justice training. Participants described wanting to experience advanced social justice training to support them along their journey to becoming better counselors and advocates to those who have been marginalized. Hop described her desire for more training and how to, as a white woman, support clients who come from different cultural backgrounds.
But how do I, how do I do this better? How do I advocate better? How do I, how do I ask questions? How do I get involved without offending? And not even offending, like, what’s the right word? Like, I don’t want to be condescending, I don’t want to be like, I feel sorry for you so let me get involved here. Like I really want to say, how can we, the white people that do see that there is a problem, the white people with privilege or actually any race that has privilege, anyone who has privilege, how can we get involved and make a difference without, I feel like sometimes we make it worse. Because we don’t know what we’re doing, and we don’t know how to get involved . . . we don’t know how to ask the questions.

And, you know, by our naivety or whatever else, we make it worse.

Like Hop, Cady expressed a desire for advanced training and feedback on how to take her skills to “the next level.” She indicated that she had a desire to make systemic level changes but was unsure of what it would look like to take on this task. She stated:

And then maybe some ideas of how to take it to the next level . . . a lot of the experiences that I have are a lot of personal reflection, I feel like, Okay, I’ve got the tools like, I’ve got the basic toolbox to continue my own personal reflection. Now, how do I take this like inside myself and externalize it and bring it into the workplace, or my town, or my group or person I’m presenting to? Something like that.

I feel a little lost in that area, and especially just organizationally, like if I was to create a nonprofit, or if I was to help give ideas to someone that would, I feel like I have a few foundational basics like to include to get ideas from those that have diverse experiences, obviously, they need to come to the table and bring their experiences for us for that to be influenced, but I really just don’t know how to take it to that next level. . . . What that means and what do I do? How do you advocate on a larger level?

In the second interview, Cady added that she would benefit from having social justice training that was specific to counselors in training. She shared that she would benefit from engaging in conversations from people who had experienced time in counseling and were willing to engage a community social justice retreat setting. She explained:

And I think if I had more time, like specifically as a counselor, I would want to bring awareness to that piece about just the plain ignorance of situations. I would really want to ask them if they feel comfortable giving counselors feedback when things get communicated or when we accidentally have a microaggression, or when we, what feels like intentionally, do something that comes off wrong or damages the relationship, like, how would they communicate that to a counselor? And how would we know? And then what would be effective at going back and
repairing that? Because I just feel like sometimes we are seen as, you know, the experts and people don’t feel comfortable telling us we’re wrong, and in reality we really need that feedback.

Speaking of the social justice retreat, Bob, like other participants, believed that “it could have been a weeklong retreat.” He expressed a desire for advanced training so that he could spend time in “deep conversation” with members in his small group. He recollected:

Yeah, like the diversity that was represented, there wasn’t just like, racial, sexual or socioeconomic. There was a lot of the people that were speaking up and like, there was one lady in my group who was in her 60s. And so I was so curious about like, she’s an older black woman and so like... how would she have been like, you know, when she was in her 20s and what were conversations like around race and diversity?

Bob expressed a desire to hear more from the older generation of women in his small group. He explained, “I would want to know more about how people from generations before me experienced life, because issues around diversity and advocating for marginalized people is like, more associated with like millennials and has been like a growing social justice movement. So I’m wondering, like, how people pull from older generations, both from marginalized and majority groups experienced that, both in their time and how they experienced the retreat, and like, the conversations that we were having, and what it was like for them and I would like to hear more about that.” He later suggested that an advanced training would include more days of training, more time spent processing with other participants, and more time spent alone to allow for self-reflection.

**An Emotional Journey**

“The group dialogue, though sometimes intense, has also been insightful too. I learned this would be a very tearful, emotional, experience, and so far it has been” (Rosie).
This theme was defined as participants described their emotional journey that began from the time they prepared to engage the retreat and, for most, lasted long after the retreat had ended. Participants described entering the retreat with feelings of anxiety and worry stemming from fears of the unknown. Many participants described being worried that they did not exactly know what type of training they were getting into and subsequently they were fearful about entering the training environment. In addition to fearing the unknown, participants worried about their lack of knowledge on issues related to social justice and multiculturalism. Specifically, they worried that their ignorance may result in unintentionally harming other social justice retreat participants or result in personal humiliation.

Participants supported this theme as they described their time at the retreat as exhausting. While they were appreciative of the rich dialogue and takeaways that stemmed from small and large group discussion, these conversations took an emotional toll on participants. They left each day both emotionally and physically exhausted. However, participants shared that they left the retreat feeling empowered and charged up. They were ready to take and use their emotional journey as momentum to implement change.

Hop entered the retreat not knowing anyone and not knowing what to expect from her time at the training. She stated, “I think, just because it just was the unknown. I didn’t know what to expect. I had no idea what to expect. And I kind of felt alone just because I didn’t know anyone that would be there. That kind of thing.” She added:

I am excited. I am insecure and unsure. I am honored to be participating this weekend. I don’t want to be the uninformed, uneducated, privileged white woman who offends others by asking dumb questions. Yet, I am that woman in so many ways, and I don’t know how to become more knowledgeable and informed
without asking questions. I am afraid of what people might think of me. I’m afraid I won’t be brave enough to step out of my safe bubble. I am afraid I will not let down my guard and I will leave this weekend having learned nothing new. I am afraid I am making this too much about me. Is this all about me? Yes and no. I want to recognize and work through my biases. I never want to hurt someone else due to my insensitivity or assumptions about someone.

Similarly, Rosie entered the retreat with feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. She captured her thoughts in her journal. “Slightly anxious. Not sure what I’m getting into. Will this be like other retreats or dialogues I’ve been to? Will I feel isolated? Will I speak up?”

Rosa wrote her thoughts and feelings as she entered into the social justice retreat:

So, I feel anxious, excited and a bit intimidated by it. I also hope to be open and come with an open heart to welcome other points of view and experiences that will help each other understand where we come from, or how we came to be who we are. Also, I have a sense of courage because I do want to lean into my discomfort zone, because I believe it will help me to become a better counselor and a better human being overall.

Similarly, Michelle documented her thoughts in her journal as she prepared for the social justice retreat:

I feel nervous and excited. I love to be challenged. But I also know that usually comes with some level of discomfort. My concern or fear is that there’s an opportunity in front of me and I could potentially miss out on growth and learning due to my fear of speaking out, including asking questions, etc.

Lorraine wrote about her feelings after walking into what she described as a “room of strangers” for the first time during the retreat. She said:

More nervousness than expected. I am “book smart” in these areas, I have watched the documentaries, read lots of books and articles, and engaged these conversations in comfortable spaces but walking into a diverse room of strangers brought up a fear of making mistakes and a fear of my ignorance being on display. I expected to feel belonging but instead fought the urge to withdraw.

Cady captured the emotional and physical toll the retreat took on the participants. She stated, “I recognize I am very much an introvert, so I need to prepare myself for feeling socially exhausted after the large or small group discussions I attend.” She shared
that part of self-care during the retreat was learning when to take part in the discussion
and when to be an active listener. She explained, “I decided that part of this is being okay
with taking care of myself, sitting and actually listening. I am still learning and still here.”

She added:

I found that I feel very exhausted by the end of the day, very exhausted. I’m not
fully sure what contributes to that, I just feel like I’ve been conditioned at this
point through diversity class, and through these lectures and conversations, there’s
always a sense of tiredness to it…I think that’s kind of a parallel process of how it
would feel to be an advocate. And to integrate all of these ideas into your work,
there is just a feeling of exhaustion. And I think, for me, that comes from feeling
lost and feeling a little bit insecure, especially starting out. There’s just a big piece
of insecurity there. And then feeling ineffective and not feeling like I can measure
the outcome. Like I don’t know how that impacted my clients, my clients might
not know how that impacted them. So it’s hard to say, you know, there’s part of
me that like, that wants to feel like, am I doing the right thing? Like someone tell
me is it right or is it wrong. Like, the gray area can be exhausting. I always have a
feeling of tiredness.

Along with talking about feeling exhausted, Cady talked about the fear expressed by
social justice retreat participants when talking about sensitive topics. She stated:

I think language is a big one. I think a lot of people expressed, like they were
earful of talking about and I think this was a big one, was sexual orientation and
sexual identity and gender identity. There are a lot of, and especially adults that
are older than me, that this stuff is new, and it’s different. And it’s a part of our
generation that they were like, I don’t even know how to begin talking about this.
I don’t know the pronouns, I don’t know what it means to be, like, socially
constructed. I don’t, it’s such an intense gray area that it felt like people were just
like, I really just don’t even know how to go there.

In his second interview Bob described the emotions that came up for him, as a
White man, to sit and hear from stories from people of color who have been impacted by
those with more privilege. He said:

Let’s say, I’m feeling the weightiness. There’s definitely like, a lot of feelings for
me as a white man to like, be in conversation around this. Like, there’s some
things I’m really unfamiliar with for some of the experiences that people are
talking about and I just have to know, I have to like wrestle with what’s mine and
what’s not mine. Yeah, who I am and who I’m not. Like, what I’m responsible
and what I’m not responsible for. So, that there’s boundaries and differentiation. So there’s definitely ways that I’m not innocent but I don’t have to take responsibility for, you know, every white person’s mistreatment or pride or privilege.

Bob recalled processing the Dominate/Subordinate activity in his small group. He shared his experience sitting with a Black woman and hearing about how she was hurt by a White man. He described the guilt and shame he felt in that moment. He stated:

The exercise where we wrote ways we are dominant and subordinate in our communities, where we heard messages of depression, especially when I thought about ways that I have been an oppressor, it was embarrassing, and feelings of guilt came up. I wonder if there’s an exercise that conveys this and brings this out without guilt? Guilt and shame silences and conversations about privilege can bring up white guilt. How do we have a conversation about privilege without making certain people feel guilty?

Jocelyn described her time at the retreat as an incredible, emotional roller-coaster. She wrote about her emotional journey in her journal.

I feel like my little big heart is just being blown wide open, charged up shattered and filled again. It’s exhausting in the best way. I’m so grateful to be on this journey with the folks who are here and those who came before us who paved the way with courage, language, action and resources. I feel so emotional listening to the painful experiences of others that are sharing as well as thinking about my own. Feeding into the messages I’ve internalized, particularly around being a woman, and the biases, discriminations, and violence I’ve condoned and perpetuated by playing into and not refusing to accept it.

She documented her thoughts and feelings when she came out to her small group during a breakout session at the social justice retreat. She wrote:

I disclosed I’m queer to my group, and the conversation that followed was so uncomfortable, but I enjoyed it in a really good way. People with strong religious affiliation, started processing their views and values regarding marriage between a man and a woman for the purpose of procreation. People were stretching and trying to expand their frameworks and I could see them making meaning which meant so much to me. Also, one person said, no matter who you love, Jesus loves you and you’re welcome in God’s house, which made me cry. I wish members of my family felt the same way.
**Voice: Turn up the volume; or to stay quiet?**

Again, there’s a cost in speaking up, you know, there’s a cost in using my voice to share my experience or to speak to challenge someone else, or to potentially rebuke and say, hey, that’s hurtful, or to speak up to advocate for someone else. . . There’s definitely a risk in all of that . . . at the same time, I think there’s a risk in being silent, you know. (Rosie)

In relationship to the theme An Emotional Journey, participants endorsed the subtheme Voice: Turn Up the Volume; Or Stay Quiet? As a part of their emotional experience at the social justice retreat participants described feeling ambivalence regarding whether or not to speak-up as they navigated the two-day training. As participants sat with people from across the community, there were times where they remained silent in fear that they would say something that might offend or hurt someone. This fear stemmed from a perceived lack of knowledge around social justice language and experience communicating with others from different cultural backgrounds. Also, participants shared that they remained silent in fear of sounding uneducated and ignorant in front of their peers.

Nine of the 10 research participants identified as women. Several spoke about the difficult of speaking and being heard in a group setting. Participants identified speaking up and finding their voice in the group setting as an outgoing growth area, and also one that is central to the goal of achieving social justice. Similar to the themes previously discussed, a detailed description of the subtheme is provided along with participant quotes as support. Participants words are used as frequently as possible in order to capture the essence of what was communicated across interviews. In addition, Table 2 is provided below in order to summarize which participants endorsed this subtheme.
Lorraine attended the social justice retreat with her partner. She received feedback from her partner that he noticed that there were times during the retreat that she struggled to find her voice. She talked about receiving this feedback from her partner and her struggle to find her voice throughout the retreat.

But yeah, I think I learned that I need to honor my own voice. My partner attended the retreat with me . . . he pointed out a couple times, that I would go to speak in the group, and people couldn’t hear me. So I’d have to, like, say it again. And I was still struggling to speak up . . . I notice that’s something that I do in a room where I’m not valuing myself. But I think I’ve masked that as like, well, I’m just trying to value everybody else and give them space to speak. But a conversation doesn’t happen if you don’t, if there’s not voices to have a conversation, right? Then it’s just a monologue . . . I think I just learned that empowering people to have a voice, I think I also need to be empowered in having a voice and speaking up and sharing.
She described wanting to share her voice with participants and also allow space for others to be heard. She compared her desires to a candlelight church service. She explained:

Have you ever been in one of those church services where you all have a candle, and like you light the room slowly? And so it’s both like, I have a candle, I have a light and I should spread that light. But I’m not the only candle either, you know, so, like, I have a voice and also I’m not the only voice and I shouldn’t ever be the only voice in a conversation. I think it was both of those realizations... allowing myself to be part of the conversation without taking it over.

Jocelyn struggled to find her voice too. She connected this struggle to her experiences as a woman, being dismissed and hurt by others. She shared her thoughts in her journal:

I have a hard time speaking in front of groups of anyone, but especially strangers. I envy folks who can feel comfortable and confident taking up space and having all eyes on them. This is connected to being a woman in my experience. Growing up in a family that would dismiss, scoff, judge or ignore what I said. It remains so difficult to find my voice and trust that anyone cares what I have to say.

Tomorrow I’m going to challenge myself to speak up a bit more, but as a white person I don’t want to take up space, so it’s a dilemma.

During the second interview, Jocelyn shared that she has tendency to silence herself when she is in the room with people of color. She shared that the feeling of guilt and shame overwhelmed her, and she finds herself taking a back seat to other voices that are present in the room. She stated:

Anytime I’m in a group of people I feel really shy and I have a really hard time speaking up, and I think that relates to my experience as a woman in my family and in the different communities that I was raised in. And so I have a hard time even finding my voice. There’s so many things I want to say. And I think they’re relevant, I think they’re important, I believe in them; and yet, I can’t get them out of my mouth because I have had 38 years of experience feeling like that’s not valued, or it’s not okay. And then in a room, where there’s a lot of people of color, I need to step back, I just, I feel that really strongly. I need to step back and listen, listen to everything, notice my defenses notice when I want to be like, but it’s not me, you know. I just really need to sit back and listen and feel, feel into what people are saying.
She wrote about her ambivalence around connecting with others in her journal. She wrote:

This love and acceptance vibe is a powerful drug, and it’s been so long, if ever, since I felt it. I wonder if I’ll be able to trust and learn and lean in more on Saturday because I crave it. And yet it feels unfamiliar. I’m afraid of trusting and indulging in it too soon and freaking everyone out, lol. Like a kid who hasn’t had sugar before. And then there alone in a room full of sweets. Be Cool! Be Cool!

Like several participants, Hop’s fear of speaking revolved around saying something out of ignorance that will ultimately hurt another social justice retreat participant. She explained:

My fear is, and I think I even said this at the retreat, my fear is, I will say something out of naivety or even stupidity, or just ignorance, like, I may say something, and that’s going to hurt somebody else. That is a huge fear for me. And that’s likely to happen . . . then I’m going to learn, and I’m going to do better. And I’m going to try and make it right. And it didn’t happen there. I mean, I said some stupid things, and I learned from it. But at the same time . . . I didn’t hurt anyone to the point where we couldn’t recover and move on. So I don’t need to hold back because of that fear.

Like (lead facilitator) said . . . if you’re afraid, or if you hurt someone with what you say, then it becomes all about you, all of a sudden and it’s not about me. . . . Building a relationship isn’t about you, it’s about us together. And so . . . I mean, it was just very impactful, impactful for me to hear that and to recognize what she was saying, and really own what she was saying, and be able to put that into my every day.

Similar to Hop, Michelle talked about being afraid to speak up during the retreat; fearing that she was not equipped with enough knowledge and understanding to speak out in the group setting. She stated:

I believe in the power of language and that that’s an important thing to be continuously learning about as it changes. But yeah, there’s sort of like, “Where am I gonna fall short? Where do I need to know more?” And that holds us back from engaging sometimes and learning and growing because we’re afraid of being naïve or wrong. And that was the fear I had at the retreat it was, “If I speak up, what if there’s something I’m missing and I’m not quite ready to speak up until I understand this even more fully.” But that never ends. You have to just kind of jump in and be vulnerable with where you’re at, if you wanna keep growing. But yeah, I’m feeling that same familiar sort of not enoughness in this realm.
Michelle continued by talking about her awareness of her own voice as she participated in the retreat. She explained:

And I think when we’re talking about giving a voice to those who may not always have a voice that came up a lot in the class, like, listen more. And so I was just very aware of that the whole time. And I don’t want it to feel like what I have to say, didn’t matter. But for whatever reason, I dropped into that role of listening, then engaging, and I’m not sure if perhaps I could have gotten more from it if I had, um, been a little more open and vulnerable . . . I just felt like I was holding back.

The biggest thing I learned is that I haven’t grown as much as I thought I have in the realm of like, speaking up. I thought I would take a lot more active role, um, because of how much I feel I’ve learned the past couple years. And it was still hard for me to feel comfortable and confident finding a voice . . . I think that was the biggest thing that stood out to me, I found myself holding back and I’m not sure why.

Cady echoed similar feelings as she journaled her thoughts about sharing her voice during the retreat. She wrote:

I am naturally integrated and highly susceptible to being overwhelmed by the emotions and experiences of others. It takes me a long time to warm up to others sometimes. I’m not sure what to share and what not to share. Certain things still feel like secrets. If they only feel safe with me? Do I need more personal time with others before sharing? Should I share because secret keeping can perpetuate certain narratives, painful narratives. But when do I know when the time is right to share? Who it impacts? Who it hurts? Who it helps?

Likewise, Rosie described her ambivalence in choosing whether to share her thoughts or whether to remain silent. She stated:

I think there’s a balance, I think there’s a time to speak up and a time to, listen. I always err on the side of listening to the point where I can sit and listen to what someone is saying for a very extended amount of time, and never share what my thoughts are, or what my feelings are around that. . . . Even if I say something, and this person might get their feelings hurt, is there an opportunity for growth or positivity to come from this? If the answer is yes, then let’s go for it. You know, even if I feel really vulnerable, and really exposed by saying what I feel needs to be said, if there is a possibility for some positive outcome or growth, let’s do it anyway.
In contrast to describing missed opportunities to speak, participants disclosed having increased confidence in using their voice weeks after attending the social justice retreat. In the second interview, Michelle talked about how she has turned up the volume to her voice since attending the retreat:

I think I told you last time, that I noticed that big time at the retreat . . . it was hard for me to turn thoughts and feelings into like words and say something. So that’s shifted for sure. Where I’m, I’m finding a voice even in groups of people who have more to learn. And I was one of those people. So, and I still am, obviously, but I’m learning that it’s safer now . . . it’s okay to say something, . . . It’s especially hard to find your voice when people you’re close to have different viewpoints or opinions, and you don’t want to rock the boat. But I’m seeing now that if nobody rocks the boat, then you know, you’re sort of contributing to the problem in a roundabout way.

Lorraine described how her experience at the retreat helped her to find her voice around people of color. She said:

I think the thing that shifted at the retreat was that before I was interested and aware and wanting to have those conversations, but I didn’t necessarily know how nor did I think; I always questioned if it was a conversation I was allowed to be part of. Specifically, like with close friends of mine that are people of color and just never wanting to take over. But I think being at the retreat with such a diverse set of people . . . I don’t know what the numbers were, but it almost felt like there were fewer white people than not, which was really amazing. And everyone there wanted to hear everyone else’s voice. And so I think it’s just given me sort of a better starting place when entering in conversations and feeling like, no, I’m just as much a part of this as everyone else.

Hop disclosed that it was her experience at the retreat and, specifically, learning on the go that allowed her to push through her fears of saying the wrong thing in the presence of others. She explained:

That was a huge fear for me, and I opened my mouth and said stupid things the entire weekend and it helped me grow and it helped me sit in that uncomfortableness and learn from it. That’s the hardest thing for me . . . I don’t think it’s feeling stupid. I tend to just say things . . . stupid things all the time. Plus I feel like that helps me grow and be a better person. My biggest fear and concern is that I might say something in my ignorance or naivety or in being uneducated or not knowing the right way to say, that it’ll hurt somebody else. That’s my biggest fear . . .
because then I have to sit with that ‘cause I just said something that hurt somebody else.

**Power in the Story**

I realized that everyone I came into contact with had a story that I wanted to hear. My heart is open to listen and welcoming to different parts of their life. That helped me to become more open-minded and see each other with grace and acceptance” (Rosa).

The Power in the Story theme was endorsed by participants and they shared their beliefs that they were significantly impacted by sitting with people from different cultural backgrounds and hearing their story. Participants stated that learning about the experiences of others in a face-to-face format afforded them a platform to challenge their assumptions and biases and expand their worldviews.

One of the first activities that participants engaged in when they first sat with their small group was the Name Activity (see Appendix G). Retreat participants had an opportunity to share the story of their name with their small group members, including the origin of their name, nicknames, and a brief family history. Several research participants discussed the power of the stories that derived from the Name Activity. For example, Rosa stated:

I like that one, too, because it brought to light the other people’s backgrounds and other people’s upbringing and how their family had already served as a function for them. From their name, or before they were even born, and how they . . . were inaccurate, some they have to make changes, some they, like, completely disagree with it.

I remember it was one guy in my group, I believe he was Baptist. He was middle class, always lived in the same place . . . I don’t remember his name, he said that his parents picked the name because he remembered some confederate guy that was really important back in the day. Then later on when he was in school and was learning he didn’t like it and hated it because he knew more of the background of that person. He had that conflict in his heart. He didn’t change his name, but I think he had a second name, like a middle name. But he said he started to get everybody to call him from that middle name.
Michelle talked about her experience sitting with her small group and sharing the story of their names. She said:

The name one was one, when we first started doing it, I think everyone was like, what’s the point of this, but then, when people started talking about their names, it went a lot further than I think anyone ever expected it to. . . . People got excited just sharing the story of their name. . . . This has to do with my dad’s favorite fictional character, like, I don’t know, just . . . going into the story of their name led to conversations around where people are from, and where this stuff comes from. . . . This was brought across the ocean, this name. . . . has been around for this long, or people knew a lot more about their names than I think they thought they would. And when people started talking to each other about, again, their stories, that’s when something cool would start to happen with connection. It dropped below surface level of just doing an activity and making something more meaningful to people. People would ask questions, like well tell us more about that and everyone’s was so different.

Cady reflected on her time sitting with her small group and being “shocked” to learn that most, if not all, the people in her group who identified as black were given their name by a slave owner. She explained:

   We all wrote our names. . . . I was in a group with a lot of people from the same area of the country, the south, and we all had nicknames. I didn’t realize that was a cultural thing. It was just the way it always was, and so we all have that in common that we all grew up with these nicknames. If people called us by our real name we were kind of shocked, like, it was very weird. We were just always known by our nicknames. And then I think. . . . I knew this cognitively, but then hearing that every person that was black in my group, and came from where I came from, their name was given to them by a slave owner. . . . That just kind of shocked me, I was like, wow, that’s really, I don’t know what it was. It was, um, it was like, a visceral feeling. That’s so . . . powerful that you can strip people of their identity, and they can never regain it back. . . . now they will always have that name.

In addition to the name activity, Cady described hearing people’s stories as one of the most powerful components of her retreat experience. She added:
Hearing other people’s stories, I really enjoy just hearing people’s narratives, I think, because it just shows, once again, that there could be two people in the same situation or group in the same county that had an objectively similar experience, and then they have just such different ways of telling it . . . I just enjoyed hearing people’s experiences and how, who they were, what they look like, influence their experiences.

In her journal, Rosie wrote, “There’s so much power in our names and meanings. I loved hearing the stories behind the names.” She shared that the Name Activity was one that she could potentially use with her clients to explore their cultural background and history. She said:

The names thing . . . that will be something that I would, depending upon the client and just where they’re at, something that I would potentially explore, just because there was definitely . . . a narrative approach to that. So, you know, what is your name? What does it mean? How did you get that name? If you, you know . . . what legacy do you want to leave? You know, essentially, what do you want people to think of when they think of your name down the road? I think that was just very powerful. We don’t think much about names . . . in our everyday lives. So there was something about that, that was very powerful . . . just a reminder, again, that we have unique stories and the way in which we derive meaning from our names, and from our experiences look very different.

Throughout the interviews, participants described connecting and sharing stories with others over the course of the two-day training. They described the cognitive and emotional impact of sitting across from an individual who comes from a different cultural background. For example, Hop, a middle-aged, white woman, described her experience connecting with an older, black man who was in her small group. She stated:

Um, I was, I think, shocked by some of the things that some people had shared. For example, someone had said they had won, in high school, it was an older African American man, he had won a scholarship. And it was not long after the public schools had integrated, and he had won a scholarship. And when they found out that he was African American, they took it away from him. . . . Those things happen. We hear about it, you know, either we’ve read about it, or we’ve heard about it in different ways. So, I knew those things happen. But just like, you know, things happen to other people, that brought it home to me. It made it more real for me . . . I think that more people have to have that experience and learn from each other that way, because if you don’t like, like I said, with my friend
who’s a Native American, in my cohort, her life experiences have made it so much more real and made the desire to make changes more real. So, bringing people together that way, and learning from them that way, is super impactful, because it’s always easy to think, oh, it happens to somebody else.

Nicole described having a similar experience, she explained:

I think just hearing people’s individual stories, like the times that we got to process after the activities, um, and hearing people’s experience. Yeah, I know, I’m like thinking about, like, when I was talking with someone that was sharing about how, like a scholarship had gotten taken away from him because of his race. . . . That story was just like, really, I don’t know, that’s one of the stories that was most impactful for me. . . . There was lots of those throughout the retreat. But, yeah, I think when we got to process afterwards, and say, like, this is what this brought up for me, this reminds me of this experience.

Nicole followed up her recollection in small group with her thoughts about the significance of hearing stories from other social justice retreat participants. She said:

I think the thing that stood out the most is like people’s stories and experiences . . . I think that is mostly what’s going to influence me. . . . I think for me, like these stories, and the experiences of people . . . changes a little bit the way or influences the way that I would do counseling. Mostly just because I think the way that when you learn about like, social justice, and these kinds of topics only in an academic setting . . . it gets very ivory tower sometimes, and very like . . . while we’re sitting here and talking this like, almost like this big game of inclusion, we’re also like, really distancing with our language.

I hate that because it’s just kind of a problem sometimes. I think like, we need this language, and we need to have it modeled in order to be able to, you know, be inclusive, but I think what felt different was like, I was talking with people who had not had the same conversations about this in the way that I had. While I felt really comfortable talking, just for example, about like gender identity, and using pronouns and things like that other people are like, wow, I’ve never done that before, but still were, like engaging and talking about their experiences even though it wasn’t in this like, academic way . . . I think that’s what felt good . . . I think that’s what’s going to be the most impactful when it comes to speaking with clients . . . not creating this distance with my language . . . being real and direct.

Similarly, Michelle talked about the power of hearing a person’s story in the retreat environment. She stated, “In my opinion, when you get in the retreat environment, it’s just more humanizing. This isn’t something we have to learn to graduate. This is like real
life, real people, real experiences, real problems, real stuff, and it lands in a completely different way.” She added:

I think seeing trainings and educational pieces only goes so far. It’s when you have more stories, more conversations in those small groups around like, what has everyone’s experience been, and then when you start talking about stories in life, it brings questions in. So people who are on the fence about like, I don’t know how to feel about this are able to ask someone directly. I know it’s not always their job to educate, but I think in that social justice retreat format, it might be the right time for everyone to just help each other understand how to show up in the world in an inclusive way and understand each other better.

She talked about the power a story can have in breaking down assumptions. She explained:

Just being curious about people’s stories. You have these opinions for a reason, and maybe you’re not just an idiot like we wanna think you are. Maybe you just have a story. I recently heard a quote, you know how things show up, you hear it somewhere and then it just keeps popping up? It was something like, “We can’t expect to build and create a more loving world out of anger.” Right now, everyone’s just so angry, and anger never brings anything together, it just makes people more defensive and angrier and more defensive, and angrier, and nobody’s seeking to understand each other.

Jocelyn shared an experience she had while she was processing the Dominant/Subordinate Activity (see Appendix G) with a training participant. She stated:

With the four quadrants one I was paired up with a, with someone who I just felt like, our conversation was so wonderful. He spoke about his experience as a man and I talked about my experiences as a woman. And he spoke about his experience as a person of color. And I spoke about my life as a white person, and he was, I think, I don’t know, but probably in his 70’s or 80’s, and I was like, uh, this is so rich, I love that conversation. It was just heartbreaking I just felt like my heart, my heart broke and then got all charged up and then like, cracked open again. And, you know, you’re emotional.
Admiration and Appreciation for Group Diversity

I think the most valuable thing about it (social justice retreat) was being able to have actual conversations with actual people from different backgrounds . . . I think that’s where the most growth happens. (Michelle)

The Admiration and Appreciation for Group Diversity theme was endorsed by participants as they expressed regard for the diversity among participants who engaged in the social justice retreat. Research participants shared that the social justice retreat was the most diverse setting they have been a part of and subsequently they were elated to connect with people who come from diverse backgrounds. Research participants expressed that leading up to the social justice retreat their time in educational settings has been dominated by White people who generally share similar thoughts and feelings.

Cady expressed her appreciation for being around a diverse community and specifically people from “different ages, different career backgrounds, and different ways of thinking.” She shared how most of her time in her counseling program was spent with people who share her same or similar identities. She found it refreshing to be among others who were different from her and come from different cultural backgrounds and noted that the diversity made the social justice retreat “a little more dynamic” than the traditional classroom setting. She added:

The part that I really found that I enjoyed was that I wasn’t with all counselors . . . I know that sounds weird, but the reason being we have developed a certain language, we’ve developed a certain way of interacting with each other, that we, I knew that in my class, that it would be predictable and safe. We would mostly all agree on topics or have the same consensus about a lot of topics and then have the same kind of passionate responses to certain things. Especially things that were going on politically or that are going on in the community, or that were going on in our country right now. We would all be on the same page. So, I kind of had that feeling going into the class. . . . Going into the social justice retreat, I was like this is a totally new group of people who come from all different backgrounds . . . it’ll be interesting to see how this is different from my class.
I think, well since I moved to Colorado, I’ve noticed that it’s kind of more of a homogenous population than what I experienced growing up . . . especially in counseling in Colorado, like, when we look across the room, we all look very similar. Most of us are from similar backgrounds. When it comes to social class. Most of us have a certain obviously, a certain level of education, most of us are in the same place or close to the same place in our development . . . I think most of us are pretty liberal leaning. That’s what we believe in, politically. So those tough issues, we are all fired up together.

In her participant journal Cady reflected on the time spent in her counseling program interacting with people who come from various cultural backgrounds. She offered the following excerpt, “Most of my experiences through my counseling journey have not been with a group this diverse. This is a unique experience for me and many others.”

Like Cady, Rosa also expressed appreciation for the diversity in the room over the course of the two-day social justice retreat. She also expressed admiration for the unified vision of coming together to create unity and understanding. She affirmed, “It was awesome to see these different backgrounds and just different people, I think, even though we were all different, I think we kind of had the same vision. We kind of want the same thing, you know, create more community and a more open-minded community.” Rosa indicated that she respected that not all participants shared the same thoughts and opinions, but it appeared that their hearts were open to sharing in the social justice retreat experience with others.

Jocelyn also admired that people who held different identities could come together and talk about difficult topics and do so from a place of “openness and love.” She described her experience:
I had an amazing time and I am still talking about it. I have friends who are involved in this work already, like friends who I worked with at the shelter, and people who don’t really do this work. I found it so refreshing . . . I experienced it to be bridge building and people coming together from a place of openness and love, and like, we’re all in this together. We want to figure this out . . . we want to learn how to talk about these issues in a way that is, yeah, like bridge building. To build relationships and go into our places in the world from this place of like, how can we do better. I noticed, I felt like everybody . . . a lot of people were coming from very different places as far as their identity.

When asked to describe her time at the social justice retreat, Hop first mentioned the diversity in the room and the opportunity to connect with people who come from all walks of life.

I loved it. Overall, I really enjoyed it. I met some really great people. I met some really passionate people, which I enjoyed . . . I met some people that just, I just wanted to listen to them talk, you know, they had, there was so many different experiences in that room with different life experiences. . . . It didn’t even matter, you know, your race, or your ethnicity, or where you came from. It’s just everyone had different jobs and different skills and just, I just really enjoyed getting to know people. I became Facebook friends with some of the people that I met for just those two days . . . I really enjoyed it.

She shared that what she appreciated most was the race and age differences that were present in the room throughout the retreat. She wrote in her research journal, “I am appreciative of the vast age differences in the group because that also greatly influenced the group dynamics.”

Participants spoke about the lack of diversity within their counseling programs and communities being a barrier to becoming a more multiculturally competent counselor. In the second interview, Michelle highlighted this lack of exposure to different cultural groups and shared that counseling students often rely on books and screens to try fill in the gaps. She shared:

I think in cities like [content removed] right, if counselors have never actually sat down and had real conversations, and it’s all just been through a book or through a screen, then when that client comes in, there’s been no real-world application.
So I would say being in a group, having real conversations about people’s experiences is what kind of opens the door to your mind and just to know how to work with people who you might not be able to relate to as much. But until you’ve actually sat there and had those conversations, it’s just all in your mind about how it might feel.

So again, I think the most valuable piece of this work is when you hear about individual experiences. When you’re face-to-face with someone having a conversation, and they say, listen to what has happened to me, or listen to what my experience of the world has been . . . I have often thought that like, again, my parents or people that are close to me who just don’t see what’s going on, if they had real conversations with people who are different than them, then that would be the fastest way for them to learn, and that’s just not happening. Right? We just expose ourselves to people who already have the same opinions and beliefs, and so then it just expands and you’re not getting any feedback from people who are different than you.

Michelle indicated that the most valuable part of the social justice retreat experience for her was the opportunity to engage in authentic conversation with people from different backgrounds. The opportunity to sit and talk to with “actual people” from across cultures provided her with experience and context that she could take with her and apply when she interacted with clients in her clinical setting.

Rosie described herself as a student in her seminary counseling program. While she enjoyed the faith-based aspects of her program she acknowledged that she has minimal interaction with non-believers and those who do not adopt Christian beliefs. She stated, “I just tend to navigate a lot of like Christian spaces, and so it’s not often that I get to hear from people who don’t hold that identity who have experienced some hurt or pain.” She found that the social justice retreat gave her an opportunity to interact with people who come from different faith expressions. She explained, “And so during that social justice retreat, I interacted with a lot of different people from different backgrounds. And I like to share their stories, because they give me a new vision for
maybe the type of population I’m going to serve, or the type of student I’m going to serve when I get out. So, for me it was a treat to be there actually.”

Bob, also in the seminary counseling program, spoke about the importance of engaging in conversations with people who do not share his same faith expression. He stated, “It was really good; it was nice to be processing these things with a variety of people. Um, here at the seminary people are generally in the same age group, coming from the same like faith background. And so it’s really great to talk to people from a more diverse background both intergenerational, and inner spiritual. So, it was really great to see this kind of diversity interacting and talking about these often-tense topics. So it was a really good experience.” He added, “Here at the seminary I often interact with Christians while processing these things so um, it was nice to process these issues with people who do not have the same faith.”

In addition to expressing appreciation for engaging in conversations with folks who have different faith expressions. Bob shared that he admired the diversity in group facilitators who guided the retreat.

Sure, you and your co-hosts are pretty different. It’s really great to hear both of your voices. I really appreciate you having a diversity of people leading the retreat and it’s something I don’t often see. You know, it’s usually a group of people who are generally the same to do something.

Participants expressed appreciation and admiration for having elders in the room and having the opportunity to learn from their life experience. While participants valued the presence of elders at the retreat, they also talked about the voice of our elders is missing in counselor education and specifically around conversations that involve social justice. Nicole shared:
I think, overall, I really liked that it was a really diverse group of people. The spaces that I’m used to talking about identity with are like other college students, like mostly in their early 20s, mostly female, mostly white (laughter). And not totally everybody . . . I think it was cool to have these conversations with a much more diverse group of people than I had been exposed to before . . . I think also, I guess, maybe a little bit more specific was just like, I really valued being around people that were much older than me. Because, like, just hearing about how their experiences with their identities are just so different in terms of like generationally, and how, like, a lot of those things still, like are part of experience, like people’s experience today, and part of my experience, but look a little bit different.

We still experience sexism, racism, homophobia, whatever, but like, it’s still really different. In a lot of ways, like there is a little bit more safety nowadays, but still, there’s a lot of problems. I think that like a lot, I don’t know that it’s ever like explicitly stated, but I think we just talk a lot about like, old people not knowing . . . I think that that’s kind of like this undertone, like, oh, they don’t, like, care about these things, or they don’t know about these things. . . . Maybe that’s because I have a lot of like, I predominantly am around, like, white folks . . . Because, you know, that’s maybe something never talked about . . . I think like hearing people’s experience when they are older, I would say that’s definitely lacking, hearing from other older folks.

Nicole expressed that prior to interacting with elders at the social justice retreat she believed that the work of creating more inclusive communities was exclusive to young and upcoming advocates. She realized this was a bias that was exposed through her interaction with elders at the social justice retreat, “I think those kind of dialogues got me thinking more about one, my own biases, and then yeah, it was just really insightful and really impactful for me to hear about their experiences and hear more about like, even if they didn’t always have the language, the most up to date language, it was just the eagerness to learn too. But it’s really not just an interest for young people, that there are older people that are interested and are engaged in this work.”

Jocelyn also shared her appreciation and admiration for sitting and connecting with elders during the social justice retreat. In her journal she described being “very pleased to see the diversity in the room, mostly regarding race, gender and age.” She
came into the retreat having participated in several multicultural and social justice retreat trainings and acknowledged that most, if not all, of her experiences had been with a much younger audience. She explained:

One more thing is the intergenerational aspect; it was awesome to be with people and having conversations with elderly folks. People from the south, you know, like there’s, diversity in the room, diversity in perspective, diversity of lessons and how people learned those lessons like the implications that they’re trying to pick apart and think critically about. And I, as a woman, and then to be in dialogue with folks coming from all different backgrounds, it just felt so good. Most of the social justice work I’ve done have been with white college people, who have been stuck in theory as opposed to life or life experience.

Throughout the social justice retreat there were times where all participants came together and engaged in large group discussion (see Appendix G). During these times all participant voices were present in one space and different question prompts and activities were initiated to encourage group interaction and sharing. It was during the large group interactions where the diversity of the group was on full display. Kayla explained, “I most treasured larger group discussions hearing from older people of color, which are perspectives I am not exposed to enough.” The retreat has been a great reminder of the concepts I know and the experience with a different group of people really made it what it was and enriched it.” She added:

I’ve never been around, I don’t think, so many people from the military. . . . And that seemed like a whole culture in itself, like, that was just really interesting to kind of hear all the stuff they were talking about their experiences. I guess I was surprised how many like, I don’t know how to say this, but like, there were a lot of like, black people and families that were like in the military…I guess I didn’t really realize . . . I just never have met black people who were in the military before. So like, that was new, and opened my eyes to a group of people I never really thought about.

I don’t remember names, but like, there was some older black gentleman that, like I spoke with, like, for quite a while, and just kind of hearing their experiences was really cool. And I wish I could remember the story that someone was telling me, but it just kind of opened my eyes to like a group that, yeah, like, I don’t really think about. Like, if a client came into my office, like, I would have
to do some research. So like, now, I feel like I have a little bit of background like, at least know that that’s a group that I might encounter or work with.

Lorraine talked about her first time walking into the large group and seeing the diversity present in the room:

Yeah, I mean, my first thought when I walked in is like, it was really cool to be in a room of people from different generations, from different socio-economic backgrounds, I mean, it like covered the gamut, I think. I’m sure there were definitely identities not represented in the room, but it was the most diverse room I’ve ever been in as far as taking in all those different factors, which was really cool.

**Making Connections and Building Trust in Community**

“I don’t mean this to sound really cheesy or anything, I just felt a strong sense of love, and trust, and community among strangers.” (Jocelyn).

Participants endorsed the Making Connections and Building Trust in Community theme and talked about the significance of making connections with community members with whom they would not normally interact. Participants were pleasantly surprised by how open others were to share their story and how invested others were to learn about their story. All social justice retreat participants attended by choice, no one was required to give of their time and effort. Research participants shared that the fact community members came willingly provided them with renewed sense of hope and trust in their community; that people can and do come together to discuss similarities and differences.

In addition to making connections with community members in a shared space, participants expressed that they were able to build trust with people from different cultural groups. They articulated that through facilitated activities and discussions they interacted with other social justice retreat participants and were able to work through disagreements and strong emotions. These authentic interactions accompanied by
community engagement increased feelings of trust and provided a sense of hope among participants that communities can come together to work through problems and talk about topics that are often difficult to discuss.

Prior to attending the social justice retreat Lorraine shared that she had become discouraged due to the events taking place around the country that caused pain to those who come from historically marginalized communities. She described the significance of seeing the community rally together and invest in making change. She shared that her time at the social justice retreat provided her with a renewed sense of hope. She explained:

I was also really impressed that it was free, in that the community sponsored the event to happen. It was a particularly hard week for me at work. Going into the retreat, I had felt really discouraged about the state of things and how nothing was ever going to change . . . so to come into a room where it’s like, hey, some people in our community sponsored this event to happen, because they want these conversations to happen and then people showed up, because they want to be part of a conversation . . . . That was like, so hope giving to me, to see that work happening, and happening at a lot of different levels.

Likewise, Hop was encouraged to see her community willingly come together to promote change. She said:

I would describe my experience as encouraging. It’s encouraging to see so many people come together because they want to learn more about each other and learn how to make changes that will influence each other to make changes. It’s exciting to be with a group of people who are willing to do this just because they are moved to and to be better to one another. We aren’t required to be here. No one was forced to come . . . . This experience is humbling. There’s so much to learn and so much I don’t know and so many areas for me to grow. I am so appreciative of the people who have answered my stupid questions and not judged me. I’m so thankful for those who openly shared their experiences.

Lorraine shared that connecting with different people over the course of two days and hearing their stories added purpose to her work as a counselor. Similarly, Nicole benefited from connecting with an array of people who attended the retreat. She stated, “I
most enjoyed getting to hear other stances and hearing about their experiences.” She recalled spending time in her caucus group after the Privilege Links Activity (see Appendix E):

Yeah, yeah, I think like I said, probably the small group thing after the linking activity, I would say is the most beneficial and probably also because there was really only three people. So I got to hear more, and it’s like more about them and more about their identities and more about their experiences, because it was really only like a handful of us.

Likewise, Michelle agreed and shared that she was able to open up and share in her small group. She stated, “I enjoy small group conversation. As an introvert, I prefer small group to large group engagement. I found it was easier to relax and open up. Social anxiety sometimes affects my ability to engage authentically in large group environments. But it’s always a good challenge for me.” She added:

And to me, the most meaningful piece of it was when people started connecting, or when people started having some conversations that were going really deeper or opening up. . . . Being able to stand in front of somebody and look at them in the eye and like hear something about their history, I think that’s what it’s all about. Just seeing your differences seeing similarities, and seeing humaneness in such an intimate, like moment

Nicole described growing closer to her community over the course of the two-day retreat. She described feeling proud that her community members volunteered their time to promote social justice. She shared:

I feel like connection and pride stand out to me. . . . Proud that so many people were so invested in coming together and having these conversations. You know, taking time out of their own weekend. I think it gets really hard to . . . slow down and take a look, we have so many things going on that this gets easy, in a way, to forget about, and so I think I felt really proud and connected that so many people from all over the place were interested in doing that work.

Kayla reported feeling a strong sense of community as well. She recognized
the Concentric Circle’s Activity (see Appendix E) as the catalyst to get participants up and talking to each other. She recalled, “I think like, the first . . . activities that we started off with, the Concentric Circles Activity . . . we got to talk to a bunch of different people. . . . That just kind of got everyone talking to each other openly.” She added, “I love the Concentric Circle Activity and trying to successfully find similarities with a 67-year-old black man. I am a 26-year-old white woman.” The opportunity to connect with other participants evoked a sense of community within Kayla. She explained:

It was so clear that there was like this tight knit community, and I didn’t feel excluded. Like, everyone was so nice, and I felt like we had community within that group for those two days. It felt really nice because I don’t often get a chance to be a part of the community. . . . Due to my living situation right now and stuff.

During the first interview Kayla mentioned that throughout her life she has had minimal interactions with racial minorities, specifically men of color. She recalled interacting with several older black men during the opening social justice retreat activities where participants were asked to pair-up and share different aspects of their lives with different partners. Kayla reflected on her time interacting with men of color.

There were a couple older black gentleman that I ended up talking to, I wish I remembered their names. They were super cool . . . they just talked to me like, no big deal . . . I don’t know, I kind of expected maybe, like some kind of reaction or something like that . . . they were just open.

Kayla shared that she was surprised by how comfortable she was engaging in conversations with men and how open the men were in engaging in these same conversations. She said:

I guess just being older . . . like an old black man and like, a young white woman that’s . . . almost as different as you can get . . . I guess I was just pleased when, you know, I approached them to talk or sometimes they approached me to talk and it was just like, no big deal . . . I guess I just don’t have that many interactions like that in my everyday life. So it’s just like, yeah, why is that surprising, though? I don’t know.
I would expect them to be a little . . . hold back a little bit. Or not be as open but . . . they were so open . . . I forget what activity, it was one of the introductory activities and like I told him, my name is [content removed], and he was like, how do you spell that? I like wrote it down and showed him like this how I spell it and explained that it’s Hebrew . . . . We were talking about our identities . . . I had marked down that I was Atheist, but also like, culturally Jewish, and he was like, “How can, is that a thing?” And I . . . explained it to him. He was like, “Okay, cool. Like, I didn’t know that that was a thing.” So, he learned that from me, and then he was telling me about, like, his military experience, and it was just like, a window into a world that I never see.

Kayla later discussed a similar experience when she connected with a black woman who happened to be a counselor working in the Colorado Spring community. She described her time being paired with the woman in an ice breaker activity:

I was paired up with was like this older black woman who was a counselor in Colorado Springs and . . . we had a really cool conversation about like, her experience. . . . It was just cool to hear about her experiences. . . . She actually is a counselor. So just kind of hearing about her experience as a black counselor in Colorado Springs . . . I don’t know, I just really enjoyed my conversation with her about that.

In her journal, Kayla wrote about her admiration for her small group facilitator. She shared the she appreciated her transparency and being open with her group. Her facilitators courage to share her personal experiences increased Kayla’s sense of trust and community within her small group. Kayla’s small group facilitator came out to the group during a small group discussion. She shared that this was the first time she had acknowledged being a queer woman in a public setting. She had worked as a school psychologist for the entirety of her professional career before recently retiring. Kayla wrote, “[content removed] was an excellent leader, and I really appreciated her self-disclosure of being gay with the group.”

In the first interview Bob described a powerful experience that took place in his caucus group following the Privilege Links Activity (see Appendix E). Bob reported that
a woman in the group was looking for guidance on how to support her grandson who had just “came out” to her family. He stated:

The most meaningful conversations were the ones where there’s something that somebody didn’t understand about a certain group and how, like, people responded patiently, and humbly to talk about . . . how to understand this about that group more. . . . For example, there was a conversation we were having where a woman, her grandson just came out . . . so she was just so burdened and feeling like, she didn’t know what to do. . . . It was so sweet to see people just come forward and talk about what was important for them when they came out, or what they did that was really helpful when their friend came out.

I thought that was just a really beautiful thing that we often don’t get the space for because we’ll share something like that on Facebook . . . then we have a screen or a TV where we’re separated or disconnected from each other’s humanity. We can’t have such a caring and empathetic dialogue, like I got to witness because somebody could have easily taken that like, “Oh, you’re a bigot, you can’t accept your grandson.” That’s just not the way the conversation went, so it was very refreshing.

Bob shared that it was moments like these that allowed him to trust the community and that the retreat atmosphere could be a place where he and others could share openly and honestly and receive support from the community. He explained:

It felt like I had time to share what I was going through and experiencing, but also being able to listen to others was part of helping, helping me feel known. I didn’t have to fight to get my voice out there. But like, there was an opportunity for everybody. There was a pretty diverse range of voices in our group, and as one person shared some things that were pretty vulnerable for them and I got to witness the rest of the group receiving that, it helped me feel like it was a safe place to be open and honest and vulnerable as well.

In addition to feeling like the social justice retreat was a place where people could be open and honest, participants expressed feeling the trust present within the community that allowed for both exploration and challenge. Participants shared they appreciated that there were times where there were loving challenges among participants and facilitators.

For example, Hop spoke about feeling accepted by the community despite her “lack of knowledge.”
I felt accepted in my lack of knowledge and . . . in my naivety and in my inability to really express myself well. I felt accepted to have the questions that I had, whether it was about transgender, or LGBTQQI . . . I always forget what all of the letters are, and that was okay. It’s okay that you forgot what all the letters are. But that you want to learn more, or that you wanted to learn more about a particular culture, or race, or ethnicity or whatever . . . . It felt like such an accepting place, to be able to ask those questions and to try to learn more . . . acceptance in every room I was in.

During the focus group portion of the research Hop and Lorraine reconnected. The two had spent time in conversation at the social justice retreat after Hop had sought out Lorraine for advice on the appropriate use of the word Queer. During the focus group Hop expressed gratitude for Lorraine’s courage to challenge her in a loving way. She shared her gratitude with Lorraine:

I was so excited to see you (Lorraine) when I saw you, ‘cause I just felt like I connected with you so quickly. I felt like I’m so comfortable with you, to ask you questions and things that . . . . It was kind of scary, some of the questions that I asked you, I don’t know if you remember, but I stopped you in the hallway, and I was asking you something . . . . it was after we had talked about transgender and gay and lesbian, and I remember I said something to you like, “Queer used to be forbidden.” And so, that’s a word that now we use. And you had stood up and spoke about something . . . . so I stopped you in the hallway and I said, “Can I ask you a question about the term queer?” And you were so straightforward and honest with me, “Why do you need to know that?” I was like, “Are we as straight people allowed to call someone queer?” Because for the longest time that had been a taboo word. At least where I was from and from the people that I knew.” And you said, “Well why do you need to call someone queer? Why would you need to do that?” It’s based on what they feel and what they need.

I remember having the conversation with you working with kids in schools when they’re exploring and trying to figure out who they are and where they are. I just want to be informed so that I can help them with that. But you and I talked . . . . well maybe that’s something that you learn together. . . . You were so open to having that conversation with me, but you weren’t afraid to say to me, “Why do you need to know that?” I just remember thinking, “I like her.” I liked how honest you were with me and just willing to have that conversation with me, not knowing who I was at all.

Likewise, Cady expressed appreciation that enough trust was built within the social justice community to support both dialogue and disagreement. She stated, “I
appreciated that there were actually some dialogue and disagreements and how they were resolved.” She recalled one specific example when the lead retreat facilitator, was talking to the large group about feeling unsafe whenever she enters Chick-fil-A due to her identity as a queer woman. A retreat participant challenged the lead facilitator on her feelings, and she confronted the participant. Cady shared how she was impacted by the interaction:

(Lead facilitator) was talking about, she said something about Chick-fil-A, and she’s like, “I don’t feel safe” and someone in the crowd said, “I don’t agree with that.” And she (lead facilitator) said, “Well, I’m allowed to say, when I don’t feel safe, and I’m allowed to define my own safety.” I was like, “wow, that’s really cool.” I never thought about that...the idea of safety being subjective. Because we’re told...growing up as a woman where our feelings of safety are objectified and the fact that certain things mean we’re safe and certain things mean we’re unsafe, and they’re very concrete. But to us, I could totally feel unsafe in a room and nothing could be happening that is subjectively unsafe. So that really stood out to me.

Jocelyn described the sense of love and community she felt during her time at the retreat. She recalled engaging in uncomfortable conversations around her queer identity, yet she walked away from these conversations with love and trust for her community. She explained:

There was a woman who was really honest with me. I shared with the group that I’m queer, and she was really honest with me about how she grew up with the message that marriage is between women and men, and for the purpose of reproduction...just like the views that she was raised with. A lot of the things that she said were things that my family has said to me that have been really hurtful, and painful. But when she said it, she was coming from such a different place...she was coming from such an open place, and really wanting to learn and grow in that area...it felt very reparative for me.

She also said that she went home the night before...she has three teenage kids, and that she and her husband went home and had a conversation with them about like, what is queer identity and what is pansexual, and these terms that she was just learning for the first time and she didn’t understand...She wanted to learn how to be a better mom to her kids, in case any of them came out, and then she also gave them the opportunity to educate her. It just seemed like she was coming from such an open place. But she was also really honest
about the harmful views that she is working on. That was very impactful for me. I thought . . . there was a level of trust and a level of vulnerability in the conversations that I would have the whole weekend that meant so much to me.

Jocelyn reflected on her time at the retreat and described it as being “incredibly fruitful” and stated that it lit her soul “on fire.” She indicated that she would like to create similar spaces for her clients who come from various cultural backgrounds. Spaces where they can engage in authentic and “difficult conversations” and trust that both parties are “coming from a loving place.” She explained:

I don’t mean this to sound really cheesy or anything, I just felt a strong sense of love, and trust, and community among strangers. I mean I was a stranger. I know a lot of people there knew each other and were connected with family or in the church or their job. But for me, I was a stranger, I didn’t know anybody and yet I felt love and trust being a part of those conversations. The work that I want to do with clients . . . when we come from different cultural backgrounds, I want to be rooted in that spirit, that place, so that we can have difficult conversations or stay in the conversations with each other . . . and be because we’re coming from a loving place knowing that we’re fallible and we’ll mess up, and we’re trying our best and we’re accountable, you know? There’s an accountability piece there too that I don’t want to gloss over. If I if I make a mistake, I apologize for it and do better . . . that message is really relevant to the work I do as a white woman with a lot, or most of my clients are Latino.

Jocelyn captured the power of community and engaging in authentic dialogue when she wrote in her journal about her experience sitting with a black man and sharing stories about their subordinate identities.

I was having a conversation with an elderly black man about our experiences with subordinate identities. He shared that he refused to accept that he was less than because he is black. He told me about times in his life, when he had a choice to make, to stay where society put him or to rise above it. He said he consistently chose the path that afforded him more opportunity and the dignity, pride, and empowerment he felt in him is something I struggle to locate in myself. I noticed tears well up in my eyes when people of color are speaking to me from a place of love, acceptance, and non-judgmental interest. I feel like I’m undeserving of it. I feel like I’ll never be deserving of it. I feel like I’m flawed, and despite my best intentions and engagement in this work, I can’t be trusted because I’m white. I feel like I don’t trust my own whiteness and I’m terrified of causing more harm. I wish everyone I know, personally and professionally, were here this weekend.
Advocacy and Action

It almost feels like I have to walk the walk. I’ve talked the talk. I can speak all day about this, but I think we tend to get a little bit on our high horse about this stuff and then don’t always engage in this stuff, and the discomfort piece. . . . It feels like it’s time for me to really do that and challenge myself. (Nicole)

Research participants endorsed the theme Advocacy and Action. Participants expressed a desire to advocate for clients by speaking out and acting against injustice on multiple levels. Participants described leaving the social justice retreat with a renewed and increased confidence in calling out injustices taking place in their communities and the systems in which they are currently situated.

During the second interview several participants shared detailed accounts of how they had already taken information and from the social justice retreat and applied it to their internships, jobs, and relationships. Others shared their hopes of facilitating a social justice retreat in their community in the near future or implementing some of the activities from the social justice retreat with their students and staff in their school or community setting which they worked.

In her first interview, Hop described her confidence level as an advocate in the weeks preceding her time at the social justice social retreat. She detailed an interaction that she had with a close friend after hearing her use insensitive language. She explained:

I think that I’m more confident as an advocate. . . . I think I’m more confident to kind of step out of my comfort zone when I hear something that doesn’t seem right. . . . I had an experience recently with someone I’m very close to, she’s wonderful. . . . She’s a person that I look up to, and I really respect her, and she said something that really floored me. I thought about it for a little bit and thought, “You know, who am I to say something? Is it my place?” You know, it had to do with race and how “those” people kind of acted on something. . . . Then I realized later that, yeah, absolutely it’s my place. Because wouldn’t it be better coming from someone that respects you, and that cares about you, and that says,
from my heart, “you know what you said the other day really bothered me, and I wanted to say why it bothered me so much.” Especially because I think that she didn’t even recognize it for a second that it could be . . . viewed differently or said differently . . .

I thought to myself, you know, even more reason that I should say something, and I did, and that’s not something that I feel like I would I just feel like for so long in my life I have been so uneducated and so unwilling to step out of my comfort zone because I was always afraid I would say the wrong thing . . . I just feel like, you know what, if everyone’s always afraid of saying the wrong things then we’re never going to have these conversations. Right?

Similarly, Lorraine talked about how her time at the retreat helped her to navigate conversations with her parents who share a different perspective on social justice related issues. She explained:

I’ve noticed even in my personal relationships, for instance, with my parents . . . a lot of what I’ve learned is impacting how I approach those conversations with them. I come from a very conservative Christian background, and some conversations around diversity haven’t been well received in the past. But I’ve been able to, kind of, develop in my own maturity and being able to set myself aside and approach it from a more calling them in rather than out. And knowing the importance of everyone’s voice in the conversation, so that’s been really cool.

She recalled a recent conversation she engaged in with her mother:

My mom has a friend at church who is married to a black man, and they have a son that’s black and white . . . I guess the wife is always bringing conversations back around to race and racism, to the extent that my mom was getting a little frustrated and wasn’t sure why every conversation was coming back to that. At one point, I just said, “Well, could I share a different perspective?” And I was fully willing to say, “okay,” if she said no. She said, “Uh, sure.” So then I was able to kind of offer a different perspective on why she might be bringing everything back to that; and also acknowledge, you know, with my counseling skills, with my mom, that I can understand why if you’re not making that connection, and you’re not seeing the importance on a personal level for you, why that could come across as kind of abrasive. But that for her having a child who’s mixed race and coming across that as their kid goes through school and her seeing now this whole world that she probably wasn’t raised with and exposed to, that injustice becomes a very central part of her life . . . it opened up a really cool conversation. I’ve noticed my own, a shift just internally as far as my openness to people who don’t agree with me and finding inroads to speak with people who don’t agree with me.
Likewise, in the focus group Michelle described feeling more confident in speaking out against injustice since attending the retreat. She said:

I still feel braver than I did before speaking up, even with the people that I love, which is sometimes the hardest part, actually, because . . . you know, that’s your family and you wanna see eye-to-eye with your family. But I think engaging in conversations at the retreat, it just teaches you something about how to engage in these conversations and just a little more confident doing it out in the real world. And also this sense of obligation, too. I have to talk about hard things. I can’t keep not talking about hard things, even with family.

Hop agreed and responded:

I was more confident, I felt more intelligent, I felt more capable, I felt more just ready to have some conversations that I had known that I needed to have, and that I wanted to have, but didn’t know how and I was like, “You know what? I’m not gonna sit here and be afraid to have this conversation anymore, I’m just gonna do it.” At the retreat, I said stupid stuff in front of a whole bunch of people . . . yet, it was okay. It happened, I learned from it. It was okay. I’m still okay and I’m better for it. So you know what; we’re having these conversations whether you guys like it or not.

Hop shared that her time at the social justice retreat lead to conversations that started in her home. She stated, “When I say locally . . . I’m going to start at home with my kids and in my family, and I think that we have, we’ve really had a lot of conversations, really good conversations since the retreat, here in the house.” She hoped to carry those conversations forward and into her role as a school counselor. “So now I’m looking at okay, now what’s that going to look like at my school? And then from my school what’s that going to look like here in Colorado Springs?”

Cady similarly echoed:

After the retreat . . . I continued my internship, working with kids and adolescents was a big wakeup call too. A lot of them said I want to work on . . . they would tell me I want to work on identity. I want to learn who I am and where I came from. I think that’s where me thinking about how I want to move forward, especially in counseling, that’s where I thought, okay, I’m going to practice intentionality . . . I’m going to be mindful in that practice.
I’m not quite there. I don’t feel confident in my ability to integrate everything I’ve learned . . . I’m kind of over focusing and over analyzing on the details, and the exact language I use, and what I say, and then how it’s perceived . . . that’s taking up a lot of energy in my interactions.

In her second interview Rosie shared that since her time at the retreat she felt called to engage in events taking place on her graduate school campus that centered on inclusivity and issues of diversity. She stated:

We had to plan a chapel for our campus . . . that chapel was specifically about diversity and inclusion on campus. . . . That was something that I think that happened at the end of April, where we just talked about, honestly, the lack diversity. This event was specifically about racial and ethnic diversity, but we talked about the lack thereof on campus and what it looks like to engage the voices of our minority and international students. So, I was part of that planning process. But there is definitely a desire to continue to create those spaces on campus to work alongside other people who are passionate about that.

Likewise, Rosa shared that she and one of her classmates implemented the Card Activity (see Appendix E) in a lesson plan at the middle school where she is completing her internship. She said:

One of my classmates, we had to do like a lesson plan for school and we pulled some of the stuff we learned from the social justice retreat to do the lesson plan . . . that was pretty cool! The one with the card; the numbers . . . we did that one. We did it in a classroom, as a plan for like if we were working in a middle school with kids, and everybody liked it!

Rosa talked about her plan to implement more activities from the retreat in future lesson plans and to engage her staff in conversation around social justice.

I plan to implement some of the activities in my future lesson plans or my activities with the students at the school, definitely. I am planning to put some of these topics that you guys talked about in some of my daily work with the students, definitely. I think that’s a conversation that we need to have, not only with the students, but also with the staff and with like, teachers and everybody. Especially in the schools if I want to help students; if it is our goal . . . I would like to have these conversations with everybody. I’m planning to implement it in parent small conferences, or like teacher small conferences. That’s in my plans, definitely.
Nicole indicated that she worked in a new role on a college campus and part of her new role was facilitating trainings for staff. She talked about her desire to carry over some of the activities from the social justice retreat and implement them in her trainings.

I really liked a lot of those activities that we did and getting . . . to build with one another. I am going to, in my position at my new job next year, we get to facilitate, you kind of have the option to partake in some of the seminars as a leader. . . . You do that with the master’s interns, like the people that were in my position this year. So, I think that those activities are going to be really helpful once I facilitate and co-facilitate some of those seminars and getting people to reflect on their identities and having conversations.

In addition to implementing trainings, Nicole stated that her advocacy plan is connecting with people who have different identities. She has a desire to expand her cultural network. She explained:

The thing for me that I don’t feel like I have done a really good job of . . . is putting myself in places by myself in which I can just learn and explore and engage with people that are different than me. I feel very . . . stuck in this grad student thing, and now I have the freedom to kind of go off on my own and try new things and be without my classmates, and that is scary, but cool too . . . I don’t know specifically that I have a plan but one area that I know that I need to do a better job in is just engaging and trying to be in new spaces with people that are different than me and stepping out of my comfort zone. Like more experiential type stuff.

Nicole expressed that experiential worked includes “engaging within different communities or even partaking in maybe more like, systemic stuff. Like, I don’t know, like political stuff and marches and things like that, that I don’t think that I have done a good job of being part of more of the bigger change.” In her journal she concluded, “For me, it’s a moral obligation to continue exploring my bias and challenging my worldview. I have an obligation as a human, as a friend, as a counselor.”

In her second interview Lorraine was excited to share that she was asked to revamp a social justice curriculum for a middle school group that was ran by her graduate
counseling program. Also, part of her advocacy plan is pursuing more education in the field of multiculturalism and social justice. She stated:

I am immediately planning to help overhaul the social justice curriculum for campus connections at UCCS, um, to help make it more suited for middle school and to really engage some of these topics. I’m hoping to get a lot more voices from community members who have similar identities to some of the students that participated in the last semester. . . . What those people would have liked when they were in middle school, specifically. Because knowing what adults want right now, it’s not necessarily going to translate easily, and I only have my perspective, so that would be right away. I think moving forward I would love to get my doctorate someday, and I don’t know, just help grow the field; and by the field I mean multicultural counseling. But any kind of opportunity that has to do with something like the social justice retreat or attend conferences and workshops around these issues and keeping my eyes peeled. I want to do as much of that as I can.

The focus group portion of the research took place several weeks after Lorraine’s second interview. She had an opportunity to implement her updated curriculum with the middle school group and talked about her experience with other retreat participants who were part of the focus group:

I led social justice, many workshops, for 10 weeks for a mentoring program for middle school students throughout the semester, and it just . . . I think it would have been a train wreck before the retreat. I had all the information, but at the social justice retreat I got to see what to do with it in a group of people who are diverse and some very well-educated and some not so much, in contexts of multiculturalism.

Lorraine described herself as having a passion for social justice and inclusivity for as far back as she remembered. She stated that her social justice and advocacy work started long ago. She used the analogy of a piece of lumber to describe how the social justice retreat impacted her. She entered as a raw and rough piece of lumber and the retreat helped to sand and smooth out her rough edges. She explained:
I feel like . . . this work for me started a long time ago, and the social justice retreat I feel like refined a lot of my edges. Like I was sort of a raw building, we’re building right now, so I’m thinking of construction material. But when you buy a piece of lumber, it’s got edges and splinters and all this stuff. I felt like the retreat was like a sander. I think I had the piece there. I had done a lot to build that and work on it, and I think a lot of different factors in my life just led to multiculturalism as something I’ve majored in in undergrad, and intercultural communication. I’ve just always been part of it, but I think it took it from the sort of raw knowledge of how it should be and what I believe, to how do I facilitate this for people, how do I say the hard things, or be okay if I didn’t.

Like other participants, Michelle described her action plan being one that involves seeking out opportunities to attend more social justice trainings as well as seeking out more diverse and inclusive environments. She said:

I hope to engage in more of this retreat style format stuff like if I’m seeing this going on, not even just in our community, but making an effort to like, be thinking about social justice work and multicultural work when I’m looking at like, what would be a valuable continuing education conference or retreat that I can attend to make sure that that’s very much incorporated into whatever I’m, you know, choosing to put my money towards when it comes to those credits that we need, right. But again, I still think the most important thing is engaging with people who are different than you and making sort of a proactive effort to do that. So, it doesn’t really just fall in your lap.

In addition to attending additional social justice training and occupying diverse spaces, Michelle expressed a desire to use her platform as an educator and counselor to teach others about social justice and inclusivity. She explained:

As I go forward in my career and even as someone who does speak publicly and does workshops, and things like that, I’m going to be incorporating a lot more of a multicultural perspective to anything that I’m presenting or teaching, or training. I know that’s just like basic ethical guidelines through ACA. But, yeah, that’s right at the forefront of my mind with everything now.

In her journal, Jocelyn shared her thoughts on what advocacy will look like for her after leaving the retreat. She wrote, “My activism will come a place of love and acceptance and non-judgment. Not the divisiveness and shaming that I’ve experienced
“other activists do.” She talked more about how she plans to impact her community moving forward in the first interview. She stated:

I would like to continue going to retreats like (this) and just keep the work alive, keep it fresh . . . I fully intend to use the topics of conversations that came up in the social justice retreat, and I just love the issues that were addressed and to continue incorporating that into, not only my professional life, but my personal life . . . I fully intend to do that, and I have been. I guess it’s not just like a future intention, it’s active.

**Summary**

In this chapter, the seven themes and one subtheme that emerged from interviews with participants were presented. The themes Increased Awareness, Desire for Prolonged and Advanced Social Justice Training, An Emotional Journey, Power in the Story, Admiration and Appreciation for Group Diversity, Making Connection and Building Trust in Community, and Advocacy and Action were discussed in detail. In addition, the subtheme Voice: Turn Up the Volume or Keep Quiet? was discussed in connection to the theme An Emotional Journey.

A discussion of these themes takes place in the next chapter as they relate to the overarching research question. In addition, implications for practice and suggestions for future research are explored.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of counseling students who attend a weekend intensive social justice retreat. The ultimate goal was to gain insight and awareness about the experiences of counselors who attend a social justice retreat as it may shed light on whether an intensive social justice experience can serve as a compliment to traditional classroom learning environments often found in counselor preparation programs.

In this chapter, I provide a summary of the findings through discussion of several major themes that emerged through the data. Next, I provide implications of these findings along with their potential application in the field of counselor education. Considerations along with efforts made to minimize the impact of potential limitations are also discussed. Finally, I present ideas to consider for future research.

Summary of Findings

The overarching research question in this study was as follows:

Q1 What are the experiences and perceptions of counselor education students who have completed an intensive social justice retreat?

In response to the research question, participants engaged in interviews, were part of a focus group, and wrote in a journal in response to their time at an intensive social justice retreat. This data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed and seven themes emerged
from this process. I now provide a summary of several major themes that emerged through the data and contextualize the findings within the existing literature.

**Engaging Diverse Communities**

**Engaging minorities.** The stories participants shared indicated that one of the elements of the retreat that they appreciated most was the opportunity to connect with people from different cultural backgrounds from their own. In Chapter II it was highlighted that there remains a lack of diversity reflected in institutions of higher education. Although the United States is becoming more racially diverse, racial minority groups continue to be disparate in higher level education (Bowen et al., 2009; Keels, 2013; Worthington, 2012). This is problematic for counseling programs that are looking to support counseling students to work alongside and advocate for clients who come from diverse backgrounds. Minorities are underrepresented in counseling programs as both students and faculty. As previously noted, of the 160,000 faculty working at Research I and II institutions, only three percent identify as a racial minority (Alger, 1999; Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2002). This fact aligns with findings in the current study that participants were appreciative of their time sitting and sharing stories with people who come from different cultural backgrounds. Put simply, participants shared that this was their first time navigating an environment with so much cultural representation.

The ACA *Code of Ethics* (American Counseling Association, 2014) stated that counselor educators are required to “infuse material related to multiculturalism/diversity into all courses and workshops for the development of professional counselors” (F.7.c). While this requirement moves the agenda forward in helping counselor educators offer a better platform to train multiculturally competent counselors, it does not remove the
barriers caused by the lack of diversity in counselor training programs. The lack of diversity in counselor training programs has contributed to an absence in diverse perspectives. For example, Helms and Cook (1999) asserted that race continues to be a “missing link” in multicultural training programs (p. 9). Counseling training programs are populated with mostly white students who enter into graduate school with less awareness of culture specific considerations and less culture competence than students of color (Chao, Wei, Good, & Flores, 2011). This is problematic given the current path to multicultural competence in counselor training programs is built on engaging students in a single course that relies heavily on classroom peer discussions (Carter, 2003; Duan & Brown, 2016).

Multicultural books and assigned articles become students primary exposure to cultural differences and results in minimal contact with diverse populations (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). Achieving multicultural competence is a lifelong process that cannot be acquired through a single semester course (Carter, 2003; Ratts, 2011). It is important for counselor educators to adopt multicultural training models that better prepare students to meet the needs of a diverse nation (Kaplan et al., 2014; Moore, 2005). When designing multicultural curriculum, counselor educators must take into consideration the racial-ethnic compositions of both the students and facilitators (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). If a diverse representation of students or instructors is not possible, counseling programs may consider adjusting curriculum to afford students the opportunity to interact with others from diverse backgrounds.

The current findings suggest that a social justice retreat allows participants to engage diverse voices, those often missing in the classroom setting. Participants shared
that interacting with people from diverse backgrounds played a key role in leading to a transformative learning experience (Mezirow, 1997) at the social justice retreat. Conversations and interactions with community members inspired self-reflection which shifted participants worldviews and altered their assumptions. Transformative learning theory was described in detail in Chapter II, with the goal being to alter an individual’s frame of reference through critical reflection of one’s habits of mind and points of view (Mezirow, 1997; Moore, 2005). The evolution of transformative learning now places great emphasis on reflective discourse. This process of reflection allows for the development of consciousness and helps to uncover assumptions and biases (Mezirow, 2000). Chen and Martin (2015) stated that transformational learning only takes place when “an individual encounters learning situations powerful enough to elicit a reflective response that encompasses understanding of how sociocultural influences impact one’s worldview, thereby influencing the individual to challenge their personally dominant worldview” (p. 89). Participants shared that connecting with underrepresented groups from the community was both a powerful and engaging experience. The findings from this study highlight the importance for counseling programs to involve students in multicultural training that affords them opportunities to interact with people from diverse backgrounds.

The current research expands the counseling literature as participants spoke about the lack of diversity in their training programs and its perceived impact. “Here at the seminary I often interact with Christians while processing these things . . . it was nice to process these issues with people who do not have the same faith,” Bob shared. Participants acknowledged that most of their conversations at school were spent with
other students who identified as Christian, White, and often shared similar political interests. Moreover, their training relied heavily on textbooks and in-class discussions. These findings are consistent with current counselor education literature that encourages counselor educators to take a critical and more holistic look at the way counselor educators are preparing counseling students to reach multicultural competence (Kaplan et al., 2014; Ratts et al., 2016). The counseling literature and participants in this study agree that the single multicultural counseling course that often takes place in the traditional classroom setting may not be the best training model when preparing counseling students to work with clients from diverse backgrounds.

Participants shared that the social justice retreat setting was the most diverse setting that they had been a part of; not only in institutions of higher education but also in life. In the theme Admiration and Appreciation for Group Diversity participants described their admiration for the diversity in the room. While several participants recalled being taken back by walking into the large group room on the first day of the social justice retreat and noticing the diversity present, others described the power in the uncovering of their peers’ hidden identities as the retreat took shape. Jocelyn, for example, disclosed that she had never felt such “openness and love” in a training environment.” She described feeling “cracked open” by the emotional vulnerability that took place over the course of the two days. She shared that she was appreciative of the opportunity to sit with people from minority groups that she had minimal contact with prior to attending the social justice retreat.

In addition to the diversity present at the retreat, participants spoke specifically about having high regard for elders and indicated that their awareness that came as a
result of interacting with and learning about the experience of elders was a pleasant surprise. Participants also shared that they though that both the voice and presence of elders was missing in their counseling training programs. Nicole, for example, shared that through her interactions with elders at the retreat she discovered a hidden bias; she believed that social justice was of “interest to young people” and she discovered that “there are older people that are interested and are engaged in this work” too. Participants shared that elders carry with them significant histories and life lessons that are often overlooked. Learning the histories of various cultural group members and how language has changed over the years was valuable information to participants. In the review of the literature C. C. Lee (2019) stated that it is these personal encounters with people from diverse cultural backgrounds that allow people to step outside of their comfort zones and grow beyond stereotypes. Participants agreed with C. C. Lee (2019), indicating that it was in those most uncomfortable moments during the retreat, while sitting and connecting with those who were once strangers, that they learned the most about themselves and others.

**Engaging communities.** In addition to the cultural representation that was present in the room, participants shared that what enabled them to share openly and engage strong emotions and difficult dialogue was the sense of community and connection they felt throughout the 2-day retreat. One consistent narrative among participants was an appreciation that the training was free of charge for all participants. They were surprised to learn that the retreat was sponsored by several organizations in the community who were committed to expanding the mission of social justice.
Moreover, participants were impressed by the fact that all attendees willingly gave up their time to attend the social justice retreat; no one was required to be there.

In the theme Making Connections and Building Trust in Community, participants reported that the mere fact that their community members chose to be at the retreat automatically added a level of trust to the environment. During the focus group participants described feeling a sense of community at the social justice retreat. They shared that they felt more of a sense of community at the retreat than they typically felt when discussing social justice and multicultural issues in the traditional classroom setting. This was due, in part, to the fact that there was free will to share and participants attended on their own terms. For instance, Hop stated, “It’s exciting to be with a group of people who are willing to do this because they are moved to and to be better to one another. We weren’t required to be here. No one was forced to come.”

Along with being no cost to participants there was no known evaluative components to the social justice retreat. Subsequently, participants may have benefited from being away from the traditional classroom setting and free from evaluation. Like other retreat participants, they were not required to attend and were free to share without fear of being evaluated by their peers and faculty. This may have allowed research participants to engage more fully during the social justice retreat without fears of institutional or program consequences and repercussions.

In Chapter II, I unpacked the importance for counselor educators and counseling students to engage with their communities in order to prepare for the changing cultural landscape taking place across the United States. To be specific, the demographics in the United States are shifting and the once marginalized and underrepresented groups are
growing into the majority. Counselors must prepare to interact with and support diverse clients and do so from a place of understanding and respect (B. Y. Cartwright et al., 2008; Ratts & Wayman, 2015; Sue et al., 1992). The social justice retreat gave participants an opportunity to interact with people from across communities.

Engaging students with people who come from different cultural backgrounds in order to prepare them to work within a pluralistic society is not a new concept. Researchers have recommended field experiences and immersion experiences as a way to encourage students to interact with people who they may not otherwise (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Tomlinson-Claarke & Clarke, 2010; Vaughan, 2005). Immersion experiences stand on the underpinnings of Contact Hypothesis, or the belief that contact between divergent social groups is the best means of working to eliminate tensions and misunderstandings (R. Brown, 1995). Creating meaningful relationships with people from diverse backgrounds and directly experiencing different cultures are ways of complementing the knowledge acquired in traditional classroom settings (Sue & Sue, 2008). Tomlinson-Claarke and Clarke (2010) stated, “direct cross-cultural interactions expose participants to cultural realities of everyday life with the goal of increasing cultural competence” (p. 172). Multifaceted approaches to multicultural training that connect students with diverse communities provide opportunities for students to challenge their assumptions and biases with minimal distraction of personal and professional biases (Tomlinson-Claarke & Clarke, 2010).

The current findings align with the existing literature as participants shared that they were significantly moved and often brought to tears when they experienced their peers stretching to recognize the experiences of others and modeling what it looks like to
interact with others from a place of understanding and respect. Participants described feeling a sense of community and trust when someone was sharing a painful experience or describing what it meant to live in oppressed skin. While some struggled to relate, they were still seeking to understand. For example, Bob described an experience that took place in his caucus group when a woman was talking about her grandson who had just “come out” to her family. He explained:

There was a conversation we were having where a woman, her grandson just came out . . . so she was just so burdened and feeling like, she didn’t know what to do. . . . It was so sweet to see people just come forward and talk about what was important for them when they came out, or what they did that was really helpful when their friend came out.

Bob described this as a healing experience. It helped break down pain and biases he was holding on to as a result of living as a gay man and being harmed by others. In line with the Contact Hypothesis (R. Brown, 1995), Bob indicated that through contact with other participants who were seeking to understand the lived experience of others in the LGBTQQI community he experienced a renewed feeling of trust and respect among community members. Participants described similar experiences as they shared their own personal stories and listened to reflections from others.

The current study expanded multicultural training literature as the findings suggest that engaging students in a relatively short intensive training that encouraged and embraced cross-cultural interactions lead to positive outcomes. As previously mentioned, most of the multicultural training literature on engaging communities and connecting with diverse populations is rooted in service learning and immersion experiences (DeRicco & Sciarrà, 2005; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010; Vaughan, 2005). Facilitators of immersion experiences often give much thought to length of the immersion
in a different culture to allow participants to adjust to various factors including adverse conditions and culture shock (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). Few studies have captured the experiences of counseling students who have engaged in cross-cultural interactions over a short period of time, which was the setting for the social justice retreat in the current study. Participants disclosed that despite the relatively short training period, they were able to establish community and a level of safety and trust necessary to sit in critical reflection. Through critical self-reflection participants were able to challenge previously held assumptions and biases and reported leaving the retreat with increased self-awareness.

Kayla described the sense of community she felt over the two-day training, she stated, ”. . . I felt like we had community within that group for those two days. It felt really nice because I don’t often get a chance to be a part of the community. . . . Due to my living situation right now.” She recalled her time interacting with Black men who were curious to learn more about her lived experience as a White woman. She explained, “They were super cool . . . they just talked to me like, no big deal . . . I don’t know, I kind of expected maybe, like some kind of reaction or something like that . . . they were just open.” Throughout both interviews, Kayla also talked about strong emotions that surfaced for her as a result of interacting with a White man who was “unaware of his many privileges.” Kayla’s experiences mirrors those of other participants who described being surprised by how quickly they established a sense of trust and community during the social justice retreat. They shared that these connections afforded them opportunities to examine beliefs that they held about themselves and others. These findings suggest that connecting students with diverse groups through an intensive experiential training,
despite its time limitations, may lead to positive outcomes including increased awareness, increased cultural understanding, and an uncovering of assumptions and biases.

Engaging personal narratives. If counselors aspire to both support and advocate for their clients, conversations about social justice and multiculturalism are to remain at the forefront of the counseling profession (Dollarhide et al., 2018; Ratts et al., 2016). While conversations about social justice and multiculturalism remain a focus in the counseling profession, counseling programs fall short of investing adequate time engaging students in conversations and dialogue regarding the lived experiences of others (Duan & Brown, 2016; Pernell-Arnold et al., 2012; Pieterse et al., 2009; Ratts & Wood, 2011; Sue, 2011). Participants disclosed that while the social justice retreat activities added value, what they honored most was their time spent learning about the experiences of others. Participants indicated that prior to attending the social justice retreat they had some level of exposure to the language and topics that were discussed during the retreat. However, the material remained distant as they had limited personal relationships and interactions to bring to life their classroom discussions and readings. At the retreat, participants acknowledged that the retreat resulted in a transformative experience. Hearing stories and creating personal connections with those who shared their history and experiences of both pain and resilience brought to life classroom discussions and textbook readings. They could now personalize and apply their knowledge gained through their interactions with participants at the social justice retreat.

As discussed in the review of the literature, transformative learning is a constructivist theory that relies heavily on human communication (Taylor, 2007). As individuals interact with the world, they develop thoughts, feelings, and values based on
their experiences. Individuals use these thoughts, feelings, and values to form habitual ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, which play a key role in how they interact with others (Mezirow, 1997, 2003). Without interaction with and learning about the experiences of others from diverse backgrounds, people run the risk of adopting ethnocentric perspectives, or the tendency to view individuals outside of one’s cultural group as inferior (Mezirow, 1997). These realities speak to the significance of participants sharing stories and making personal connections throughout their time at the social justice retreat. While they entered the retreat with some level of understanding about the lived experiences of others, their multicultural classroom training was not adequate for the purpose of reshaping their worldviews and assumptions.

Participants shared that hearing stories from community members during the social justice retreat helped to create a deeper understanding of who they are in relationship to others. These findings connect closely with counseling literature that calls for counselors to have a keen understanding of who they are in relation to others (Chi-Ying Chung et al., 2011; Davis, 2012; Ratts et al., 2016). Moreover, Ratts et al. (2016) posited that it was imperative that counselors possess an understanding and awareness of their values, beliefs, and biases and were attuned to the clients’ worldviews and experiences. In the theme Power in the Story, participants described moments throughout the social justice retreat where their worldview and beliefs shifted as a result of hearing stories from other participants. These findings are consistent with other researchers who found that connecting students with people from different cultural backgrounds can help shift perspectives and break down assumptions about themselves and others (E. L. Brown, 2004; Pernell-Arnold et al., 2012; Prosek & Michel, 2016; Zygmunt et al., 2018).
For example, Cady described her experience hearing from her Black group members about how their names were given to them. She stated, “I knew this cognitively, but then hearing that every person that was black in my group, and came from where I came from, their name was given to them by a slave owner . . . that just kind of shocked me.” Hearing the stories behind a name through the Name Origin activity or learning about the daily fight for acceptance that others often engage in changed some of the long-held beliefs and assumptions for participants. Participants indicated that hearing stories directly out of the mouth from people who were “living it” was a both an eye-opening and life changing experience.

In spite of the growing attention, multiculturalism and social justice has received in the counseling profession (Constantine et al., 2007; Duan & Brown, 2016; Jun, 2010; C. C. Lee, 2019; Ratts et al., 2016), there is little research that captures the training modalities that may lead to shifts in students worldviews and assumption’s outside of service learning and immersion experiences. The findings from the current research expanded the counseling literature as it appeared that connecting with a diverse body of people in a social justice retreat environment may lead to a transformative experience (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2007) helping students to reshape old assumption’s and worldviews. Although participants were not immersed within a community for an extended period of time, a characteristic of most immersion experiences (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Prosek & Michel, 2016; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010; Zygmunt et al., 2018), they described leaving the retreat feeling closely connected to various community members and a greater understanding of the lived experiences of those who come from backgrounds that were different from their own.
Self-Awareness

**Increased awareness.** At the heart of becoming a multiculturally competent counselor is self-awareness (C. C. Lee, 2019; Ratts et al., 2016). The significance of self-awareness in counselor development is clearly outlined in the CACREP Standards. Specifically, standard 2(d) under social and cultural diversity states that a counselor understands the “impact of heritage, attitudes, beliefs, understandings, and acculturative experiences on an individual’s view of others” (Council for the Accredidation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2016, p. 82). In this research, a social justice retreat was designed using social justice education curriculum and activities. Subsequently, much time and attention was given to creating a judgement free environment where the voices of all participants could be honored and embraced without judgment (Adams et al., 2007; Bettendorf, 2016). In the theme Increased Awareness, participants described leaving the social justice retreat with more knowledge of their attitudes, beliefs, and biases than when they arrived. I found that participants were alarmed when they completed the Sociogram Activity and realized that the people they were most influenced by and spent the most time with shared their same or similar identities. Simply put, we risk spending the majority of our time with people who look, think, and identify as we do (Adams et al., 2007). The Sociogram Activity (see Appendix E) gave participants insight into their circles of influence and the lack of diversity within their circle.

One consequence of having limited diversity in our circles of influence is that biases go unchallenged, thus remain hidden. Counseling students remain unaware of their own racial and cultural privileges and may be ignorant to the various forms of
discrimination and prejudices that exist in public schools and mental health systems (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Zalaquett et al., 2008). During the analysis of the data, I found that participants entered the retreat believing that they were more aware and conscious of their biases than they realized. They were surprised when certain thoughts and feelings surfaced in response to an interaction or a conversation that took place during the retreat. These findings support the literature discussed in Chapter II which highlighted that a lack of critical self-awareness may result in an inflated sense of competence (B. Y. Cartwright et al., 2008). Participants shared with me that they arrived at the retreat feeling fairly knowledgeable and “awake” having taken their multicultural counseling course and on the brink of graduation. They left the retreat humbled and aware of the road left to travel on their journey towards multicultural competence.

Participants were surprised by how much they learned about themselves and others in a relatively short period of time. For instance, Rosa described being most impacted by learning about the experiences of those who identify in the LGBTQQI community. When summarizing her time at the retreat, she explained, “I thought I was very open and aware, but apparently I had some things in there . . . there were people . . . that have so much more knowledge about the topic and things that we don’t even think about, because we don’t come across it.” Bob echoed a similar message, stating, “I appreciate the retreat helping me . . . open my eyes to more of my biases, and realizing that just because I’ve gone through this training, in a counseling program, that I’m not bias free, and I am not . . . totally free from all biases that I’ve had.”

Throughout several of the themes that emerged from the data, participants shared that an aspect of the social justice retreat that helped to increase their awareness was
seeing how difficult dialogues were handled with care over the course of the retreat. The challenge of engaging in difficult dialogues in multicultural training courses from both a student and faculty perspective has been well documented in the counseling literature (Buckley & Foldy, 2010; Burton & Furr, 2014; Dunn et al., 2014; Estrada, 2015; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). Faculty often lack the training and experience required to facilitate these challenging discussions (Mitcham et al., 2013) and this contributes to contentious reactions when students are asked to examine personal biases and prejudices. The current findings expanded the counseling literature as participants shared that, through guided facilitation and modeling, they were able to stay engaged in conversation when they would normally pull away. Although future research is needed, these findings suggested that a social justice retreat may support counselor educators and counseling students in embracing challenging conversations around social justice and multicultural issues.

During interviews, participants described how they benefited from seeing how challenging dialogues were handled by facilitators. When a sensitive topic surfaced or someone in the room was triggered by a comment, participants were paying close attention to how it was supported by facilitators. Michelle, for instance, shared that her awareness increased when she noticed an “emotional escalation” within the crowd of participants when someone was talking. She shared:

Any little moment where I saw an emotional escalation in somebody . . . I get emotionally escalated, and sensitive to very specific things too based on like, how I feel I’ve been affected or impacted by marginalization or whatever . . . Whenever I see that emotion, like I saw with our group leader. I saw it with the (lead facilitator), at certain times, where like a small comment is made and there’s an immediate emotional escalation. That’s what impacts me the most when I see how . . . hurt people are by how this is all affecting them, and that it doesn’t take very much . . .
In addition, participants shared that their awareness increased when they saw facilitators challenge and hold difficult dialogues with retreat participants. Conversely, over the course of the research interviews, participants shared a multitude of examples when they felt that their instructors failed to hold safe and effective classroom conversations in the areas of social justice and multiculturalism in their counseling programs. The experiences described by research participants during interviews in the current study mirror the myriad of poor experiences described in the counseling literature from students who have sat in traditional multicultural counseling classrooms (Buckley & Foldy, 2010; Burton & Furr, 2014). Thus, it came as no surprise to learn that students appreciated observing challenging conversations take place during the social justice retreat.

Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010) reminded us that, when determining who was best suited to facilitate and attend multicultural training, representation matters. Regarding the social justice retreat, the racial-ethnic composition of both the participants and the facilitators was significant. The lead facilitator shared with participants that she was a woman who held several subordinated identities. Research participants shared that they benefited greatly from seeing her serve in the role of lead facilitator and stand up to the privileged voices in the room during the retreat. Several participants, who also identified as female, described being empowered by the lead facilitator who, on multiple occasions, confronted participants who attempted to use their privilege to tell her how she “should” think and feel in certain situations. Participants described being both enlightened and empowered, as women, to hear another woman speak up and speak out against injustice.
**Transformative learning experience.** Dyce and O’wusu-Ansah (2016) reported that transformational learning took place when students developed self-authorship for a better society and made meaning with different dimensions of awareness and understanding. Participants reported that transformational learning took place over the course of their time at the social justice retreat. As previously mentioned, through the process of engaging with others from various cultural backgrounds along with self-reflection, participants raised their awareness and reshaped their worldviews. This process, however, was no easy task. In my time connecting with participants following the retreat, they detailed engaging in an emotional experience during the retreat. In the theme An Emotional Journey, participants described sharing in a collective emotional experience ranging from feelings of guilt and pain to pride and joy.

Mezirow (2003) stated, “transformative learning involves critical reflection of assumptions that may occur either in group interaction or independently” (p. 61). The goal of transformative learning is to alter an individual’s frame of reference through critical reflection of one’s habits of mind and points of view (Mezirow, 1997; Moore, 2005). Furthermore, Mezirow (1997) suggested that, if learning was too comfortable for students, change in understanding was unlikely to occur and the transformation may do more harm than good. In order for a transformational learning experience to take place, students must engage in the uncomfortable and a safe and supportive environment must be established in order for them to do so. Transformational learning theory was described in more detail in Chapter I and II. In summary, Taylor (2007) suggested that transformational learning could result in an increase in self-confidence in new roles and
relationships, feelings of greater personal power and spiritual growth, and increased compassion for others.

Sitting in difficult emotions throughout the retreat contributed to what appeared to be transformational learning experiences for research participants. Jocelyn captured her emotional journey when she stated, “I feel like my little big heart is just being blown wide open, charged up, shattered and filled again. It’s exhausting in the best way.” She recalled listening to others describe how they had been hurt by others in positions of power. She explained,

I feel so emotional listening to the painful experiences of others that are sharing as well as thinking about my own. Feeding into the messages I’ve internalized, particularly around being a woman, and the biases, discriminations, and violence I’ve condoned and perpetuated by playing into and not refusing to accept it.

Jocelyn, along with other research participants, shared that she was challenged by retreat facilitators and her peers to fight the urge to withdrawal from conversations and, instead, lean into the discomfort and engage. She reported that her continued engagement resulted in a renewed trust in her community and a belief that her voice mattered. As a woman who identifies as queer and also raised in a family where she struggled to find support, Jocelyn found the retreat to be a place of both transformation and healing. She shared:

I disclosed I’m queer to my group, and the conversation that followed was so uncomfortable, but I enjoyed it in a really good way. People with strong religious affiliation, started processing their views and values regarding marriage between a man and a woman for the purpose of procreation. People were stretching and trying to expand their frameworks and I could see them making meaning which meant so much to me. Also, one person said, no matter who you love, Jesus loves you and you’re welcome in God’s house, which made me cry. I wish members of my family felt the same way.
Barriers to speaking up. Classroom conversations with a focus on race, language, sexuality, or intersectionality can be challenging for students and educators alike (Burton & Furr, 2014; Dunn et al., 2014). Developing multicultural awareness is often accompanied with feelings of discomfort, fear, anxiety, ambivalence, and anger (Abreu, 2001). These feelings can lead to student disengagement and ultimately result in a lack of critical self-awareness along with an inflated sense of competence (B. Y. Cartwright et al., 2008). Participants shared that they entered into the social justice retreat weekend with many of the same feelings as those documented in the counseling literature. In the subtheme Voice: Turn up the Volume, or Keep Quiet?, participants described their ambivalence around speaking up in the social justice retreat setting. Many were silenced by their perceived ignorance and incompetence around social justice related topics. Others described feeling unworthy of taking space from members of minority groups who had been or are currently oppressed and marginalized. At times, feelings of guilt and shame stood in the way from participants saying what they wanted to say, when they wanted to say it. These findings are consistent with the experiences of other counseling students who reported similar struggles when engaging in multicultural counseling courses, and immersion experiences (King, Borders, & Jones, 2019). However, the current research adds an important component to what is known about multicultural training. It appears that the social justice retreat setting offered an opportunity for counseling students to move through difficult emotions and the accompanying paralyzing thoughts that often keep them stuck and fearful of pressing forward in multicultural and social justice training. Participants shared that what separated their experiences at the social justice retreat from their time spent in
multicultural counseling courses in traditional classroom settings is the feeling of safety they experienced during the retreat. This feeling created a level of comfort which allowed them to stay engaged and challenge the barriers that often stand in the way of staying actively involved in tackling difficult conversations around social justice and multicultural issues.

Jocelyn described how difficult it was for her to speak-up at the retreat due to not wanting to take space away from people of color. She stated,

In a room, where there’s a lot of people of color, I need to step back . . . I feel that really strongly. I need to step back and listen, listen to everything, notice my defenses, notice when I want to be like, but it’s not me, you know. I just really need to sit back and listen and feel, feel into what people are saying.

Michelle described a similar struggle where she found herself disengaged and holding back at times. She explained, “For whatever reason, I dropped into that role of listening, then engaging, and I’m not sure if perhaps I could have gotten more from it if I had . . . been a little more open and vulnerable . . . I just felt like I was holding back.”

Both Jocelyn and Michelle commented that while, at times, they were hesitant to take up space by sharing their thoughts and feelings with others, their interactions with retreat participants and witnessing the interactions of others helped to breakdown damaging internal messages and feelings of guilt and shame. They returned on the second day of the retreat feeling more confident to speak up and share their thoughts, no matter who was in the room. They both described leaving the retreat and returning to their communities with increased confidence in using their voices to call out injustices. Michelle, in particular, shared that she had used her increased confidence to dialogue with her family and challenge her parents long-held views on issues of discrimination and oppression.
Similarly, Lorraine described how the retreat helped her breakdown messages that her voice did not belong with people of color. Prior to attending the social justice retreat she held back from sharing her thoughts and feelings with people of color, fearing that she may dominate the conversation. She shared:

I think the thing that shifted at the retreat was that before I was interested and aware and wanting to have those conversations, but I didn’t necessarily know how . . . I always questioned if it was a conversation I was allowed to be part of . . . like with close friends of mine that are people of color and just never wanting to take over . . . I think being at the retreat with such a diverse set of people . . . I don’t know what the numbers were, but it almost felt like there were fewer white people than not, which was really amazing, and everyone there wanted to hear everyone else’s voice.

Desire for Enhanced Social Justice and Multicultural Training

The findings in the current study highlight counseling students desire for the inclusion of more social justice and multicultural training in counseling programs. In the theme Desire for Prolonged and Advanced Social Justice training, participants spoke emphatically about their desire for more training around inclusion and diversity. Despite giving up their weekend to attend the retreat and shelving their personal and student responsibilities, participants expressed that they wished the social justice retreat were longer. A two-day retreat was not enough time for them to engage their peers at the level they desired, leaving participants with a feeling of unfinished business.

It is no secret that becoming a multiculturally competent counselor requires much training (Abreu, 2001; Atkins et al., 2017; Carter, 2003; Ratts et al., 2016; Sue et al., 1992) and is an ongoing process (B. Y. Cartwright et al., 2008; Ratts et al., 2016). C. C. Lee (2019) stated that counselors must continue to “immerse themselves in their communities to learn how power, privilege, and oppression influence their experiences”
As previously documented, participants entered the retreat with feelings of ambivalence and uncertainty. Most had never attended a social justice retreat and were unsure of what to expect. Participants described being overwhelmed with fear and anxiety, not knowing how they might be impacted both cognitively and emotionally. Participants also described entering into the retreat with residual and ruminating thoughts and feelings stemming from their required multicultural training course. Some participants experienced pain and discomfort in their multicultural training course due to poor instructor facilitation while others described feeling unprepared due to various factors including lack of diverse perspectives. These experiences were not unique to the researcher participants in this study as other counseling students have described similar experiences (Burton & Furr, 2014; D.W. Sue et al., 2009).

Although some participants reported having painful experiences in their multicultural counseling courses, they reflected on their time at the social justice retreat and shared that they wished their time would have been extended to allow for more personal exploration and to sit with others who come from diverse cultural backgrounds. Several participants expressed that they wished that the retreat had been more emotionally charged and were looking forward to pursuing similar trainings in the future. Participants shared that what separated the social justice retreat from their previous classroom experiences was the level of safety present in the social justice retreat environment. They appreciated the time spent creating a safe environment and facilitators who were better equipped to negotiate challenging dialogue. Participants found trust among their peers which afforded them opportunities to make authentic connections. This resulted in a desire for research participants to attend more trainings of a similar nature.
Nicole, for example, shared that she wished that conversations that took place at the retreat could “go deeper” and that she could enter into these conversations on more of an “emotional level.” When asked what a more emotionally advanced retreat would look like she referenced the movie *The Color of Fear*, which is often used to compliment the training that takes place in traditional classroom multicultural counseling courses in counselor training programs. Similarly, Jocelyn disclosed that she wanted “more time” so that the conversations could go to the next level. She described being “cracked open” emotionally and then having to disperse from the retreat without opportunities to “go deeper.” She stated, “I just wanted one more day to . . . make it go even deeper.”

King et al. (2019) captured the role that emotions played in the development of multicultural counseling competence. Emotions are described as neither good nor bad but rather a necessary component for MCC growth. Facilitators can foster growth by facilitating open discussion and describing the importance of these emotions (King et al., 2019). Participants described feeling supported in their emotional experience during the retreat. Subsequently, I found that participants expressed a desire for a more in depth and emotionally charged social justice training.

As part of the social justice competencies discussed in Chapter II, Constantine et al. (2007) challenged counselors to develop advocacy skills in order to inspire change within institutional, neighborhood, and community settings. In a similar light, the current findings reveal that participants desire more social justice training, so they are better prepared to advocate for clients at all levels. Hop, for example, indicated that she desired more social justice training. As a school counselor working in a school with a large
percentage of minority youth, she could have used more time to learn how to advocate for her students. She explained:

But how do I, how do I do this better? How do I advocate better? How do I, how do I ask questions? How do I get involved without offending? And not even offending, like, what’s the right word? . . . I don’t want to be condescending, I don’t want to be like, I feel sorry for you so let me get involved here . . . I really want to say, how can we, the white people that do see that there is a problem, the white people with privilege or actually any race that has privilege, anyone who has privilege, how can we get involved and make a difference without, I feel like sometimes we make it worse . . .

Likewise, Cady expressed a desire for more training so that she could take her knowledge to the “next level” and advocate for clients at the institutional level. She stated, “I’ve got the basic toolbox to continue my own personal reflection. Now, how do I take this . . . inside myself and externalize it and bring it into the workplace, or my town, or my group or person I’m presenting to, something like that.” The findings revealed that as participants’ self-awareness increased so did their desire to advocate for and on behalf of their clients. The social justice retreat curriculum and format allowed for brief conversations around what it means to be an advocate and ally. Participant responses indicated that they longed for advanced and prolonged training where these topics could be discussed and processed.

It is important to note that eight of the 10 participants endorsed the theme Desire for Prolonged and Advanced Social Justice Training. Michelle and Kayla did not endorse this theme. Kayla described having a healthy exposure to social justice and multicultural related trainings prior to attending the retreat. She also communicated that she found the social justice retreat as more of a “refresher” training, she reported that she was familiar with many of the topics and activities introduced during the social justice retreat. Both Kayla and Michelle described painful experiences in previous multicultural trainings.
These experiences are described in the research participant introductions section in Chapter IV. Throughout participant interviews both Kayla and Michelle described how these previous experiences played a critical role in how they entered into the social justice retreat. In summary, both described being sensitive to and fearful of multicultural and social justice training environments due to the poor quality of facilitation which resulted in unwarranted and unsolicited painful experiences. These factors may have played a role in both participants not endorsing the theme Desire for Prolonged and Advanced Social Justice Training as they may not have full trust and confidence in these spaces and, more specifically, the facilitators who are responsible for making these environments welcoming for all participants.

**Advocacy Through Action**

Research participants endorsed the theme Advocacy and Action. C. C. Lee (2019) argued that the role of the counselor has shifted, and counselors are called to “intervene with, and on behalf of, clients at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, public policy, and global levels” (p. 274). Participants expressed a desire to respond to Lee’s call by advocating for clients by speaking out and taking action against injustice on multiple levels. Participants described leaving the social justice retreat with a renewed and increased confidence in calling out the injustices taking place in their communities and the systems in which they are situated.

Multicultural and social justice competent counselors understand the importance of social justice advocacy (C. C. Lee, 2019; Ratts et al., 2016). Participants described leaving the retreat and returning to their homes and places of work with a desire to advocate for their clients and people who were being harmed by those in positions of
power. Participants indicated that the interactions and knowledge from the social justice retreat resulted in increased confidence when confronting injustices. Hop, stated, “I think that I’m more confident as an advocate . . . I think I’m more confident to kind of step out of my comfort zone when I hear something that doesn’t seem right.” She described an experience where she confronted a close friend who made an insensitive comment about a person who identified with a minority cultural group. Hop reported that prior to attending the social justice retreat she would not have had the language nor the confidence to confront her close friend.

Comparably, Lorraine shared that she left the social justice retreat with a renewed confidence in her voice and a willingness to step into conversations that she would normally shy away from. She was raised in a home by parents who endorsed conservative Christian views. She described having difficulties being heard, especially when she brought up matters relating to social justice and the inequalities that exist in the community. She described how the social justice retreat gave her tools to advocate for herself and others. She was able to take her knowledge and apply it to conversations with her parents. She explained, “I’ve noticed even in my personal relationships, for instance, with my parents . . . a lot of what I’ve learned is impacting how I approach those conversations with them. I come from a very conservative Christian background, and some conversations around diversity haven’t been well received in the past. But I’ve been able to . . . develop in my own maturity and being able to set myself aside and approach it from a more calling them in rather than out.”

In addition to calling out injustice, participants left the retreat with motivation to take action and get involved in their communities. In the weeks in-between the social
justice retreat and connecting with participants for interviews, several participants had already taken action in their communities. Rosie, for instance, played a key role in the facilitation of an event that took place on her graduate school campus that gathered both faculty and students to talk about the lack of inclusion and diversity on campus. Likewise, Rosa described how she incorporated an activity from the retreat, the Card Activity, and implemented it into her middle school classroom.

Lorraine was responsible for facilitating social justice workshops for middle school students through a program coordinated by her counseling program. She used activities and interactions that stemmed from her time at the social justice retreat to revamp the curriculum for the workshops. She described the impact that the retreat had on her time facilitating the workshops after the updated curriculum. She stated,

I think it would have been a train wreck before the retreat. I had all the information, but at the social justice retreat I got to see what to do with it in a group of people who are diverse and some who were very well-educated and some not so much, in the contexts of multiculturalism.

Perhaps one of the most significant findings in the current research as it relates to advocacy was that participants expressed a desire to engage in similar trainings and seek out opportunities to connect with others who come from different diverse cultural backgrounds while also uncovering their hidden biases and blind spots. Michelle, for example, when describing her action plan stated, “I hope to engage in more of this retreat style format stuff . . . if I’m seeing this going on, not even just in our community, but making an effort to. . . be thinking about social justice work and multicultural work when I’m looking at . . . what would be a valuable continuing education conference or retreat that I can attend to make sure that that’s very much incorporated into whatever I’m . . . choosing to put my money towards when it comes to those credits that we need, right.”
Jocelyn stated that she would like to continue the work that she started at the retreat. Her action plan included continuing education where she could be challenged but also communicate love and understanding to others. She explained, “My activism will come a place of love and acceptance and non-judgment. Not the divisiveness and shaming that I’ve experienced other activists do.” She described a desire to attend social justice retreats in her near future. She stated,

I would like to continue going to retreats like (this) and just keep the work alive, keep it fresh . . . I fully intend to use the topics of conversations that came up in the social justice retreat . . . I just love the issues that were addressed and to continue incorporating that into, not only my professional life, but my personal life . . . I fully intend to do that, and I have been.

Participants’ commitment to engage in future trainings supported C. C. Lee’s (2019) challenge to counselors to act as agents of change by working in communities to better understand the attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, and biases that affect client well-being. Furthermore, counselors who were willing to stay engaged in continuing education in the areas of social justice and multiculturalism were more likely to develop a better understanding of the different ways that power, privilege, oppression, and social group statuses shape the counseling relationship, while also gaining insight into what multicultural and social justice approaches are necessary to best support clients (Ratts et al., 2016).

Although there is an increased call for advocacy efforts in the field of counseling, there is little research on the topic (Jones, Sander, & Booker, 2013; Ratts & Hutchins, 2009). Minimal research exists that captures how to motivate counseling students to engage in advocacy efforts. The current findings extend the current counseling literature as it highlights a social justice retreat as one training modality that may motivate and
encourage counseling students to engage in social justice advocacy. Jones et al. (2013) introduced a problem-solving approach to advocacy that included:

(1) Defining the “problem,” (2) Assessing the frequency/intensity of the problem, (3) Developing a measurable goal, (4) Developing an action plan, (5) Implementing the plan, and (6) Evaluation outcomes. (p. 20)

The social justice retreat appeared to address steps one and two in the problem-solving approach model. Through interactions with various community members during the retreat, research participants gained greater awareness and insight into “the problems” taking place in their communities. Greater knowledge about the struggles different groups are facing due to oppression and marginalization aligns with step one in the advocacy problem-solving approach model (Jones et al., 2013). As participants moved through retreat activities and large group discussions, they described making connections through a community of shared experience. They gained greater insight into the depth and breadth of struggles that groups of people were facing in their communities and navigating various systems. This contributed to assessing the frequency and intensity of the problem, step two in the problem-solving approach model (Jones et al., 2013). Participants described a desire to advocate and to do more in their communities as a result of having made a personal connection at the social justice retreat. They now had a personal connection with someone who was being treated unfairly and were willing to use their privilege to make change.

Due to time limitations, participants engaged in a brief activity that focused on creating goals and an action plan (see Appendix E), steps three and four of the problem-solving approach to advocacy (Jones et al., 2013). They were given time to think about and process how they will take what they learned from the social justice retreat and use it
to implement change in their communities. During interviews, several participants described wanting to know how to better advocate. How to use their influences to inspire individual, community, and institutional changes. Cady, for example, described feeling ill-prepared to tackle community and institutional change. She shared that she was growing more confident in advocating for her individual clients, but still feeling “lost” when taking her voice to the community and institutional level. These findings are consistent with current literature that suggest that the field of counseling has failed to articulate how to put social justice advocacy into action (Field & Baker, 2004; Nilsson & Schmidt, 2005; Ratts & Hutchins, 2009). Moreover, it appears that the current findings confirm that although advocacy remains a goal for current and future counselors (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009; Ratts et al., 2016), counseling programs fall short of preparing and motivating counseling students to engage in advocacy work.

Implications for Practice

In the current research, the experiences and perceptions of counselor education students who attended a social justice retreat was captured through interviews and journal entries. Now that the participants experiences have been thoroughly analyzed and discussed, the implications for practice are explored below. The most significant implications of the current research are for students, counselor educators, clinical supervisors, curriculum designers, and members of the counseling profession. In the section that follows, implications underscore how a social justice retreat can be used to advance the current state of multicultural and social justice training in counseling programs. Implications for counselor educators attending and working with community members to develop a social justice retreat are given. Lastly, implications for supervisors,
strengthening the voice of counseling students through feminist models of supervisions is discussed.

Multicultural and Social Justice Pedagogy and Curriculum Design

The findings in the current research support a need for enhanced multicultural and social justice training in counseling programs. Throughout interviews participants described being negatively impacted, if not harmed, by experiences in their required multicultural counseling courses. These experiences mirrored those documented in the counseling literature which suggest that the field of counselor education is missing its mark on providing quality multicultural counseling training experiences for counseling students (King et al., 2019; C. C. Lee, 2019; Seward, 2014). Bemak and Chung (2007) posited that counseling programs have had an opportunity to uncover blind spots and challenge personal biases yet failed to do so. Counseling programs fell short of giving multicultural training the attention it deserved (Bemak & Chung, 2007). As a result, counseling students often left counseling programs ill-prepared to work with clients from various cultural backgrounds.

Seward (2014) found that students of color often felt misunderstood in their multicultural counseling courses. Moreover, these same students reported feeling responsible for representing and speaking for their cultural group (Seward, 2014). White students did not fare much better, reporting feeling targeted by peers, shame towards their privilege, and ultimately overwhelmed by the course (Pieterse, Lee, & Fetzer, 2015). Counseling programs remain predominantly White spaces. Until the diversity within counseling programs at both the student and faculty level reflect the communities which
we reside, counseling programs must search for creative ways to connect students with diverse populations.

The current findings suggest that a social justice retreat may serve as a compliment to current counselor education multicultural and social justice counseling curriculum. Participants described having their biases and assumptions challenged through facilitated activities and dialogue. While they were overwhelmed with many of the same feelings and thoughts that surfaced in their traditional classroom settings, the safety created in the retreat environment along with the face-to-face engagement with community members allowed them to lean into their discomfort in place of pulling away. Participants stated that the social justice retreat brought the theories and classroom discussions to life. They now had a living person to connect their knowledge to, and this knowledge allowed them to shift their long-held beliefs and worldviews. For many, the social justice retreat was the most diverse space they had navigated. For two days, they traded stories and shared emotions with people from diverse identities they had never connected with before.

In addition to connecting with a diverse population, participants may have benefited from a multicultural training environment that was free from the evaluative nature commonly found in a traditional multicultural classroom learning environment. There were no evaluative components to the social justice retreat; participants could participate without worry of being evaluated by program faculty and peers. This may have afforded participants the opportunity to engage more fully in the retreat without the potential thoughts and feelings that may surface as a result of being evaluated in the traditional classroom setting.
Decision makers within counseling programs may wish to consider working with community members and social justice advocates alike to develop a community social justice retreat. Counseling programs, in conjunction with and support of community members could work to host a social justice retreat. This retreat could, in turn, serve as an integral part of the counseling programs curriculum. Advanced counseling students could support faculty in creating community partnerships and the recruitment of small and large group facilitators for the retreat. Both faculty and counseling students may benefit from attending the retreat alongside other members of the campus and neighboring communities. Given the findings in the current research, an increase in trust and a sense of community are likely outcomes should faculty chose to enter into a social justice retreat space with their peers and students.

Lastly, participants indicated that they appreciated hearing stories from other participants. They benefited from learning about each other’s cultural histories and areas where their lives both intersected and differentiated. Participants in this study described having a vastly different experience when on campus and sitting in their multicultural counseling course. They indicated that there simply isn’t enough time built into the current structure of counseling programs to get to know their peers, especially from a multicultural lens. Counselor educators may wish to consider making time in their courses to allow for space for students to learn about each other to a greater depth. The current findings revealed that activities from the social justice retreat lead to sharing beyond surface level. This came as a surprise to participants. Specifically, the Name Origins activity and the Where I Am From Poem are two activities that were used during the social justice retreat that may integrate into existing multicultural counseling
curricula. These activities, and others, may allow counseling students and counseling faculty an opportunity to explore their cultural histories to a greater depth in traditional classroom settings.

**Counselor Educators**

The findings from the current research have implications for counselor educators. Vera and Speight (2003) suggested that counselor educators have been challenged to show their commitment to a social justice perspective through the training of the next generation of counseling professionals. However, this was no easy task considering that most counselor educators were not adequately prepared to do so (Mitcham et al., 2013). As previously discussed, educators in counseling programs are often asked to teach multicultural counseling courses with minimal training and having had limited engagement with the materials they are asked to teach. Furthermore, educators often lack the skills necessary to facilitate the challenging and intense dialogue that accompanies conversations around multicultural and social justice issues (Mitcham et al., 2013).

Participants described the hurt and pain that often surfaced as a result of thrusting counselor educators into a position that they were ill prepared for. If counseling programs are to take the next step in leading counselors down a path towards cultural competence, it is imperative that counseling programs arm its educators with the tools and skills required to do so. A social justice retreat may be one resource that counseling programs may consider when considering how best to equip counselor educators to step into multicultural counseling classrooms. Participants shared that a powerful part of their experience was seeing how difficult conversations and interactions were handled by trained facilitators. During the social justice retreat, they described being both challenged
and supported while engaging in difficult conversations with peers. Historically, these were conversations that participants described as awkward due to poor facilitation. There was reason to believe that counselor educators could also benefit from being positioned at the heart of these challenging dialogues and watching how these conversations are navigated by facilitators who have much experience and a passion for negotiating difficult dialogue.

It is increasingly more important that counselor educators have engaged in their own process of critical self-reflection before being leading students through a multicultural classroom or closely related experience. Put simply, counselor educators must do their own work before asking students to do theirs. Counselor educators may benefit from a weekend long intensive training format where they are encouraged to interact with participants through facilitated small and large group experiential activities. Counselor educators would be invited and encouraged to engage in storytelling and also construct knowledge and meaning on issues related to diversity and inclusion through short presentations and group discussion. It is an assumption that counselor educators, like other participants, enter into the retreat with knowledge and life experience relating to social justice. Therefore, the retreat would introduce to some and refresh for others the concepts of social justice. Counselor educators would be challenged and inspired to take the next step in their journey to serving as agents of change and creating more socially just communities. Challenging dialogues are seen as both vital and necessary to aid in the transformative learning process and trained facilitators are on site to guide retreat participants through these interactions.
In conjunction with modeling how to hold difficult conversations, a social justice retreat may allow counselor educators a space to examine their own biases and assumptions related to multicultural and social justice issues while sharing their life experiences with others. Participants reported that the social justice was a transformative experience. The setting allowed them to challenge their worldviews while connecting with others. Participants attended the social justice retreat voluntarily. This allowed participants to embrace critical self-reflection without the pressures to perform or being evaluated by faculty. Additionally, unlike a traditional classroom environment, participants were screened prior to the start of the retreat which likely increased the degree to which participants were willing to engage in the learning process. Research participants shared that the environment of learners committed to improving social justice helped to create a sense of trust and connection within the community. There is reason to believe that counselor educators who attend a social justice retreat could experience these same or similar benefits. As noted earlier, counseling students and counselor educators who attend a social justice retreat together may result in the same feeling of increased trust and sense of community that participants described in the current research.

Research participants shared that they benefited greatly from the self-disclosure that was shared during the social justice retreat. These disclosures came from both social justice retreat participants and facilitators. The current findings demonstrate the benefit of appropriate and transparent self-disclosure in the classroom when broaching topics related to social justice or multiculturalism. It is has become increasingly important that counselor educators have attended a social justice retreat or similar experience so that
they are able to model appropriate and transparent self-disclosure in their multicultural counseling classrooms.

The current findings suggest that students may benefit from including experiential activities into the multicultural counseling classroom. Participants shared that activities such as the Name Origins Activity, Card Activity, Sociogram, and the Where I am From Poem were all powerful and rewarding exercises. There is reason to believe that these activities could be incorporated into a classroom setting if done with consideration and intentionality. It is important, however, that counselor educators are willing and able to embrace both the emotions and dialogue that often surface when engaging these activities. This, again, highlights the importance for counselor educators to sit through each activity as a participant before serving in the facilitator role.

**Supervisors: A Feminist Approach**

In addition to providing implications for counseling pedagogy, the current findings provide insight into how supervisors may support counseling students in strengthening their voice and advocacy efforts. In the current study, participants acknowledged that they struggled to share their thoughts and feelings at different times during the retreat. This was due, in part, to feelings of guilt and shame around their dominant identities. As previously stated, most participants identified as White and female. Subsequently, participants acknowledged feelings of guilt and shame around taking up space when situated in a room with people of color. Participants shared that identifying as a woman also played a role in choosing whether or not to speak-up and speak out in conversations during the social justice retreat. They described wrestling with thoughts and feelings that have resulted from painful interactions with men and others
with an abundance of privileged identities who minimized and dismissed their voices. This has led to internalized oppression and, ultimately, turning down the volume of their voice.

Counseling students, particularly those from marginalized identities, may benefit from supervisors who adopt theories and ideologies that place high value on the voice of the supervisee in the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Simply put, counseling supervisors may play a critical role in turning up the volume to the voices of women and other cultural groups who have been historically oppressed. Supervisors might consider adopting a feminist, or closely related, approach to supervision with counselors in training. Feminist supervision is a supervision approach that pays specific attention to the voice of the supervisee (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Gizara & Forrest, 2004; Szymanski, 2005). Supervisors who operate from feminist informed ideology give maximum voice to the supervisee (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Supervisors are mindful about the power differences that exist in the supervisory relationship and will often withhold giving directives to supervisees, instead opting for a collaborative effort and encouraging autonomy.

Feminist supervision models lend themselves to work with people from all cultural backgrounds (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Szymanski, 2005). Emphasis is placed on allowing the supervisee’s voice to be both heard and affirmed. This goal fits with the current findings as participants who identified as female shared that they struggled to find their voice. While situating counseling students in cross-cultural supervision relationships may be ideal, it may also be an unrealistic goal given the lack of diversity in counseling programs and in the counseling profession as a whole. Until cross-cultural supervision is
more readily available in the counseling profession, feminist and closely related approaches to supervision may help counseling students increase confidence and turn up the volume to their voices.

**Considerations**

There were several considerations in this study that were important to consider. In the following section, the considerations of the current research are discussed. Efforts made to reduce these considerations are noted as well when applicable. These considerations may be considered limitations, however; there are multiple sides to the argument. What may appear to be a limitation may have ultimately benefited the current research. Foremost, participants in the current study reflected a homogenous group in reference to gender; 90% of participants identified as female. Similarly, very few participants identified as ethnic minorities given that 70% of participants identified as Caucasian. Two of the 10 participants identified as LGBTQI. As a result, voices from minority communities were underrepresented in the current research. While the research may have benefited from more diverse voices, the participant demographics were representative of the counseling profession which is predominantly White and female.

Time commitment should be considered in the current study. In order to capture a thorough understanding of counselor education students experience and perceptions at a social justice retreat, participants were asked to attend a two-day, intensive experiential training and multiple data collection efforts were implemented. Participants kept a participant journal while they attended the retreat, participated in two individual interviews, and were invited to a focus group. The intense nature of a social justice retreat along with the time and energy required to serve in the research may have contributed to
fatigue for participants. Conversely, the research design contributed to prolonged engagement with research participants, affording opportunities for me to interact with participants in different environments and through various means. In order to honor participants' time and promote trustworthiness, efforts were made to reduce participant contact and collect information in a timely and effective manner.

The inclusion criteria for this study required participants to be: (a) actively enrolled as a counseling student in a CACREP-accredited institution and (b) have taken and passed the required multicultural counseling course (or equivalent) for their counseling program. Several potential research participants expressed interest in participating in both the social justice retreat and the current research study but were not eligible to participate in the study as they had not yet taken and passed their required multicultural counseling course. These students were encouraged and welcome to attend the social justice retreat although they were not able to participate in the research. The inclusion criteria, while also having benefits, reduced the number of potential participants qualified to participate in the study.

Lastly, I served as the primary researcher and also as a co-facilitator during the social justice retreat. Participants' exposure to me, as a retreat facilitator, may have influenced how they responded to interview questions as I also served as the sole interviewer. As previously noted, efforts were taken to minimize the threat to the reliability to include: full disclosure on informed consent, minimal researcher-participant contact throughout social the social justice retreat, audit trail, and member checks. Nonetheless, participants may have responded to questions in a socially desirable
manner. Future researchers may consider replicating the current study with exclusive roles established for researchers and retreat facilitators.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

This research was one of the first in the field of counseling to capture the experiences of counseling students who engaged in a social justice retreat. There remains more to discover regarding how experiential and social justice education may be used in counselor training programs to increase multicultural competency in counseling students. To this end, suggestions for future research are given.

First, replicating the current study with a more diverse body of participants may help to provide a richer picture of the experiences and perceptions of counseling students who attend a social justice retreat. As previously mentioned, the current study yielded a fairly homogenous group of participants. Including more participants from historically underrepresented identities, such as LGBTQQI, ethnic minorities, youth, and women will add to the current research. Also, in line with social justice principles, including more minority participants will turn up the volume of voices that have been largely missing in the counselor education literature.

Second, throughout research interviews participants shared both positive and painful experiences as a result of their engagement with faculty and peers in their required multicultural counseling course. Participants who described having a poor experience indicated that their professor was not equipped with the skills necessary to teach the course. Specifically, participants reported that their professor shied away from engaging in difficult dialogue which contributed to an unsafe and awkward learning environment. These findings appear to support the work by Mitcham et al. (2013) who
found that counselor educators are often required to teach at least one multicultural counseling course with little to no training on how to effectively do so. This often results in increased anxiety and ambivalence for both the professor and the counselors in training (Mitcham et al., 2013). As previously noted, it can be challenging, at best, for a counselor educator who is triggered in class by a student’s response to single-handedly facilitate a safe space for students.

Research is warranted to learn better approaches to prepare counselor educators to teach multicultural and social justice courses. Research should be conducted with counselor educators to explore whether or not a social justice retreat environment could help foster self-awareness and model the facilitation skills required to be successful in a multicultural or social justice training course. A group of counselor educators could be invited to a community social justice retreat and a similar research framework could be applied to explore counselor educators’ experiences and perceptions while attending an intensive social justice training.

Finally, this study was conducted by exploring counseling students experience at a social justice retreat. Data was captured during and shortly after the retreat had concluded. Participants expressed increased awareness and a desired to engage in social justice advocacy in response to their participation in the retreat. A research model that supports future inquiry may allow counseling students to share their insights and perceptions regarding changes to their lives and multicultural competence months or years after attending the social justice retreat. This information may support counselor training programs in designing curriculum and training opportunities that best support students in both their immediate and long-term counseling careers.
Summary

The current research is one of the first to capture the experience and perceptions of counselor education students who attend an intensive social justice retreat. Through multiple sources of data collection, including two interviews, a focus group, and a participant journal seven themes, and one subtheme emerged from the data. As a result of the findings I found several implications for practice that could potentially benefit students, counselor educators, clinical supervisors, curriculum designers, and members of the counseling profession.

Findings suggest that a social justice retreat could be used to enhance the current state of multicultural training. Furthermore, staff and counselor educators may benefit from working alongside community members to develop and attend a social justice retreat. Findings suggest that an increase in self-awareness, trust within community, and a desire to advocate for clients are a few potential benefits that ascend from engaging in an intensive social justice retreat experience. Lastly, findings suggested that counseling students could use additional support in finding and increasing confidence in their voices. Feminist supervision approaches were offered as one avenue to explore to support counseling students in doing so.

Becoming a multiculturally competent counselor is a lifelong journey that requires a lifelong commitment (Ratts et al., 2016). It would be important that research in the field of counseling continues to explore ways to enhance multicultural training in order to best support counseling students along their paths to becoming multiculturally competent counselors. Future research could be conducted with a more diverse pool of participants to better capture the experiences and voices of minorities who attend a social
justice retreat. Second, research that explores the experiences of counselor educators who attend a social justice retreat is warranted. This may shed light on improving training that prepares counselor educators to step into multicultural counseling classrooms. Lastly, a similar research design to the current study that captures the experiences of counseling students months or even years down the road may speak to long-term implications of a social justice retreat training format.

To the research participants; Bob, Cady, Hop, Jocelyn, Kayla, Lorraine, Michelle, Nicole, Rosa, and Rosie, thank you. You stepped out of your place of comfort and into your brave space. Because of your courage, sacrifice, and willingness to share your story we, the counseling profession, have benefited. Your courage, time, and commitment to this research is not in vain. If you are a representation of our future, the counseling profession; on solid rock we stand.
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APPENDIX A

FIRST INTERVIEW QUESTION
First Interview Questions

Introduction Reminders (Creswell, 2016):

- Introduce self
- Discuss the purpose of the study
- Get informed consent signature
- Provide structure of the interview (audio recording, taking notes)
- Ask if interviewee has questions
- Define any terms necessary

Basic Interview Information

Time of interview: ______________________
Date: _________________________________
Place: ________________________________
Interviewer: __________________________
Interviewee: __________________________
Position of interviewee: ________________
Recording/storing information about interview: __________________________

Semi-structured Interview Content Questions

1. Tell me about your desire to join the counseling profession. (ice breaker)

2. Describe your multicultural training experience prior to participating in the social retreat.
   Probes: Tell me more. Please explain.

3. Please describe your experience at the social justice retreat.
   Probes: Tell me more. Please explain.

4. How might your experience at the social justice retreat impact your ability to provide counseling to clients who have a different cultural background than your own?
   Probes: Tell me more. Please explain.

5. What, if anything, did you learn about yourself through your participation in the social justice retreat?
   Probes: Tell me more. Please explain.

6. What, if anything, did you learn about others who come from different cultural backgrounds through your participation in the social justice retreat?
   Probes: Tell me more. Please explain.
7. As you reflect on your experiences, which of these experiences would you consider most significant to you? Tell me a story about these experiences. *Probes: Tell me more. Please explain.*

8. What factors about your experiences were most important to you as a counselor in training? *Probes: Tell me more. Please explain.*

9. After some time has passed what, if anything, was significant about your experience? *Probes: Tell me more. Please explain.*

10. What retreat conversations were most impactful to you? *Probes: Tell me more. Please explain.*

11. What would you have changed about your social justice retreat experience?
   a. What would have helped to improve your social justice retreat experience? *Probes: Tell me more. Please explain.*
   b. What additional information would you like to share about your time at the retreat? *Probes: Tell me more. Please explain.*

**Closing Instructions** (Creswell, 2016):

- Thank the individual for participating
- Assure individual of confidentiality
- Reminder about 2nd interview and focus group
- If asked, comment on how interviewee will receive results of the study
APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
DATE: January 4, 2019

TO: Aaron Henderson, MA Clinical Counseling
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB


SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: January 4, 2019

EXPIRATION DATE: January 4, 2023

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Morse at 970-351-1910 or nicole.morse@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB’s records.
APPENDIX C

SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP RETREAT APPLICATION
You are invited to participate in the Colorado Springs social justice leadership retreat, to be held from **February 1 (5:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.)-February 2 (9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.), 2019** in Colorado Springs, Colorado. We are looking for up to 100 participants join us in this years’ experience. If you are interested in attending the retreat, please look over the requirements and complete the application.

The social justice leadership retreat is a two-day experience that brings together individuals in the community to engage in meaningful dialogue around diversity and social action. The ultimate goal is to give people the skills to act on the issues and causes that they are most passionate about.

Requirements for Participants:

- Attend the entire retreat and participate fully.
- Agree to keep confidentiality, as topics discussed during the retreat may become very personal.

**Retreat Dates**

- Friday, February 1, 2019, from 5:00 p.m.-9:00 pm; and Saturday, February 2, 2019, from 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
- Registration opens Friday, February 1, 2019, at 4:30 p.m.

If you would like to participate in the social justice leadership retreat, please complete and submit this application to hend6267@bears.unco.edu by 5:00 p.m. on **Friday, January 18, 2018**. For additional information, contact Aaron Henderson at xxx-xxx-xxx. You will be notified via e-mail or phone call of your application status by **Friday, January 25, 2019**.

Thank you for your interest in attending the Colorado Springs social justice leadership retreat!
Social Justice Leadership Retreat Participant Application

Please type or print clearly. You may use additional pages if necessary.

Name: __________________________ Phone: __________________________
Address: __________________________________________________________
                    Street    City    State    Zip
Email: __________________________ Cell#: __________________________
Gender: __________________________
Occupation: __________________________
Will you have access to email over the next few weeks?  Yes  No
If not, what would be the best way to contact you?
_____________________________________________________________________

Demographic Information (Optional):
Ability Status: __________________________Sexual Orientation: __________________________
Ethnicity and/or Race: __________________________Faith/Belief System: __________________________
Other: __________________________

Are there any accommodations we can make that would allow you to fully participate in this retreat (e.g., physical accommodations, sign language interpreter, dietary restrictions, etc.)? If so, please explain.

(Continued on the next page)
IMPORTANT-Please fill in this circle if you are counselor in training and interested in taking part in the research study during the social justice leadership retreat (see attached document for additional information specific to the research study).

*Please note that to be considered for participation in the current research participants must (a) be actively enrolled in a CACREP accredited counseling program, and (b) have already taken their required multicultural counseling course.

*The primary researcher will serve as a facilitator throughout the retreat and will also be a part of the team that reviews applications for acceptance into the retreat.

Please provide a response to the following questions:

1. How do you define the term “social justice”?

2. Given your definition of social justice and the issues/causes you are passionate about, how do you make a difference in your communities?

3. Please speak to your experiences concerning an area of your personal identity.

4. What do you hope to gain from facilitating at this social justice retreat?

5. Please rate the following areas in respect to your knowledge about each topic area (circle a number for each area – “1” being “I have little knowledge about this topic” to “9” being “I have an abundance of knowledge about this topic.”

(This will help in planning the retreat)
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</table>

Applications are due to the social justice leadership retreat committee no later than 5:00pm, Friday, January 18th, 2019 or to hend6267@bears.unco.edu. We will let you know your status no later than Friday, January 25th, 2019.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact Aaron Henderson at xxx-xxx-xxx or by e-mail at hend6267@bears.unco.edu.
DIVERSITY TRAINING OBJECTIVES

- Expand your awareness on issues of diversity and cross-cultural communication
- Engage in meaningful dialogue on topics of diversity & social action
- Discuss privilege, oppression, and differences
- Translate learning into individual and group action plans
- Build trust within your community through sharing and listening

DORA FRIAS, LEAD FACILITATOR
DIRECTOR OF THE PRIDE CENTER
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

SOCIAL JUSTICE:
A COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP RETREAT

WHAT: Social justice: A Community Leadership Retreat

WHEN: Friday, February 1st (5:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.) and Saturday, February 2nd (9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.)

WHERE: The Hotel Elegante

COST: FREE (Sponsored by Henderson Consulting and EAP Services)

WHO: All Adults Welcome to Apply (Ages 21 and Up)
CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Social Justice and Multicultural Training
Researcher: Aaron Henderson, PhD Candidate, Counselor Education and Supervision
Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx
E-mail: hend6267@bears.unco.edu

Advisor: Dr. Heather Pendleton-Helm, Counselor Education and Supervision
Phone: 970-351-1630
E-mail: heather.helm.@unco.edu

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of counselor education students who have completed an intensive social justice retreat. Over the next two days you will engage in a social justice leadership retreat. You will be given a journal for you to reflect on your thoughts and feelings as you participate in the retreat. Your journal will be collected at the culmination of the retreat and your responses will be included and analyzed with the interview data. You will not receive your journal back once it has been collected.

At the conclusion of the social justice retreat you will be contacted by the primary researcher via telephone within two to three weeks to setup a time for you to participate in your first interview. After the interview has taken place, your responses will be transcribed, and the data will be analyzed. After your responses have been transcribed you will receive a copy of your transcription by email for your review. Hopefully this will allow you to reflect on your answers and stay connected to the research between interviews. You will again be contacted within three (3) to four (4) weeks of the initial interview to setup a second interview. Questions for the second interview will develop out of your responses from the first interview. Your responses from the second interview will again be transcribed and the data will be analyzed. You will receive a copy of your transcript for your review.

You will be contacted within three (3) or four (4) weeks after the second interview and invited to take part in a focus group. The purpose of the focus group is to discuss your experience at the social justice retreat with peers who also attended the retreat. The primary researcher along with another facilitator will lead the focus group. As previously mentioned, other research participants will also be invited to participate in the focus
group. Please be aware that due to the nature of focus group confidentiality cannot be assured. Focus group questions will be developed based on participant responses from both the first and second interviews.

After all data has been transcribed and analyzed you will receive a copy of the themes through email that emerged from the data. You will be asked to examine the themes to assess the accuracy and consistency of the themes that emerged from the data.

At the end of the research study, we will be happy to share your data with you at your request. We will take every precaution in order to protect your confidentiality. You will be asked to choose a pseudonym to be used throughout the research study so that your actual name will not be connected to any information you choose to share. Only the lead investigator and his assistants will know the pseudonym connected with a subject number and when we report data, your name will not be used. Data collected and analyzed for this study will be kept on a locked file on a password protected computer. Hard copies of the Informed Consent documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the office of Dr. Heather Pendleton-Helm at the University of Northern Colorado Campus in McKee Room 286. Voice recordings and signed consents will be erased three-years after the study is over.

Potential risks in this project are minimal. Social justice retreats often inspire self-reflection which can trigger an emotional response. This reaction is anticipated and welcomed and trained facilitators are on hand to process with participants in the moment. You will be asked to reflect on your experience at the social justice retreat in individual interviews and in the focus group which may elicit an emotional response. Additionally, you may experience the discomfort of having your views challenged by others in the focus group. You will receive a copy of a local Mental Health Referral List in the event you would like additional emotional support services.

A potential benefit to you is that you may find that processing your experience at the social justice retreat will allow you to explore your feelings; this may be therapeutic. An indirect benefit is that this research will hopefully help counselor educators enhance the current state of multicultural training in counselor training programs. In this way, you may receive an indirect benefit in knowing that you are helping the future of the counseling profession and ultimately improving the communities in which you live.

Upon completion of each interview, you will receive a $25.00 Visa gift card for your participation in the study. If you complete the first and the second interview you will receive two (2) $25.00 Visa gift cards. Pizza and soft drinks will be provided for the focus group.

The primary researcher will serve as a facilitator throughout the retreat and will also be a part of the team that reviews applications for acceptance into the retreat.
Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Office of Research, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Subject’s Signature          Date

Researcher’s Signature       Date
## Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
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<td>Black</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>Queer</td>
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<td><strong>Faith/Religious Expression</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Ability Status</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Able Body</td>
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<td>Able Mind</td>
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APPENDIX G

OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL JUSTICE RETREAT ACTIVITIES
Social Justice: A Community Retreat  
Sponsored by Henderson Consulting & EAP Services  
February 1st & 2nd 2019

**Friday, February 1st**  
*5:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Concepts &amp; Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5:00 pm</td>
<td><strong>Large Group</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Welcome and introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Welcome, Intros</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Welcome - Why this program? (Aaron)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Welcome, Reflection Self vs Other</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Designed to offer something different, texts and</td>
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<td>classroom discussion are important-not enough, etc.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Thank You’s-</td>
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<td>○ XXXXXXXXXX- Space to hold the retreat</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● HCEAP- Sponsoring the retreat</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● HOP-Henderson Outreach Program- Funding</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Delta Sigma-Breakfast</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● CSU Delta Force- Funding support</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Lead Intro - Name, pronoun, title, experience</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Participants - Name, Pronouns, Title.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Fill out Name Tag</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● What is one thing you are putting on pause in order</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to be here?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● We are all leaving something we “could be doing”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>this weekend. How do we honor that AND work to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>be present in this time?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Logistics</td>
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<td></td>
<td>○ Restrooms, breaks, nametags</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Explain Small groups and intro SG facilitators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Name, Pronoun, Title and something they are</td>
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<td></td>
<td>looking forward to this weekend</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Icebreakers (1-2) - (Aaron)</td>
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<td>○ <strong>Cultural Bingo</strong></td>
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<td>● Participants are given a Cultural Bingo playing</td>
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<td>board</td>
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<td>● Participants are asked to connect with other</td>
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<td></td>
<td>participants asking questions to find someone who</td>
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<td></td>
<td>has accomplished or has experienced the description</td>
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<td>in the square</td>
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Once they had found “a match” ask the participant to sign their name on the square.

Participants can only sign one square for each participant

- Intentions, Overview of time together
  - Share with partner: Why are you here? What prompted you to sign up for this experience?
  - Have a few folks from the group share out?
  - You get what you put in
  - Sharing Schedule

- Community Guidelines
  - Allow for complexity…find the both/and…recognize multiple truths
  - Speak from personal experience: use “I” statements to share thoughts & feelings
  - Listen actively & respectfully to gain understanding
  - Share air time: encourage others’ participation
  - An attitude and willingness to learn about self and others
  - We don’t know all there is to know
  - Be open to new and different perspectives
  - Respect and maintain confidentiality - What’s shared here, stays here; what’s learned here, leaves here.
  - Trust that dialogue will take us to deeper levels of understanding & acceptance
  - Take risks: lean into discomfort; be brave: find your learning edges
  - Any additions?

*Developed and Adapted from Washington Consulting

- PANNING
  - The concept of panning is used to increase your awareness of what is happening inside of you and around you.
  - Just as a movie camera “Pans” the environment to see the whole picture, we need to continuously PAN all around us and inside us as we increase our ability to notice the patterns and treatment and experiences of others.
  - PAY ATTENTION NOW
    - Intentionally observe and notice behaviors, comments, feelings and patterns of treatment
    - AVOID the trap of snap judgments or creating a story about what you see.
    - Ask if participants have things to add? Anything people do not understand/need clarification on?
6:00-6:20  **Large Group**  
**Concentric Circles: Mattering and Marginality**  
- Set up the activity and give examples, then have the group get into concentric circles.
- 1st round: With your first partner . . .
  - Find 10 ways you are similar to your partner
- 2nd Round: Will the outer circle move one person to your right to find a new partner . . .
  - With this partner, find 10 ways you are different from each other.
- Debrief these first two share pairs:
  - What did you notice as you tried to find similarities and differences?
  - If they say: It was easier to find similarities . . . then ask: So why is there so much tension and focus about our differences?
  - If they say: It was easier to find differences . . . then ask: Why do you think this is?
- Key points:
  - We have so many things in common, and also many differences.
  - The key in this community is to find ways to build on our commonalities while still creating space and acceptance/respect for our differences.
- 3rd Round: Will the outer circle move 5 people to your right to find a new partner
  - Talk about a time in your life when you felt that you mattered ~ when you were a part of a group or situation where you felt included; important; valued, connected to others; you were respected for who you are
  - NOTE: Give a brief example from our own experience
- Debrief:
  - Let’s get a few “pop-outs” about what you talked about….
  - Who will share a quick story of a time you felt valued/you mattered (3-5 is plenty).
  - What happened that helped you feel you mattered? You were respected and valued?
- 4th Round: Will the inner circle move one person to your right to find a new partner…
  - Talk about a time you felt you were treated less than, by someone or a group because of their attitudes towards some difference you had…or they perceived you had….
○ What happened…how did you feel?
○ What did you do?
○ What, if anything, did you or someone else do to intervene and create more inclusion, understanding, stop the disrespectful treatment?

● Debrief:
○ What were your feelings when you were treated less than?
○ What did you do?
○ Raise your hand if someone else spoke up to intervene?
○ What are some of the differences people have that tend to get treated as less than in society? on campus?

● Large group processing questions:
○ What is easy to share? What was more difficult?
○ What if anything stood out about this activity?
○ Where you surprised by your response?

● Key Points for wrap up
○ Point of this work is ultimately to think about how we consistently create spaces where folks feel like they matter.
○ Where they feel welcome, valued and included.

Announce Small Groups
● Participants assigned colors (Red, Blue, Green, Yellow, Purple, Orange)

6:30-8:00 Small Groups
Intros and Icebreakers (Aaron insert content)

● Introductions- Have each group member complete an introduction to the group including: Name, Positionality (title), pronouns.

● Name Origins (10 min)
○ Have participants stand in front of the group one person at a time and write their full name on a large piece of paper. Be sure to have a variety of colored markers available. The person in front of the class explains the things that are interesting about their name. One may choose to talk about why their parents choose their name, the ancestral significance of their name, why they chose a specific color to write their name, any nicknames they have, or anything else they want to share. You may also wish to ask participants what they would change their name to if they were to change it.
● Where I am from Poem (HANDOUT) (30 min) (Aaron)
  ○ “Who am I?” is a question we are asked a lot. These “Where I’m from” poems get beyond aspects of identity that are often more obvious and familiar (such as ethnicity, gender and age), by focusing on other factors that shape our identities such as experiences, relationships, hopes and interests. Writing “Where I’m from” poems help us clarify important elements of our identity.
    ○ Write Poems
    ○ Share Poems
    ○ Debrief
      ■ How does where we are from influence who we are?
      ■ What does it mean to be “from” a place?
      ■ What is the connection between place and belonging? Is it possible to be from more than one place?
      ■ How is identity affected when we move from one place to another? What might stay the same? What might change?

● Sociogram (HANDOUT)
  ○ First Ask participants to jot down in their notebooks the 7 most influential people in their life
  ○ Then Second hand out the Sociogram Worksheet
    ■ Have participants then fill out the identities for each of the influential people they chose. If you don’t know for sure how someone identifies make the best guess possible.
    ■ Acknowledge that we are asking participants to make assumptions about people. Ask for them to PAN (Pay Attention Now) the things they are using to make those assumptions.
  ○ Ask participants to answer the following reflection questions regarding their chart, with a partner
    ■ How did you define influential?
    ■ How did you select your people?
    ■ Why did you select them? What were the easiest/hardest identities to describe? Why?
    ■ Do you PAN anything about your chart?
    ■ Did you PAN anything about yourself as you were filling out the chart?
    ■ How do these folks influence your practice/job/role?
    ■ What feelings/emotions come up as you look at the sheet?
What are some of the strengths that you see present on your sociogram? What are some of the potential limitations?

How does this show up in your work? When you are working with a client? Meeting with a peer, etc.?

- Debrief as an entire group

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<tr>
<th>8:00</th>
<th>Large Group</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Digging Deeper into Concepts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Card Activity</td>
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<td>○ As participants are returning from their Small groups hand them a playing card face down. Ask them to not look at the value of their card.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Tell the participants that this will be a silent activity. Ask them to place the card on their foreheads with the value of the card facing out. They are not to look at the value of their card.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Tell the participants that you are going to give them a few minutes to talk around silently and ask the participants to engage with each other base on the value of each other’s card.</td>
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<td>○ Let the simulations run for a couple of minutes</td>
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<td>○ Ask the participants to stop, ask them to not look at their cards yet. Ask the following questions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● What was that like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Can you guess the value of your card? How can you guess that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● What did you PAN?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Now look at the value of your card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● What did the simulation feel like?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● How did you all decide how to engage with each other?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Common Ground Definitions
  ○ What is Social Justice?
    ○ Have participants process the following questions with a partner:
      ● Based on what you know so far, how would you define Social Justice?
      ● What do your identities have to do with social justice?
- **Provide Sample Definition of Social Justice:**

  - **Social Justice:** “We believe that social justice is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable, and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure.”

  - **Social Justice:** The distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within society. Due to the recent social justice movement counselors can no longer hide behind their understanding of the multicultural counseling competencies (June, 2010). Goodman et al. (2004) further define social justice as “The scholarship and professional action designed to change societal values, structures, policies, and practices, such that disadvantaged, or marginalized groups gain increased access to these tools of self-determination” (p. 795).

- Our identities influence the way we see the world, the way we interact with is and the way others interact with us. We create rules of engagement based on some of our identities that impact our experiences in the world, both positively AND negatively. The goal of social justice education is to enable you to develop skills to understand HOW these identities impact you, others and the greater society . . . in hopes that through this understanding we can create change for a more equal and just society.

- **Socially Constructed Identities**

  - Created for the purposes of categorizing people; based on beliefs about groups of people, not biology. Including, but not limited to, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and religion.

- **Show the identities we are going to be focusing on. Give examples of definitions**
### Homework: **Identity Chart (HANDOUT)**
- Aaron and Lead Share their charts

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**Saturday, February 2nd**
9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Concept/Activity</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 9:00 am-9:15 | **Large Group**<br>Grounding for the day (Aaron)<br>  
  - Icebreakers  
  - Silent Interview-<br>  
    1. Divide group into pairs-preferably who don’t know each other well<br>  
    2. Ask participants to introduce themselves to your partner<br>  
    3. Instruct the group from this point forward, speaking is no longer allowed. This includes whispering, mouthing words, and making sounds, too!<br>  
    4. Inform the group that they must tell their partner three (3) things about themselves without speaking, similar to the charades game. These can be physical characteristics.<br>  
    5. Once all partners have finished miming to each other, call everyone back into the large circle. (may need to break into 2 large circle for timing purposes)<br>  
    6. Ask each pair to verbally introduce their partner to the group, as well as the three things that they learned (or think they learned). |
| 9:15-10:30 | **Large Group**<br>Grounding Concepts<br>  
  - Sometimes you’re a Caterpillar Video<br>    ○ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRiWgx4sHGg<br>  
  - Cycle of Socialization<br>  
  - Privilege, Oppression,<br>  
  - Fill out Identity Charts (Process)<br>    ○ Define areas where you have privilege<br>    ○ Pair and Share<br>  
  - Internalized Oppression, Internalized Dominance<br>  
  - Systems |
● **Dominant Group Patterns** (10 min) (Aaron)
  ○ Greater access to power and resources
    ■ Male privilege. No worries or fears about how my job or access to resources will be impacted by my gender.
  ○ Make the Rules
    ■ Often placed in a position of power or given “space” or “airtime” where I have influence on rules.
  ○ Define what is normal, “right,” the “Truth”
    ■ How my words and actions are taken differently than Lead’s-Boss example
    ■ I could do no harm
    ■ And Boss was a Jackass to Lead
  ○ Assumed to be leader, smarter, competent…
    ■ Shared facilitator roles with women, I will often be sought ought over my peers, assumed to be the leader, more competent, etc.
  ○ Given the benefit of the doubt
    ■ Treated differently that other black men because of my social/financial status
  ○ Often unaware of dominant group membership and privilege
    ■ Able bodied-spend minimal time thinking about how difficult it may be to navigate space for those who are differently abled
  ○ Less aware about exclusive and discriminatory treatment of subordinated group
  ○ Are more comfortable with members of subordinated groups who share similar behaviors, appearance, and values to them
    ■ Feel more comfortable with folks who have invisible disabilities as opposed to physical disabilities
  ○ Hold to dominant cultural beliefs, often without examination
    ■ Being a Christian, spend little time thinking about my privilege. Assume that my holidays and traditions will be honored and in the workplace, schools, government. Not worried about other cultural traditions, celebrations, etc.
- Collude, and if challenge, risk being ostracized/punished
  - Football locker room- Daily! As a player and now coach.
- Focus on “how far we’ve come”

- **Subordinated Group Patterns** (10 min) (Lead)
  - Less access to power and resources
  - Often seen as less than, inferior, deficient . . .
  - Often assimilate, collude, abide by the rules, try to fit in . . .
  - Track the daily indignities they experience; very aware of oppression
  - Punished if challenge the status quo
  - Have their truth and experiences questioned and often invalidated
  - Know more about members of dominant groups than dominant group members know about them
  - Often struggle with finding a balance between who they are and who they are told they need to be to be “acceptable”
  - Often struggle with finding their voice and speaking up to challenge
  - Focus on “how far we need to go”

- **Dyads** (high five buddy) (10 min)
  - When was a time that you acted in one of these ways? What did you do?
  - Which one are you having a gut reaction to: “NO way I don’t do that.” Why do you think that might be?
  - Which one triggers the strongest emotional reaction (anger, sad, hurt, guilt/shame etc.)? Why is that?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity/Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:30-10:40</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:40-12:00</td>
<td>Small Groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
  - Questions from Large Groups (5 Min)
  - *Dom/Sub Identity Reflection Instructions* (HANDOUT) (45 minutes)
  - The purpose of this activity is to allow participants to reflect their personal socialization and specific instances where they experienced privilege or marginalization based on a particular identity. *Facilitators should share an example before participants start the process.*
Participants will select a dominant and a subordinated identity to reflect on. They must select from the identities on which we are focusing this weekend.

If a participant does not feel like they have a subordinated identity please ask for them to reflect on two dominant identities (same for dominant)

Ask participants to divide up their sheets into four quadrants. Have them draw symbols or other representations of answers to the following questions. 4 questions=4 quadrants

Give participants time to draw their pictures. (15 minutes)

Have participants pair up with one or two other participant and share their reflections. They should share in detail their experiences with their privileged identities (20 minutes)

Reflection Prompts

Dominant Identity
- What messages have I learned about this identity?
- Where did I learn messages about this identity?
- Describe a time when I consciously or unconsciously participated in marginalization of another person/group that subordinated in this identity.
- How does this identity impact my work?

Subordinated Identity
- What messages have I learned about this identity?
- Where did I learn messages about this identity?
- Describe a time when I consciously or unconsciously acted on internalized oppression related to this identity.
- How does this identity impact my work?

Process as a collective group. (10 minutes)
- What was that process like?
- What came up for you as you were drawing?
- What came up for you as you were sharing?
- How do your identities impact the work you do?

Privileged Group Dynamics: Commons Patterns (30 Mins)
- Have participants work through the “Privileged Group Dynamics Worksheet”
- Ask participants to really focus in on dynamics they have specifically participated in
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:00-1:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00-2:30</td>
<td><strong>Large Group</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Privilege Links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Privilege Links Activity</strong> (45 min)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Quickly review the concepts of power and privilege</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Activity is to help participants see how privilege shows up in the</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ We’re going to read of a series of statements. For each statement</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ The point of this exercise is not to make any of us embarrassed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ ○ Read statements out loud (Alternate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Dyad Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Send them to groups based on length of links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30-3:15</td>
<td><strong>Processing Links</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Journaling</strong> (5-10 min)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ What did you PAN about yourself during this activity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ What were you feeling? What were some of your behaviors?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Why do you think you might be feeling some of these things?</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>○ What do you see as the benefits, and the limitations of this activity?</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Large Link Caucus Processing Questions</strong> (60 or more)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>○ One word go around the room: How are you feeling right now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ What did you PAN about yourself during this activity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Was there a particular statement that stood out to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Were there any statements that were confusing or that you didn’t</td>
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<td></td>
<td>○ If you were to lean into your discomfort right now what would you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ ○ Is anyone experiencing feelings of guilt/shame?</td>
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</table>
- Address any feelings of guilt/shame. It’s okay to feel embarrassed and/or guilty for a bit, but we shouldn’t dwell on our guilt because that puts the focus on back on the dominant group by attempting to be the victim, which is exactly the problem!
- What are some things that we can do in this group to hold each other accountable towards reflecting on our privilege?

**Middle Link Caucus (30-60)**
- One word go around the room: How are you feeling right now?
- What did you PAN about yourself during this activity?
- Was there a particular statement that stood out to you? Why?
- Were there any statements that were confusing or that you didn’t get?
- If you were to lean into your discomfort right now what would you want to say/ask/do?
- Does anyone feel like they belong in a different size link group? Would like to be in a different size link group?
- What do those feelings mean?
- What are some things that we can do in this group to hold each other accountable towards reflecting on our privilege?

**Small Link Caucus (less than 30)**
- One word go around the room: How are you feeling right now?
- What did you PAN about yourself during this activity?
- Was there a particular statement that stood out to you?
- Were there any statements that were confusing or that you didn’t get?
- If you were to lean into your discomfort right now what would you want to say/ask/do?
- Does anyone feel like they belong in a different size link group? Would like to be in a different size link group?
- What do those feelings mean?
- What are some things that we can do in this group to hold each other accountable towards reflecting on our privilege?

<p>| 3:15-3:30 | Break |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:30-4:15</td>
<td><strong>Small Group Action Planning</strong>&lt;br&gt;● Spend a bit of time processing their Link Caucuses (15 min)&lt;br&gt;○ What was the experience of breaking up by link length?&lt;br&gt;○ What are some of the benefits, and limitations of this activity?&lt;br&gt;○ How does this impact the work I do on a daily basis?&lt;br&gt;● Have participants work through the <em>Self-Assessment: Critical Skills for Inclusion Practitioners Worksheet</em>&lt;br&gt;○ Once they have filled out the worksheet, have them pair up with a partner and process&lt;br&gt;○ Have them share the areas where they see the most opportunity for growth&lt;br&gt;● Once they have partnered shared, have them fill out the <em>Intentions for moving towards Inclusion</em> worksheet. Have them share with a partner. Have them specifically share the things they need to be held accountable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Final Affirmations</strong>&lt;br&gt;● Ask participants to share a small appreciation, piece of learning or key takeaway from the weekend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:15-5:00</td>
<td><strong>Large Group</strong>&lt;br&gt;Cycle of Liberation&lt;br&gt;10 things Allies should Know&lt;br&gt;Wrap up thing (Aaron)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Retreat Rules and Regulations**

**Laying the Foundation- The Ground Rules**

Facilitators will guide the process of establishing the ground rules for the retreat. Facilitators will ask the group to generate rules in hopes of creating cohesion, safety, and trust. Facilitators, if necessary, will add to the rules established by the participants. The rules will guide the time that will ultimately be spent in both the large and small group setting.
Here is a general guide for the ground rules:

❖ Really listen- don’t talk over others
❖ Treat others with respect
❖ Be fully present
❖ Take risks, lean into discomfort
❖ Ask clarifying questions when you don’t understand
❖ Notice and name group dynamics in the moment
❖ Agree to disagree
❖ Consider how/why you are where you are today
❖ Speak from personal experience: Use “I” statements to share thoughts and feelings
❖ Participate fully (at your own comfort level)
❖ Take responsibility for the group
❖ Confidentiality is expected, but not guaranteed-safe space
❖ Self-attribute your motives and thoughts, do not assume about others
❖ Respect that we are all at different places
❖ Attribute the best motive to others

Example Ice Breaker Activities (Large Group Facilitators)

❖ Move If- Arrange the group in a large circle with one person in the middle. The center person says, “move if . . . you wore sandals yesterday (for example).” Everyone who wore sandals yesterday finds a new space and there is a new person in the middle. The game continues until there is an appropriate ending point.

❖ Teddy Toss- The objective of this activity is name recognition. Arrange groups in small circles of 8-10 people. Have a soft object to throw to someone else in the circle. Instruct participants to say the name of the person before throwing the object in their direction. State the person’s name and then toss the object in their direction. The person responds by saying, “thank you” along with your name. Facilitators can add more objects to throw

❖ Similarities and Differences- Have participants break into small groups of 4-6 people. Find four things unique to each individual and four things that all group members have in common. Share with the larger group.

❖ Nametag Switch- Have people introduce themselves to someone including their name and two or three interesting things about them. They then switch identities (nametags) and introduce themselves to other people with their new identity.
Example Ice Breaker Activities (Small Group Facilitators)

During small group time, facilitators will engage ice breaker activities so that group members can get to know each other more intimately. A few suggestions for ice breakers are provided; however, small group facilitators are welcome to use their own ice breaker activities.

❖ **Do you like your neighbors**- Participants stand in a circle with one person in the middle. The person in the middle will approach someone in the circle and address them by name and ask, “Do you like you neighbors?” The person responds, “Yes, I like my neighbors______ and ________ (referring to the names of the people on either side of them), but I really like people with ___________.” (any other attribute a person might have, e.g., red hair, brown eyes, traveled across the county, etc.) The people who this latter statement applies to must move to another place in the circle, and the person in the middle moves to one of their slots. One person is left in the middle and the game continues.

❖ **Name Origins**- Have participants stand in front of the class one person at a time and write their full name on a large piece of paper. Be sure to have a variety of colored markers available. The person in front of the class explains the things that are interesting about their name. One may choose to talk about why their parents choose their name, the ancestral significance of their name, why they chose a specific color to write their name, any nicknames they have, or anything else they want to share. You may also wish to ask participants what they would change their name to if they were to change it.

❖ **M&M Game**- Present a bag of M&M’s or another multicolored candy. Ask each participant to take three candies, each a different color. Pre-brainstorm questions to be paired with each color. Thus, if someone draws a yellow M&M, they may have to say what their favorite movie is and why, or if they pick a blue M&M they may have to name their favorite music artist and why. Go around the room having each participant answer their questions according to their candy color.

❖ **Two Truths and a Lie**- Instruct participants to think of three facts about themselves, two of which are true and one of which is a lie. Then go around the room, one at a time, and have participants state their facts. The rest of the class will guess which facts are true and which one is the lie.

❖ **Mapping Our Diversity**- Each group will be given a small map of the world and three colors of small sticker dots (red, blue, and green). Have each member of the group put a green sticker where they were born, a blue dot where their ancestry lies, and a red dot where their heart would be (if they could be anywhere in the world, where would they go). Allow group members to place more than one dot of a give color (especially the blue dot) if they want to do so.
**Creating A Common Language- Definitions**

Participants will engage in a conversation about the definition of the terms listed below.

**Agency:** Taking back or exerting power in a subordinated identity.

**Ally:** A person who supports marginalized, silenced, or less privileged groups without being a member of those groups. This person will often directly or indirectly confront systems of oppression.

**Diversity:** The presence of difference between and among communities. This can include, but is not limited to: social identities (race, gender, religion, etc.) experiences, worldviews, values and beliefs.

**Dominant or Agent Group:** Membership in a social identity group that provides access to privilege.

**Intersections of Identity/Intersectionality:** The concept that our social identities do not exist independent of each other. Instead, our various identities interact on multiple and often simultaneously levels to create unique experiences of both dominance and subordination.

**Oppression:** Restricted access to resources and marginalization and isolation based on social group membership.

**Privilege:** An unearned benefit or right granted to a person based on membership in a particular social group.

**Social Justice:** A belief that all people should have access to resources for sustaining healthy existence.

**Socially Constructed Identity:** Created for the purposes categorizing people; based on beliefs about groups of people, not biology. Including, but not limited to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and religion.

**Subordinated or Target Group:** Membership in a group that experiences oppression or marginalization in a mainstream society.

**Systems of Oppression:** Structures that perpetuate limited access to power based on cultural norms, values, legal systems, and other structural components of society; systems of oppression center members of the dominant group.

**Internalized Oppression:** Members of subordinated groups believe/act on messages about their subordination (also applies to treatment of people with similar identities). Also internalized superiority- beliefs that we are better based on dominant identities.
**Interpersonal Oppression:** Oppression happening between two people-individualized.

**Internalized Oppression:** Policies and practices of institutions that marginalize or subordinate.

**Structural Oppression:** Cumulative and compounding effects of societal factors.

*At the culmination of the culmination of the presentation, participants will return to their small groups to complete the Social Identity Chart handout.*
APPENDIX H

SOCIAL JUSTICE RETREAT PHILOSOPHY
Social Justice: A Community Retreat - Program Philosophy

The Social Justice: A Community Retreat is a potentially transformative experience that relies heavily on large and small group experiential activities, storytelling, and short presentations to construct knowledge and meaning. The retreat is designed to introduce to some and refresh for others, concepts of social justice as well as to both challenge and inspire participants to act as agents of change in creating more socially just communities. The social justice retreat is open to all members of the Colorado Springs community over the age of 21. The following retreat objectives are adopted from Bettendorf (2016) and the University of Northern Colorado’s social justice retreat:

1. Build a foundation using basic social justice concepts.
2. Participants will create a personal definition of social justice.
3. Build trust within the large and small group setting.
4. Identify social identity differences.
5. Identify social consequences of social identity differences in the form of stereotypes and language.
6. Simulate the cultural and systemic oppression and the power/privilege that people with target identities have.
7. Name real life experiences by providing language that matches their simulated experience.
8. Participants will learn to communicate understanding to others.
9. Explore social identity difference, cultural and systemic oppression, and privilege on an individual level through the listening and sharing of personal narratives.
10. Encourage participants to take responsibility for continuing their own self-discovery and learn through the use of provided media.
11. Introduce the concept of Social Justice Allies and explore the skills and behaviors that are required.
12. Participants will explore the definition of ally and what it means to be an ally to a community.
13. Translate weekend learning into individual and group action planning.
14. Maintain ongoing development once group has returned to their communities.

Facilitator Roles and Expectations (Bettendorf, 2016)

❖ Role Modeling- Facilitators are expected to use inclusive language, adhere to the SJR philosophy, take healthy risks, share, and subscribe to a developmental approach to facilitation.
❖ Developmental Approach- Facilitators understand that learning around social justice is a process and the ultimate goal is to move the process forward. A developmental approach requires patience, especially when it comes to your own identities. Keep in mind that at times one participants learning is another participants pain.
❖ **Facilitation of conversations** - The facilitator role is designed to assist students in having conversations with each other. Facilitators set the tone by role modeling risk taking and sharing and then let students retain most of the focus. The facilitator role is not one of judge or jury, but one of developmental accountability and creating an open space for dialogue.

❖ **Support for target populations** - It is critical that facilitators are aware of students who have target identities and provide the support that is needed. This often comes in the form of validating experiences and being an ally if needed. Facilitations from identities underrepresented at the retreat may be sought out by participants for additional support.

❖ **Admitting privilege** - It is critical that all facilitators with privilege openly own that privilege. This is especially important for men, white people, and heterosexual people.

❖ **Admitting mistakes** - Facilitators are expected to be honest about their mistakes to each other and to the participants.

❖ **Participants first** - The retreat experience is designed to put the participant experience first. That means facilitators should do their own work prior to the retreat and allow student voices to be heard.

❖ **Partnership** - Each facilitator will work in a small group partnership. This partnership takes planning and time to prepare for.

❖ **Feedback** - All facilitators must be open to feedback from other facilitators. Additionally, facilitators are expected to give each other feedback. Egos and fear of hurting someone’s feelings need to take a back seat. The goal of feedback should be a better experience and allowing all parties to retain their dignity.
APPENDIX I

SECOND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Second Interview Questions

Introduction Reminders (Creswell, 2016):

▪ Provide structure of the interview (audio recording, taking notes)
▪ Ask if interviewee has questions
▪ Define any terms necessary

Basic Interview Information

Time of interview: ______________________
Date: _________________________________
Place: ________________________________
Interviewee (Pseudonym): ________________________
Position of interviewee: __________________
Recording/storing information about interview: ________________________________

Semi-structured Interview Content Questions

12. Please tell me how you have been since we last connected. Any significant changes in your life? (Ice Breaker)

13. What, if anything, has changed in your interactions with client, colleagues, or peers since you attended the social justice retreat?
   Probes: Tell me more. Please explain

14. If the retreat made you more aware of your biases, has this awareness influenced or changed you as a counselor?
   Probes: Tell me more. Please explain

15. Tell me what, if anything, comes to mind for you when you hear the phrases “honoring your voice” or “turning up the volume to your voice.”
   Probes: Tell me more. Please explain

16. If the retreat were longer, what conversations would you have wanted to engage in with your peers? What questions would you want to ask your small group? Large group? Facilitators?
   Probes: Tell me more. Please explain

17. As you reflect back on your time at the retreat, what feeling(s) best describe your experience? Please explain.
   Probes: Tell me more. Please explain

18. Do you have a plan to carry forward and/or build on the takeaways from your time at the social justice retreat?
   Probes further if the response is “yes”- “Tell me more.”
19. What is the next step in your journey to becoming a more multiculturally competent counselor?

_Probes: Tell me more. Please explain_

_Closing Instructions_ (Creswell, 2016):

- Thank the individual for participating
- Assure individual of confidentiality
- Reminder about focus group
- If asked, comment on how interviewee will receive results of the study
APPENDIX J

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS
Social Justice Focus Group Questions

Check-In

1. Please share your name, where you attend school, what stage you are in (in your counseling program), and any additional information you would like to share with the group.

Questions:

2. What is it like being back together again as a group after sharing the social justice retreat experience?

3. What would you like to share with the group about your time at the social justice retreat?

4. From the initial participant interviews the theme of confronting or speaking out against injustices emerged from your time at the social justice retreat. I’d like to explore this theme more in depth with you today. What thoughts do you have about confronting or speaking out against injustice since you have left the retreat?

5. From the first participant interviews the theme of the power of people’s story and sitting with people and learning about their life experiences emerged. I want to explore this theme more in depth with you today. What would you like to share about the power of people’s story?
APPENDIX K

AUDITOR TRAINING
Auditor Training Reminders

Thank you for serving as an auditor for my research. Time is valuable and I am honored that you have given a portion of your time to audit my work.

- On your USB stick you will find a file folder titled Research Transcription and Coding. In this file folder you will find a file dedicated to each research participant (labeled by participant’s name).

- There is also a separate file with the focus group transcript (Social Justice Focus Group).

- I have also included a summary of all my themes and supporting research transcriptions (Social Justice Coding).

- Under each participant file you will find their coded participant journal, coded first interview, and coded second interview. You will also find my journal reflections from both their first and second interviews.

- Please select a few participants files to audit (I do not expect you to review all the participant data provided).

- Please provide feedback on whether or not you believe my themes are accurate, the coding is consistent and were established without overrepresentation or underrepresentation.

- Also, I would appreciate any feedback on whether or not you believe the theme Influence of Previous Multicultural Training answers the research question and should remain a theme or if the narratives provide more contextual information and should be included as part of the participant introductions.

Research Question:

Q1 What are the experiences and perceptions of counselor education students who have completed an intensive social justice retreat?

As always, please don’t hesitate to contact me with questions as they arise. Thanks again!
APPENDIX L

SOCIAL JUSTICE MANUSCRIPT
INTEGRATING SOCIAL JUSTICE TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES: CONSIDERATIONS FOR COUNSELOR EDUCATORS

Introduction

Counselor educators have been charged with the task of preparing counselors who possess multicultural competence (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011; Ratts et al., 2016). Counselors must possess the awareness, knowledge, and skills to work with individuals who have various life experiences and cultural backgrounds (C. C. Lee, 2019; M. Y. Lee & Green, 2003). Integrating conversations and activities involving social justice has been introduced as one avenue for increasing awareness around counseling professionals understanding of multicultural counseling competency (Ratts et al., 2016; Ratts & Wayman, 2015). Although considerable attention has been focused on social justice in the counseling literature (Constantine et al., 2007; D’Andrea & Daniels, 2001; Ratts et al., 2004; Ratts et al., 2016) minimal attention has focused on how to implement social justice activities in counselor education curriculum in a format that facilitates transformative learning experiences for students.

Transformational learning can be described as learning that shifts assumptions and ultimately changes behaviors (Mezirow, 1997). Mezirow (1997) further described the transformational learning process as one that calls for self-examination, a sharing of thoughts, which leads to exploring new roles, relationships, and actions. It appears that providing transformational learning opportunities may allow professional counseling students an opportunity to learn from the experiences of others while wrestling with their own beliefs and assumptions about others who come from different backgrounds. Nevertheless, a gap in the literature exists regarding the pairing of social justice
conversations and activities in counselor education curriculum that are designed to provide students with transformational learning experiences. It is essential for counselor educators to prepare future counselors to be efficient in developing a therapeutic process that is relevant to all clients, including racial and cultural minorities (Ratts et al., 2016). Thus, it is imperative that counselors in training are provided opportunities to embrace in shared learning experiences that extend far beyond discussions that take place in traditional classroom settings.

Immersing students in an intense, transformative experience, such as that offered in a social justice retreat, may serve as an avenue that counselor-training programs can utilize to provide students with a chance to learn from others who come from various walks of life. Social justice retreats, for example, offer variables that are difficult to find in the traditional classroom setting, including; trained large and small group facilitators, exposure to people from various cultures, 2-3 days of intensive study, and a curriculum designed by experts in the field of social justice and multiculturalism, to name a few. One goal of social justice education is to bring people together to talk about similarities and differences, and learn how to embrace both (Adams et al., 2007). These components may serve to add to students learning experiences by introducing them to perspectives outside of their normal spheres of influence (Cartwright et al., 2018; Paitu & Hinton, 2003).

Many of today’s counseling training programs utilize books and articles as primary tools for exposing students to cultural differences (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). This often results in a lack of direct contact with diverse populations. Developing opportunities for students to establish relationships with individuals from diverse backgrounds is identified as a way to supplement intellectual knowledge (Mio, Barker-
Thus, in order for counselor training programs to provide students with opportunities to expand multicultural counselor competency it is imperative that faculty search for opportunities for students to interact directly with people from various backgrounds. Counseling programs may wish to consider requiring students to attend a social justice retreat in addition to the existing multicultural training curriculum. This may offer students an opportunity to increase their awareness and sensitivity to the many issues that relate to working with others who come from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, requiring students to attend a social justice retreat may aid in increasing students understanding and bring to life the knowledge acquired from the articles, books, and classroom discussions that take place in the traditional classroom setting.

**Barriers to Incorporating Transformative and Experiential Learning in Counseling Programs**

Now that potential benefits of an intensive learning experience have been discussed, it is important to consider the challenges that counselor educator and counselor education programs face when attempting to incorporate these practices into counselor education curriculum. Engaging in transformative learning does not come without its unique set of challenges. The transformative process is often an exhausting and emotional journey for all who are involved in the process. Shifting one’s worldview often results in an awareness that some relationships are no longer healthy and may become damaging (Robertson, 1996). Additionally, transformative learning requires a level of maturity necessary for self-reflection and engagement and can become awkward if students lack the skills necessary for these critical components (Cranton, 1994; Moore, 2005). Mezirow (1997) suggested that if learning is too comfortable for students, change in understanding
is unlikely to occur and the transformation may do more harm than good. Furthermore, transformative learning is an intense process for students and educators alike. In order to be successful, institutional support structures have to be in place that allow time for both students and educators to engage in the process of self-examination (Robertson, 1996).

As previously mentioned, transformational learning process along with experiential activities is often and emotionally exhaustive process. Enthralling students to share and self-reflect can trigger strong emotions. Put simply, engaging students in dialogue about their personal-lived experience is likely to trigger strong thoughts, feelings, and reactions. Conversations centered around race, affectional orientation, class, gender, ability, religion and other diverse identities can create strong emotions within both students and faculty (Adams et al., 2007). Moreover, classroom conversations with a focus on race, language, sexuality, or intersectionality can be challenging for students and educators alike (Dunn et al., 2014). When students are provided with information that conflicts with their personal and familial knowledge base resistance may follow.

Hoshmand’s (2004) research captured the challenges present in embracing a transformative learning paradigm. Transformative learning requires time, energy, and commitment to developing a relationship and a program culture to sustain a platform that both accepts and supports transformative education. Additionally, institutions must hire and train staff who are competent in facilitating transformative learning. Often times facilitators must support conversations and navigate group dynamics that can be difficult, to say the least (Hoshmand, 2004). It may be unsettling for untrained professionals to question the long-held beliefs and assumptions of students.
Hoshmand (2004) highlighted institutional shortcomings that serve as barriers to the implementation of transformative learning in higher education. Faculty workload and the lack of time for building community are common pitfalls to the infusion of collaborative learning environments in institutions of higher education. In order for counseling programs to adopt a transformative education learning environment, “there must be institutional support in every respect” (Hoshmand, 2004, p. 88).

Lastly, an important barrier to the commitment to transformational learning has to do with how counselors view themselves as change agents. Some counseling students hold on to traditional views of the role of the counselor, therefore limiting their capacity to view themselves as being capable or willing to effect systemic change (Hoshmand, 2004). Thus, curricular changes may be vital to help students broaden their counselor identities and widen their perspectives on how they might use their counselor roles to impact social change and transformative, second-order change (Hoshmand, 2004).

Mitcham, Greenridge, & Smith (2013) described difficulties that counselor educators face in teaching the multicultural counseling course. More specifically, counselor educators are often required to teach at least one multicultural counseling course with little to no training on how to effectively do so. This results in increased anxiety and ambivalence for both the professor and the counselors in training (Mitcham et al., 2013). It was recommended that professors have the opportunity to “do their own work” by engaging in specific multicultural training that prepares them to facilitate difficult dialogue while holding a safe place for students who are navigating the multicultural counseling course. It can be challenging, at best, for a counselor educator
who is triggered in class by a student’s response and also attempting to single-handedly facilitate a safe space for students.

Mitcham et al.’s (2013) work captured the importance of exploring the current research, where counselors in training may attend a social justice retreat, facilitated by trained and experienced social justice advocates. These facilitators have received professional training in order to best facilitate difficult dialogue. Most facilitators have also been active participants in social justice retreats and are aware of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that may surface as triggers during their time serving in the facilitator role. A common belief for those who serve as facilitators at social justice retreats is that the participant experience is the most important experience, and the facilitator’s experience is not to interrupt or negatively impact the participants experience (Bettendorf, 2016). In order for the participant experience to be first, facilitators have to be in a healthy place in terms of their social justice and multicultural journey.

An additional barrier that exists in the classroom is the power difference between the student and the teacher (Mitcham et al., 2013). Counselors in training are aware that there is a judgement and evaluation component regardless of the safety and security that is present in the classroom setting. Asking students to be vulnerable by engaging in the practice of disclosing culturally sensitive and vulnerable information in the company of peers and instructors can be a difficult task for students. There may be increased anxieties and ambivalence considering the evaluative nature of the classroom environment and also the pressure that students may feel knowing that they must return to the classroom in order to pass the course.
A social justice retreat environment allows participants the freedom to express their thoughts and feelings without fear of formal evaluation. Much time and attention is given to creating a judgement free environment where the voices of all participants are honored and embraced without judgment (Adams et al., 2007; Bettendorf, 2016). Given the logistics of the retreat, a weekend schedule with multiple breaks between sessions, participants are free to come and go, without penalty. While feedback is encouraged and embraced, facilitators are trained to teach and guide participants how to both give and receive feedback in a way that honors the stories of other participants.

In addition to the power differences that exist in traditional classroom settings, there remains a lack of racial diversity reflected in institutions of higher education. Although the United States is becoming more racially diverse, racial minority groups continue to be disparate in higher level education (Bowen et al., 2009; Keels, 2013; Worthington, 2012). This is particularly an issue in counseling programs which place great emphasis on multicultural competency and advocacy (Ratts et al., 2016). Although the counseling profession in largely dominated by individuals who identify as women, women of color are underrepresented in university settings, both as students and faculty when compared to the national representation (Zeligman et al., 2015). Furthermore, of the 160,000 faculty working at Research I and II institutions, only three percent identify as a racial minority (Alger, 1999; Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2002).

These facts bring to light the alarming truth that institutions of higher education, including counselor preparatory programs, fail to recruit and retain culturally diverse students and faculty. As one can imagine, this failure has resulted in various destructive outcomes. Specific to the current research, failure to recruit and retain diverse faculty has
led to minimal opportunities to expose counseling students to others who come from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, the lack of diversity in counseling programs has also led to minimal research in the counseling literature that serves to enhance the state of multicultural training in counselor education. Clients, students, faculty, and the field of counseling deserve the exploration of nontraditional approaches to multicultural training, where students and faculty have the opportunity to interact with individuals who come from all walks of life. Until students and faculty in institutions of higher education reflect the racially diverse communities we live in, nontraditional approaches to multicultural training that allow for students to interact with a diverse body of participants are worthy of increased focus and exploration.

**Integrating Transformative and Experiential Learning Into Multicultural Training in Counseling Programs**

It is difficult to ignore the challenges of including potentially transformative and experiential learning opportunities in multicultural training curriculum in counseling programs. Despite the difficulty, there are counseling programs who have found ways to make the connection. Although the counseling literature seems to have minimal contributions that capture the art of implementing opportunities for counseling students to engage in experiential and transformative multicultural training opportunities, there have been attempts to raise awareness about the importance of such work. Mitcham et al. (2013) advocated for adopting a Transformational Multicultural Pedagogy when teaching multicultural counseling courses in counseling preparation programs. Mitcham et al. (2013) noted that counselor educators are often expected to teach the multicultural counseling course with little to no training or support prior to being handed the responsibility of teaching an often emotionally charged course. Subsequently, both
instructors and students often enter the classroom with an abundance of anxiety and
ambivalence (Mitcham et al., 2013). A nontraditional approach to teaching the
multicultural class is offered as a way to reduce anxieties, shed light on meaningful
aspects of multicultural counseling, and facilitate access to cross-cultural opportunities
(Mitcham et al., 2013).

The Transformational Multicultural Pedagogy model builds on both narrative and
transformational theories and incorporates both experiential and transformational
activities into the classroom (Mitcham et al., 2013). The professor is challenged to use
creativity and activism to engage students and highlight key aspects of culture and
identity. For instance, the professor may invite students to bond over food in the initial
class sessions, encouraging students to try foods from different cultures. This activity is
often followed up by similar activities that highlight cultural similarities and differences
as the semester progresses. Because the course is intended to be built on active
engagement, students are asked to participate in individual and group interviews,
presentations, as well as to engage in cultural immersions experiences (Mitcham et al.,
2013). Students may view films throughout the semester, such as Malcolm X, and write
self-reflection papers followed by process time in small and large groups. Simulations
and games, exploring personal histories, and case studies are additional activities
counselor educators can draw on to incorporate in their multicultural counseling
classroom.

Research conducted by Zalaquett, Foley, Tillotson, Dinsmore, and Hof (2008)
examined the impact of a multicultural/social justice professional-organizational project
that was implemented at five universities throughout the United States. A primary
motivation for conducting the study was to gain a more accurate understanding of what strategies college of education and counselor education programs are utilizing to enhance multicultural competency in administrators, faculty, and students (Zalaquett et al., 2008). The authors noted that as the United States continues to diversify in terms of race and culture, it is imperative that administrators, faculty, and students develop skills in multicultural/social justice competencies in order to work effectively with students.

The team of researchers focused on enhancing and promoting multicultural/social justice awareness at the systemic level. They put together a national tour devoted to assisting college of education and counselor education programs in developing and implementing institutional changes that advance the field of multiculturalism and social justice in the fields of education and counseling (Zalaquett et al., 2008). The results of qualitative, semi-structured interviews on the perceived effective of the training by those who took part were positive. Most respondents believed that as a result of their participation in the tour they increased their multicultural counseling skills as well as gained an increased awareness of the many cultural issues that are present throughout the United States. Additionally, a follow-up interview was conducted one year after the tour had taken place. Overall, the individuals who attended the tour reported they felt as though they continued to focus on the multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills as a way to conceptualize counseling interventions, and embraced a continued commitment to integrate social justice activities into their curriculum (Zalaquett et al., 2008).

Kim and Lyons (2003) described how experiential activities, games in particular, can be used to enhance multicultural competence in counselor in training. Researchers
frame their research on the work of Crocker and Wrobelwski (1975) who posit that using games during counseling produced six helping functions:

(a) to sensitize a person to which he or she has been unaware; (b) to allow a person to confront feelings of powerlessness; (c) to offer opportunities to deal with rules of the game as an analogy to living by norms of society, norms that may be different from personal norms; (d) to allow childlike playfulness to emerge, which may lead to some forms of risk taking; (e) to create a safe and permissive climate to experiment with new behaviors and (f) to help a person learn effective coping behavior. (Kim & Lyons, 2003, p. 403)

Moreover, games have the ability to balance the power that exists between the course instructor and class participants (Kim & Lyons, 2003). This balance in power often leads to a greater sense of safety within the classroom, resulting in an increased likelihood for participants to own their biases and work to eliminate them. Kim and Lyons (2003) suggested games that can be used in the classroom to address each of the core multicultural counseling competency areas; awareness, knowledge, and skills (Sue et al., 1992). When these experiential activities are used in conjunction with didactic methods often found in counseling training programs, counselors in training have the ability to practice the skills they have read about in the counseling literature and discussed in various training settings (Kim & Lyons, 2003).

Bell, Limberg, Jacobson, and Super (2014) illustrated how experiential-learning play-based activities can be used in a play therapy course to inspire self-awareness through the process of self-reflection. Instructors designed a curriculum built on Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Theory as its foundational backbone. Students participated in a one-week intensive setting where they met for eight hours per day over the summer semester. Students participated in lecture, discussions, group activities, role-playing, reflection, demonstration, and experiential activities (Bell et al., 2014). The primary goals
of the course were to introduce the meaning of play in children’s lives, introduce the stages of child development, and provide a review of child-centered play therapy and a variety of directional play modalities (Bell et al., 2014).

Students were given opportunities to engage in multiple experiential learning activities over the development of the course. Each activity included lower-level processing; questions that are less threatening to the student, and higher-level processing; questions that require more depth of thought and intended to inspire more reaction and opportunities for personal growth (Bell et al., 2014). An example of an experiential activity offered in the course is the Mask Activity. In the Mask Activity students have the opportunity to reflect on perceptions of themselves and others. The goals of the activity are to (a) gain self-awareness, (b) gain self-awareness of how other perceive you, and (c) use creativity to demonstrate perceptions (Bell et al., 2014). Students are given Play-Doh or clay and asked to create a mask representing how they see themselves. After they have created their first mask, they are directed to create a second mask to symbolize how they believe others perceive them. Students build their masks independently and are asked not to destroy their first mask until they have created their second mask and have had an opportunity to compare the two (Bell et al., 2014).

After students had the opportunity to reflect on their masks, the instructor led the group through the lower and higher-level processing questions. Students were encouraged to reflect on the concept of masks, and what masks people put on in their daily lives. Additionally, students reflected on both the benefits and costs of wearing masks and the process of removing masks (Bell et al., 2014). Bell et al. (2014) concluded that a result of the Mask Activity was increased group cohesiveness, group immediacy,
greater self-awareness. Additionally, students became aware of the differences between their two masks and were encouraged to provide feedback to their peers regarding noted differences on perceptions they formed of each other.

There were several experiential activities that accompanied the Mask Activity. The play therapy course incorporated music collage activity, fear-painting activity, puppet activity, and group drawing activity (Bell et al., 2014). The results indicated an enhancement in the personal and academic classroom experience. Through data collected in journal entries students reported an increase in self-growth and self-awareness (Bell et al., 2014). Furthermore, students reported that the activities added fun and elements of excitement to the classroom, which are often missing in the traditional classroom setting. Bell et al. (2014) advocate for the use of experiential activities in various counseling courses and as well as in “individual, group, and family counseling, and counselor supervision” (pp. 411-412).

Creating a Transformative Environment

As previously mentioned, it is important to expand and enhance the state of multicultural training in counseling programs by creating more opportunities for students to connect with others from diverse backgrounds. While classroom readings and activities are important, students must also engage in activities that will challenge them to engage in critical self-reflection, a key element in gaining self-awareness (C. C. Lee, 2019; Ratts et al., 2016). Mezirow (1997) highlighted the importance of transformative learning experiences that calls for students to engage in the process of self-examination, a sharing of thoughts, which leads to exploring new roles, relationships, and actions. Mezirow’s definition of what constitutes a transformative learning experience appears to subside
with the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts et al., 2016). In order for counselors to provide the best care for clients it is imperative that they are aware of their own beliefs and assumptions about those who come from different backgrounds. Mezirow (1997) posited that transformative learning experiences are designed to encourage students to engage in conversations and activities that they may have tendency to shy away from, such as those difficult dialogues around sensitive issues that take place in the traditional classroom setting.

Adams et al. (2007) suggested many approaches to consider when designing activities for students to engage in dialogue on the many issues that relate to social justice. The authors indicate the activities should offer a presentation of self or an opportunity for students to disclose attitudes and behaviors in order to inspire feedback and learning. Feedback is considered an important component of these learning experiences as it offers students an opportunity to learn and understand the impact of what they say and do (Adams et al., 2007). Opportunities for counseling students to learn the impact of language is essential for students in the helping professions as the language used in the process of counseling has the ability to significantly impact the client-counselor relationship.

It is important to consider the make-up of the environment when designing activities that encourage students to be vulnerable and engage in discussions that are sensitive topics, related to issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and affectional orientation. It is important that these conversations take place in an environment where participants feel safe and where there is a high degree of trust and nondefensiveness (Adams et al., 2007). An environment that is accompanied by a high level of trust and safety may allow
students to challenge each other and correct language and behavior that is inappropriate (Adams et al., 2007). This environment is often difficult to create in a traditional classroom environment where teachers and students may have received minimal training on how to create a safety and trust when talking about sensitive issues. Additionally, students may be reluctant to challenge peers in fear of damaging relationships with those who they may have to spend a great deal of time with as they navigate through the counseling program. Social justice conversations and the sensitive issues that derive from these conversations that take place in an environment that is lacking trust and safety have the potential to create an adverse effect on students by exposing them to further acts of prejudice, discrimination, and invalidating responses (D.W. Sue et al., 2009; Zalaquett et al., 2008).

Adams et al. (2007) suggested social justice activities grounded in research and theory that support students in understanding and engaging group experiences. Designing activities that are grounded in theory and research reduces the risk of both teachers and students imposing a ‘personal agenda’ onto the group where discussions and activities are motivated by the experiences of one individual within the group. The authors suggest the activities encompass a chance for students to experiment, practice, and apply the material that has been learned through interaction with peers. It is crucial that students practice new patterns of thoughts and behaviors in order to increase the chance that they will be able to transfer their new knowledge to back-home situations (Adams et al., 2007). Opportunities to apply of knowledge seems to be absent in conversation grounded in social justice that take place in the traditional classroom setting. Although classroom discussions that allow students to share their experiences in regard to issues pertaining to
privilege and oppression are invaluable, these conversations often conclude without any dialogue on how to incorporate this new knowledge into their daily lives and in their work with clients.

The principles for fostering learning experiences outlined by Adams et al. (2007) highlight the significance of offering counseling students’ chances to engage in transformative learning opportunities that extend far beyond the classroom setting. It appears that providing students with a chance to fully engage in sensitive conversations while wrestling with their own core beliefs may be best suited in an off campus setting where students can interact with peers and professionals who come from diverse backgrounds.

**Integration of a Social Justice Retreat**

One alternative model counselor educators might consider using to compliment the multicultural training that takes place in a traditional classroom setting is requiring students to take part in an intensive, off-campus, weekend experience, such as what is offered in a social justice retreat. There appears to be many advantages of requiring counseling students to participate in a social justice retreat while they are enrolled in a counseling program. One benefit of requiring students to engage in a social justice retreat is that it takes them out of the traditional classroom and places them in an environment where they are challenged to sit with their discomfort and engage with people who may share opposing beliefs and points of view. Sue (2011) identified many barriers that make it difficult for students to engage in conversations that are of a sensitive nature. He identifies many fears that students often experience when participating in these discussions including; fear of appearing racist, fear of realizing one’s own reaction to
racism, fear of confronting White Privilege, and fear of taking responsibility for racism (Sue, 2011). These fears may lead to students shutting down and refraining from conversations that take place in a traditional classroom setting. A common goal of social justice retreats is creating an environment where students are encouraged to talk about topics that they may have previously avoided. Social justice retreats are often facilitated by several large group facilitators who have wealth of knowledge, experience, and training in engaging in conversation of a sensitive nature (Bettendorf, 2016). Facilitators often encourage participants to “lean into their discomfort” meaning to take healthy risks and wrestle with the thoughts and feelings that accompany participation in conversations about privilege and oppression.

It is essential for counselors in training to engage in the process of wrestling with their own beliefs and assumptions in or order to best prepare them to provide counseling to those who come from diverse backgrounds (D’Andrea & Daniels, 2001; C. C. Lee, 2019; Motulsky et al., 2014; Pieterse et al., 2015). If counselor educators are devoted to increasing the ability for counseling students to work with people from various backgrounds it is imperative that students are encouraged and provided with opportunities to engage in activities and conversations that promote self-reflection. In order for future counselors to be effective in working with clients from various backgrounds they must possess awareness of their own cultural values and biases as well as a continually increasing awareness of the worldview of others (Roysircar, Arredondo, Fuertes, Ponterotto, & Toporek, 2003). Social justice retreats attract people who differ in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, affectional orientation, religious beliefs, class, and ability (Bettendorf, 2016). Additionally, many institutions for higher education offer retreats that
are not only available to students from all academic levels (undergraduate, masters, doctoral), these same opportunities to attend are available to university staff, faculty, and administration. It is rare that students are placed in an environment that is as diverse in terms of privilege/oppression as well as representatives from departments, clubs, and organizations across campus.

Adams et al. (2007) describe the importance of role modeling on the part of those who are in facilitation roles. Facilitators must be transparent with students about their attitudes and beliefs relating to social justice. Facilitators may use self-disclosure regarding their advantaged and targeted identities as a way of joining with students, expanding boundaries for discussing difficult topics, and modeling frameworks for how difficult conversations take place. Social justice retreat facilitators often have diverse educational backgrounds and experiences are trained in group facilitation. They possess a special interest in forming relationships with students and participants and serving as a catalyst along their social justice journeys. The connections made between facilitators and participants are often lasting relationships that allow for continued conversation once the retreat has ended and participants return to their communities.

In addition to the potential for lasting relationships through participation in a social justice retreat, there are often opportunities for advanced training and facilitation opportunities. Social justice retreats are offered at various institutions and these institutions seek out students and faculty who have experience working with others to serve as small group facilitators (Bettendorf, 2016). Often time’s students who are enrolled in counseling programs are ideal candidates to serve as small group facilitators in social justice retreats. Students who are selected to fulfill this role are required to take
part in training that prepares them to facilitate discussions that surface in social justice retreats. These facilitators often receive training on how to confront participants who may lack awareness on their places of privilege and in encouraging these same participants to reflect on how their lack of awareness may be impacting others. Students who serve as facilitators are able to gain invaluable experience in group facilitation and creating an environment that is safe for others to share their thoughts and experiences.

Activities for Change (Crossing the Room)

Competent and knowledgeable facilitators, although important, are one part of what makes a social justice retreat a potentially transformative experience for participants. Social justice retreats also include activities, discussions, and interactions aimed at increasing awareness among participants. In this section we highlight an activity that is commonly found in a social justice retreat called Crossing the Room (Adams et al., 2007). This activity is most effective in a room that offers a good deal of space for participants to move around. Participants are invited to assemble themselves at one end of the room in a straight line. They are then directed to hold hands with their neighbors. Group facilitators inform the participants that a series of statements will be read and if the statement is true for them, they will take one step forward. Participants are instructed to remain silent throughout the entire duration of the activity and to continue to hold hands for as long as it is physically possible. Facilitators proceed to read a list of seventeen statements that encourage critical self-reflection around their dominant and subordinate identities (Adams et al., 2007).

Once facilitators have finished reading the statements participants are asked to freeze where they are and to take a look around the room. Facilitators ask the participants
what title they would give this image. Group facilitators then engage in a group 
discussion about the experience. Examples of the discussion questions include:

(1). How did people feel at different points in the exercise? 
(2). What happens when some people can move forward and others cannot? 
(3). Did anyone question why he or she should move forward? Did anyone think 
of resisting or refusing? Why not? (Adams et al., 2007, p. 140)

Participants are then asked to engage in a conversation with the person next to 
them and discuss their responses to the activity. After several minutes of discussion 
between pairs, participants are invited to come together as a large group and discuss the 
activity. Participants are asked to think about what happens to the community (holding 
hands) when people have different levels of privilege and advantage.

The Crossing the Room activity serves as one example of the powerful nature of 
activities often found at social justice retreats. Not only does the activity encourage 
participants to reflect on their identities, both subordinate and dominant, it also serves as 
a visual representation of the real-life barriers that exist between those who have 
benefited from privileged identities versus those who may have experienced a lifetime of 
oppression. Activities like Crossing the Line allow students to engage in conversations 
with people who may not be present in a traditional classroom setting. The aspect of 
joining hands with others who are likely to have different experiences in relation to 
identity helps foster an intense emotional component that is often absent in traditional 
classroom settings. Having students immediately engage in the processing of the activity 
creates a platform for participants to share raw thoughts and emotions with others. This 
activity provides counselors in training an opportunity to enhance their ability to engage 
in conversation while potentially being triggered and having to control thoughts and 
feelings while staying present in conversation. The ability to remain present while
experiencing intense emotions and thoughts is a skill that will be utilized throughout a student’s time in the counseling profession.

**Implications for Counselor Educators**

The review of the literature indicates there are many barriers in place, which contribute to the lack of social justice activities, and discussion in counseling programs (Ratts & Wood, 2011; Sue, 2011; Sue, Lin, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009; Utsey, Gernat, & Hammar, 2005). These barriers range from issues related to departmental finances to possible attitudes and beliefs held by solidified faculty towards new faculty members who wish to add a social justice component to an already existing curriculum. The idea of programs requiring students to attend a social justice retreat serves as a starting point for institutions that wish to incorporate a social justice component to counselor training programs. Although having students attend a social justice retreat is far from sufficient in preparing students to work with clients who come from different backgrounds, it does provide these students with a chance to engage in a potentially transformative learning experience that extends far beyond a traditional classroom setting.

An environment is often created in social justice retreats, which will offer counseling students a chance to increase their awareness of their own assumptions, and biases that may ultimately impact their ability to provide the best care for future clients. This same environment also allows participants to learn from the experiences of others. The learning that takes within a social justice retreat will allow counseling students to connect their experiences, while attending the retreat, to future classroom discussions relating to working with clients who come from various backgrounds. The many issues clients bring to therapy are real and are often grounded in social, political, and economic
conditions (Ratts, Toporek, & Lewis, 2010). This is also true for participants who utilize social justice retreats as a way to process through impactful experiences while educating those who may be unaware of how their behavior may be contributing to incidents involving racism and prejudice.

Counselor educators who choose to adopt the idea of implementing a social justice retreat into counseling training programs need to consider how the knowledge and lessons acquired through participation in the retreat can be used to enhance discussions relating to privilege and oppression in other areas throughout students time in the training program. Faculty may wish to offer students opportunities to take part in focus groups where students can come together and talk about what the social justice retreat experience was like and how they have applied these experiences to their daily lives and counselor development.

**Conclusion**

The integration of social justice components into training programs of counseling students has been a challenge (Ratts & Wood, 2011). Some counselor educators argue that due to the decrease in funding for programs and competition from other professions including counseling psychology and social work that it is not the best time to bring in more components to already existing counselor training programs (Ratts & Wood, 2011). However, if counselor educators and counselors alike are in hopes of continuing to provide optimum care for clients by adjusting training programs to meet the needs of the changing face of our communities, it is important that counselor educators continue to advocate for the implementation of social justice components in counselor training programs.
Although requiring students to attend a social justice retreat is not the ultimate solution for increasing their abilities to work with students from various backgrounds, it does offer opportunities for students to engage in a transformative learning experience while the field grapples with the task of figuring out how to provide similar on-campus experiences for these students. Environments that are safe, allow students the chance to give and receive feedback, possess a high degree of trust, and allow students to practice and implement their acquired knowledge serves as a model that gives students a framework to learn from others (Adams et al., 2007). It appears a social justice retreat offers all the components that will provide an environment to allow students the opportunity to embrace a potentially life-changing experience.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research should focus on discovering ways that allow counseling students to engage in activities and dialogue about the many issues relating to social justice. Specific attention should be given to exploring ways for students to interact with other students who are diverse and come from various backgrounds. Research should focus on how counseling programs can create transformative learning opportunities for students where they feel safe talking about sensitive issues relating to their identities. Furthermore, it is important for research to focus on if, in fact, attending a social justice retreat increases counseling students’ awareness and knowledge of personal biases and assumptions that may impact their ability to provide the best care for clients. Future research is necessary to discover whether or not attending a social justice retreat has an impact on counseling student’s beliefs about whether or not they possess the skills and knowledge to work with clients who come from various backgrounds.
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