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Undiscovered Meanings of Minority Doctoral Students in Counselor Education Programs

by

Beronica M. Salazar

A dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education and Counseling

Idaho State University

Summer 2015

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## **Committee Approval**

To the Graduate Faculty:

The members of the committee appointed to examine the dissertation of Beronica Salazar find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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RE: Your application dated 11/24/2014 regarding study number 4204: Undiscovered Meanings of Minority Doctoral Students in Counselor Education

Dear Ms. Salazar:

I agree that this study qualifies as exempt from review under the following guideline: 2. Anonymous surveys or interviews. This letter is your approval, please, keep this document in a safe place.

Notify the HSC of any adverse events. Serious, unexpected adverse events must be reported in writing within 10 business days.

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Sincerely,

Ralph Baergen, PhD, MPH, CIP  
Human Subjects Chair

## **DEDICATION**

Dedicado a los grandes amores de mi vida:

Mi lindo esposo, Matty, Lillian, Karla, Robert, y Familia

I am forever grateful for your support!

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## **Abstract**

Higher education institutions aim at being more receptive to attract, recruit, and retain diverse students (“Diversity & the Ph.D.,” 2005). The increase of racial/ethnic diverse minority doctoral students in counselor education programs has created a need to understand their individual challenges. The dearth of research related to the in-depth experience of doctoral students in counselor education program affirms the need for exploration of minority doctoral student experience. This research proposal aspires to give voice to minority doctoral students’ stories of their challenging experiences, employing a reflexive process to discover the meanings connected to the experiences and identifying essential themes for participants. I will utilize a phenomenological research approach to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of minority doctoral students. The research design follows Max van Manen’s (1990) principle philosophy to establishing procedures for a phenomenological study with the aim of uncovering meanings beyond the text by applying a reflexive practice and viewing this from different spatial lenses. Findings from this study could serve a source for counselor educators in supporting minority doctoral students (MDS). Recommendations will be provided based on conclusions.

*Keywords:* phenomenology, minority doctoral students, qualitative research, heuristic

# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards outlines the training requirements for preparing master's and doctoral students for professional practice and identifies systemic recommendations for institutions (CACREP, 2009). The American Counseling Association (ACA) 2014 Code of Ethics (F.11.a.) and standards urge counseling programs to “recruit, employ and retain a diverse faculty” (CACREP, 2009, p. 6), highlighting the importance of a diverse faculty for training future counselors, supervisors, and educators. The attention placed within the standards and ACA Code of Ethics to expand staff diversity warrants attention toward understanding the complexities of preparing minority doctoral students (MDS) to become the educators of tomorrow.

Diversity can go beyond “across cultures and the intersection of cultural and social identities” (ACA Code of Ethics, p. 20, 2014). The focus on inclusion of diversity within the standards and ACA Code of Ethics urges counselor educators to be open to differences, thus far, with the aim to work toward equality for all to eliminate oppression. With a majority White student and faculty population presence in accredited counselor education programs (CACREP, 2013), there is an essential need to further examine MDS. The MDS literature demonstrated the utilization of both terms *minority* and *students (persons) of color* to represent racial/ethnic minority individuals. Considering the evolving literature with self-identifying language as *minority* or *students (persons) of color* for participants and/or researchers, the inclusion of both terms within this study is needed to provide a framework of acceptance of differences and individual choice.

The increase in minority doctoral students in higher education institutions has compelled educators to understand the complexities of preparing minority doctoral students to become the counselor educators of tomorrow. Variables that contribute to attrition and/or perseverance differ and to date have not been well defined (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). The importance for finding a match between doctoral programs and students has shown to be significant in enhancing persistence for program completion. Although Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) described the importance of further research in order to understand attrition, retention, and perseverance of minority doctoral students, this area has yet to be fully explored. Uncovering the meaning of the experiences of MDS can inform about retention to increase persistence and enrich opportunities for master's students to engage in racially/ethnically diverse programs. A phenomenological qualitative study could enhance understanding of the lived experiences of MDS. Potential implications from this study for counselor educators could be significant in providing further information to understand and nurture persistence in emergent minority counselor educators to ultimately secure faculty positions in academia.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework includes only literature directly related to the phenomena being explored (Maxwell, 2013; Maxwell, 2006). Consideration was placed on enhancing rigor by formulating an overall rationale for the study (Koch, 1994). The following conceptual framework provides readers with a rationale by reviewing the literature that identifies the problem and argues for the study to subsequently, shape the research design and procedures.

### ***Significance of Ethnic/Racial Minority Population***

The minority population represents a growing demographic within the general population yet they remain underrepresented in higher education (Diversity & the Ph.D., 2005). The U.S. Office Management and Budget (OMB) defines race by White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (U.S. Census, 2013). The OMB classification relies on individuals self-identifying with ethnicity of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish aside from race. In the U.S. Census projection for 2011, the representation of the total population in the United States for race and ethnicity were as follows: White 78.1%, Black 13.1%, American Indian and Alaskan Native 1.2%, Asian 5%, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders .2%, Persons reporting two or more races 2.3%, Hispanic or Latinos 16.7%, and White Persons not Hispanic 63.4%. According to the United States Census of 2010, Hispanic/Latinos became the largest minority group for race and ethnicity. In spite of this, there continues to be underrepresentation of most minority groups within counselor education programs (CACREP, 2013). The disproportionate representation of some minority groups in counseling programs may create limitations in preparation of students to work in their communities.

A lack of diversity in doctoral programs limits the multicultural opportunities, training programs provide counseling students, master's and doctoral, and ultimately responsiveness to the mental health needs of communities. CACREP oversees the development of the standards and procedures for accreditation for counseling and related educational programs (2009). The CACREP 2013 Annual Report described a total of 271 accredited institutions and 614 counseling programs. The 2013 Vital Statistics

Survey outlined the demographics for masters and doctoral graduate students.

Racial/ethnic student demographics were as follows: White/Caucasian 60.43%, African American 20.74%, Hispanic/Latino 7.69%, Asian American 1.79%, American Indian/Native Alaskan 0.74%, Multiracial 1.80%, Nonresident Alien 0.89%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander .25%, and Other Undisclosed 5.67%. The 2013 Vital Statistics Survey represented 1,655 doctoral students enrolled in accredited counselor education programs. The racial/ethnic doctoral student demographic were as follows:

White/Caucasian 60.12%, African American 20.54%, Hispanic/Latino 5.26%, Asian American 2.54%, American Indian/Native Alaskan .91%, Nonresident Alien 5.08%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander .30%, and Other Undisclosed 3.44%. The student representation within CACREP programs speaks to the continued underrepresentation of Latinos, Asian, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders within counseling programs (CACREP Annual Report, 2013; 2012). In particular, Latinos, despite being the largest minority group in the US, represent only 5.26% of doctoral students within counseling programs. This underrepresentation could represent unique challenges for Latino MDS. Although there may be many extenuating factors that limit some minority groups more than others to reaching acceptance to PhD counseling program, exploring the lived experiences of MDS in their program deserve further exploration.

The CACREP Vital Statistic Report (2013) uncovered an increase in enrollment of MDS in counselor education programs, yet there continues to be a lack of representation of minority counselor educators. Haizlip (2012) described an upward trend of African American doctoral students, yet noted an underrepresentation of African American faculty in counselor education and psychology programs. The proportion of

MDS in doctoral programs to minority counselor educators as faculty within CACREP accredited programs demonstrates a persistent lack of racial/ethnic diversity in academia (CACREP, 2013). CACREP's Vital Statistics Results Report (2013) began collecting information about faculty racial/ethnic self-identification for the first time in 2013. Procurement of racial/ethnic identification of faculty members illuminates on the representation of counselor educators in CACREP programs. The Vital Statistics Survey (2013) results of fulltime CACREP faculty were as follows: Whites/Caucasian 74.64%, African American 13.46%, Hispanic/Latino/Spanish American 4.72%, Asian American 3.32%, Nonresident Alien .59%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander .11%, and Other Undisclosed .64%. The demographics of faculty members in accredited counselor education programs reveal an underrepresentation of minority faculty relative to the population in counseling programs. Survey results leave questions as to the impact on nurturing the development of developing MDS considering the lack of diversity within CACREP accredited programs. Enrollment of MDS in counselor programs does not necessarily result in completion and subsequent employment in counseling programs observed by the CACREP Vital Statistics Reports (2013) demonstrating a decline from enrollment to degree completion.

### ***Expatriating the Significance of Minority and Person of Color***

Expanding on the meanings of terms *minorities* and *persons of color* beyond statistical constructs can highlight the influence of social aspects. Omi and Winant (1994) posit racial identity as complex due to individuals' opinions over the classification of groups, and the way individuals are placed. They further argue that racial categories are grounded in ever changing social concepts connected to history and social relations.

The identification as minorities, for some, has been associated in a negative worldview or a perceived notion of less than the dominant culture (Vidal-Ortiz, 2008). The Oxford Dictionaries online search defined minorities as “the smaller number or parts, especially a number that is less than” (Def. 1, 2014), thus, potentially reaffirming the presumption of being connected to a lower group. However, minorities are also defined as “a relatively small group of people specially one commonly discriminated against in a community, society, or nation, differing from others in race, religion, language, or political persuasion” (Oxford Dictionaries online, Def. 1.2, 2014) plausibly speaking to the unequal position of minorities next to the dominant culture. Aside from the latter definition, the presence of *persons of color* has gained momentum over the use of minorities (Vidal-Ortiz, 2008).

Omi and Winant (1994) described racial meanings are shaped by the existence of social, economic, and political pressures as such persons of color emergences in society. The 1808 Act to Prohibit the Importation of Slaves introduced persons of color in a positive direction by proclaiming against slavery for “negro, mulatto, or persons of colour” (Yale Law School, 2014, website: [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/sl004.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/sl004.asp)). Then in 1969, Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech of “I Have A Dream” noted the inclusion of citizens of color, thus far, marking the significance for the identification of a group of color. These events contributed to the identification of persons of color as a symbol of solidarity and redefined identity of racial/ethnic minorities (Vidal-Ortiz, 2008). However, persons of color has been challenged for considering Whiteness as not having color and categorizing

individuals that may not desire to identify themselves within this characterization (Vidal-Ortiz, 2008).

The self-identification as persons of color over minorities (and vice versa) remains arguable within society and within the literature, but essential. Within this study, minority and persons (students) of color focuses on ethnic/racial individuals. MDS, herein, serves as the overarching term for capturing the self-identification of individuals that opt for either *minority* or *persons (students) of color*.

### ***Expanding Diversity in Academia***

Gurin, Dey, Hurtado and Gurin (2012) argued that increased diversity within a classroom can present a valuable learning experience to expand multicultural competencies. The presence and success of minority doctoral students (MDS) increases opportunities for master's students to engage with racially/ethnically diverse faculty members, thus strengthening their preparedness for working with diverse clients. "Culturally skilled counselors recognize their sources of discomfort with differences that exist between themselves and clients in terms of race, ethnicity, and culture" (Arredondo, Toporek, Brown, Jones, Locke, Sanchez & Stadler, 1996, p. 1) and this can be fostered in a diverse educational setting of students and faculty. By better understanding the lived experiences of minority doctoral students (MDS), this can expand the possibilities for MDS retention and increase the opportunities for master's students to engage in racially/ethnically diverse programs.

The disproportionate representation of some minorities groups (CACREP, 2012; 2013) in academia has required graduate programs to address the racial/ethnic disparity in training programs. Affirmative action does not respond to all the complexities of

fostering minority students. Munoz-Dunbar and Stanton (1999) described the need for increase diversity in psychology programs and recognized there are no set standards for achieving this goal. The Holmes Scholars Network (HSN), the Compact for Faculty Diversity organization, Preparing Future Faculty Program, and other formalized mentorship programs are among some of the strategies geared toward assisting African-American students and pre-tenured faculty to increase their success in higher education (Haizlip, 2012). Programs motivated to respond to needs of graduate students of color should include a supportive mentoring approach and foster academic scholarship (Neal-Barnett, Mitchell, & Boeltar, 2002; Munoz-Dunbar & Stanton, 1999). “Universities must make it their mission to hire and retain diverse faculty in order to promote growth in a diverse student body” (Robinson, Lewis, Henderson, & Flowers, 2009, p. 186). Programs are called upon to be responsive to the needs of minorities beyond retention. CACREP includes in their vision stated the recommendation and necessity for “standards and procedures that reflect the needs of a dynamic, diverse, and complex society” (CACREP, 2013, Vision). Overall, recruitment and retention of ethnically/racially diverse students represents a component for counselor education programs requiring greater attention.

### ***Significance of Retention and Attrition***

Protivnak and Foss (2009) discussed the need for counselor education programs to look at attrition of doctoral students. Researchers followed a grounded theory approach to generating the themes. Their qualitative study demonstrated three processes within first semester students “(a) experiencing thoughts and feelings of self-doubt, (b) questioning whether they were engaging in appropriate doctoral study activities, and (c)

believing that they could succeed in doctoral programs” (p. 240.). Beyond this, Protivnak and Foss (2009) identified that a lack of connection within faculty members and peers prompt students to discontinue their doctoral programs. Programs motivated to respond to needs of doctoral students of color should include a supportive mentoring approach and foster academic scholarship to maintain engagement (Neil-Barnett, Mitchell, & Boeltar, 2002; Munoz-Dunbar & Stanton, 1999).

Protivnak and Foss’s research study provided meaningful findings for doctoral programs. However, Protivnak and Foss (2009) revealed that their study lacked the in-depth exploration that can be found with a smaller sample. Additionally, they noted the importance of narrowing the research to a specific group. Considering the value of an in-depth and focused qualitative research study asserts the exploration of MDS lived experiences as worthy examination.

Completing one’s doctoral degree for MDS is impacted by different factors: financial, parents’ educational history, undergraduate preparation, self-esteem, isolation and efficacy (Graham, 2013). Robinson et al. (2009) noted differing perceptions between minorities and Whites in relation to thinking optimistically about the future. MDS’s individual experiences within their graduate studies could potentially influence their ability to reach graduation. Unaddressed MDS’s issues can contribute to struggles with persevering in their graduate studies due to the already present challenges with the intensity of doctoral programs. The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundations (2005) completed an in-depth report exploring educational attainment of underrepresented groups, African Americans and Latinos, in proportion to the US population. Factors found to influence MDS challenges are as follows: lack of support

systems, decreased fellowship opportunities, decrease financial support, and the lack of awareness of available resources. Absence of systemic support for MDS amplifies the feelings of isolation, henceforth, increasing a sense of disconnection (“Diversity & the Ph.D.,” 2005). Across different fields of studies for MDS were feelings of isolation related to their ethnicity/race. This further affirms the need to examine the lived experiences of MDS in counselor education programs more closely to support permanency to completion to enhance diversity within counselor education programs.

### ***Challenges for Minority Doctoral Students/Students of Color***

There is a scarcity of research specifically looking at the experiences of MDS in counselor education programs. Henfield, Woo, and Washington (2013) conducted a phenomenological study aimed at gaining an understanding of the challenging experiences of African American doctoral students in counselor education programs. This study consisted of 11 participants and two interviews that were completed and verified via email. Email messenger and email used to check their responses and researchers’ interpretations of meaning. The themes identified were as follows: feelings of isolation, peer disconnection, and faculty misunderstandings and disrespect. Although this study provides meaningful information to understand African American doctoral student experiences, researchers noted further in-depth qualitative research was needed due to the inherent limitations of email/instant messenger interviews used in the study.

Ethnic/racial minority students throughout their PhD counselor education programs confront overt and covert racism, disproportionate obligations, and microaggressions (Patton, 2014). Racial microaggressions are defined as subtle racial insults or degrading messages toward individual for simply being part of a minority

group (Sue et al., 2007). The impact of the different forms and severity of racial micro-aggression toward minority doctoral students can be significant to their experience in academia.

Torres, Driscoll, and Burrow (2010) completed a mixed-methods study to explore the types of micro-aggressions, and impact to the mental health of African American doctoral students. Torres et al. employed Corbin and Strauss' grounded theory methodology to study participants' challenges and success in their programs via a secure website. Participants typed responses to open ended questions based on the open-ended question: "What obstacles, if any, did you have to overcome to earn your doctorate degree?" (Torres et al., 2010, p. 1081).

Torres et. al's (2010) qualitative analysis consisted of 97 African Americans participants within physical sciences, health sciences, social science, arts, and humanities fields of study. Emergent themes consisted of *Assumptions of Criminality/Second-Class Citizen*, *Underestimation of Personal Ability* and *Cultural/Racial Isolation*. The *Assumptions of Criminality/Second-Class* theme was described as racially motivated negative events in which the participants were thought to be deviant or treated as a lesser person. *Underestimation of Personal Ability* theme referred to the lack of perceived ability of participants to succeed in academia and continually needing to prove their abilities. *Cultural/Racial Isolation* described as being singled-out due to participants' race.

The quantitative analysis portion included 107 African American doctoral students and recent graduates who engaged in a longitudinal study collected in Spring of 2007 (T1: defines the first data collection) and 2008 (T2: defines the second data

collection). Participants reported that the majority of participants (92.4%) were attending predominately-White institutions. The doctoral students were asked to complete an online questionnaire, the Daily Life Experience-Frequency Scale (DLE-FS) of the Racial and Life Experiences, and those that completed the initial questionnaire were invited to complete a one-year follow-up questionnaire (Torres et. al, 2010). The DLE-FS is a self-report instrument that assesses the frequency and impact of 20 racial microaggressions. Items most frequently endorsed by participants in the DLE-FS T1 were as follows: “treated rudely or disrespectfully (37.7%); having their ideas or opinions minimized, ignored or devalued (30.3%); being ignored or overlooked, or not given service (26.4%); not being taken seriously (24.8%); and being considered fancy...(22.6%)” (Torres et al, 2007, p. 16). During the T2 administration participants findings indicated a positive correlation related to perceived stress and depression across the three racial microaggressions subscales. Symptoms related to depression were reported at both T1 and T2. Torres et al (2007) concluded African American doctoral students’ environment and the role of racial microaggressions may be detrimental to their psychological functioning. Results of study provide some valuable insights yet the data collection through the secure website was limiting to capturing the richness of participants’ stories. These results assert the need to further explore the lived experiences of MDS within counselor education programs to increase retention.

Further exploration of the oppressive experiences of MDS in graduate programs could be informative for counselor education programs. Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez (2011) conducted a study that looked at the Latina/o and Black doctoral students from a critical theory and critical race theory lens. The study aimed at deconstructing the

narratives of Latina/o and black doctoral students related to how they navigate oppression and dehumanizing experiences.

By using a critical race theory emphasis, Gildersleeve et al. placed focus on the influence of race for the Latina/o and Black doctoral students' experiences. There were 22 participants, eight Latina/os and 15 African Americans, from three research institutions from the West Coast, Midwest, and Northeast. The majority of the participants were in education, 17, and the remaining 5 from different fields of study (statistics, agriculture, anthropology, and psychology). Participants engaged in individual 45-90 minutes interviews with some being in person and others by telephone. Gildersleeve et al. found an overarching theme throughout the transcripts with participants, the phrase "going crazy" (p. 98). The phrase was further defined as "Am I Going Crazy?!" (p. 100) narrative to capture the essence of the experience of participants, MDS. *Am I Going Crazy* communicates uncertainty and self-doubt experienced by Latina/o and Black doctoral students. Gildersleeve et al. described the *Am I Going Crazy* as way of being of MDS that is present in their everyday life including in their graduate programs. The insecurity of participants was further provoked by both micro and macro racial aggressions that heightened challenges within their academic experiences. The racial aggressions added self-doubt to participants as they question their fit with their programs. The consequences of these narratives resulted in several different themes identified as: *Self-Censorship*, *Questioning Ability or Worth*, *Adopting the Rules of the Norms*, *Stifling Scholarly Endeavors*, and *Peer Support Networks*. The themes identified in the study ranged from MDS internalizing the dehumanizing experiences to accessing supports to express frustrations related to racial aggressions within their programs.

Gildersleeve et al. posit Latina/o and Black doctoral students with experiences of *Amy I Going Crazy* leads to the need to confront and negotiate their daily experiences to the extent that it may become a component of their schooling and at times may go unnoticed by students. The impact of race evidently places an unique experience for MDS from their White peers, which deserves further exploration.

### ***Personal Interest***

My interest in MDS developed through my educational experience and journey as a doctoral student of color in a counselor education program:

I recall a first day of grade school, as I looked out to this large room with my food tray on my hands. I wondered if there was a place for me. I remembered standing for a few minutes, yet this seemed like hours as I decided what direction to take to find a place for me. Then from the middle of the crowd among screaming children hustling and bustling, I could see my beautiful fiery red haired friend. He smiled with welcoming gestures and pointed at a place next to him where I could sit. I marched over with much relief and excitement as I had found my place. Just as I sat to feast, this tall heavy weight woman with dark hair called me out. She pointed to another dark secluded spot and said this was my place. Saddened with leaving my place next to my dear friend; I wondered what this meant and why I could not sit with him.

Then many years later, as I approached a beautiful nontraditional college campus that marked the beginning of my doctoral program, I found myself again not quite sure what to expect. As I tried to figure out

logistical details, what classroom I needed to be in, a tall man with dirty blonde hair approached me. With eagerness and excitement, I attempted to explain who I was, a *doctoral student*. Before, I could speak he abruptly told me that I did not belong. I wondered for a longtime after this initial encounter what he meant by this and questioned if I misunderstood his intent; however, with time I discovered he had affirmed (by his actions) my initial gut reaction of discontent and coldness toward me. I was not welcome by him. These encounters with him reshaped my experience as a doctoral student far beyond the challenges of my coursework and gained meaning to my being.

As a minority, Latina, I found myself mystified with the evolution of my own journey in academia and I wondered about the experience of other minority students. In recalling my first initial experience with education, as a child, I could not help to recall the blatant challenges with being able to remain in school and continual struggle across my lifespan. These barriers ranged from limitations related to socio-economic status, familial cultural traditions, and discrimination. All of which, informed my hesitations and struggles through my journey. Throughout my life, I have found these challenges remain present even as I transition into higher education in the counselor education doctoral program at Idaho State University. I continue to be bewildered by the ongoing discussions connected with the disproportionate rate of minority doctoral students (MDS) and faculty in counselor education programs. I cannot help to wonder about the lived experiences of other MDS in counselor education programs. Then I recall my barriers in

being able to sustain in the program and I continue to question how others experience the world within counselor education programs.

These experiences as a MDS became a more salient interest while attending the American Counseling Association National Conference in Cincinnati Ohio in 2013. Other minority students connected with me and asked about my own struggles within the program. They shared their stories related to the academic demands and shared some prejudicial events all too familiar to me. They speculated if their experiences were unique and yearned for confirmation that these experiences were not isolated to them. I was saddened to find myself in this situation, as I wanted to remain in the illusion that my struggles were no different from that of my counterparts, White doctoral student colleagues.

The informal stories shared with me at the American Counseling Association Conference touched me. This established an interest to give “voice” to their experiences’ as they navigate through their program of study in counselor education programs. Their voices could be beneficial to faculty members within the counseling profession. The process of giving voice does not entail the complete discovery of what is unknown but instead to enlighten readers about how MDS experience their counselor education programs. By allowing doctoral students of color voices to be heard, this process could capture those aspects that are most salient to them. My experience leads me to question how other MDS experience their journey in counselor education programs and curious about our differences or similarities.

## **Epistemological Stance**

A philosophy can continue to evolve for a researcher as they become exposed to new information. D. Kleist (personal communication, January 29, 2013) noted that not all researchers remain with a specific philosophy and instead shift within a continuum. The suggestion is for the researcher to gain awareness about their current stance and make this known to the reader. Allowing for this variance, the following represents my current stance as a researcher.

Postmodern perspectives include different paradigms. I find myself most connected with the broad umbrella of the postmodern paradigm. Creswell (2013) described postmodern perspectives as theories directed to changing ways of thinking and call for advocacy to make a change. Among the postmodern perspectives that closely resonated with my epistemological stance were constructivist and critical theory. Commensurability of paradigms can be possible within the same overall tenets such as constructivist and critical theory (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). Social constructivism (Interpretivism) attempts to understand the world in which we live (Creswell, 2013). A social constructivist relies on understanding the world through the participant's views. This view is consistent with my study's design to allow the participants to interpret their experience from their views.

The interpretation of the participant's world can be influenced by the researchers' personal, cultural, and historical experiences (Creswell, 2013). This process requires the need to maintain transparency throughout the study. Although I predominately hold views within social constructivism, I also see components of myself inclined to deepening understanding of ontology and epistemology through a critical theory lens.

Critical theory looks at seeing life with new possibilities by empowering individuals beyond the limitation placed on them related to race, class and gender (Creswell, 2013). This includes the pursuit to understand and the transformation of participants with gained awareness. In bridging these two paradigms, meaning making surfaces through the understanding of others views while remaining thoughtful of the influence of race, class and gender.

### **Research Question and Purpose**

*What is the lived experience of minority doctoral students during their counselor education programs?*

The need for diversity in counselor education programs gives urgency to the need for examining MDS further. This study may inform readers about the individual experiences of doctoral students of color. An in-depth understanding of the experience can potentially bring awareness to educators about the individual challenges of MDS. The research question intends at trying to gain a rich essence of the experience of MDS while in their counselor education program. “We cannot help you if we do not know what is going on in your world” (Barcus & Crowley, 2012). This study will provide a small example of the lived experiences of MDS; nonetheless, it will allow readers to get a richer understanding of the lived experience of MDS in the sample. The value of a qualitative inquiry has a potential impact to researcher, participants, and consumers, readers, of the study.

### ***Typological Sense***

The research question focuses on getting a deeper understanding of the experience of MDS. The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the experiences

encompassed by doctoral student of color in counselor education programs.

Additionally, I intend to give voice to doctoral students of color and discover the meanings connected to those experiences. A phenomenological approach can most likely provide the rich and meaningful interpretation of MDS experiences. This study goes beyond simply discovering the narratives to uncovering meanings' of the experiences of participants.

### **Conceptual Framework Conclusion**

The challenges connected to minority doctoral students in counselor education programs remains limited by the lack of focus within the published research studies. Some studies identify the need for more in-depth focus on the needs of MDS to gain a better understanding of their needs. The goal of this study is to discover their unique experiences while in a counselor education program. Robinson et al. (2009) noted the perception between minorities and Whites in relation to thinking optimistically about the future is different. This would substantiate the need to gain an understanding of the MDS experiences in counselor education programs as educators' perception may or may not be congruent. This phenomenological study aims at giving voice to the narratives, essential themes and meaning connected to the challenging experience of MDS within counselor education programs. The uncovering of participants' voices can help expand the discourse to understanding the intricacies for MDS through their counselor education program with the intent to enhance retention to increase diversity.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Methodology**

Maxwell (2013) posits a research design is best shaped through not following preset steps and allowing this to be formulated by the needs of the study. The flexibility for formulating procedures based on the needs of the study can be responsive to the uniqueness to each phenomenon being examined and helps deepening the understanding explored. Consideration to this principle has shaped the design for my study. The research methods of Max van Manen (1990) will be the guiding research method for the study. Although the rationale for procedures for the study will be outlined, there are no systematic preselected techniques. The study maintains a self-critique component as the procedures established for this specific study will be continually re-evaluated throughout the research. This is consistent with phenomenological research and van Manen's approach. "The method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is that there is no method!" (van Manen, p 30, 1990). However, systematic procedures for my study are presented with consideration that the design will be continually assessed throughout the process while allowing room for potential changes.

#### ***Phenomenology Approach and Rationale***

Phenomenology aims to uncover the meanings connected to a lived experience (van Manen, 1990) and provide a breadth of understanding of the phenomena (Dall'Alba, 2009). Van Manen (2007) clarified phenomenology even further as:

Phenomenology is a project of sober reflection on the lived experiences of human existence –sober, in the sense that reflecting on the experience must be thoughtful, and as much as possible,

free from theoretical, prejudicial[,] and suppositional intoxication  
(p 12).

The purpose lies on looking at the meanings of the experience and not necessarily geared at looking for facts related to the narrative of the event or phenomena (van Manen, 2014). The intent is to provide an in-depth description of the experience and interpretation of the meaning connected to it. Remember a valuable experience may not be “quantifiable” (van Manen, p 53, 1990); nonetheless, other things can be gained from this method. “Hermeneutic phenomenological research is a search for the fullness of living...” (van Manen, 2014, p. 12). The procedures for discovering the *fullness* of an experience through van Manen’s approach identified the absence of prescriptive techniques that guide a study. However, there is continual self-examination of the goals and methods to respond to the inquiry of information embedded within the experience. This continual evaluation affirms the systematic process within van Manen’s approach when presenting phenomenological research.

van Manen (1990) identified six research activities within hermeneutic phenomenology that will be inclusive within this study:

1. To give complete attention to a specific area of concern represents complete thoughtfulness to the phenomenon. The *turning to nature* embodies giving complete dedication to thinking more deeply about a lived experience.
2. The investigation of a phenomenon assumes a reconnection to the original lived experience by remembering the event. The *reawakening*, recalling, of the event places the researcher in the position to capture the fullness of the experience while

in relation to another being. This refers to the process by which a researcher can assist a participant to re-experience the lived experience (*reawakening*).

3. The reflection of *essential themes* does not represent identifying the facts instead highlighting the experiences most relevant for participants. The identification of *essential themes* exemplifies concepts of importance within an experience. To uncover *essential* and *incidental themes* related to the phenomenon necessitates a reflexive process by participants.
4. Phenomenological research requires the *writing* and *rewriting* to understand the lived experiences. The *writing* and *rewriting* process is shaped by bringing forward or giving voice to something of significance within the phenomenon. The continual *writing* and *rewriting* allows text to transform to meaning by incorporating reflection.
5. *Maintaining a strong and oriented relation* represents persistent commitment to answering the research question while minimizing deterrence from the study. *Oriented relation* rejects a narcissistic notion that could separate a researcher from the focus of the study. This requires constant interest in the study while not wavering to meaningless perceived ideas or settling for falsities unrepresented.
6. *Balancing the research* context refers to the ability of the researcher to relentlessly move from the writing process and stepping back to assess the research design. The review of the different parts and the whole within the research design represents an integral component to shaping the design for uncovering the essence of the phenomenon.

The research activities described above are intended as overarching principles that are not necessarily meant to represent formalized procedures; instead, mere guides to better uncovering the essence of a phenomenon. The six methodologies will be incorporated within my research design.

### ***Researcher Relationship***

Heuristic inquiry will be inclusive in the memos to understand the lens through which information has been processed and where meaning was cultivated. van Manen (1990) speaks about the role of the researcher in meaning making of a lived-experience; therefore, I will incorporate memos to help build on my own awareness of my influences in the meaning making of the lived experience of participants. The inclusion of memos follows a social constructivist approach by maintaining a level of transparency of the position between myself to participants for understanding themes that have emerged. Participants will be provided access to my memos from the inception to participate in the study.

The memos will be placed in a blog platform to ease access for participants to view postings at their discretion. The blog represents a cost effective (Hooks 2008) way to share thoughts and stories while giving readers the opportunity at a glimpse into the mind of an author (Chenail 2011) or a researcher, in this study. Participants will be able to maintain a voyeurism position or contribute through the addition of comments. However, there will be no set expectations to access blog (memos) for participants. Information about my position throughout the research process will be within the blog (memos). The blog, memos, is important to maintain the attention on unearthing

participants' essential and incidental themes while not confining them to my preconceived notions as a MDS.

This process of sharing my memos, blog, could reshape and/or influence participants own views of their experience as a MDS. Nonetheless, the sharing of memos is a source for maintaining openness to my own position within the study. My lens has been influenced by my own experiences and will likely be affected by the relationship developed with participants. Considering van Manen's phenomenological approach and my personal view, it would not be feasible to bracket my way of being and the memos could be fundamental to understanding these dynamics.

### ***Participant Selection***

Patton (1990) described purposeful sampling as selecting "information –rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research," which would be the aim of this study in the selection process of participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described beyond purposeful sampling the importance on the investigator to have the ability to identify those cases (participants) that match the purpose of the study. I will seek participants through a screening process that demonstrate the ability and willingness to provide a rich experience as a MDS in a counselor education program. The goal would be to get a sample of four to six participants. van Manen (1990) talks about purposeful sampling being focused on the ability of participants to be reflective to capture the fullness of the phenomenon. Identifying thoughtful participants relies on the ability to request participation through multiple methods.

The goal would be to attain a sample of participants willing to be reflective about their experience as a MDS. I will reach out to faculty and doctoral students that I met at the biennial Association for Counselor Education and Supervision conference and candidate from the National Board of Certified Counselors' Foundation Minority Fellowship Program (MFP fellows). In addition, I will reach out to members of the Association of Multicultural Counseling and Development in particular members I have met through the writing consortium to send out a request for participation. I will also use my committee members to help me connect with other counselor education programs to extend the invitation to other potential MDS participants. As needed, I will access the Association of Counselor Education and Supervision graduate student list serve to invite potential participants. If needed, I will submit a request for participation through the Counselor Education and Supervision NETwork-Listserv (CESNET-L from <http://www.cesnet-l.net/FAQ/index.html>). The CESNET-L does not purport to have a formalized mission statement; however, the list serve has served as an open forum to share resources and discuss different issues related to the profession of counselor education and counseling. Although the list serve functions independently from the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, the openness to the public increases the potential to capture non-ACES members missed through the ACES graduate student list serve invitation. The multidimensional recruitment process, starting with known professional acquaintances to extending to more general venues for inviting participants, can potentially increase the possibilities for identifying individuals that meet criteria—to be reflective about their experience as a doctoral student of color.

Participants identified for the study will be currently enrolled in their second semester or beyond in a counselor education doctoral program. The rationale for choosing the second semester is to allow participants the opportunity to experience the doctoral program, as the experience of the phenomenon will be critical in this process. Participants will be asked to be reflective about their experience through their counselor education program and to capture the *fullness* of their experience.

Doctoral students will self-identify as an ethnic/racial minority individual or student of color. For purposes of this study, racial/ethnic minority will be defined as Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino (a) and Multiracial/Other (i.e. bi-racial). Self-identification as a minority doctoral student versus students (persons) of color will be left to the discretion of participants' personal self-identification preferences. Participants will have the option to being referred as minority or students of color yet they will still need to be a member of a racial/ethnic minority group. The classification of minority has expanded to include other groups such as LGBTQI community members and individuals with disabilities; however, for purposes of this study the focus remains on exploration of the experiences for ethnic/racial minority populations.

### ***Data Collection***

Data collection will involve interviews I will complete with each participant and the review of my memos generated throughout the study. Appendix B outlines the interview process and questions at this stage. During the interviews, I will place heightened awareness to the existential guides of "lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality or

communality)” (van Manen, p101, 1990) to deepen understanding of participants’ experiences.

- *Lived space* refers to the physical environment surroundings the lived experience of participants. This focuses on the *felt space* related to the experience by giving special attention to participants feelings connected to the space.
- *Lived body* represents the physical body. This gives attention to the participants as physical beings in relation to the lived experience.
- *Lived temporality* helps in understanding participants’ perception of the experience based on the past, present and future. It is practical to recognize participants may reshape those memories as they recall or think about the future yet their perspectives provide meaningful understandings to their experiences.
- *Lived human relation* places attention to the inherent need for interpersonal relationship engagement. In essence, the process by which a participant can create meaning of themselves through relationships with other individuals.

Follow up questions will be asked to expand on these existential factors to extend the meaning of the events for participants. Consistent with van Manen’s phenomenology, this process will be reassessed and when necessary adjusted through the study. Rationale for making changes to the design will be documented in my memos and shared during final dissemination of study results.

The data collection will consist of individual participant interviews, a follow-up check-in with each participant, focus group with all participants, and a final member check-in.

- **Interviews --** The interview will be a means to gain understanding of the personal experiences of MDS and develop a relationship with interviewee to assist with meaning making (van Manen, 1990). The goal is to be able to get an in-depth understanding of lived experiences for participants in their counselor education programs. The interviews will be video and/or audio recorded then transcribed. I will use Blackboard Collaborate, Skype or another technological source for each of the interviews. The transcription will be completed by a certified service provider that adheres to the Health Insurance Portability Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPPA at <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/index.html>) guidelines and/or by myself. Accessing a transcription service provider will be dependent on my available personal resources at time of completion of interviews.

Where possible the interviews will be in person, if not feasible then by the use of Blackboard Collaborate, Skype or another technological means. Participants will be informed about the limits of confidentiality based on the inherent nature of the use of technology. Additionally, given the nature of the detailed information gathered through the interview process, I may be limited in ensuring complete anonymity. Participants will be providing potential identifying information about themselves and their counseling education programs, which may lead readers to make potential conclusions about their identity. Therefore, I will make every effort to alter any identifying information to decrease the likelihood of recognition. Participants will be given opportunities to review, clarify, or change their information. This will include choosing to decline to proceed with the study.

**Interview Questions:**

1. What have been the most significant experiences that have affected you as a minority doctoral student (student of color) in your counselor education program?
  2. How are you making meaning of these experiences?
  3. How has this influenced your experience as a doctoral student?
- **Member check-in #1**– Predominately these connections with participants will serve to deepen participant’s description of the emergent themes. van Manen (1990) described the significance of a theme as something “telling,” and “meaningful” (p.86). I will identify essential and incidental themes. Essential themes aim to capture the fullness of the phenomenon since the qualities are fundamental to the experience, or demonstrate a significantly revealing component (van Manen 1990). Conversely, incidental themes may not always be present in the phenomenon yet have a meaningful component related to the experience. I will offer to share interview recordings and/or transcripts to allow participants to expand further on the *fullness* of their experiences as MDS. The attempt is to capture their truth of their experience as doctoral students of color through their counselor education experience. Considering knowledge does not exist in absence of me, I will contribute to the meaning making of the experience while continuing to checking-in with participants. I will then provide each participant the shared themes discovered from all the interviews and again allow space for feedback on themes.
  - **Focus Group Interview** – Participants will have the limits of confidentiality communicated to them prior to the focus group. The focus group interview

meeting will be an opportunity to bring shared themes and deepen participants' description of the emergent information to expand on their experience. This process also takes into consideration my social constructivist approach to understanding knowledge. Questions for this section will evolve based on the previous encounters with participants. I will make every effort to use Blackboard Collaborate, Skype or another technological source; however, if not possible, then we will meet via conference call for focus group.

- **Member check-in #2** – I will offer to share interview transcription recordings to affirm or disconfirm themes emerged from focus group meeting. Depending on the outcome from the participants' feedback through the member check, I will provide another opportunity to allow them to see the compiled findings. These finding may include new themes and/or corrections generated. I will allow space for clarification, corrections, and feedback on themes.

The interview process will include consideration of “lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality or communality)” (van Manen, p. 101, 1990) to reflect on the participant experiences. Bringing in these factors to recall the experiences can further extend the meaning and depth of the events for participants. Consistent with van Manen's phenomenology, the research design will be re-assessed and when necessary adjusted through the study.

### ***Data Analysis***

Maxwell (2013) posits the decision about data analysis should be reflected in the research design. I will share the transcriptions and preliminary themes within the

interviews conducted with participants. Interview questions, prompts, are found in Appendix B. Steps in data analysis will be as follows:

1. Following van Manen's perspective for data analysis, I will systematically complete coding after interviews. This process would include exploration of emergent themes with participants during the member check-ins (#1 and #2) to take into account their input. The rationale for this process is to ensure an accurate representation of their experience in the development of both essential and incidental themes.
2. During the review period of data coding, I will complete a memo connected to reviewing each of the interview recordings with participants (See Appendix C). Participants will have access to my memos, at their discretion. Memos will be posted to a private Google blog that participants will have access. Considering the increased acceptance and use of blogs within qualitative research (Chenail 2011; Hookway 2008), I will use this method to ease access throughout the study. Participants will be given the opportunity to comment or contribute to the blog as a means to increase the reflective process. The blog settings will be pre-set to private ('friends only'). I will direct participants' comments to automatically be forwarded to me prior to them being displayed in vivo in the blog due to the inherent sensitive nature of this study, and potential sensitive information shared. The screening of participants' comments will be completed to ensure the focus of the study remains central to the blog's purpose.

3. I will revisit connections and themes with participants individually then in the focus group interview. At the completion of the focus group meeting, a memo will be generated by the researcher and coded along with the recordings.
4. The identified essential themes will be shared with participants to check for accuracy and further giving space for reflection on the discovered themes.

The essential and incidental themes developed from the data will be made available to all participants. I will be open to making adjustments of data analyzed based on the participants' interpretations of the data. The data analysis process includes a social constructivism approach by being open as a researcher with my own meaning making of themes while ensuring it is representative to the lived experience of participants.

Considering my philosophical stance includes a critical theory lens, the potential social and culture influences to the lived experiences of MDS will be examined. My inquiry auditor, David M. Kleist, will be providing input to the process and potential areas of concern to address trustworthiness.

### **Trustworthiness**

van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological study does not seek to generalize. Instead, it strives to gain a rich understanding of the phenomena studied. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research there needs to be consideration to credibility, transferability, and dependability. These factors have influenced the response to potential threats to trustworthiness within this study.

Trustworthiness and response to threats will be addressed as follows:

- ***Researcher's experience:*** My lived experience can threaten trustworthiness and potentially influence my interpretation and meaning creation. As noted in the design,

this would be addressed with a heuristic inquiry. Participants will be made aware of my colored lens to increase transparency of the underlined beliefs and perceptions based on my own life experiences.

- ***Researchers' influence toward experience:*** My potential influence, as a doctoral student of color in a counselor education program, will be captured through the writings in memos, and they will be shared with participants. Considering not all biases may be known, I will seek faculty/peer consultation as the study evolves.
- ***Interpretation and meaning making:*** There will be continual review of research design to address new information gained and issues drawn up by participants, peer review, or faculty. The memo writing will be an inclusive step during this process. Participants will be afforded the opportunity to contribute through different mediums beyond language at their discretion during their interviews, member check-ins, and throughout the study if language limits the expression of their experience as a MDS. Participants, at their discretion, will share drawings, pictures, or other mediums to provide further understanding beyond verbal language; however, this will not be an expectation. The writing and rewriting of emergent essential and incidental themes will be shared with participants. I will seek consultation from inquiry auditor as interpretations are made from the data.
- ***MDS motivation to please researcher:*** I will explain to participants that within a phenomenology approach there are no preconceived notions of expectations desired from the study. The focus of the study is on giving voice to participants' narrative experiences and deepening participant's description of the emergent theme. To

understand the basis of the study, I will share a brief overview of my philosophical assumptions and phenomenological position.

- ***Researcher relationship--*** As a MDS, I may be viewed as a peer and colleague.

Formal consent outlining the potential beneficial interactions of the relationship will be completed at the onset of the study and revisited throughout the study. MDS participants have the option to engage or not in a relationship (with other participants or researcher) further than what they perceive as comfortable. There will be no penalties or retribution for choosing to limit the scope of the relationship with participants/researcher or to leave the study at any point in time. Aside from participants desired level of engagement with researcher, I will maintain a level of transparency throughout the research process. A heuristic inquiry will be inclusive in my memos to understand the lens through which information was processed and where meaning was cultivated. This process is important to unearth participants' rich meanings while not imposing my preconceived notions and gain further confirmation that themes are based on participants' input.

### ***Ethical Issues***

As the principal researcher, I will inform participants about the ethical obligations (ACA Code of Ethics, G.1., 2014) and their rights (ACA Code of Ethics, G.2., 2014). This will include human research committee approval, confidentiality, informed consent, and accurate data reporting. Within the informed consent, participants will be notified of the continual consultation practice with Idaho State University faculty and colleagues as this will be essential to this process. The consultation conferences will serve as an auditing mechanism to maintain the integrity of the study.

Participants will select their own pseudonyms to allow them to maintain anonymity. Detailed information shared about the institutions participants will be altered to the extent possible to protect identity of participants. The aim to decrease recognition would help participants be open about their experience and maintain their information confidential to minimize potential reprisal connected to sharing their experiences associated with different counselor education programs or institutions. Participants will be notified about their right to leave the study at any point in time.

The plausible benefits of forming relationships with other participants and myself, as a result of the study, will be reviewed (ACA Code of Ethics, G.3.d). Participants will be given the option and space to engage or not in a relationship (with other participants or researcher) beyond what they perceive as comfortable. There will be no penalties or retribution for choosing to limit the scope of their relationship with other participants or myself.

### **Conclusion**

*“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” -Maya Angelou*

The experiences connected to minority doctoral students (students of color) in counselor education programs remain a mystery. The need for better understanding the experiences of doctoral students of color could be informative to programs and contribute to the body of literature for addressing underrepresentation of diversity in counselor education. A phenomenological inquiry will provide an in-depth review of MDS lived experiences that could expand the body of literature in counselor education. This methodology allows for the voices of MDS, within this study, to emerge while potentially

enhancing participants' awareness about their own experience. Although the findings from this study cannot be generalized to all MDS, themes discovered can speak to the transferability of findings based on the conceptual framework. This chapter details the proposed methodology for my study by capturing and considering each area of the research design. van Manen (1990) and Maxwell (2013) emphasize the importance of remaining open within the research design while still formulating a basis for engaging in the study. Therefore, I am open to making changes that will maintain the integrity and bring forward the essence of participants' experience.

## CHAPTER III

### Commencing the Study

*“I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.” — Mother Teresa*

The request for participation initiated once the Human Subjects Committee (IRB) of Idaho State University approved the study. After discussion with inquiry auditor, David M. Kleist, and authorization of IRB had been satisfied, I began the multidimensional recruitment process originally proposed began. A letter for invitation to participate was sent to candidates from the National Board of Certified Counselors Foundation Minority Fellowship Program (MFP fellows), faculty, and doctoral students known to me through the biennial Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) conference. After a few days with limited response, the invitation extended to my group members from the writing consortium connected to the Association of Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD). These efforts led to a response of multiple potential participants interested in sharing their stories and/or wanting to contribute to the study.

#### ***Selecting-to-Screening for Inclusion***

Upon initial contact from potential participants expressing interest in the study, I screened to ensure they were enrolled in their second semester or beyond of their counselor education program and self-identified as an ethnic/racial minority individual or student of color. The initial screening led to excluding at least three individuals due to not being eligible based on criteria set of ethnic/racial minorities for the study. Participant selection screening extended from meeting the minimum requirements to

ensuring an ability and willingness to be thoughtful about their experience, as MDS, had to be present.

van Manen (1990) has emphasized the importance about identifying participants capable of being reflexive to capture the fullness of their experience. The ability to be open to the process of uncovering their lived experience remained crucial in the participant selection for the study. After the initial screening, I had seven potential participants that identified as MDS, enrolled in their second semester or beyond of their counselor education program and expressed being open to sharing their stories. The seven potential participants were provided with the informed consent before proceeding. However, only five participants elected to commence with the study and signed informed consent. The other two potential participants did not provide a rationale for opting out of the study, nonetheless, in the interest of transparency, it is important to give mention of their existence through this process.

### ***Individual Interview Progression***

Participants' individual interviews screened to ensure their ability to be thoughtful and a willingness to be open about their experience. Once informed consent was returned then I initiated contact with each participant to schedule interview meetings. I arranged individual interviews arranged via a technological means (telephone or Skype) depending on the chosen preference of participants while considering mutually available means. I completed Skype interviews with three of the participants and two telephone interviews. I informed all participants about the limitations of confidentiality when using their chosen selected technological means for interviewing for the study. Abundant attempts made to

ensure their confidentiality during and throughout the interviews. I enhanced confidentiality in the study by allowing each participant to self-select a pseudonym.

Language played a role in the study. I gave interviewees the opportunity to self-identify as an ethnic/racial minority member. Participants had freedom of choice to use minority doctoral students (MDS) or students of color descriptors to describe themselves. I was intentional in my efforts to use their language when possible during data analysis presentation; therefore, the terms MDS and students of color will be used interchangeably for the remainder of the chapters.

I provided participants with three interview questions. All participants responded to the following interview questions:

1. What have been the most significant experiences that have affected you as a minority doctoral student (student of color) in your counselor education program?
2. How are you making meaning of these experiences?
3. How has this influenced your experience as a doctoral student?

These three questions guided each individual interview; however, to deepen the understanding of participant's worldview they were asked to elaborate further to highlight van Manen's (1990) existential principles of lived space, lived body, lived temporality, and lived human relation. I asked further probing questions to expand on the meanings raised by each of the participants. The research question, *what is the lived experience of minority doctoral students (students of color) during their counselor education programs*, remained as the overarching goal of each interview.

## **The Human Science Connects with Participants' Backgrounds**

Presentation of participants and their interviews conducted through this study will include narratives to gain the *fullness* of participants' experience. Identifying participants willing to be reflexive and thoughtful represented critical traits for inclusion yet their specific backgrounds extenuate their stories. My intention was to provide enhanced understanding of participants' meanings, which included presenting their individual interpretations of their lived-experiences. Getting acquainted with participants represents giving context to formulate the foundation for preparing to introduce those ideas that had the greatest significance for participants.

### ***Getting Acquainted with Mercedes***

Mercedes was the first participant interviewed individually via Skype. She originally self-identified as a Latina woman. As the discussion progressed, she talked about being connected with "other transracial internationally adopted people." She went back and forward with characterizing herself as a Latina and transracially identified individual.

A "White family" raised Mercedes. Her adoption by a White family presented a unique perspective to understanding her world-view. She was raised in a "very homogenous white" community. The presence of racism had interplayed in her upbringing. The skills she gained growing up translated into interpretations she made as a doctoral student of color. She described how she knew "how to negotiate a White world because that is what I had to negotiate." The way she navigated her identity interconnected with her nuclear family and transferred to her academic life.

Assumptions made or inferred by other students and faculty members of her nuclear family existed, which had an impact on her. Her daughter and son were identified with a multiracial background. Her nuclear family was an important piece to defining her. Moving beyond her personhood, the cultural context of her surroundings can help expand understanding of her position.

The counselor education program was described as predominately homogenous. Mercedes said, “we don’t have any faculty of color.” She further expanded as to students being in a program with mostly White students. She described the student populations as “mostly White students in the program.” She identified as the only “Latina doctoral student of color.”

At the time of the interview, she was in the pre-dissertation phase and preparing for her dissertation proposal/prospectus. She connected her experience being dependent to her stage in the program. All these variables presented by Mercedes could be meaningful in gaining better understanding to the context of her lived-experiences as a student of color.

### ***Getting Acquainted with Chad***

Chad responded fairly soon after the initial request for participants. I completed the initial screening process face-to-face considering our mutual availability. Due to conflicts with our schedules, a later appointment was scheduled to conduct the individual interview. Although these facts informed about the process in enrolling him in the study, I believe his actions spoke to his willingness to assist in the study needs mention.

The initial interview was originally planned as a video conference call. Struggles with connecting for a video conference meeting led to making the decision to conduct the interview by telephone. After connecting via telephone, the interview recommenced.

Learning about Chad included understanding the particulars that seemed most meaningful to him. Chad described his program as an “online doctoral program.” His program consisted of intermitted visits to the main campus described as “residencies.” The residencies were opportunities to engage with faculty members, which he associated as vital to his development. The residencies experience helped him learn more about his faculty members and himself. He described his faculty members as predominately White. It was apparent to him that he was the only “black male” in his program.

Chad described having a family. He identified with being a father, and stressed the importance of his children to his life. He expanded on his familial role by mentioning the connection with extended family. Learning about Chad encompassed capturing the things he highlighted as noteworthy. The physicality of his program, the components he chose to share about his program, and personal attributes spoke to his personhood. All of these factors inform about Chad and speak to areas he chose to point out as significant to understanding him.

### ***Getting Acquainted with Sherri***

Sherri interviewed via Skype. Sherri identified herself as an African American female. She talked about having a family. She is married with children. She defined herself as “a nontraditional student.” Her familial influence played a role in her interpretation of her experience and views of self in relation to her student peers.

Sherri described having a distinctive experience as a doctoral student. She attended a doctoral program in 2009, but due to unforeseeable conflicts, she left the program. Her initial program enrollment and subsequent departure influenced her views beyond the academic experience and shaped her personal views. She viewed the differences between the programs as vital to understanding her experience.

Sherri described her first program as traditional brick and mortar with a cohort model. Contrary, her current program encompassed a hybrid model with once a month face-to-face meetings. Although she disclosed initial reservations to an online program, she talked about her academic experiences being meaningful. She noted that most of her peers were mostly “nontraditional students.” She described “nontraditional students” as individuals that have been out in the workforce for ten years or more. She felt this was noteworthy given the interactions with peers comparatively from her first program. Her description also included her current transitional role. She highlighted her changeover from counselor to emerging educator as significant to her identity. She referenced all of these pieces of her identity as relevant throughout her interview. These descriptors speak to aspects that Sherri felt important to present within the initial interview to understand her individual situation and interpretations.

### ***Getting Acquainted with Strong Woman***

Due to limited technological means for Strong Woman, the interview was conducted via telephone. She identified herself as a Native American woman, more specifically Arapaho. Strong Woman referenced her personal culture and ethnicity as a core component in defining her identity. She highlighted her continued connection with

the reservation. Her elaboration of her ethnicity helps to better understand her beyond the label of Native American.

Strong Woman described attending a predominately-White institution. She talked about being the only Native American in her program. Her program lacked diversity. She noticed that the dearth of representation of minority students extended across the university.

Strong Woman's family represents an important component to her identity. She described being married and having adult children. She identified her peers as much younger than her and with much different experiences. She disclosed a history of extended clinical experience, which further diverged from her peers.

The program she attended was a traditional brick and mortar institution. She described being in the final stages of completing her course work and the beginning stages of her dissertation proposal prospectus. The location of the program was within the Rocky Mountain area of the United States. Her community was described as rural with a predominate presence of White people. While she readily provided details about her faculty members, program, and location, only information that spoke to her personhood was included, considering the privacy of others needs consideration.

### ***Getting Acquainted with Eva***

Eva was the last interviewee due to our mutual availability to schedule a meeting. We met via Skype. The Skype meeting was completed but there were technological challenges throughout the interview. She was flexible and persisted with using Skype aside from the technology glitches with calls disconnecting a few times. Eva's identified

as Hispanic female. Her Hispanic heritage appeared to be a significant component to her identity.

To know Eva involves understanding her background and the connection to her family frames her views of engagement with others. Eva described herself as different compared to her peers. She identified as a single parent with young children. She disclosed being a survivor of domestic violence. Her family of origin continues to be involved in her life. She viewed them as a key source of support. She described being raised within “a lower socio-economic status” family. Her family represented a driving force to endure through challenges and a guide for everyday living.

Eva disclosed her program had a broad representation. She indicated that across students to faculty members there was a diverse ethnic/racial representation. She talked about the diversity even extending to the community, which provided unique opportunities for her. She described being in a unique program compared to other MDS due to the demographics.

The program Eva attends is in the Southern part of the United States. Her program is in a traditional brick and mortar institution. She described being in the second year of her program of study. Eva disclosed, during the interview, concerns of reprisal related to her actions by professors and others in the profession; therefore, she was allowed the opportunity to review information presented within this study and make changes as she saw fit.

### ***Orientation to Participants Essence***

Uncovering who the participants were beyond basic demographics provides rich context and shapes the groundwork for introducing their narratives. Each of their

backgrounds speaks to their individual lens, which formulates the meanings composed from their experiences presented within this study. Learning about their distinct life experiences can help with providing an enriched picture while allowing room for subtle connections to emerge from their descriptions.

All participants met the initial requirements for inclusion to the study. They demonstrated the ability to be thoughtful, self-identify as a racial/ethnic minority, and have enrolled in a counselor education program at their second semester or beyond. Participants were from different levels of their program with the majority of them being at or past their second year of their doctoral studies in counselor education.

The geographic distribution demonstrated a wide range across the regions of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES). Participants' geographic represented the following divisions: North Central (NCACES), North Atlantic (NARACES), Southern (SACES), and the Rocky Mountain (RMACES). Although participants were selected based on the criteria of willingness and ability for reflexivity, the participation encompassed a diverse group of students from across the country.

Racial/ethnic backgrounds varied across participants. Their narratives included the labels such as Latina/o (Hispanic), African American (Black), and Native American (American Indian). The use of their words in the study can be an important disclosure and characteristics that need consideration as it can add to understanding their stories. Definitions of their racial/ethnic identity were included in their narratives shared during interviews to give additional meanings beyond predetermined ideas of the terms used, compared to day-to-day terms or those found in the literature.

Participants readily provided demographics connected to their identity. Although I had initial reservations with the inclusion of detailed participant information due to wanting to ensure their privacy and anonymity, I fully embrace the idea of empowering them in making their own decisions to include or exclude information from the study. Their willingness to share and authorize inclusion of this information speaks to their vulnerability, thus, giving true shape to uncovering the *fullness* of their human experience as MDS.

### **Individual Participant Interviews**

*“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you.” – Maya Angelou*

The following section will focus on elaborating Mercedes, Chad, Sherri, Strong Woman, and Eva’s stories. I will present the preliminary emergent themes and provide rich descriptions from each participants’ interview. I will include summary interpretations and specific excerpts that will define concepts highlighted by each participant.

### **Individual Participant Interview: Mercedes**

Mercedes’ response to the initial question, *what have been the most significant experiences that have affected you as a doctoral student of color or minority doctoral student in your counselor education program*, prompted her to talk about different areas connected to her experience as a doctoral student of color. She identified her relationship with master’s students of color, feeling like a “poster child for her department,” and the recognition by a national organization as significant. These ideas evolved through her interview to deepen the descriptions of her lived-experience and giving rise to the vital concepts within her story.

### *Connecting with Master's Students of Color*

From the beginning of the interview, Mercedes recognized her supervision relationship with master's students of color as noteworthy. She described her amazement as, "I was struck by how much the master's student of color really made good use of me. Not that the others didn't but really connected when talking about some of the issues of masters students of color." The interactions with master's students seemed to affect her positively as she perceived their receptiveness linked to her capacity to be supportive with their particular needs.

Mercedes expressed truly feeling she could contribute to her supervisees' development. This reasoning even led to her pondering about the potential limitations to their growth in the absence of her support. She expressed being concerned about the progress of master's student of color without a supervisor that could be responsive to their needs. She expressed this logic as, "I was struck by how or where would they go if I weren't their supervisor. Where would these students' emotions go if I was not their supervisor? That was kind of an eye opening experience for me." The realization of her influence on master's students of color had a significant impact to her own development.

Mercedes spoke about "one profound experience" during her supervision internship. This "profound experience" exemplified the implications of being able to connect with master's students of color at a deeper level. She talked about powerful encounters with a supervisee due to her unique position to be available to them. She noted that supervisees perceived difficulty with reaching out to academic advisors for fear of not "being heard" about certain problems. This confidence in the supervisor-supervisee relationship led to occasions where she discussed topics related to the

presence of “microaggressions” and impact to supervisee’s academic experience. The opportunity to participate in these conversations represented momentous engagements that increased her reassurance and purpose as a supervisor. She described these topics being a focus of their supervision relationship. She explained, “It just seemed it became a theme through supervision.” Connecting with master’s students of color in an open genuinely honest manner epitomized her personal values and motivation for wanting to support student development.

*“Negotiate a White World”*

Mercedes described coming “from a unique position” with being adopted. She expanded, “I am a Latino person, but I was raised by a White family.” As a Latino woman within a White family informed her particular experience and life lessons, thus, bearing implications to her way of being. Having been raised in “a very homogenous White and predominately Italian community,” placed her in a position to learn to “negotiate a White world.”

Mercedes saw her upbringing as an educational life experience that informed her relationships later in her doctoral program. She elaborated by explaining, “I have unique abilities because that was the world I lived in.” She admitted to being raised close to a “racist community.” She recalled there was a community of Puerto Rican people close by and seemingly viewed as the “not so great people.” The perception of the “White world” led to her having to figure out ways to navigate a racist community. She summarized,

“So I spend my youth developing lots of survival skills to protect that part of my identity to not really announce to a lot of people of where I was

actually from. To really try to pass as Italian which was somewhat successful but quite a bit. I know how to negotiate a White world because that is what I had to negotiate.”

Out of necessity, Mercedes talked about having to gain skills to deal with racism. Considering the prevalence of the challenges, it was evident she became astute with persisting even through these difficult situations.

The ability to “negotiate a White world” successfully linked to her later encounters within her counselor education program. She elaborated, “I think that made it so much easier for me to deal with some of the faculty as well some of the kind of current weird stuff that happened in academia.” Her “survival skills,” although necessary to overcome racism, apparently became tools essential for relating with faculty members and others in academia to endure manifested injustices. Learning to navigate “a White world” seemed more important rather than becoming defensive with the challenging situations. She viewed this as a more optimal way of dealing with issues that arose within her program.

#### *“Second-guessing”*

Mercedes within her responses revealed a persistent idea of “second guessing.” She described continual self-questioning about her abilities even when granted acknowledgements and awards. The concept of “second-guessing” was apparent in her summary,

“I got the XXX award. I was given the most outstanding counselor educator of both programs award. And I always wondered in the back of

my head, am I selling myself short, and I think I am a good student. I always wonder do I serve a purpose for them, too.”

The latter part of her statement evidently speaks to her own self-doubt of her abilities yet trying to challenge these thoughts by acknowledging being a “good student.”

The struggles in trusting faculty members’ motivations had an influence on her interpretation of the recognitions received. Mercedes disclosed her inner dialogue by clarifying the basis for questioning credit for her hard work. She presented her thought process behind faculty members’ motivation by saying “See we do promote students of color because look at who we selected as a student.” She questioned their intentions and perceived being misled due to identifying as a doctoral student of color, which limited her ability to be accepting of acknowledgements received for her efforts. The continual “second-guessing” left her feeling “kind of bitter sweet.” Managing these feelings of doubt created an added weight to her experience. She described these struggles,

“There is a lot of burden with second guessing. Did I really earn this?

Am I serving a purpose for them to be able to say well look at this stellar student we cultivated or is it really on my merit.”

The continual back and forward between these two ideas generated uncertainty that persistent, thus, adding meaning to the ideas of feeling like a “poster child.”

Mercedes mentioned feeling like “a poster child of student of color for the department.” The concept of “poster child” linked to the feelings associated with “second guessing.” Being perceived as a “poster child,” produced feelings of anger as this idea continues to add doubt to her abilities. The perpetuation of her “second-

guessing” provided a rich context for understanding the intricacies of her personal struggle in her everyday-life.

### *Sense of Responsibility*

Mercedes displayed a resilient determination for completing her program. She mentioned being encouraged about completing her PhD, however, her reasoning for completing appeared to be grounded in having a “sense of responsibility.” Her “sense of responsibility” linked with believing in herself to accomplish her goal yet resonated from an “obligation” to succeed.

Mercedes described her commitment coming from individuals that believed in her. She explained,

“I have an obligation to give back to this community that is trying to get more people of color of diversity into the field, I feel like that this is a big privilege and obligation that I really have to complete.”

The realization of being connected to a community that believed in her increased her “sense of responsibility.” This association to this community also provided a sense of that she was not on her own and to prosper due to their support.

### *Discovering Other Students of Color*

Mercedes identified as “the only Latina doctoral student of color” in her program. The awareness of lack of ethnic/racial diversity was worth noting during her interview. The dearth of diversity was even present at the master’s level of her program. She said, “In the master’s program, there are only a few of them [students of color] in the entire program.” The acknowledgement of the limitations led to overwhelming feelings as she discovered other students of color.

Mercedes connection with a national organization led to the discovery of other students of color. Her learning about other students of color provided a renewed sense of purpose. She described positive feelings being in a diverse group and recognized being impacted by the experience. She explained, “I never had a chance before to be in a room with doctoral students who were predominately of color and different backgrounds. I had never had that experience.” She liked knowing that there are “a lot of people out there,” which subsided her previous feelings of aloneness. The experience with interacting with other students of color led to increased hope and faith in herself. She said, “People have way more struggles then I have had, so there is absolutely nothing stopping me from completing it.”

#### *Feeling Heard*

Mercedes elaborated on her experience with feeling heard. During her association with the national organization, the ability to engage in this manner was most apparent. She expanded on the concept of feeling heard related to the national organization’s way of creating an environment that demonstrated “a great deal of respect.” Feeling heard increased her sense of worth and trust in herself. She described the faith in her abilities was a surprise. She described this as a unique experience. She said, “Because it was not how we [MDS] were necessarily treated in the outside world so that made a big difference I felt like.” A culture of respect by the national organization gave her increased confidence and trust that she would be heard. The entire experience led her to have faith in she had value and further conclusion that she could make a meaningful contribution to the profession. This experience reiterated her inner voice by explaining, “I kind of heard a voice in my ear ‘you deserve to be here.’” She described these positive

encounters to remind herself that she has “value” and “validity.” These experiences reinforced her confidence to succeed through her program.

### **Mercedes’ Story**

Mercedes’s individual interview uncovered those aspects that were most meaningful to her life as a doctoral student of color. Her rich descriptions defined meaningful ideas, which deepened the understanding of her lived-experience to move closer to the phenomenon examined. Her story emerged the following concepts:

*Connecting with Master’s Students of Color, “Negotiate a White World,” “Second-guessing,” Sense of Responsibility, Discovering Other Students of Color, & Feeling Heard.* These concepts represent the initial findings from the rewriting process of her narrative.

### **Individual Participant Interview: Chad**

Chad’s recounting of his story gave rise to the most influential aspects of his experience as a MDS. From the onset of the study, he demonstrated eagerness in wanting to share his story yet seemed taken aback by the interview questions. After interview questions posed, he commonly filled the space with elongated pauses. Chad’s response to the initial question, *what have been the most significant experiences that have affected you as a doctoral student of color or minority doctoral student in your counselor education program*, produced a “wow” response then an extended pause. His prolonged pauses could communicate that he moved from simply retelling his story to allowing space for thoughtfulness to uncover the true meanings behind his lived-experience.

*“Taking me under his wing”*

The presence of “taking me under his wing” seemed to have fundamental importance to Chad’s overarching experience as a MDS. His foremost discussion began around characteristics related to “taking me under his wing.” This remained as an overarching emphasis throughout the interview.

Chad began his depiction of “taking me under his wing” by slowly unveiling the meaning of this concept. His encounters with faculty members were through his “residency” experiences. He explained, “Each residency was an experience for me.” It was apparent his interactions during his residencies with faculty members and other students was enriching to his academic career. He saw the residencies as momentous opportunities. These encounters began to formulate his thoughts about his counselor education program and faculty members. He explained,

“And they [faculty members] seemed to have genuine interest in what I wanted to do my study on. And seemed to have a genuine interest as far as providing advice of which direction I should go with my dissertation.”

“Taking me under his [her] wing” arose as he detected a sense of support by observing a true interest by faculty members in his studies. Faculty members’ investment in his development seemed “genuine.” The trust and support was an enlightening sentiment.

Peculiar interactions with a professor solidified his overall feeling of support as a MDS. Chad explained, “Each residence was an experience because I had this professor he was a Caucasian professor and he literally took me under his wing.” His tone within his responses indicated hesitation and disbelief of the existence of such a supportive

relationship. The manifestation of “took me under his wing” embraced the importance of the faculty-student relationship as a worthy encounter.

The notion with being taken to the side and granted time to talk was a moving experience for Chad. The instrumental exchange with this particular professor brought about an overall emotive moving academic experience. He described more in-depth feelings associated with his interactions. He said, “He [professor] was really talking with me and giving me some insights. I really enjoyed that. I really learned a lot from him. I really enjoyed it.” The faculty-student had a deeper meaning as he shared being touched by his professor’s efforts in helping him grow as a student. The interactions with the professor added a feeling of amazement considering the humbling gestures by faculty member. Chad’s astonishment was apparent with his statement, “He didn’t have to take me out to eat, and he didn’t have to spend extra time with me. But he did it. I was kind of blown away by that.” He apparently saw his interactions with his professor as meaningful and reshaped his views between faculty-student relationships.

### *“Assumptions”*

Chad’s responses revealed the presence of “assumptions” as influential to his interpretations of his experience. His hesitations seemed to be grounded on preconceived ideas based on his previous life events. The discovery of “assumptions” affecting his life had merit due to the added realization that emerged throughout his story.

Chad acknowledged the existence of assumptions as he engaged with individuals in his program. He explained,

“I guess I had in my head my assumptions going in that they are not going to give the time of day or maybe they are not going to spend any time with me being the only male black man in the group.”

These “assumptions” led him to believe that he was going to be “pushed” to the side. His preconceived ideas added an extra weight as he evolved as a MDS.

Chad recognized these “assumptions” as inaccurate. He described the motivation for challenging his own assumptions represented a meaningful area of focus. He experienced that life had the potential to look differently, but required him to think differently. His experience informed him “not to have those assumptions” and to “think first before having those assumptions.” It was evident his perspective changed by combating his initial beliefs with positive encounters that reshaped his interpretations.

#### *Ethnic/Racial Differences*

Chad talked steadfastly about noticing a difference compared to those in his program. He recognized “being the only African American male.” He had an awareness of a lack of diversity across his program informed his way of being throughout his experience. His actions were directed by his beliefs connected to being in a predominately-White culture. He elaborated that he viewed this awareness as most meaningful. Most of his advisors were “Caucasians.” Considering the stereotypes, he perceived other Caucasians held he worried about the impact to his academic experience. The ethnic/racial differences had a meaningful influence due to his opinions seemed to have dramatically changed throughout his MDS experience.

### *Lack of Acceptance*

Chad admitted to having experienced a lack of acceptance within the program and his personal life. The lack of acceptance referred to the absence of a caring relationship due to identifying as an African American. He explained, “I guess in most of my experiences ‘I will tolerate you for the moment and after the moment, you know we can go back to our separate lives.’” He repeated throughout the interview that his experience was filled with moments where he felt “tolerated” for the moment yet with no further interactions or desire to engage with him beyond that point. These encounters were troubling for him.

Chad recalled a specific incident that demonstrated the lack of acceptance. He described a faculty member that exemplified these characteristics of “I will tolerate you in class that kind of dry response.” The exchanges with this particular faculty member encompassed a “sarcastic and kind of dry” attitude toward him. This type of interaction mimicked other encounters outside of the program; therefore, it informed his original bias. He elaborated on this concept by explaining that the faculty member’s action told him, “I really don’t want to spend time with you.” He recognized the difference between the way the faculty member treated him and “Caucasian students.” He noticed the professor interacted much differently with them while he was being placed to the side. He explained,

“Well, I noticed how he was with the other Caucasian he was laughing and smiling. You know talking with them saying is there any way I can help you. I noticed when it comes to me he was dry sarcastic. You know I sensed that from him.”

The disparity between his fellow “Caucasian” classmates and him were attributed due to being an “African American” male. He admitted there was a part of him that expected this behavior. However, he indicated he did not allow this to consume him.

### *Confidence & Commitment*

Confidence and commitment provided the framework to help Chad maintain focus on his academic work. He discovered the strength of his confidence and commitment through his doctoral program. He explained,

“When I first enrolled, I had those things like I ‘am I supposed to be here?’ Those experiences I gained confidence. That experience made me feel like I need to step it up a notch that I need to be the best I can be.”

His experiences as a MDS provided confidence to follow through with his studies. He admitted his personal doubts slowly transitioned to increased confidence, which led to renewed commitment for completion. He disclosed, “I guess I wasn’t sure if I had the smarts. But through the way I was able to gain some confidence.”

The belief in his abilities formulated with successful experiences with his academic objectives. He discovered, “That I can do the work and what is required of me. I can do the work. Because at first I thought, I could not do it.” Acknowledgement of his improved trust in self encouraged him to see through finishing his counselor education program. He explained this further,

“I know what got me this far. I know I have what it takes to get here. I know I am not done yet. It was a struggle to get to this point that I am at right now.”

As he reflected on his journey, he recognized moments of uncertainties and struggles to help create improved awareness about his own abilities. His confidence and commitment informed his motivation to continue even when he had doubts about his competency.

### *Personal Values*

Chad talked about the influence of other areas of his life as MDS. These additional areas of his life interconnected with his academic path, which deepened the understanding of his experience. The inspiration of his personal values revealed as he talked about the management of all these aspects of his life. The nature of these dynamics became apparent as he shared,

“What I mean with working on my dissertation and starting a new job that requires learning the system of a new job the paperwork of a new job is taking me away from working on my dissertation like I need to. So, trying to balance that with my dissertation right now is very overwhelming.”

Roles beyond being a MDS added an extra layer of complexity. The realization that all these obligations occupied an imperative part of his life appeared to produce struggles with balancing everything.

The desire of wanting to meet academic and personal responsibilities placed an increased burden on him. However, this only encouraged him to press forward. The following demonstrated his thought process as he navigated with balancing everything,

“To the point that I am asking ‘are you going to finish this?’ Are you going to get to this point? And that’s it. I know I need to balance this and I know I need to work on it. But trying to find that balance it is an uphill

for me. I know I can do the work but trying to find the balance to do the work and my job is overwhelming right now.”

He trusts in his skills to succeed in all these areas but clearly continues to navigate with having to be pulled in multiple directions. The real struggle remains in wanting to do everything due to his personal values that ground his motivation.

The balancing act between personal and academic goals became even clearer as he talked further. The following summary truly captured the essence of being driven, pulled in different directions, and emotionally taxed,

“Balance my new job so far as the paperwork. Sometimes, I have to bring paperwork home to finish. Balance the family because my kids need my time as well as you can tell... [pause]. Balancing family, my job and trying to find the time I need to complete this dissertation because it seems to be very overwhelming right now. Trying to get all of it in with unavoidable distractions that may come up like having a sick uncle that I am trying to help take care of and just something else. You know it’s almost like a domino effect. Trying to balance all of it is a struggle, but I am trying to hang in there.”

This reality became tangible during his interview. The pause noted within the summary above actually represented him asking me to hold the conversation to step aside for his children during the interview. To honor his privacy, the detailed account of incident was excluded; nevertheless, inclusion of the event had merit to deepen the understanding of his story. This instance exposed the influence of personal values right in the moment during our interaction.

### **Chad's Story**

Chad's narrative provided a rich context to his experience. Areas of attention were as follows: *"Taking me under his wing," "Assumptions," Ethnic/Racial Differences, Lack of Acceptance, Confidence & Commitment, and Personal Values*. The complexities of his story extended beyond the recalling of the words to understanding different aspects such as the process he used to share his story. This section focuses on elaborating areas of significance by including Chad's words to communicate the true meanings behind his story.

### **Individual Participant Interview: Sherri**

Sherri's response to the initial question, *what have been the most significant experiences that have affected you as a doctoral student of color or minority doctoral student in your counselor education program*, prompted her to share about areas most closely connected to her experience as a doctoral student of color. The different concepts she shared were not isolated from each other but instead interconnected.

#### *Lack of Support*

Sherri disclosed her experience from a previous program as important to her narrative. She highlighted the significance of talking about her previous program experience to inform accurately the impact to her overall academic career even as she transitioned to her new program. Both programs, past and current, represented meaningful learning opportunities that influenced each other.

Sherri identified a lack of support from faculty and advisors during her first doctoral program as integral. She summarized,

“The lack of mentorship that I received and what was quiet obvious for me not only was I not receiving the mentorship and support but there a couple other minority students that were not receiving the support as well.”

She recognized early in her program the absence of support by faculty members. She observed the lack of mentorship extended to other minority students, which reaffirmed that this was clearly happening and a reality. She mentioned that “other cohort members being encouraged to present at conferences and being asked to support faculty members and advisors in research studies and things of that nature.” The disparity between minority doctoral students and other students seemed apparent.

Sherri viewed the disproportionate support compared to other students by faculty members and advisors as barriers for growth. She described,

“A few of us, three of us that were minority students in the program, had no idea of what was going on outside of the course requirements and we kind of found out about things after they were already done.”

She elaborated that the lack of support included creating obstacles by the missed opportunities. Without the awareness of integral conference presentations, and invitation to research prospects her development along with other MDS was limited. The way of being of the professors from her first program made her cognizant of traits she would later seek out from her next program. She explained, “I realized I needed to find a place that would be more condescend of my needs as a student and be more nurturing towards me.”

### *Clear Differences*

Sherri observed a clear difference compared to her peers, which had an added meaning beyond simply thinking about it as a lack of support. The difference seemed grounded between MDS and other students from the dominant culture. She recalled students from the homogenous White culture talked about being exposed to unique opportunities while MDS were being treated differently. She described this as,

“And so, it was kind made very evident that certain students were being pulled to the side and being mentored. You know asked to be student editor for a counseling organization. Just different opportunities that they were being given that we weren’t being exposed to”

She described the realization of the clear difference as disheartening. The inequality of treatment appeared targeted to MDS, henceforth, questioning her ability to maintain in a program that functioned in this manner. She elaborated, “So honestly, it really made me feel very dismissed to be perfectly honest with you.” She envisioned an environment of collaboration with peers yet the culture of the program created distinct separation between cohort members.

### *Sense of Loss*

Sherri talked about the high hopes entering her first doctoral program. She admitted the unsupportive atmosphere was an immense sense of loss. She talked about her internal struggles with having to make a decision about leaving her first program. She explained,

“And it seemed to me it was such a struggle to get the additional support that I felt like I needed the additional support in moving along. In seeking

some of it and facing the opposition. It was a decision I thought I am wondering if I am receiving this level of opposition just doing my coursework then what type of support will I receive doing my dissertation classes, which I know it is huge.”

Her reflections provided a rich description of her emotional turmoil with the persistent “opposition.” She elaborated, “I wondered ‘do I really want to do another 2-3 years of enduring for a lack of better term projected scrutiny.’ I decided that would be my last semester at that point.” She explained her logic for rationalizing her departure from the program. The decision process was evidently a “very disappointing” outcome that had a lasting impact.

Sherri saw all the hopes connected to her doctoral program were lost. She admitted the separation produced feelings far beyond her imagination. She explained, “I can honestly say I can remember even grieving the thought of leaving the program.” The pursuit of her dream seemed like it had ended and was deeply hurt with the end of the program.

### *Express Your Voice*

Sherri discussed during her first program there were incidents that brought to question her ability to express her thoughts. A profound classroom experience stood out and informed her expression of her voice as forbidden due to the outcome. Within her story, she revealed the emotional impact far beyond the mere account of the event.

Sherri identified an encounter with a faculty member during her practicum course that affected her. She explained the class topic was around theoretical approaches. She recalled interjecting to propose considerations of “billing” and issues connected to

“working within a community organization” to better prepare master’s students. Based on her previous private practice experience she felt compelled to contribute to the discussion with insights from her job; however, the response from the “practicum instructor” was surprising. She explained,

“Somehow, that conversation turned into an extremely long conversation, like three paragraph email that he sent to me over the weekend, stating that I was suggesting that what he was offering was incorrect.”

She described feeling taken aback by the instructor’s email as it was far from her intentions. She felt overwhelmed by his message. She believed that her input was simply attempting to have “an open dialogue” yet the instructor’s reaction relayed a different message. She attempted to clarify and responded to the instructor. She “expressed to him that was not my intention I was suggesting how can we incorporate a more integrative approach.” Her attempts for clarification proved, in future encounters, to be in vein considering the instructor’s reactions toward her.

Sherri described further disheartening dealings with her practicum instructor. She summarized,

“It really got to the place that every time I wrote a paper he was critiquing in a way that he was looking for fault. When he was commenting on my paper, he was commenting on things that I never said in my paper.”

The continual search for “fault[s]” weighed heavily on her spirit. The persistent “push” back from the practicum instructor, even with external support, was demoralizing to her development. The “push” relayed the message that her voice was disallowed, thus, influencing her experience negatively.

### *Goal of Learning*

Enrollment to her doctoral program was driven from a yearning for learning. Aside from the struggles from her first program, she talked about finding opportunities for growth. She talked about seeking out “support from the department chair” to find ways of improving her understanding of feedback from instructors due to the subjective nature of coursework.

Sherri elaborated on the importance of learning. She highlighted her views of learning by explaining, “I am like many people earning a doctoral degree. I love learning.” She expanded on the anticipation she felt for being “excited with taking courses,” “learn from faculty, and learn from their experiences.” Her main purpose for enrolling in a doctoral program came from a desire to learn, which included gaining knowledge from her faculty members’ own experience.

### *Transition from Counselor to Educator*

Sherri talked about the influence of her transition from counselor to educator. She acknowledged, “even though I had experience as a practitioner for several years, I am not a researcher, and I am not an educator.” Transitioning from therapist to educator had additional significance, as she became a MDS. She accepted that her experience as a counselor did not necessarily transferred to her new role of educator. She summarized,

“Obviously, you are aware when you are transitioning from therapist to wanting to become a researcher and educator. There are things you don’t know that you should be doing to build your resume and build in your field.”

Her experienced as a therapist allowed her to have some insights while she acknowledged there were some apparent limitations she accepted as a future educator.

Sherri talked about the impact of her therapist experience when interacting with faculty members. As she recalled an encounter with a faculty member, she perceived “behavior that demonstrated a certain level of insecurity” due to her clinical experience. She felt that this particular faculty member experienced challenges with being able to see outside of academia. She explained,

“Because of his inability to embrace that there are things going on outside of these academic walls that require us to have a different level of understanding. You know where I am going with that in particular when we are talking about using one theory or one technique when in reality that is not how counseling works.”

The lack of openness to input by the faculty member made her question her ability to be able to bring in her past clinical experience. She had hoped that there would have been an opportunity to have a discussion that included academic material and real world counseling practice.

#### *Connecting with a Minority Student*

Sherri’s first doctoral program experience had many inhibiting opportunities; nonetheless, she found meaningful relationships by connecting with a MDS. She recalled a MDS, “an Asian woman,” that made a meaningful difference due to the relationship that emerged. She described,

“She covered me. She found out about one or two things that were happening. She came to me and she said I found about a conference and asked if I would like to present. Actually, we wrote a paper for a class.”

The relationship formed from the absence of other supports and allowed important opportunities to evolve. Sherri saw the connection with her as pivotal to their development.

Sherri noticed their collaboration solidified their relationship and strengthened with time. She talked about the many other projects they worked on together, hence, helping her to improve her researcher and educator skills. She attributed their success due to her “Asian” peer for learning about the academic system, “culture,” and was willing to share this information with her. Even after she left the program and her peer graduated, they “still have a good relationship.” She fondly expanded on her feelings toward her “friend” for collaborating with her and for maintaining contact even after she left her first program.

Sherri believed the relationship formed from a difficulty situation. She elaborated on the absence of faculty support produced a sense of isolation. The lack of support of faculty members in her first program seemed to have brought about “a meaningful very positive experience.” She described,

“I want to say out of that isolation, her and I were able to develop a very good friendship. So, we created our own, I guess you would say our own community within that program.”

Their “isolation” from academic supports created the space for them to bond. She deepened the understanding of the experience by elaborating that it felt like they were

“pushed” to unite. She explained this idea as pushing “to embrace each other in ways we probably would have not sought out if it weren’t that we were isolated from other students.”

### *Personal Values*

Sherri believed her personal values were a guiding principle that informed her actions. Aside from all her experiences, she attributed her “intrinsic motivation” as the main source of strength for her achievements. She discovered her personal values as a driving force to manage even through difficult situations. She reflected on her persistence for wanting to complete her doctoral degree. She questioned, “Is it externally because I want to be called Dr. one day? Well, it is not worth all this trouble (laughter).” As she reflected on everything, she acknowledged her personal drive gave her the strength to endure. She described, “So, the whole meaning for me is one looking at intrinsically what do I truly value and understanding what I value.” She revealed learning about the connections between her internal personal values and her doctoral experience was profound to her journey.

### **Sherri’s Story**

Sherri’s narrative provided a rich context to her experience. Areas of attention were as follows: *Lack of Support, Clear Differences, Sense of Loss, Express Your Voice, Goal of Learning, Connecting with a Minority Student, & Personal Values*. The complexities of her story extended beyond the recalling of the words to understanding different aspects connected with her story. This section focuses on elaborating areas of significance by including Sherri’s words to communicate the true meanings behind her story.

### **Individual Participant Interview: Strong Woman**

Strong Woman's response to the initial question, *what have been the most significant experiences that have affected you as a doctoral student of color or minority doctoral student in your counselor education program*, prompted her to share about areas most closely connected to her experience as a doctoral student of color. The different concepts she shared were not isolated from each other but instead interconnected. The interwoven concept of being "misunderstood culturally" played a role in her story and during the rewriting process.

#### *"Misunderstood culturally"*

Strong Woman started the conversation with an extended pause then a long sigh that led to pinpointing her professors for culturally misunderstanding all aspects of her personhood. She perceived their lack of understanding came from minimal awareness about her Native American heritage and characteristics. The influence of the concept of being culturally misunderstood affected many areas of her life and persisted throughout her entire interview.

Strong Woman expanded on being "really misunderstood culturally" by faculty members. She recalled being told by her professors how quiet she was and the lack of participation. She wondered about their comments toward her and explained, "To me, I was there and participated. As a Native American, that is to listen and we learn by observation." Their feedback appeared obvious that they were placing value on characteristics contradictory to her person. Strong Woman placed importance in hearing others for fear that she would be perceived as a "know it all" if she engaged in ways professors wanted her to participate in class.

Strong Woman elaborated on her way of being. To understand Strong Woman meant to appreciate Native American principles. She explained,

“Culturally my way is to let them go, kind of let them go, maybe more supporting by encouraging and listening. I never have taken to you know jumping in there and know it all and really speaking a lot.”

She placed worth in “listening” to give space for others to express themselves. However, within her academic experience her actions appeared to be understood incorrectly. Throughout the interview, she continued to explain that she was “misunderstood culturally.”

Strong woman concluded her professors misperceptions led to an unfair evaluation of her skills. She explained, “Sometimes, I think a couple of these grades I have gotten are because of their impression of me.” She believed their assessment of her was faltered by their narrowed minded way of grading. She wondered, “Maybe, they think less of me.” It was heartbreaking for her to recognize the possibility she was inferior based on their assessment. Although she did not want to believe she was viewed in this manner, her grades reaffirmed the likelihood it was accurate.

*“Big piece missing”*

Strong woman began the conversation with a few thoughts that led to questioning the idea of the “big piece missing.” She explained,

“Is this why our students are not making it? Is this why we are dropping out? Or are we are not feeling like we fit in? Or not feeling like we belong? Or understood? Those kind of things.”

As she wondered about all these factors, she acknowledged that it was evident this had an impact on other Native Americans and her. She quoted the dropout rate from the university at 80%, for Native Americans, which she believed connected to the “cultural piece.”

The lack of understanding by faculty members essentially created a distance in the relationship. She explained, “I feel like they don’t understand. I feel if they went to my reservation and spent some time there. They would see what I see then maybe they’d understand.” The “big piece missing” represented the lost opportunity for a supportive relationship. The continual misunderstanding that created a distance encouraged her to “teach these teachers” about her culture.

Strong Woman identified an event that for once allowed her to experience a meaningful connection. She talked about leading a presentation focused on Native Americans. After the class discussion, she was amazed with the response from her instructor. Strong Woman said, “That teacher was the first one who apologized to me. She told me she was sorry and she wished she would’ve known more about this stuff.”

The “big piece missing” was clearly present. The faculty member’s response, and gained awareness of Strong Woman’s way of being, resulting in a profound impact on the professor. After this experience, the professor was even encouraging. Strong woman described for the first time being able to have a discussion with a faculty member about the importance of reassessing their “teaching style” to be responsive the students’ culture influence. She summarized,

“So, I am excited that it is going take the turn that it is going to take then I wonder about those other teachers who have not seen what I can do yet. I

wonder how they are going to feel when they see the information I am going to share. You know ‘you really didn’t understand my culture and I feel like you put me less because of how you saw me. And really, there is more that you didn’t even tap into here’ and I am going to be able to expand on.”

Her reflection expands on the missed opportunities, “big piece missing,” by faculty members. She continues to feel that there is a “big piece missing” for her due to the lack of a faculty member willing to mentor her all the way through her program. She talked about feeling being on her own with lack of guidance.

#### *Joy of Learning & Sharing*

Strong Woman was firm in identifying the worth she placed on the joy of learning. She described,

“I really like school that was probably one of my things since I was a young kid. I liked to read and enjoy it. I just learn so much and I just keep learning that is what has stood out to me having this opportunity to learn.”

She seemed moved by the opportunity to learn. She described being excited with coming back to school and seeing her writing improve. She proceeded to talk about the process of learning helped her gain confidence and generate future career goals.

Learning was viewed as only one component of her experience as she felt it was important to also share the knowledge. She explained,

“That is why I came back to school because I want to be able to teach, even though, it is required as part of this program. That is probably the best part. I enjoy it.”

The joy of learning linked with sharing of information, which brings excitement to Strong Woman. She credited learning as the push to keep her in her doctoral program.

Strong Woman talked about helping others also learn about Native Americans. She expanded on the importance of sharing of knowledge as a means to strengthen the profession. She planned to complete teaching experiences during her faculty members’ luncheons, and creating a webinar. The sharing of knowledge extended to helping other students in “guiding them and supporting them in their work.” She felt the privilege of learning came with the responsibility of giving back to others.

Strong Woman accepted her learning represented all her experiences. She highlighted the importance to “not let anything bother” her. She talked about her experiences “were not all that great” yet wanting to find learning opportunities even with her current situation. She emphasized, “I am going to find ways to get a lot more accomplished and a lot more done. And (paused) it has been school that has taught me how to do all of this.”

### *Giving Back*

Strong Woman felt compelled to be responsive to her community. There were different ways she felt it was important to give back to her community. She talked about feeling privileged to assist, and wanted to make a lasting impact for the Native American community. She indicated, “I am the only native that is working, who is licensed and getting a PhD from the tribe. I mean that feels good.”

Strong Woman discussed unique opportunities that could be important for the reservation. She talked about the “Indian Health Services” requiring clinical supervision training. She expanded on feeling honored to be the one that would be providing the clinical supervision training. She described, “I am really excited to have this knowledge and be able to take it back.” She talked about those things she has learned as important to share with others in her community.

Strong Woman saw giving back included being able to work with individuals at the reservation. Her ability to have greater empathy of the community perspective encouraged her role as a counselor. She talked about feeling fulfilled with knowing she can help at the reservation.

#### *Lack of Diversity*

Strong Woman talked about worrying that the absence of diversity in particular the lack of Native Americans in academia. Her program had a predominately-White representation. She wondered about the potential impact of the lack of diversity influencing her own development.

The importance of cultural awareness was an essential idea within her program. However, she talked about viewing the actions of professors as contradicting this notion. She explained,

“I am like thinking these teachers talk about being culturally responsive and we got to teach all this cultural diversity stuff and make sure our counselors learn how to work with different cultures”

Yet there remains a misunderstanding of the needs of ethnic/racial minority groups. She perceived the lack of diversity and knowledge perpetuated the continual issues with supporting MDS. In reflecting on Native Americans, she explained,

“I think there is a lot that needs to get out there that I think more people in society we weren’t educated on the problems that American Indian experience in going to higher education that they be more understanding and be more supportive of them as they enter.”

She pointed out that she has been the only Native American in her program. She acknowledged the apparent limitations for faculty members in trying to support her yet continues to struggle with being alone.

Strong Woman has heightened awareness with being “the only one.” She repeated, “I’m the only one.” Being the “only one” created increased inner turmoil. Within the interview, she realized the meaning of being “the only one” was an unspoken concept yet prevalent to her experience. She explained,

“This is the first time I am actually telling somebody, where I am the only one. That is what I mean I don’t fit in and like I don’t belong, but I do it anyway because it is not just for me.”

Aside from the feelings connected with awareness of being “the only one,” she continues to maintain. She described feeling she needs to “let things roll of and keep going.” Her main focus remained that she wishes that her experience will help others “make it.”

### *Influence of Family*

Strong Woman talked about the influence of family within her educational experience. She recognized the academic struggles were extenuated by her family life. It was important for her to share about the relationship between academia and home life.

Strong Woman described the relationship with her family as significant. After an extended pause, she explained,

“I feel like my own family doesn’t understand, like my husband. Often times, he is always asking me, are you done yet? Are you done yet? And, I have to explain to him that I am never done. I might be done with one paper, but I am never done. I still have a million other things to do.”

She described having struggles with helping her family understand about all the intricacies connected to her doctoral program. She explained her continual efforts with having to explain her story repeatedly to help them understand. Although her tone of voice appeared to infer exhaustion with having to re-explain herself, she seemed to understand their reasoning. She pointed out being “the first to get a college degree.”

Strong Woman embraced the privilege with being the first college graduate within her family. She talked about wanting to show her family, in particular her children, that she could achieve her PhD. She explained, “I feel like at some level, I want to show my kids that it can be done.” She described her family as being a driving force to achieve her academic goals.

### **Strong Woman’s Story**

Strong Woman’s individual interview uncovered those aspects that were most meaningful to her life as a doctoral student of color. Her rich descriptions defined

meaningful ideas, which deepened the understanding of her lived-experience to move closer to the phenomenon examined. From her story emerged the following concepts: *“Culturally misunderstood,” “Big piece missing,” Joy of Learning & Sharing, Giving Back, Lack of Diversity, & Influence of Family.* These concepts represent the initial findings from the rewriting process of her narrative.

### **Individual Participant Interview: Eva**

Eva’s response to the initial question, *what have been the most significant experiences that have affected you as a doctoral student of color or minority doctoral student in your counselor education program*, prompted her to talk about different areas connected to her experience as a doctoral student of color. She identified the differences between her student peers and the influence of family as informative and meaningful to her experience. These ideas evolved through her interview to deepen the descriptions of her lived-experience and giving rise to the vital concepts within her story.

#### *Assumptions*

To understand Eva’s story the role of assumptions needs attention. From the start of her interview, there appeared extended pauses that were present throughout her responses. With much hesitation, she eventually gave meaning to the pauses. Further prompting allowed her the space to be open about her hesitations and actually give meaning to this unknown. The emergence of the significance of her pauses had great significance to understanding the *fullness* of her story.

Eva was ready to share her story yet readily admitted feeling doubtful about the accuracy. She viewed most of the things she shared as perceptions and wanting to be careful in holding them as complete *truths*. She described her story as, “these are all

assumptions.” Her narrative was perceived as a complete “assumption.” She even seemed to minimize the potential value of her ideas. She pointed out on several occasions to recall that she was making statements based on her “assumptions.” She even feared her reflections, although her own, would be perceived as being “judging” of others due to her “assumptions” she was making within her narrative.

### *Your Voice*

Eva had a difficult time allowing her experience to speak for her. The challenges with speaking up seemed grounded due to her lack of confidence that connected with different aspects to her personhood. It was evident that trusting her *voice* went beyond worrying about the assumptions she was making and associated to the many ways she saw herself in her encounters.

Your voice referred to Eva’s internal dialogue with speaking up or lack of ability of expression. Early in the conversation, she described noticing the differences between her peers compared to her when it came to talking with professors. She explained, “I guess feeling able to or not able to speak to my professors in a certain manner about the topics.” She walked slowly into this conversation, as she appeared amazed with the ability of some students with speaking up. She expanded by saying, “I feel like for me speaking as a minority and being from a lower socio economic background the way I grew up background, my family and my background.” She linked her background to her reasoning for seeing the barriers with expressing bringing out her voice.

Eva talked about her desire with wanting to use her voice. She described, “Sometimes, I feel like I am unable to challenge or ask questions and there may be things I may be thinking.” Her discussion provided more in-depth understanding of her inner

struggles at times related to speaking up. The internal struggles for not speaking appeared to have an emotional impact on her.

The personal struggles with allowing her voice to come about were coupled with feeling amazement for the way others were able to communicate with ease. She recalled a particular situation that their differences with speaking up were noticeable. She explained that her professor had set some unrealistic expectations for the students. The cohort met to discuss the professor's requirements yet the conversation evolved in a different direction. She elaborated,

“In that conversation, a couple of people, they were not minorities, made the comment, they were saying something to the effect ‘this is not fair so we need to say something about it and we need to talk to whoever we need to talk.’”

She was taken aback with her peers' confidence with the possibility of voicing their concerns and even more surprising confronting a professor. They proceeded with talking about the next steps they would take if their concerns were not heard. She said,

“In fact, they said ‘if we need to we will go higher and then we higher,’ they were talking about the chain of command starting with the professor and then going up the chain of command.”

She noticed within their dialogue the obvious difference with the ability for some students to use their voice. The challenges with speaking up was even presenting with the discussion among her peers.

*“Power and privilege”*

The question, *what have been the most significant experiences that have affected you as a doctoral student of color or minority doctoral student in your counselor education program*, brought about a long pause then admittedly indicated it was a “loaded question.” Eva pondered the question with a big sigh then eventually revealing the influence of “power and privilege” to her story. “Power and privilege” were terms she used throughout to describe the rationale for the differences between her non-minority peers and her experience.

Eva reviewed her limitations related to the role of “power and privilege.” She attributed non-minority peers with the ability to express themselves due to being “in a position of power.” The ability to have power was synonymous with having the capacity to do more compared to others. She noticed individuals with higher levels of “power” were able to do more. She noticed that “without having privilege” there are actions you cannot do. She summarized,

“My assumptions but I am assuming people that have more power growing up enter this situation that is our counseling program, with a different way of approach to challenging moments. Versus me and even for others without power and privilege positions might come in with different set of expectations, different ways of coping with difficulties, and different manner of requesting things that we may feel good for us whether it is not fair or if it is just checking for clarification on something.”

The absence of “power and privilege” was associated with ways of coping and informing a person’s interactions. She viewed the existence of “power and privilege” as a means to be able to engage in ways that may be privy to those with possession of this unique attribute. It was evident to her that not everyone had this and the gift of possessing “power and privilege” granted a greater scope of opportunities.

Eva presented an example that spoke to the influence of “power and privilege.” She explained an encounter with her cohort where their problem solving skills held elements connected to their “power and privilege.” She viewed their logic with being able address a situation in a “linear way” lacked consideration to the potential influence of their actions to a person that does not have power or even considering the struggles coming from this position to intervene within a given situation. She alluded to this reality as she shared,

“Great linear way of thinking though because in the real world sometimes there are other forces at play where we don’t have control or have the same power of a professor and a student ‘period.’ So, I was just kind of thinking about in that way so coming from that way how in the real world this is going to look.”

She recognized the influence of power informed her hesitations with taking the similar actions of her peers due to realities that had been present for her in the past. She was condescend of the “real world” being unfair and connecting this to power. She said, “They [nonminority students] are used to having things working out, which it has not worked out for me that way. For me, it is a very different experience.”

The acknowledgement of “power and privilege” within her experience emerged strong feelings. She talked about feeling “frustrated.” Her frustration was connected to the lack of awareness of others for not considering the influence of “power and privilege,” while also questioning the existence of it. Questions she posted to herself were,

“Are they understanding things differently because of their power and privilege? Or ‘am I understanding it inaccurately because I don’t have that lens?’ So just questioning all the way around, questioning within the entire situation? ‘Where do I fit?’”

Her reflections revealed attempts to understand further “power and privilege” while trying to be open of the potential misperception on her part. Her questions in the interview spoke to her continual curiosity about other’s perceptions connected to “*power and privilege.*”

### *Familial Influence*

Eva’s story demonstrated clear clues that her familial influence played a role. She mentioned the different ways her presence and actions were grounded by her “familial messages.” The continual presence of her familial influence interposed within her interview, thus, deepening the understanding of her lived experience.

Eva discussed the ways her family shaped and informed the meanings she makes about her engagements. Growing up within a “poor family” created “disadvantages” for her in certain areas yet found strengths in other parts. She discussed the manner, which “family supports” separated her from others and essentially gave her opportunities. She viewed her “family support” being a significant strength to achieving her goals. She

stated, “Having the extra support has truly been the key to a different outcome than what it could have been.”

The concept of respect had a noteworthy impression on her presence. She identified respect representing a vital belief from her childhood that remained essential within her interactions as a MDS. She elaborated,

“I would say that is a huge tenet of my upbringing of being respectful. It is kind of like the idea when you are child and now as a student even when your teacher is being unfair you still have to be respectful because no adult is wrong because then that would mean your parents are wrong.”

She saw respect as a guiding principle throughout her encounters. Respect appeared to be clearly associated with a core value associated with ways of engaging with those in authority. She acknowledged that respect was ingrained in her. She described this idea further,

“That is not going away maybe that is a better way to describe my sense of being. All that means, you need to be respectful in every sense. You have to treat your chair, professors and everybody else in a way that is respectful.”

Respect meant that she had to hold this belief at the utmost aside from any unjust or adverse actions by others. She held this idea with high regard as it represented a piece that connected with her family.

### *Learning Opportunities*

Eva viewed learning as interrelated with her academic and personal development. From the start, she recognized the importance of being open to growing as an individual

beyond the educational experience. She accepted the reality that she was “coming to learn about helping others” while also being “open and flexible to learning about” herself. She recognized everything interconnected within her program.

Education represented a worthy opportunity. Eva talked about being “motivated” and wanting to “prove” herself within her academic journey. She expanded on learning perceived as another opportunity and as such she should not be “wasteful” with taking advantage of growing. She explained, “So, if an opportunity comes up then I will go for it because that was what I was taught to do ‘don’t waste anything.’” Her entire doctoral experience seemed like an opportunity in itself for learning and needed to be treated in that manner. She highlighted, “Everything that I have been offered, I say yes.” She emphasized the importance of not wanting to be “wasteful” about the gift of learning and acknowledged it as a driving force within her program.

#### *Sense of Responsibility*

Sense of responsibility appeared throughout her interview. Eva discussed as a Latino woman, she felt privileged while also having a burden linked with her academic opportunities. She explained,

“I feel like in the conversations I have had with other minorities in the program when we sign our name on the paper it has to be as close to pristine as possible. When I do anything, I think about the impact I have on my children, on my parents. It is not just my name. It is a collectivist way to look at it.”

Her actions seemed closely linked to her family and even her community as a Latina. She viewed the representation of self encompassed a sense of responsibility that would not be faltered in any situation.

Eva talked about the weight on her shoulders. She viewed her work connected to others and the importance of remembering this fact. She stated, “I am still connected to family. We represent one another.” She deepened the understanding by describing her feelings associated with wanting to do well for those important to her life. She summarized,

“It is very important to me to maintain a certain level of I would say doing professionalism and my best or wanting to be the person that my children want to be. I want to be the person that my parents are proud of. The person my brothers and sisters would be proud of. I don’t know that others feel that way, I feel at least in the Hispanic community of professionals, or talking with Hispanic students, I have heard the obligation of responsibility to represent ourselves in our families and talk about being respectful.”

The “obligation of responsibility” to be a representative seemed to be held with high regard. This idea extended to wanting to do it for others outside of her family.

Eva talked about the desire to leave her mark so that others behind her can be helped through her efforts. She described it as, “And be the best representation of who I am so that way anyone else coming behind me can benefit from it if it works for them as well.” At the core, her action speak to a strong aspiration to do for the Latino community

as a whole. The following statement described her sense of responsibility best, “I want to show up for the Hispanic community.”

### *Connecting Authentically*

Eva identified the importance of being able to connect authentically. Engaging authentically consisted of interacting with a trusted individual while striving to present your true to self. She viewed this as the optimal goal within her own development.

The conversation for connecting authentically emerged from a discussion about a relationship with a mentor. She identified this professor with high regard and as “a very good role model.” She was amazed that aside from their cultural differences the mentor had much to admire. She explained, “We have very different cultural backgrounds and even different perspectives approaches to certain situations. I find her to be an inspiration, a very strong and powerful person.” The strength she noticed in her professor was credited to her ability to be unpretentious about her position. She explained, “She was commenting on her position on an issue that was in opposition to someone else, a powerful person in the profession.” As Eva reflected on her mentor, she viewed her actions as keeping true to self. She explained her interest in becoming more authentic led to a genuine and emotional conversation with her mentor.

Eva talked about discovering her journey to becoming more authentic. She associated connecting authentically with a way to “cultivate” her own voice. She acknowledged that there is value in her and wanting to bring this about. She elaborated,

“I can’t be anyone else I can only be myself everything that I do the constellation of characteristics, memory, heritage, all of those things that

make me who I am in this world to embrace that to use it to advocate for self and others.”

She began to allow herself to embrace all those pieces that made up her personhood. Although she admitted to struggling with implementation of an authentic self, she acknowledged the benefits. She explained, “So, I think one of the ways I am making meaning of my experiences is to do my best to stay true to what matters to me, to family, to children.” The ability to engage authentically speaks far beyond the academic person and connects to her own identity. Connecting authentically was a striving goal.

### **Eva’s Story**

Eva’s individual interview uncovered those aspects that were most meaningful to her life as a doctoral student of color. Her rich descriptions defined meaningful ideas, which deepened the understanding of her lived-experience to move closer to the phenomenon examined. From her story emerged the following concepts: *Your Voice, Influence of Power & Privilege, Familial Influence, Assumptions, Learning, & Sense of Responsibility*. These concepts represent the initial findings from the rewriting process of her narrative.

### **Individual Participant Interviews Summary**

Procedures accomplished aimed at revealing the stories of participants’ lived experiences. The presentation of *getting acquainted* with participants was intended to provide a clearer picture of their personhood. The individual interview demonstrated preliminary focus areas for Mercedes, Chad, Sherri, Strong Woman, and Eva. The separate interviews begin to give shape to those aspects most significant to participants. Their stories were captivating and informative.

The following chapter (IV), I will represent the thematic analysis of individual interviews. I will included a member check-in (1) at the latter part of the chapter. Then the focus group interview will be presented in the subsequent chapter (V). The specific procedures for conducting focus group will be introduced herein. Following chapter (VI) will be the thematic analysis of focus group interview, which will include member check-ins (#2). Essence of the experience will be the final chapter (VII), which presents the interconnectedness of reflecting, recalling, and recollecting.

## CHAPTER IV

### Thematic Analysis of Individual Interviews

*“The privilege of a lifetime is being [exactly] who you are.” – Joseph Campbell*

To capture the *fullness* of the participants’ experience in print can be an intricate process of rewriting, “re-thinking, re-flecting, [and] re-cognizing” (van Manen, 1990, p. 131). However, the rewriting practice allows unveiling a phenomenon’s richness beyond the narrative to reach the essence of an experience. Individual interviews from this study attempt to illustrate the stories that highlight bare truths of the experiences of doctoral students of color while the writing and rewriting aim at deepening the meanings. My social constructivist paradigm also calls for responsiveness to the creation of knowledge as a shared meaning act for the emergence of a truth yet acknowledging there may be many potential truths. Consequently, the process includes allowing the contribution of participants to extend beyond the interview by affirming their stories through input through the study.

van Manen (1990) conceded phenomenological human science research as complex and inevitably difficult to grasp the totality of a phenomenon explored. However, this reality does not underestimate the value of findings discovered. Herein this chapter, and forthcoming chapters, I will introduce the emergence of thematic meanings from each individual participant interview introduced while heightening group essential and incidental themes. Thematic aspects were uncovered by performing van Manen’s (1990) data analysis, which included the following approaches:

- (1) the wholistic or sententious approach;
- (2) the selective or highlighting approach;

(3) the detailed or line-by-line approach. (p. 93)

Wholistic approach consisted of considering the entire text while asking to find the principle meanings from the whole (van Manen, 1990). Selective or highlighting approach examines the text by reading aloud to identify phrases or aspects that are especially revealing of the experience. Line-by-line approach places emphasis on the reviewing each sentence and considers the significance in relation to the phenomenon or experience explored. These approaches were fundamental to obtaining the essential and incidental themes of participants.

### **Unfolding Thematic Meanings: Individual Interviews**

Review of Mercedes, Chad, Sherri, Strong Woman & Eva's transcripts led to the identification of thematic phrases that spoke to the essence of their lived-experience. The essential themes revealed for participants were as follows:

- *Significant faculty relationships*
- *Navigating with microaggression*
- *Sense of responsibility*
- *Influence of family and personal values*
- *Desire for learning and educating others*

Incidental themes identified by at least 4 out of 5 participants from the individual interviews were: *Lack of diversity*, *"Expressing your thoughts" - your voice*, and *"Second-guessing" self*. Incidental themes discovered in one or two participants' narratives yet just as worthy of discussion: *Aware of potential assumptions*, *Connecting with master's students* and *Transition from counselor to educator*. A member check-in (#1) will be included in the final portion of this chapter.

### ***Essential Theme: Significant Faculty Relationships***

The role of a faculty-student relationship appeared with each of the participants. Relationships with faculty members around their development seemed vital to their narratives, thus, placing attention to the implications of this phenomenon. “When ethnic minority students have positive interactions with faculty, this counteracts this belief such that they feel a sense of belonging in the academic environment and embrace the idea that they can have a successful academic career” (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012, p. 7). All the participants talked about *significant faculty relationships* as an influence, however, their experiences fell into two subcategories either describing the absence of it (“*big piece missing*”) or the presence of an embracing relationship (“*taking me under his [her] wing*”). Although the experiences may have looked different for each of the participants, the overarching importance to having an encouraging relationship played a role in their experiences. Considering the importance of this essential theme, participants’ language (“*big piece missing*” and “*taking me under his [her] wing*”) was used for defining subcategories within this essential theme.

The subcategories of “*big piece missing*” and “*taking me under his [her] wing*” came across all the participants’ interviews. They all described key aspects related to an encouraging relationship either the longing for one, “*big piece missing*,” or existence of one, “*taking me under his [her] wing*.” Participants identified the meaning of *significant faculty relationships* as central to their professional development. Their narratives described, “*taking me under his [her] wing*” subcategory as follows:

**Chad:** He explained, “I had this professor he was a Caucasian professor and he literally *took me under his wing*. He literally took me out to dinner.

We talked. He talked to me about the opportunities being an African American Professors and my chances of becoming a professor. Most universities are looking for African American male professor counselors. He was really talking with me and giving me some insights. I really enjoyed that. I really learned a lot from him.” He elaborated this idea further with a metaphor. He stated, “It was like he picked me from the crowd and put me on his knee sort of speak.”

**Strong Woman:** She noted finally feeling connected to a professor as she described, “I was just like, Wow! Like even now, she is excited. She is emailing me and telling to get these things done. She is supporting me on what I am going to do and really encouraging me.”

**Eva:** She talked about a mentor with great admiration as she explained, “I was having other conversations with a mentor of mine; I have great appreciation for her. She is a professor at my university. She has been a very good role model. We have very different cultural backgrounds and even different perspectives approaches to certain situations. I find her to be an inspiration, a very strong and powerful person.”

Participants’ descriptions were rich in describing the *relationship* as meaningful to their lived experience as MDS. It was apparent through their narratives this was significant and valued by all the participants.

The participants also noted an absence of a genuine encouraging *relationship*, “*big piece missing*,” affected them in different ways. Participants highlighted the absence of this in their stories as noteworthy. They explained,

**Strong Woman:** This theme appeared throughout her interview “This PhD experience hasn’t and I haven’t felt like I have had that support from any faculty member.” She explained further, “But, it is kind of like at the end of my program. It has been a piece for me missing of making a connection with a faculty member who is basically mentoring all the way through your program.”

**Sherri:** She emphasized impact of absence of support as, “So, in 2009, when I initially got accepted to a [doctoral] program some of the things that were meaningful to me the lack of support I received from faculty and advisors. The lack of mentorship that I received and what was quite obvious for me not only was I not receiving the mentorship and support but there were a couple other minority students that were not receiving the support as well.”

The desire for a supportive faculty member or advisors seemed to stand out within their stories as important. Participants viewed the potential of a trusting relationship as a means to help with their journey by enhancing their confidence and trust in their abilities as emerging educators.

### ***Essential Theme: Navigating with microaggression***

The essential theme that began appearing was *navigating with microaggression*. All the participants seemed to demonstrate different aspects of this theme. It is important to note that the emergence of *navigating with microaggression* came from the broad research questions without inference that participants had the experience. The

participants through the stories emphasized components of microaggression and the influence to their experience.

The manifestation of *navigating with microaggression* seemed to evolve slightly different for each of the participants, nonetheless, the essence remained the same across all of them. Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, and Torino (2007) defined microaggression as, “everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group. These exchanges are so pervasive and automatic in daily interactions that they are often dismissed and glossed over as being innocuous” (p 72). Although the use of Wing Sue et al’s definition will present an overarching understanding of the term *microaggression*, the meaning fundamentally evolved through participants’ narratives to formulate the bases of this thematic focus.

To comprehend the presence of *navigating with microaggression* within participants’ stories all parts of their human existence need to be considered as it evolved subtly for some and clearly for others. Some participants talked about the existence of *navigating with microaggressions* within their programs. The following descriptions captured some of those experiences,

**Sherri:** The lack of support by faculty members stemmed from prejudicial actions against minorities. She stated, “It really made me as well as other people two other minority students felt very isolated. It was almost like we were there to get the education because it was something that was afforded to us but we were not there to get the community support that the program was willing to offer to others.” She attributed

those experiences as contributing factors to her decision for “leaving the [doctoral] program.”

**Strong Woman:** She identified multiple times throughout her interview being “culturally misunderstood,” which related to unfair treatment due to being “Native American.” She explained, “They [(faculty members)] don’t understand how Native Americans learn and I have done a lot of research on it to see this is how we are in classrooms. I feel like they [(faculty members)] don’t understand. I feel if they went to my reservation and spent some time there [that] they would see what I see. Then maybe they’d understand.” She hoped her academic successes would send the message to faculty members, “You know you really didn’t understand my culture I feel like you put me less because of how you saw me.”

The reality of microaggression for participants seemed connected to experiences within their doctoral program. The incidents appeared to significantly impact their experience, thus, giving shape to this theme as essential due to the prevalence within their narratives and influence to their lives.

The appearance of *navigating microaggression* seemed to go beyond the academic experience and interconnect with their personal life experiences. The following narratives identify the personal component of *microaggression* connecting with their current life as MDS. They described,

**Mercedes:** She talked about her childhood experiences informing her present position. She explained, “I was raised in a very homogenous

white and predominately Italian community. It was rather at the time, although I think this is changing, a racist community.” She elaborated that her experiences helped her to survive difficult encounters. She stated, “Yes, I am protected. They gave me a buffer for when I have those really bad moments or when there is some sort of horrible microaggression that happens or when I see it happening to other people. It is a buffer to not dull my anger or dull my sense of justice about it but more protect me. And to remind me that I have worth.”

**Eva:** She pointed out, “I know that for me I live in a very rural area and there is a lot of racism that still persists where I am.” The existence of racism informs her behaviors even within her doctoral program. She explained, “And I realized that it for a while I have done that, even about myself. When I think about myself, I try to be constantly prepared, as put together, and as sharp as I can.” In essence, her continual striving to “be as put together” appeared to be grounded with her way of fighting the misconceptions of stereotypes connected with the racism she encountered and related to her role as a MDS.

The participants shared the existence of microaggression yet spoke about ways of navigating it through different venues. Participants’ interpretations appeared slightly different for each; however, they all spoke about the manner these incidents informed their interpretations with the real world.

***Essential Theme: Sense of responsibility***

All the participants spoke about a *sense of responsibility* theme as essential to their experience. The appearance surfaced in different ways for each of the participants yet it was evident for each of them. The sense of responsibility related to different factors connected to their lives; however, the inclusion was vital due to the presence of it within all their stories.

*Sense of responsibility* was identified as essential in the data analysis due to the prevalence of the idea of *responsibility* in the transcriptions. Through analysis of the transcripts the concept of *responsibility* seemed represented as a spirited drive that helped participants move through their program. The following excerpts underscored those aspects that spoke to the *sense of responsibility* for participants,

**Sherri:** Her summary speaks to the determination connected to responsibility as she explained, “And even after I left the [doctoral] program, two of our proposals got accepted, and actually I left the state at that particular time but came back and presented with her at a conference. We did our presentation together, our proposal, and we did our poster board together.”

**Strong Woman:** She alluded to feeling a sense of responsibility by sharing, “That is what I mean I don’t fit in and like I don’t belong, but I do it anyway because it is not just for me.” She noted being compelled to “keep going” even when her experiences became difficult.

**Mercedes:** The *sense of responsibility* appeared as motivation to using her skills to link groups. She explained, “I feel like I am use to being the

bridge. I was the bridge when I went to college. I went to a college that was very diverse on purpose, in a city that was diverse on purpose, and I felt like I was one of those that got along with everyone.” The desire and privilege to help guided her actions even when it was difficult to do.

The participants above insinuated the presence of *sense of responsibility*. Their narratives made known their motivation to accomplish tasks related to an underline push aside their discomfort with achieving the undertaking. While for Eva, responsibility was apparent and guided her actions. She explained,

**Eva:** She attempted to make *sense of responsibility* even through her reflections within the interview. She elaborated, “I don’t know where it comes from, but I know it is there. ‘What you do? Where you work?’ Sometimes society puts it on our faces that add to the feeling of *responsibility*. I don’t know if it is because I am perceived in a certain way or because I don’t look a certain way or the color of my skin.”

The *sense of responsibility* included direct remarks connected to theme while for other participants this represented a subtle guiding principle within their lived experience. Both patterns represented a crucial component in informing the significance of theme for participants.

### ***Essential Theme: Influence of family and personal values***

All the participants communicated the existence of the *influence of family and personal values* as an essential theme. Contrary to a *sense of responsibility*, the shift goes further by considering familial and personal influences as fundamental to enhance the fullness of their lived-experiences. van Manen (1990) described a thematic aspect as

one having considerable impact that can inform the nature of the phenomenon explored. Participants' *influence of family and personal values* had a grounding impact to each of their lives.

The *influence of family and personal values* materialized through van Manen's (1990) highlighting approach. The data analysis led to the significance of *values* as a resounding influence on all the participants given the impact to their lives. Although the interview questions focused on reflecting on their doctoral experience, participants associated their student experiences with the *influences of family and personal values*. The following narratives spoke to *family values* in shaping their experiences,

**Chad:** He explained, "Balance my new job so far as the paperwork.

Sometimes, I have to bring paperwork home to finish. Balance the family because my kids need my time as well as you can tell... [pause].

Balancing family, my job and trying to find the time, I need to complete this dissertation because it seems to be very overwhelming right now.

Trying to get all of it in with unavoidable distractions that may come up like having a sick uncle that I am trying to help take care of and just something else. You know it's almost like a domino effect. Trying to balance all of it is a struggle, but I am trying to hang in there."

**Strong Woman:** She described, "I'm the only one in my family to [pause] I was the first one to get a college degree. For me, it is showing my family, showing my kids mainly, because I didn't graduate high school. And I never wanted my kids to throw in my face you didn't graduate high school."

**Eva:** She discussed the impact of family support as she elaborated, “Our clients come in with different problems and struggled with the same issues of power and privilege but don’t have all the family support. Having family support is what separates me from a lot of the women I counsel at the Women’s Shelter.” She further expanded that family served as a guide to do her “best to stay true to what matters” to her family and children.

**Sherri:** She described the influence of her *family* represented a component in her decision making process for when to pursue her doctoral education as she explained, “I am a nontraditional student meaning that I’ve been married, I have kids and trying to make a career while going to school etc. I always had my mind set that I would get my doctoral degree. And when the opportunity presented itself with my children being at an older age and me being a little more independent in my career that I have the time to commit to school.”

Participants held with high regard *family*, which informed their encounters as MDS. The impact of family appeared interrelated with their student encounters and seemed to generate a sense of strength for pushing forward through their program. It was evident in the interview and during the transcription reviews—*family values* was important to all.

The *influence of family and personal values* seemed important throughout participants’ stories. The idea of *personal values* was used to encompass areas aside from familial thrust to include other aspects that appeared noteworthy for them.

Participants highlighted these areas in the following summaries,

**Mercedes:** She described her motivation guided from a personal value as she explained, “And I have an obligation. Not that I didn’t before but now I really feel like I have an obligation to give back to this community that is trying to get more people of color of diversity into the field, I feel like that this is a big privilege and obligation that I really have to complete.”

**Eva:** She explained, “I want to show up for the Hispanic community. I don’t know if that sounds ridiculous or not but it kind of feels ridiculous coming out of my mouth.”

**Sherri:** She noted, “But once again I am looking at my *personal value*. What is that, for me, I have to reflect on why am I so adamant about achieving a doctoral degree. Is it externally because I want to be called ‘Dr.’ one day? Well, it is not worth all this trouble [laughter].”

The influence of *family and personal values* seemed to be a driving force for combating the difficult situations through their doctoral experience. This theme appeared to have an impact with their encounters while informing their worldview to making meaning and even problem solving.

***Essential Theme: Desire for learning and educating others***

An academic setting epitomizes an environment that allows growth. Participants’ sensitivity to their educational goals within their counselor education program was a major component that stood out as significant for all of them. Desire for learning and educating others essentially represented participants’ aspiration for sharing of knowledge and personal commitment to their own development. The emergence of desire for

learning and educating others went beyond the action and interconnected with their experiences as MDS.

The indication of learning was apparent within participants' narratives, additionally, the willingness to share their knowledge with others seemed relevant to include. The following excerpts defined the *desire for learning and educating others*:

**Mercedes:** She stated, "Because I understand some of the ways that they [(students of color)] don't get their needs met in other more traditional programs. This is something that I could do and could be very meaningful to me. As well as helping, them learn what I am trying to *learn*. They do have value in this counseling community."

**Sherri:** She described her longing for *learning* as she explained, "I just wanted to come and learn and share. Here at the program I am at, I am feeling like the professors as well as the students are sharing and respectful." Desire for *learning* was clear as she admitted, "I love *learning*."

**Strong Woman:** She expanded by sharing, "After being out of school for several years and coming back, oh, my writing has changed and I am actually enjoying writing now. I get ideas like I want to write books. I guess giving me more passion for the counseling profession as a whole and made me a better counselor and a better teacher like I never realized that I would like teaching so much."

**Eva:** She shared the value of interpersonal learning as she explained, "I knew that [a doctoral program] would be an experience where I had to be

very open and flexible to *learning* about what makes me. Where does it all come from? What does it mean for my work as a clinician, now as an educator, as a researcher, as a supervisor, as a colleague, as a professional?”

***Desire for learning and educating others*** informed the participants overarching notion of knowledge while readily being open to share personal and professional information for the sake of others. Participants viewed the importance of learning as an underline core to their persons. They celebrated academic wisdom and interpersonal growth as essential to their development. Although *learning* within an academic setting could be a foreseeable area of focus, participants placed increased worth on the meanings associated with the practice and privilege connected to knowledge.

### **Incidental Thematic Meanings: Individual Interviews**

Analysis of interviewees’ transcripts led to incidental thematic notions that deepened the meanings of participants’ lived-experiences as MDS. Findings of incidental themes provided value to understanding the phenomenon of MDS’ experiences beyond their narratives. Contrary to essential themes which are crucial concepts endorsed by all the participants within a study, incidental themes resonated with only a few participants. Incidental themes represent an vital component due to the added understanding to participants’ experiences. The following will include those incidental themes that exemplified aspects of participants’ stories to expand the meanings behind their lives.

#### ***Incidental Theme: Lack of diversity***

Participants self-identified as being racial/ethnic minority. The identification as a minority doctoral student was used to define participant selection. However, most

participants' stories spoke beyond the classification as MDS and gave importance to the *lack of diversity* as essential to their lived-experience. *Lack of diversity* appeared in their descriptions of their program, or selves, which enriched the descriptions of their narratives. With the exception of one participant (Eva), most of them described being impacted, thus, compelling attention to the role of diversity within their experiences.

The *lack of diversity* had merit to their day-to-day interactions. Although the *lack of diversity* had individual meanings, participants had a heightened awareness associated with the *lack of diversity* as it informed their encounters. **Chad** pointed out some important aspects linked to the *lack of diversity* as noted,

**Chad:** He identified as the “only African American male” then elaborated, “What was most meaningful for me was that most of my advisors were Caucasians. And they seemed to have a genuine interest in what I wanted to do my study on. And seemed to have a genuine interest as far as providing advice of which direction I should go with my dissertation.”

The *lack of diversity* meant far more due to challenging an opposing belief connected to perceptions of White faculty members. The amazement seemed grounded on personal experiences linked with identifying as an “African American male” in the program.

The meanings related to *lack of diversity* seemed to vary from participant-to-participant yet the experiences were noteworthy. Following are a few summaries that spoke to participants' *lack of diversity* theme as an unsettling experience:

**Mercedes:** She admitted, “I am the only Latina doctoral student of color.” She talked about being concerned with the absence of “any faculty of

color” in her program created limitations for students of color. She wondered if her teaching opportunities were on merit as she explained, “then again on the other hand wait a minute are you pulling me the only person of color because it is hard for you to talk about this. So, there is that.”

**Sherri:** She connected *lack of diversity* with increased feelings of isolation as she explained, “I want to say out of that isolation her [(MDS peer)] and I were able to develop a very good friendship. So, we created our own, I guess you would say our own community within that program.”

The *lack of diversity* appeared as inevitable as she explained, “Going back to that feeling of isolation that feeling of being dismissed. ‘How am I going to handle that?’ Because I know that this will not be the last time that I will come across this type of struggle.”

**Strong Woman:** She described, “I guess now that I am talking to you it is helping me to better explain it. Natives from the reservation, like myself, who live all their lives raised traditionally and live somewhat traditionally, where we realize we are different in the classroom. I am the only one they have. It is not like they have 10 or 15 students like me. I’m the only one.”

She acknowledged the realization with being the “only one” came to fruition for the first time through her reflections during the interview.

Participants recognized the *lack of diversity* as significant. Their acknowledgement of their racial difference in comparison to their peers in their program seemed essential to their lived-experience. The racial/ethnic self-identification contributed to their student

development, which gave more weight their narratives far beyond a simple demographic classification.

***Incidental Theme: “Expressing your thoughts”- Your voice***

The ability to be able speak had an impact for participants in the study.

***“Expressing your thoughts”- your voice*** was grounded on the meanings generated by the participants from the different parts of expression. Understanding the concept of giving voice and influence to participants’ experience as MDS had a profound impact to their stories. Considering the existence in participants’ narratives, their words from the interviews contributed to the name of this theme.

The incidental theme of ***“expressing your thoughts” – your voice*** solidified through the wholistic approach of data analysis. Participants’ stories revealed aspects related to their feelings and ideas about their *voice*. Seeing the added worthiness placed on ***“expressing your thoughts” – your voice*** by Mercedes, Sherri, Strong Woman and Eva, the discussion seemed relevant to capturing the fullness of their stories. The following participant summaries provide insights to the freedom of ***“expressing your thoughts”***,

**Mercedes:** The gift with being heard brought a sense of comfort to Mercedes. She described a supportive setting she encountered, “they created the space that really allowed us to be very respectful to one another and allowed us to be heard. I really got the impression that they really wanted to hear from us. I still get that impression. They really want to know what we think about this program and what we think the program can do to be better. That spoke volumes to how valuable they felt like we

are and how valuable to the professional community we are to the profession. I did not feel tokenized. I did not have the poster child feeling when I was there.”

**Sherri:** The positive feelings associated with a supportive doctoral program were described as, “The classroom environment is a lot more freeing to express your thoughts. Generally, I don’t feel like I have to do a lot of self-critique. We do have some challenging discussion but they are respectful discussions and I don’t feel like I have to put an extra monitor on what I have to say to express myself in the classroom environment.”

They truly believed the interactions identified allowed an opportunity to speak-up and trust that their words were accepted. Interactions that allowed “*expressing your thoughts*” deepened to build their sense of value, thus, reshaping their personhood in through each situation. Their gained confidence served as an overarching umbrella to gain assurance of self about their overall abilities as MDS.

The reactions associated with “*expression your thoughts*” – *your voice* created varying responses from participants. Participants described them in the following manner,

**Sherri:** She defined the difficulties with *expression* as, “I felt like everything I said was underneath a microscope. And so it got to the point that everything I said was constantly being challenged, not from all my professors. But maybe one or two and to me it was unnecessarily challenging as we were just discussing and we were just sharing thoughts.

And so, it got to the point that I felt my voice was challenged at the other program.”

**Strong Woman:** She explained, “I am going to do this and that thing, I decided this year and this semester is going to be my best semester (laughter). I decided. I am not going to sit back and be quiet. I am going to do more of jumping in and talking. They [(professors)] are going to see a difference in me and I decided this is going to change.”

**Eva:** She described her inability to express her thoughts as she shared, “Sometimes, I feel like I am unable to challenge or ask questions and there may be things I may be thinking.” She admitted for longing for a her voice as she explained to her mentor, “How do you cultivate such a strong voice? Teach me. Tell me I want to know because I want to do that, too’ (laughter).”

The inability to “*express your thoughts*” – *your voice* had a strong response from participants. Missed opportunities with expression led to disheartening feelings, thus, yearning for opportunities to be able to take part in open conversations with faculty members.

Participants’ capacity to *express their thoughts* – *their voice* appeared interconnected with their engagement through their doctoral experience, which informed their own development as MDS. It was apparent that participants viewed the influence of “*express your thoughts*” – *your voice* as vital to honing in their skills as scholars and educators. The strong attachment to their development made this theme critical for inclusion to better understand their experience.

### ***Incidental Theme: “Second-guessing” Self***

Participants’ first inference to “*second-guessing*” *self* theme gave rise gradually within their stories. However, within their interviews it was evident that they experienced this phenomenon as a MDS. Considering the prominence of “*second guessing*” *self* in the text throughout the identified participants’ interview transcripts, it made sense to look at this more closely and thoughtfully to appreciate the meaning attached to their lives. The “*second guessing*” phrase was used to classify this theme to bring about the language identified by participants, which revealed a genuine representation of the existence within their shared experiences.

The “*second guess*” *self* was identified as an incidental theme given that not all the participants endorsed experiencing it within their interviews. Mercedes, Sherri, Strong Woman and Eva gave importance to the concept of “*second guessing*” *self*. The narratives below highlighted the impact of “*second guessing*” *self*,

**Mercedes:** She stated, “Well, it makes me angry. It makes me burden. I feel like this burden in a work place situation before. So, it is burden, there is a lot of burden with *second guessing*. ‘Did I really earn this?’ Am I serving a purpose for them to be able to say ‘well look at this stellar student we cultivated,’ or ‘is it really on my merit’. So, there is a lot of common second guessing. The same kind of things we talk about in affirmative action. ‘Did I earn this?’ Also, ‘are people wondering?’ ‘Oh, that is because she is a Latino of course that is why she got it and not because she earned that.’”

**Strong Woman:** She explained, “Sometimes, I think a couple of these grades I have gotten are because of their impression of me. Maybe, they [(faculty members)] think less of me. But then I see myself on the reservation where I come from and I see nothing but Native American people, I am comfortable and I am the most outspoken one there.” Her narrative provided her interpersonal reflection grounded in *“second guessing” self* by questioning faculty members’ actions and the logic behind their evaluation of her.

**Eva:** She described, “Frustrated with the part of, ‘am I being unrealistic’ or ‘am I being cynical and pessimistic?’ ‘Are they understanding things differently because of their power and privilege?’ Or ‘am I understanding it inaccurately because I don’t have that lens?’ So just questioning all the way around.”

*“Second guessing” self* seemed nestled within their stories yet apparent through their enriched descriptions of personal doubt. The weight behind *“second guessing” self* incidental theme generated a sense of burden due to the continual questioning of selves. Although there were differences within each of their accounts, it was evident that this was a component vital to their experiences.

#### ***Incidental Theme: Awareness of Potential Assumptions***

To appreciate the role of *awareness of potential assumptions* as an incidental theme necessitates understanding the influence to participants. Eva and Chad were the only participants that identified with *assumptions* as significant to their experience. However, the importance placed on *awareness of potential assumptions* was not

conditional on the number of participants identifying with the incidental theme instead dependent on the value of the concept in enriching their lived experience.

*Awareness of potential assumptions* represented an aspect that informed further the meaning of participants' stories. The impact of *assumptions* to participants, Eva and Chad, was relevant due to the ways their reflections interconnected with their beliefs and feelings generated from those thoughts. Chad described this as follows,

“I guess I had in my head my *assumptions* going in that they are not going to give me the time of day or maybe they are not going to spend any time with me being the only black man in the group.”

And he further elaborated by saying, “Um...so, you know I just figured they would push me to the side based on my assumptions.” The *awareness of potential assumptions* seemed evident in his story and played a role in his interactions. He later admitted the need for him to adjust his thinking from his original *assumptions* of others. His experience informed him “not to have those assumptions” and to “think first before having those assumptions.” It was evident his perspective changed by combating his initial beliefs with positive encounters that reshaped his interpretations. The shift in his thought process was noteworthy and recognized as a meaningful part of his experience.

The *awareness of potential assumptions* for Eva emerged distinctively from Chad. At the beginning of her interview, she exhibited extended pauses that persisted throughout her interview. With much prudence, she eventually gave meaning to the pauses in responding to my questions. Further prompting gave meaning to the unknown behind the pauses to speak frankly that there were *assumptions* she was worried about

sharing with me during the interview. The revealing of the meaning behind her pauses had great impact to understanding the *fullness* of her story.

Eva talked about wanting to share her story yet readily admitted feeling uncertain about the accuracy. She described her experience as her “perceptions” while remaining cautious as her story could be inaccurate. She described her story as, “these are all *assumptions*.” Her narrative was described as a complete “*assumption*.” She even seemed to diminish the value of her ideas and experiences. She pointed out, on several occasions, to acknowledge that she was making statements based on her “*assumptions*.” She even feared her reflections, although her own, would be perceived as being “judging” of others due to her underline “*assumptions*” she was making within her narrative.

The influence of *awareness of potential assumptions* appeared woven in within their stories. Chad and Eva’s narratives are better understood by the impact of their *awareness of potential assumptions*. The presence of this incidental theme allows others to capture fully their lived experience.

#### ***Incidental Theme: Connecting with Master’s Students***

The meaning behind *connecting with master’s students* had implications for some of the participants. Mercedes and Strong Woman’s relationships with minority students appeared noteworthy to their experience as MDS. Although several ideas gave rise while completing the data analysis, at the core their relationship with students was most remarkable to their stories. *Connecting with master’s students* was an absent characteristic for the other participants yet worthy of mention for Mercedes and Strong Woman due to the existence of it had a major influence in their development.

The desire for *connecting with master's students* represented a key component for Mercedes and Strong Woman. The following are a couple excerpts highlighting the presence of the incidental theme:

**Mercedes:** She explained, "I think during my supervision internship. I was struck by how much the master's student of color really made good use of me. Not that the others didn't but really connected when talking about some of the issues of master's students of color. And I was struck by 'how' or 'where would they go if I weren't their supervisor.' Where would these students' emotions go if I was not their supervisor? That was kind of an eye opening experience for me." She expressed feeling fortunate she was available in ways that would otherwise been missed with a different supervisor. She recalled her supervisee stating, "She [(supervisee)] would even say if 'I didn't have you as a supervisor I don't know where I would be able to go to work some of these things out.'"

Personalization topics extended to having conversations about problem-solving ways to assist with supervisees' interpersonal issues. Mercedes described, "We talked about having outside counseling, and even that was a struggle because there are not a ton of counselors of color or especially Latino counselors of color." Her relationship with her supervisee represented as integral component to her experience.

*Connecting with master's students* extended from giving support to personally cherishing the impact from participants' interactions. Strong Woman began her conversation of *master's students* with the following description,

“I have enjoyed teaching master’s students. That is why I came back to school because I want to be able to teach, even though, it is required as part of this program. That is probably the best part. I enjoy it.”

The opportunity to work with master’s students seemed meaningful to Strong Woman’s professional growth. She further expanded on their influence to her educational experience,

“Now when I work with master’s students, I really enjoy the students. They really look to me as somebody who really knows a lot. To me, it is a really good feeling to have my students look to me for teaching them, guiding them and supporting them in their work. I look at what I have learned and what I need out of being a student in the doctoral program.”

*Connecting with master’s students* had a bidirectional imprint that Strong Woman appreciated. The knowledge and support given to students paralleled the return for Strong Woman and Mercedes. They both treasured the interactions with *master students* due to the effect in shaping them as supervisors and educators.

#### ***Incidental Theme: Transition from Counselor to Educator***

*Transition from counselor to educator* represented a vital shift to Sherri’s MDS lived experience. She recognized the evolution from counselor to educator as impactful. While Sherri was the only participant that spoke in depth about the *transition from counselor to educator* within her story, to understand *fully* the essence of her experience necessitated embracement of this incidental theme.

The *transition from counselor to educator* incorporated varying aspects present for Sherri. She explained, “even though I had experience as a practitioner for several

years, I am not a researcher, and I am not an educator.” She recognized her limitations coming into her doctoral program, thus, demonstrating a willingness for growth. She summarized,

“Obviously, you are aware when you are transitioning from therapist to wanting to become a researcher and educator. There are things you don’t know that you should be doing to build your resume and build in your field.”

She embraced the idea that as a future educator she would need to learn more about the role of a researcher and educator. Aside from her limitations as a developing educator, her counseling experience set her apart from her peers and even faculty members in her first program.

Sherri recognized her counseling experience informed the interactions with her faculty members. She identified an encounter with one of her faculty members that remained imprinted for her. She acknowledged the interactions with the faculty member resulted in “behavior[s] that demonstrated a certain level of insecurity” in part of her clinical experience. The faculty member appeared to show struggles with being able to accept the value of clinical experience over academic knowledge. She described,

“Because of his inability to embrace that there are things going on outside of these academic walls that require us to have a different level of understanding. You know where I am going with that in particular when we are talking about using one theory or one technique when in reality that is not how counseling works.”

The limitations with an expanded way of thinking by her faculty member created demoralizing feelings toward her opportunities for growth as an educator. Her original aspirations had been that her clinical experience would be integrated in the classroom discussions by considering real world counseling practices and academic learning. The resistance against her original desire led to feelings of disillusion and weigh heavily in her impressions about academia.

### **Recapitulating Unfolded Thematic Meanings**

Participants' individual interviews uncovered those aspects that were most meaningful to their life as a MDS. Their rich descriptions defined the thematic concepts, which intended to deepen the understanding of their lived-experience and move closer to phenomenon examined. Participants' emergent themes were compared beside one another, which separated essential and incidental thematic concepts. Although essential themes connect to the rest of the participants, incidental themes added insight as they highlight specific areas from each of their lives to grasp the uniqueness of them. This notion was true in identifying incidental themes as they expressed certain meaningful aspects to their story while others may have not. However, their distinctiveness lends to enrich the meanings behind their narratives, in effect, to understand abundantly the phenomenon from all directions.

### **Confirming Thematic Meanings: Member Check-in #1**

To ensure the deeper meanings connected to each participants' story was captured a member check-in (#1) completed to assess accurate representation of those components significant to their lived-experiences. Member check-in (#1) embodied the principle of inclusion through participants input throughout the data analysis. The member check-in

(#1) completed by distributing each of the participants interview transcripts, and a personalized spreadsheets identifying their themes along with quotes or summaries connecting each one of them via email. The spreadsheets identified clearly, which themes connected with the group (essential themes) and those that were individual focus areas (incidental themes).

The spreadsheet served for ease of clarity of data coding process with the aim to orient participants to theme descriptions and interpretations generated from their interview transcripts. The essential themes noted in spreadsheets included:

- *Significant faculty relationships*
- *Navigating with microaggression*
- *Sense of responsibility*
- *Influence of family and personal values*
- *Desire for learning and educating others*

Incidental themes identified by at least 4 out of 5 participants from the individual interviews were as follows:

- *Lack of diversity*
- *"Expressing your thoughts" – your voice*
- *"Second-guessing" self*

Incidental themes discovered in one or two participants' narratives yet just as worthy for discussion encompassed:

- *Aware of potential assumptions*
- *Connecting with master's students*
- *Transition from counselor to educator*

The spreadsheet separated those themes specific to each participant while labeling those that were identified by all. Excerpts from each of their transcripts were used to define themes identified for each of them to ensure interpretation of information reflected their *truths* behind their reflections.

Participants completed the member check-in (#1) by email. This form of communication was used over other electronic connections due to participants' availability and ease of exchange. Participants were presented with all the information (spreadsheets) and directions for providing input or confirmation of themes identified from data analysis. The following correspondence denoted some directions provided to participants in their individual email message for member check-in (#1),

“Member check-in: I am attaching two documents (your interview transcript and data analysis of themes identified). Please take a moment to review and see if I am capturing those things that resonate for you. You will find in the data analysis where I color-coded the essential themes. I am completely open to making changes, as I want to capture your experience or any new things you think may be important. The statements that were not highlighted were incidental themes I did not find for the majority of participants during the interview. If you find an additional theme resonated for you, please share this with me to include it. Please complete review of transcript and themes by Thursday, 03/12/2015.”

The participants were given a week to review themes uncovered from their individual interviews and provide feedback, as necessary.

### ***Results of Member Check-in (#1)***

Participants' responded being in agreement with the essential and incidental themes presented from the individual interview thematic analysis. The following passages from their email messages, which affirmed their agreement with themes revealed with some minor additions:

**Mercedes:** She explained, "I read through both documents and still strongly feel as though they are accurate portrayals of my doctoral experience. In fact, it was nice to remind myself how important the [national organization] program is to me!"

**Sherri:** She said, "I reviewed the transcript and themes. I believe you did an excellent job in capturing my voice and message."

**Strong Woman:** She responded, "I looked over your transcription. I'm Arapaho not Navajo. Other than that, it looks great. American Indians get offended when you refer to them as a wrong tribal affiliation."

**Eva:** She stated, "Thank you for sending what you have done so far. It looks great, and it's evident you have done a tremendous amount of work. I love your study and am glad to have contributed. I reviewed the transcript and data analysis, and I think it accurately captures our discussion."

**Chad** asked for more time and space to review spreadsheet and transcripts considering his busy schedule. He was informed that the member check-in (#1) could be valuable to this process to ensure the essence of his experience was captured in the analysis. Prior to the in vivo focus group meeting, I spoke in person with Chad about the spreadsheet and

transcripts. He agreed that themes embodied his experience and declined needing to make changes from originally proposed concepts.

The member check-in (#1) served as an opportunity to allow participants to provide input about thematic analysis from their individual interviews. The member check-in (#1) was grounded from my social constructivist paradigm that meaning can come from our experiences while being interconnected with others. My openness to encourage feedback during this stage was to safeguard participants' experiences were their *truths* as MDS. Participants' responses confirmed the essential and incidental themes as an accurate representation of their experiences.

### **Thematic Analysis of Individual Interviews Summary**

The writing and rewriting process within this chapter aimed at enhancing the meanings of participants' reflections to comprehend the *fullness* of their stories. My data analysis of individual interviews incorporated van Manen's (1990) approach to obtain the essence of participants' lived experience through their counselor education doctoral program. Thematic analysis from interview transcripts revealed the following essential themes: *Significant faculty relationships, Navigating with microaggression, Sense of responsibility, Influence of family and personal values, and Desire for learning and educating others*. Incidental themes identified were as follows: *Lack of diversity, "Expressing your thoughts" - your voice, "Second-guessing" Self, Aware of potential assumptions, Connecting with master's students and Transition from counselor to educator*. Essential and incidental themes symbolized a core component that helped deepened the understandings of participants' most meaningful experiences, thus, illuminating the *truth* of participants' heuristic phenomenology. The member check-in

(#1) represented the last point within this chapter. This final step in the analysis process ensured participants' meanings represented their own *truths* to minimize obscuring their stories with my personal experience as a MDS.

## CHAPTER V

### Focus Group Interview

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead*

The focus group interview was a method used to further comprehend participants' narratives. The findings from the participants' individual interviews provided rich descriptions of their deeper meanings behind the stories while the focus group interview aimed at expanding the understandings. The focus group represented the setting for “collaborative hermeneutic conversations” (van Manen, 1990, p. 99) to discuss themes from previous interview to gain deeper meanings or uncover new themes. The focus group interview created an opportunity of data collection to reveal the shared meanings of their lived experiences as MDS. This chapter will provide the details of the meeting progression and information gathered from the group focus interview to extend the understanding of their experiences.

#### ***Focus Group Interview Process***

All participants were informed during individual interviews about the follow-up focus group interview. I reviewed the limits of confidentiality due to one another finding out about their identities from the face-to-face meeting. All participants were agreeable with meeting each other during the focus group.

The focus group interview aimed at including all the participants. Considering the availability of most participants during the annual American Counseling Association (ACA) Conference, the focus group meeting was scheduled and completed then. Eva, Mercedes, Chad and Strong Woman agreed to be present, in vivo, for the face-to-face

meeting while Sherri indicated she could only participate via Skype. The chance to meet *in vivo* provided a unique opportunity for data collection while inevitably increasing the possibility for participants to interact beyond the study. There were no expectations set about establishing relationships among participants with this meeting yet all participants were made aware of the possibilities of connecting with each other beyond the study.

The data analysis from the individual interviews informed the focus group discussion topics. A goal of this study remained towards putting aside defined notions of findings; instead, the aim was to allow participants' experiences to create greater understanding of their lives. Based on this idea, I decided to place attention on the essential and incidental themes from the individual interviews. The themes were the center of dialogue rather than identifying questions that could inadvertently redirect areas of importance for participants. Presenting the themes as the key point of discussion, provided an atmosphere to give participants the chance to highlight or expand on those areas most important to them.

I followed the following procedures to complete the focus group interview meeting with Mercedes, Chad, Eva, Strong Woman and Sherri:

- Prior to initiating recording, participants were reminded of the limits of confidentiality due to meeting as a group, in spite of this, I emphasized the informed consent stressed the importance of upholding everyone's anonymity. They were reassured I would maintain the highest level of confidentiality to ensure their anonymity with those not directly participating in the study.

- Participants were informed that their pseudonym would be used upon starting the audio recording (i.e. computer and tablet) for the focus group discussion. They were encouraged during the interview to refer to each other by their pseudonym.
- I allowed participants to ask questions and seek clarification about instructions before initiating recording.
- At onset of audio recording, I reminded participants the aim of study was on capturing the meaning behind their experiences as MDS through their counselor education programs.
- I reintroduced essential and incidental themes from the individual interviews. I defined themes to orient participants to the meanings grounded from their stories. Two broad questions were used to prompt further conversations and to maintain the attention at heightening the lived experience of participants:
  - *What thoughts resonate for you from the themes uncovered as a MDS or doctoral student of color?*
  - *Were there any other impactful experiences that influenced your counselor education experience as a MDS or doctoral student of color?*

The focus group interview procedures, formed and executed, intended to bare the shared meanings from participants lived experiences.

### **Focus Group Interview Discourse**

The focus group interview represented a means to stimulate discussion about participants' most influential experiences as MDS. The information from the discourse had significance in better understanding their stories. The following are descriptions of different areas highlighted by participants during the interview.

*“Second-guessing”*

Participants were informed of the themes at the onset of the focus group session. A broad question, *what thoughts resonate for you from the themes uncovered as a MDS or doctoral student of color*, posed to offer participants the chance to direct the discussion. Chad initiated the dialogue by guiding the conversation to *“second guessing.”*

Chad pointed out that *“second guessing”* was present within his MDS’ experience. He claimed *“second guessing”* existed for him aside the absence of it during his individual interview *“it is still there now.”* He could not recall sharing with me the presence of *“second guessing”* but wanted to ensure this was considered significant to this own experience. He elaborated on *“second guessing”* as,

“I thought ‘am I supposed to be here’ and things of that nature. So, I know I got accepted into the [doctoral] program but had the feeling like ‘did they make a mistake here?’ You know I had been trying to get into a doc program and each program I attempted to get into I was off in one mark on something, so getting into one shocked me.”

The summary provided a rich context for Chad and linked his experience to the theme of *“second guessing” self*.

Chad’s reactions to *“second guessing”* generated thoughts from other participants. Mercedes affirmed being in agreement with Chad and explained,

“Being here [(American Counseling Association Annual Conference)] my second-guessing goes into high gear. ‘Do I really fit in?’ (Pause) ‘Am I really going to be able to (Pause)?’ ‘Are people going to take me

seriously?’ (Pause) And then those incidents like you just had reinforced our second-guessing.”

Mercedes viewed “second guessing” as even a current phenomenon within her experience at the conference while with other counseling professionals. The questions revealed an internal dialogue that happened within her. She shared her thoughts in the group and even linked “second guessing” with other participants’ stories. She elaborated by explaining that the “second guessing” seemed to be enhanced at the professional conference while almost nonexistent in her “normal life.” She said, “It is this weirdness that I don’t normally have in my normal life. So, it is really uncomfortable.” The continual “second guessing” weighed heavily on Mercedes.

#### *Related Understandings*

*Related understanding* was an idea that was a new concept within the focus group. The participants characterized as ethnic/racial MDS within a counselor education program. The defined identification as MDS denoted them to meet eligibility for participation in the study; however, the participants’ awareness of *related understandings* between each other appeared of greater importance during the focus group beyond the simple classification. *Related understandings* encompassed participants’ cognition of one another’s considerations of their narratives beyond a simple association as a member of the focus group meeting.

*Related understandings* originate in participants’ verbal communication during the focus group. Strong Woman described the sense of connection with group members as she said, “Like we can *relate* to each other. We understand each other, here.” The

opportunity to be among individuals that could have a *related understanding* was unique and brought about a sense of comfort for Strong Woman.

Other participants confirmed Strong Woman's similar experience. The *related understandings* extended to feelings of being in place that others "get it." Eva explained,

"I feel like a gratitude of being an X [national recognition] and sharing this with other people that get it. It kind of goes back to what you were saying Strong Woman when you were talking about being with others that get it versus being around others that just don't get it. I feel like I can *relate* with you about being with others that get it."

*Related understandings* were not just a mere recalling of an interaction where they were around others that "get it" but appeared within the focus group meeting. Sherri, Chad and Mercedes added to the conversation identifying with *related understandings*.

Nonverbal instances among participants seemed to also affirm *related understandings*. Persistent gestures suggesting links with one another's shared stories were present throughout most of the interview. These signs included nodding's and pointing to one another as they elaborated on each of their stories. To consider the meanings behind their nonverbal communication deepened the understanding above verbal dialogue happening within the focus group.

### *Belonging*

The idea of *belonging* newly came about in the focus group. Most of the participants brought up the idea of *belonging*. A desire for *belonging* informed the conversation of participants. They extended on the concept of belonging from being a

troubling internal experience of self-doubt to also being self-conscious considering other people's impression of them.

Participants shared the value of *belonging* as essential to their experience.

Although Strong Woman, Chad, Eva and Mercedes expressed feelings of *belonging*, they were tarnished by the insecurity of how others perceive them in professional settings.

Strong Woman explained belonging as, "I kind of feel that is where you (pointing to Chad) are saying you (pointing back at Chad again) are sitting back in the room and not quiet feeling like you *belong*. I feel like I *belong* there but I feel like they feel like I don't *belong* there." *Belonging* was epitomized by the continual questioning and wondering if others accepted them as colleagues. Aside from participants' ability to gain a sense of comfort with feeling as they belong, the continual battle with the unknown way others perceived them extenuated feelings of uncertainty.

The concept of *belonging* appeared within other areas yet it was important to highlight here due to the impact in clarifying participants' stories. Feelings of *belonging* resonated even during their interactions within the focus group. To reach the wholeness of *belonging* included maintaining confidence in self and trust that others value them, too.

#### *Lack of Diversity*

The *lack of diversity* was an incidental theme re-introduced in focus group.

Participants brought up the concept of *lack of diversity*. The reality of their enrollment in doctoral programs that *lacked diversity* shaped their experiences in different ways.

Participants communicated the demographics of the programs.

The lack of diversity linked to the way participants saw themselves compared to others in their program. Mercedes, Strong Woman, Chad, and Sherri all talked about being the only ones or among the few students of color within their programs. Strong Woman deepened the meaning by explaining, “I feel like I am by myself,” and “I am probably one of the first Native Americans in the program I am in. I didn’t feel comfortable.” The participants seemed to share Strong Woman’s reaction to the *lack of diversity* with the exception of Eva.

All participants except Eva identified with *lack of diversity*. Eva explained the reason for the absence of this within her story. She clarified the geographic location of her doctoral program may have an influence due to a more dense minority population within the surround area. She noted that half of her cohort represented White students and the rest included other minority students. She attributed having an ethnic/racial diverse cohort minimized sentiments connected to the theme *lack of diversity*. Aside from this reality Eva stated,

“However, I will say being a little older than some of them and single parent that differentiates my experience drastically. It’s a different life for me-a different experience. A different balancing act, so that is probably where I feel that the most.”

The lack of diversity expanded to mean being “different.” She viewed her personal life experiences as not aligning with the rest of her cohort and noticing some apparent differences. Although there were some connections Eva made, her individuality led to her rejecting the fullness of lack of diversity as part of her narrative.

The *lack of diversity* seemed to include the concept with being different and the feelings associated with acknowledging dissimilarities. The link of the core experience behind lack of diversity echoed for Sherri. She stated, “I just find it interesting that we all have the same isolation and we all feel somewhat the same rejection.” She thought that instead of focusing on the differences that it was more profound for her to see the emotional connections of participants behind the *lack of diversity*.

#### *Significant Faculty Relationships*

Participant discussion led to exploring and appreciating trusting relationships. Then meaningful interactions evolved to focusing on the essential theme *significant faculty relationships* in their roles as MDS. Relationships represented a key aspect to helping participants move forward through their doctoral program; however, *faculty relationships* made the difference to participants’ development. Their stories began to shape the description of *significant faculty relationships* to understand the value bestowed on them.

The discussion of *relationships* began with recognizing the value of peers and those around participants. Sherri noted during her first program the connection she made with an “Asian woman.” She described this connection as, “The relationship I established with her meant so much more than the relationship with faculty members.” She recognized that the support provided by her “Asian” peer had greater implications over interactions with faculty members due to the challenges she had that limited her opportunity for growth through her first doctoral program. Mercedes shared Sherri’s sentiment and talked about also connecting with a student peer. Mercedes elaborated,

“I have forged a really good *relationship* with another student of color at the other campus. We email. We are in the same process in the program. We email, text and sometimes we talk on the phone almost every day. We keep ourselves going.”

A trusting relationship built on support with peers seemed to be meaningful for participants’ growth. Although noteworthy the relationship with peers, there were limitations comparatively with connecting with faculty members. Sherri admitted her peer helped to get “through” her academic experience “but it was not enough to sustain” her.

The benefit of *significant faculty relationship* had an influential impact to their development. Eva provided a rich explanation of the impact of *relationships*,

“I am very much a believer of the foundational role that comes from *relationships* that we need that to sustain our creativity, our energy, our growth, and wellbeing. So, I really do believe in that fundamentally for people in general.”

Eva’s description extenuated the importance of *relationships*, which speaks to Sherri’s comment that a *significant faculty relationship* could be key to being successful through a doctoral program. Sherri said, “I want to echo that. I think *relationship* is definitely huge for me as well.” Chad also contributed to the discourse by illustrating that a supportive faculty other than a peer had a greater influence. He stated,

“So, for me to be able to experience that and see that then these anxieties stopped. To see someone would support me, a faculty member, and they were of a different race. I went in thinking let me find a faculty person

that is of my race that maybe will help me but it turned out totally opposite.”

Participants talked about a *significant faculty relationship* meant a caring individual aside from their race/ethnicity. Eva, Strong Woman, and Sherri concurred that a connection grounded in sustenance with a faculty member represented a buffer and increased the potential for success as evolving educators while the absence could lead to disheartening experiences.

### *Your Voice*

The ability to express your thoughts, *your voice*, seemed to have substantial relevance to participants’ lived-experience. The conversation from Chad, Eva, Strong Woman, and Sherri paralleled one another. They described the practice and even the desire to use their *voice* created internal turmoil; however, Mercedes’ unique background provided a different perspective.

The limitations with sharing their opinions was restricted by their individual struggles. Chad admitted that it was important for him to express his thoughts but has often shied away from this due to feeling uncomfortable with speaking up. He elaborated, “So, I tend to be silent in a group and just try to figure out how am I going to say this without sounding stupid so to speak.” He was hesitant in wanting to believe that there were generalizations made of him for being a “Black male” and “from the South” yet he believed his fears of “sounding stupid” were grounded on previous negative experiences. He talked about the way his internal dialogue created a barrier for him to express his thoughts.

Strong Woman described her own obstacles with using her *voice*. She communicated that the use of her voice included internal challenges that limited her to voice her opinion and impacted her academic careers. She believed her assessment from some of her faculty members was unjust. She admitted she longed to speak up and worked at being different; however, she explained this was difficult due to the use of *your voice* was contrary to her roots. She stated, “I have always been kind of (pause) I guess shy when it comes to doing those things maybe because of where I come from.” She knew the ability to voice was valued within her program and a needed attributed to increase her success in her program aside from her comfort with this skill. Strong Woman saw this as important as she explained,

“So, that was my goal was to overcome that and build up my, I guess I want to say assertiveness, but then again not. I guess maybe confidence to speak in front of large groups of people and feel good about myself. So, I am still struggling with that ideal.”

The concept of using *your voice* evolved to meaning more for her and discovered at the core this related to her lack of confidence with speaking up. She admitted to getting “choked up, stuck or held back” when she was around a large group of people due to feelings of uncertainty with herself. She acknowledged seeing a difference within herself when she was around other Native Americans; therefore, crediting her struggles to her insecurity. She yearned to overcome this hurdle.

Eva viewed the challenges with using her *voice* were deeply engrained in her. She described this as follows,

“Even hearing you all (gesturing toward others in the group) talk about the confidence and like being silent. Because it made me think about me, it is not a conscious thing, I feel like that but it is coupled with my way of being. I worry about articulating myself in a certain way. I just feel like that is my thing.”

Her self-doubt to use her voice was an automatic response. Along with other participants, her description above noted that the obstacles to speaking up were founded on her lack of confidence and fearing a “terrible consequence.” Therefore, remaining “silent” was perceived as a better option due to underlying fears. She elaborated the fears connected to using your voice, “I always always always worry about how I am being perceived and what messages am I sending.” She even acknowledged noticing a difference with the way others are able to achieve using their voice without regard for consequences. She spoke about wanting to be able to learn to use her voice.

Sherri interjected in the conversation to point out that using her *voice* has been a tenacious struggle for her, too. She revealed her internal challenges relate to worries that others will perceive her incorrectly. She spoke about being apprehensive as she explained, “So, I am always thinking in this place where, I am kind of like Chad, am I articulating everything correctly because I am from the South. So, you can hear my southern accent.” The stereotype of an “angry black woman” has persisted within her to the extent as a heightened awareness that redirects her actions. She stated,

“But then at the same time that I am articulating, I am always thinking should I pull back a little bit more because when you are speaking in class you are learning to project your voice or maybe I shouldn’t project my

voice. Because I don't want to come out as 'angry' you know what I mean?"

She even connected her experience with other participants. Although a part of her desires to use her *voice*, she has become proficient with silencing her *voice*. The realization that she needs to silence her *voice* weigh heavily. She explained,

"I really hate to say that, but it is true. I have learned to just silence *my voice*, even when I have a strong need to express myself for fear I don't want to come across as being this angry black woman."

Silencing her *voice* has been a means of survival; however, she wondered at what expense. She expanded on the continual silence that could cross over to her future roles and wondered about the persistent challenges with this position. The realization of this filled her with dread in always having to be silent.

Mercedes provided a distinct outlook compared to the rest of the participants. She denied having the anxieties or worries participants described. She credited the absence of these core hesitations were connected to her unique life experience. Her adoption by a White family granted her "privilege," thus, generating a different message about using her *voice*. She recognized she was "raised in a bubble" where she had "all the privilege." She had the support of her family growing up, which provided exclusive chances to use her *voice*. The "bubble" she grew up in permitted her the time to "solidify" herself, thus, allowing her to have a foundation to hone in the use of her *voice*. This provided a sense of comfort unlike the other participants. The fundamentals for her voice were present through her childhood, which she recognized once she left home there was a difference. She stated,

“But that privilege goes away once you are on your own. People don’t see me or treat me like I have a White family. They don’t know. People don’t know that about me. So, I had to ‘relearn’ wait not ‘relearn’ but ‘learn’ how to navigate this world based on status and color that I didn’t learn growing up.”

Mercedes noticed her “White privilege” disappeared after she was on her own. Although she cherished having been able to experience “privilege,” she recognized that she was influenced by the ideals others may follow and could impact her being heard. She has the capacity and confidence to use her voice; nonetheless, the way it will be received may vary from person to person.

The significance with expressing your voice was important for all the participants. However, the reactions to using their voices varied from participants. The similarity shared between all of them connected to the way others could respond to the use of their voice. Aside from their individual logics connected to using their voice, participants’ narratives demonstrated vulnerability with sharing their stories.

#### *Focus Group Interview: My Personal Influence*

The annual ACA conference provided a unique opportunity to meet with participants far beyond the focus group interview. The ability to be in the same room with most of the participants and interact in vivo needs mention. Along with the benefits of enriching my relationship with them and further building trust, my presence intertwined to influence their own experience. I believe the nature of shared experiences was most noticeable with an incident that occurred just prior to initiating the focus group and extended into the meeting time.

I had arranged to reserve a location that was both private and comfortable to meet with participants. I set up my equipment and materials to ensure we would be able to proceed with ease once everyone was present. All the participants had agreed to meet at a designated location then proceed to our meeting location. Considering participants did not know one another, it was imperative I remained at the designated location to walk everyone back.

Participants arrived and we all proceeded to the meeting location. Upon arrival, I noticed somebody was occupying part of the space I had reserved. He was a White male with gray hair, wearing a suit, and in his late 50's or so. I was taken aback by his presence due to the inherent nature of my study and in disbelief. My computer and other materials clearly demonstrated the area was occupied but he demonstrated no regard for any of it. I asked my participants to wait for a moment to speak with the stranger. I approached him with much hesitation then explained my need for the space. He was immediately dismissive of me and said, "I'm not moving." I reiterated the sensitivity of my work and pointed to him that I had reserved the area for my meeting, but responded, "oh, well." I recalled his words pierced me like a dagger and formed thoughts of despair,

"Oh, my! I'm a terrible researcher. I can't believe he is doing this to me.

What am I going to do? Is this really happening? How can I proceed with my focus group? What is going to happen? Can I do anything? No. Oh, my! What are my participants thinking or saying about me?"

I could not believe his response, so I stepped back and communicated to my participants that I needed to address the situation. They appeared very understanding and tried to provide suggestions to solving the problem. I returned to talk to the stranger then the

moment I got closer two other White males in suits interjected to tell me I had to leave. I was hurt and shocked that my peaceful assertion brought about such hostility from them. I was filled with many feelings, mostly anger and hurt, yet I knew I had to push through to accomplish the focus group interview.

My return to the participants felt like a defeat. I explained the situation and offered to reschedule the meeting if they felt the incident had changed their mind about wanting to continue with the study. They chose to proceed and we found another meeting space to initiate the focus group. I recalled being unsure how to deal with the incident and where to leave all my emotions. I could not deny it, so I was open about being impacted and did not want those strangers to influence my work with participants. The participants briefly shared their own reactions as I prepared the equipment for recording. I worried about the spill over to the focus group but remembered their interpretation of their experience included me and I should be open to allowing them to share those aspects that resonated for them.

To comprehend the *fullness* of the focus group interview required the inclusion of this incident. This encounter provides a context to aspects that could be missed. The influence of the event with the strangers and my own reactions has relevance to deepening our understanding of the experience of participants.

### **Focus Group Interview Summary**

The focus group interview provided an opportunity to create a shared meaning of their experiences. The inherent nature of meeting other participants allowed for connect and deepened their reflections of their experiences through their counselor education programs. Participants illuminated those aspects that were most meaningful to their lives

as MDS. Their rich descriptions defined themes further, which deepened the understanding of her lived-experience to move closer to the phenomenon examined. From their shared stories emerged the following concepts: “*Second Guessing*,” *Related understandings*, *Lack of Diversity*, *Significant Faculty Relationships*, and *Your Voice*. These concepts represent the highlights from the rewriting process of her narrative. To capture the *fullness* of the focus group interview I included the *Focus Group Interview: My Personal Influence* section. This was done with the aim to review the phenomenon from all directions.

## CHAPTER VI

### Thematic Analysis of Focus Group

*“The fear of freedom is greater still in professionals who have not yet discovered for themselves the invasive nature of their action, and who are told that their action is dehumanizing.” (Freire, 2012, p. 156).*

Focus groups have been a means for data collection within qualitative research since 1926 (McLafferty, 2004). The utility of focus groups includes providing space for reflection of group members’ *truths* of their cultural experiences and takes account of observed interactions that add to the data collection. The exchanges within a smaller focus group constructed of individuals that have a connection yield deeper understandings, which matches the core aspects within a heuristic-phenomenological inquiry. The consideration of all these parts led to the decision and guided the achievement of the focus group interview with the intent to recapture all aspects of the phenomenon behind the human experience of MDS through their counselor education program.

My thematic analysis examined the human science experience of participants within the focus group interview. van Manen’s (1990) data analysis directed the writing and re-writing procedures to illuminate all aspects of the phenomenon. The uniqueness of the group’s wholeness and individuality of participants enriched the meanings of their narratives. Themes measured on the basis that without them “the phenomenon could not be what it is” (van Manen, p.107, 1990). This notion served as the foundation of thematic analysis of focus group interview.

### ***Unfolding Thematic Meanings: Focus Group Interview***

Focus group interview analysis revealed crucial aspects of participants' stories. Essential and incidental themes from the individual interviews were part of the hermeneutic conversation to enhance understandings. The focus group dialogue led to the affirmation of all the themes from the individual interviews by all participants. The essential themes reviewed included: ***Significant faculty relationships, Navigating with microaggression, Sense of responsibility, Influence of family and personal values, and Desire for learning and educating others.*** (Figure, 1). Incidental themes reviewed included: ***Lack of diversity, "Expressing your thoughts" – your voice, "Second guessing" self, Aware of potential assumptions, Connecting with master's students, and Transition from counselor to educator*** (Figure, 1).

Participants confirmed the existence of all of themes. However, they did not denote a rank order for themes and equal importance placed on all of them. Their narratives enriched the descriptions to get at the essence of their experience. The following were the essential and incidental themes participants highlighted during the focus group discourse: ***"Second-guessing" Self," "Express Your Thoughts"- Your Voice, Significant Faculty Relationships, and Lack of Diversity.*** The quintessence around these themes will be included in this chapter. The focus group transcription analysis demonstrated participants' identification with incidental themes not previously endorsed during their individual interviews. Participant motivation for the inclusion of ***"second guessing" self*** and ***"express your thoughts" your voice*** as essential themes will be conveyed within this chapter.

A member check-in (#2) was completed to ensure interpretations are a representations of participants' experience. The member check-in (#2) will be included in the final portion of this chapter. The member check-in (#2) gave participants an opportunity for clarification while also allowing space for reflection on the text of themes presented.

***Essential Theme: "Second guessing" Self***

Participants' rich stories informed the deeper meaning of the themes. The individual interviews of Mercedes, Sherri, Strong Woman, and Eva exposed "***second guessing***" *self* as an incidental theme. Chad's narrative had originally not demonstrated the concept of "***second guessing***" *self* within his individual interview or the member check-in (#1). However, the focus group transcript bared his self-disclosure and connection with "***second guessing***" *self* as a crucial piece to define his experience. The heighten importance placed by him during the focus group linked "***second guessing***" *self* to his life, which led to the decision to classify as an essential theme.

The opening dialogue of the focus group interview permitted participants to lead the discussion to areas of influence for them. Chad opened the conversation by wanting to clarify that "***second guessing***" *self* was definitely an aspect that captured his experience. He admitted that he might have missed sharing this struggle during his individual interview. However, during the focus group he stated, "I guess for me as far as the ***second-guessing*** it was there. It is still there now!" The presence of "***second guessing***" enthused a strong sense of uncertainty that engulfed his everyday interactions with doubt about his academic career. He elaborated by divulging about his initial worries. He indicated, "When I first got into the [doctoral] program I thought am I

supposed to be here and things of that nature.” He recognized along with the others participants he was engrossed with questions about his ability to be successful through his doctoral program. He saw *“second guessing” self* blemished the joy of celebrating being accepted into a doctoral program. The following speaks to Chad’s experience,

“I know I got accepted into the program but had the feeling like did they make a mistake here. You know I had been trying to get into a doc program and each program I attempted to get into I was off in one mark of something, so getting into one shocked me.”

His amazement seemed grounded on feelings of doubt due to his uncertainty with having the capacity of embarking into the role of a doctoral student. The existence of *“second guessing” self* was apparent for him.

The rest of the participants confirmed the presence of *“second guessing” self* to their lives through the individual interviews. Chad’s description sparked further dialogue with the meaning of *“second guessing” self*. Mercedes added to the conversation by providing a personal example of *“second guessing” self*. She explained that being at the annual American Counseling Association (ACA) conference filled her with insecurity about her position among other professionals. She confessed questioning her position as a doctoral student of color, “‘Do I really fit in?’ (Pause) ‘Am I really going to be able to (Pause)?’ ‘Are people going to take me seriously?’ (Pause).” Similar to Chad, she doubted her place among others from the counseling profession. Her internal dialogue asserted, *“second guessing” self* as a guiding principle that carried through her interactions with others. She said, “And then those incidents like you (Beronica) just reinforces our *second-guessing*.” She noted that spotting the transgression such as the

incident prior to the onset of the group with the White male strangers during the conference affirmed ***“second guessing” self***.

The group argued that ***“second guessing” self*** seemed grounded on internal dialogue associated with the way others perceived them. Participants’ narratives discerned ***“second guessing” self*** was subdued during those times that they felt like they *belonged*. Strong Woman described this as,

“I kind of feel that is where you (pointing to Chad) are saying you are sitting back in the room and not quiet feeling like you *belong*. I feel like I *belong* there but I feel like they feel like I don’t *belong* there.”

The sense of confidence with feeling like they belonged provided reassurance that alleviated the feelings of ***“second guessing” self***. Chad, Eva, Mercedes, and Sherri used words like “I know what you mean,” “right,” and “yes” demonstrating their agreement with experiencing *belonging* producing a sense of comfort.

The interconnectedness of *belonging* and ***“second guessing” self*** necessitated inclusion within this section. The transcript analysis demonstrated *belonging* had relevance to within the theme ***“second guessing” self***. *Belonging* was a new subcategory from focus group interview discussion.

### ***Essential Theme: “Express Your Thoughts”- Your Voice***

The individual interviews analysis bared the veracity of the incidental theme of ***“express your thoughts” – your voice***. Mercedes, Sherri, Strong Woman, and Eva gave mentioned through their previous interviews interpersonal challenges with using their *voice* through their doctoral programs. It was apparent to them through the individual interviews’ thematic examinations ***“express your thoughts” – your voice*** played a role in

their counselor education experience. Chad's earlier individual interview transcript had not demonstrated the presence of *"express your thoughts"-your voice* within his narrative; consequently, this was designated as an incidental theme.

Thematic analysis of focus group transcripts revealed participants attention to *"express your thoughts"-your voice* far beyond individual interview findings. Chad initiated the dialogue by stating, "It is important to express my thoughts, but sometimes I shy away." His statement begins to communicate the reasons for he finds it difficult to use his *voice*. The initial disclosure was attributed to him being shy yet he slowly exposed a fear of the way he would be perceived by others. He stated, "I tend to be silent in a group and just try to figure out how am I going to say this without sounding stupid so to speak." "Sounding stupid" seemed to be in part the reasoning for holding back with expressing his thoughts. He further expanded on his qualms with incorrectly being perceived by others,

"And it is like, when I open my mouth people are like he is from the South, and Mississippi. So, I know it sounds crazy but those are experiences that my thoughts have been informed with. So, I guess I have to feel comfortable with it."

His suspiciousness that others would underestimate him created the barriers for him to express his thoughts given generalization he made from past experiences. He continues to restrain himself as he explained, "I don't want them to perceive me in a certain way or I don't want to say anything that may sound stupid. So, I just kind of sit back." His motives for restricting to *"express your thoughts"-your voice* evolved far beyond being related to shyness to worries of others perceptions of him.

Strong Woman contributed to the discourse connected to “*express your thoughts*”-*your voice*. Her response to Chad’s comments was of agreement by stating, “What he just said I relate to.” She worried, similar to Chad, that she was incorrectly perceived due to informed experiences within her counselor education program. She identified an experience with a professor that based her course grade due to her inability to “speak up” or “participate a lot” without consideration to her personhood. She shared that her hesitations with not speaking up affected her academic career. She further elaborated on her discomfort with using her voice through the following summary,

“I felt like I was there, I was participating, I was understanding, I was learning and I had my thoughts, but chose to sit back because part of it I attributed it to my age and they are younger. And I will let them do all the talking or whatever because I don’t want to come across as know it all and dominate this conversation so I sat back. But at the end of semester, the notes on my paper from my teacher was participation and you need to *speak up* more in class and certain things like that, so I felt like that was why my grade was what it was.”

She talked about her approach with learning was different from her peers yet was evaluated against others way of being. Although she acknowledged the injustice of the faculty members, she opted not use her *voice*. She stated, “I did not go to the teacher and tried to defend it or argue for a better grade. I just let it go.” She mentioned the desire for wanting to speak up yet struggling. She stated, “I have always been kind of (pause) I guess shy when it comes to doing those things maybe because of where I come from.”

Her historical challenges with expressing her thoughts have encouraged her to take a different approach. She explained,

“My goal was to overcome that and build up my, I guess I want to say assertiveness but then again not. I guess maybe confidence to speak in front of large groups of people and feel good about myself. So, I am still struggling with that ideal.”

She desired for a new way of being but admitted obstacles with being able to use her voice.

Eva related with “*express your thoughts*”-*your voice* being a component of her experience. Eva claimed the other participants’ stories connected to “*express your thought*”-*your voice* led her to further reflection to the existence of this in her own life. She described,

“Even hearing you all (gesturing toward others in the group) talk about the confidence and like being silent. Because it made me think about me, it is not a conscious thing, I feel like that but it is coupled with my way of being. I worry about articulating myself in a certain way. I just feel like that is my thing.”

Her reflexive process revealed rich descriptions of her struggles behind expressing her thoughts. Along with the other participants, she noticed her lack of confidence hindered her ability to use her *voice*, which has resulted in her remaining silent. She viewed this behavior as automatic due to her persistent worries with others perceptions of her. She explained, “I always always always worry about how I am being perceived and what messages am I sending.” Her persistent apprehension connected with using *your voice*

was based on fears of a “terrible consequence,” which carries over to her interaction with other people. She admitted she wished these underline worries of a consequence were not there due to the limitations carried throughout her interactions.

Sherri added to the conversation that she has struggled with “silencing *your voice*.” She acknowledged within her doctoral program the persistent challenges with thinking she needs to hold back from using her *voice*. Her worries were attributed to being perceived with the stereotype of an “angry black woman.” She explained,

“I am always thinking in this place where, I am kind of like Chad, am I articulating everything correctly because I am from the South. So, you can hear my southern accent. But then at the same time that I am articulating, I am always thinking should I pull back a little bit more because when you are speaking in class you are learning to project your voice or maybe I shouldn’t project *my voice*. Because I don’t want to come out as angry, ‘you know what I mean?’

She talked about her reservation with not wanting to use her voice due to fearing she would fall into the stereotypes. She stated, “I don’t want the projection of my *voice* to appear as if she is this angry black woman.” Similar to some of the other participants, her hesitations with using her *voice* were grounded on previous experiences. She indicated,

“The first program kind of prepared me to, for lack of better terms, to learn to *silence my voice*. I really hate to say that, but it is true. I have learned to just silence my voice, even when I have a strong need to

express myself for fear I don't want to come across as being this angry black woman.”

Her past informed her need to silence her voice; even though, she had those moments of desire to express her thoughts. She found silencing her voice helped her “to get through” difficult situations yet she questioned her actions with remaining quiet. She elaborated,

“Then my next thought is ‘what am I doing with being quiet?’ I am thinking I am already being quiet as a student then, ‘What will that look like for me as an educator?’ ‘Or as a faculty member?’ ‘Will I always be in this position where I have to *silence my voice* to just get through it?”

The idea of silencing her *voice* was obviously helpful to survive as a MDS; however, she recognized the lack of ability express her thoughts could be impactful for her future as an educator.

Mercedes’ individual interview distinguished “*express your thoughts*”-*your voice* connected to my environment. Her discussion within the focus group interview amplified the context for refining the interpretation of “*express your thoughts*”-*your voice*. She associated her thoughts behind expressing her voice centered on her upbringing and the influence of “White privilege.”

Mercedes opened her discourse with her personal background. She explained she was raised with “White privilege” and “White parents.” Her childhood was described as

“I was raised in a bubble where I had all the privilege. I don’t have the speaking fear because my mom was an English teacher and I am always saying talk like your mom. Especially if I am in a room full, I am saying talk like your mom.”

She described not having the speaking “fear.” She felt that her “White privilege” granted her the opportunity to experience an environment that would allow her to express herself with success. Nevertheless, she discovered this was done under “a bubble” that eventually would be lost after she left home. She summarized,

“But that privilege goes away once you are on your own. People don’t see me or treat me like I have a White family. They don’t know. People don’t know that about me. So, I had to ‘relearn’ wait no ‘relearn’ but ‘learn’ how to navigate this world based on status and color that I didn’t learn growing up.”

Her distinct position with using her *voice* brought about the awareness of barriers with doing this in the absence of her home life security. Mercedes’ interpretation of “***express your thoughts***”-***your voice*** within her lived experiences was not dependent on her inability to use her voice, instead, it interconnected with “White privilege” and other people’s perceptions of her. She explained,

“It didn’t matter that I had all that White privilege maybe there are certain pieces that I feel more confident in it but that doesn’t get me very far when I am on my own.”

Her narrative helped heighten another aspect of “***express your thoughts***”-***your voice*** to understand all the parts of the phenomenon.

The emphasis given to “***express your thoughts***”-***your voice*** by all the participants was striking. Thoughtful narratives exposed by all the participants redirected the decision to consider this as an essential theme. Participants stories displayed the depth of

***“express your thoughts”-your voice*** far beyond generalized descriptions, thus, helping truly understand their experience.

***Essential Theme: Significant Faculty Relationships***

***Significant faculty relationships*** materialized during the thematic analysis of individual interviews. ***Significant faculty relationships*** included those components defined by participants such as longing for support ("*big piece missing*") and collegial guidance ("*taking me under his [/her] wing*"). Participants' dialogue within the focus group interview enhanced the interpretation of ***significant faculty relationships***.

Participants shared a related explanation of ***significant faculty relationships*** to shape their experiences as MDS. The description of ***significant faculty relationships*** enriched by Eva's statement,

“I am very much a believer of the foundational role that comes from relationships that we need that to sustain our creativity, our energy, our growth, and wellbeing. So, I really do believe in that fundamentally for people in general.”

Eva described the essence of a relationship means so much more than a simple interaction and actually accredited advancement of self attributed to a trusting connection.

Participants described the link with a faculty member superseded that over another person to help their academic advancement. Sherri stated,

“The relationship I established with her [(Asian woman)] meant so much more than the relationship with faculty members that kind of helped me through but it was not enough to sustain me.”

Although Sherri placed great value on her peer friendship, she even acknowledged the worthiness superseded the association with faculty members. All the struggles within her first program demonstrated her peer relation was inadequate to survive all the demands of an academic journey. Her statement evidently highlights that the faculty-student relationship can provide a distinctive encounter.

A *significant faculty relationship* represented a comforting and trusting collegial association that can provide assurance to enhance an academic journey. Chad described a meaningful relationship as,

“Would anybody in this program support of me other than my peers? ’

So, for me to be able to experience that and see that then then these anxieties stopped to see someone would support me, a faculty member, and they were of a different race. I went in thinking let me find a faculty person that is of my race that maybe will help me but it turned out totally opposite.”

He realized that through his counselor education program a supportive faculty relationship had a profound impact on him. He found the much needed support and challenged his previous beliefs that relationships needed to be based on “race.” This awareness was an eye-opening encounter.

Sherri indicated she was in agreement with viewing a faculty-student relationship as important aside from the race. She stated, “I want to echo that. I think relationship is definitely huge for me as well. I went into my initial doctoral program not necessarily looking for someone that was of my same gender or ethnicity.” She described wanting to find someone that who identified with her “dissertation ideas that would be able to

mentor” her through her academic progression. She added, “What I found interesting is that the two faculty members of my same gender and of my same race they were very disinterested in mentoring me even when I reached out.” She ended up seeking out that support from “a Caucasian male” faculty member. This encounter demonstrated that a trusting and nurturing relationship with a faculty member surpasses selecting a mentor based on race, ethnicity, or gender.

Eva’s response further complemented participant’s interpretation of *significant faculty relationships*. She elaborated,

“I think it is important to feel validated. I can connect to Sherri when she is talking about having a mentor or seeking out a mentor who didn’t necessarily reflect your core appearance, gender or ethnic background that has been my experience.”

Eva agreed a faculty member that can infuse confidence has more implications than focusing on physical commonalities to evolving with a mentor. She deepened the meaning of a faculty-student relationship,

“I have a mentor that is very dissimilar for me in those ways characteristically, but she is very supportive and validating. I think that has been very helpful to me to be able to have someone to support me and trying out my ideas and provide feedback.”

A *significant faculty relationship* established through support to grow as a MDS. She viewed this especially valuable as she explained, “I guess kind of join with me and guide me through this process both professionally and personally.”

Participants discourse during the focus group meeting emphasized the value of *significant faculty relationships*. Their narrative illuminated on the aspect that a genuine relationship with a faculty member could make the difference for their academic success. *Significant faculty relationships* based on MDS development could have greater influence no matter professors' physical attributes matching students. Participants viewed all these components as notable to defining significant faculty relationships.

***Incidental Theme: Lack of Diversity***

*Lack of diversity* evolved as an incidental theme from the individual interviews thematic analysis. Strong Woman, Sherri, Mercedes, and Chad presented different experiences that spoke to *lack of diversity* as integral to their counselor education experience. *Lack of diversity* referred to the heightened awareness about participants differences and feelings associated with this realization. The focus group interview discussion deepened the understanding of *lack of diversity* to move in even closer to the phenomenon.

The discussions of *lack of diversity* related to the manner participants viewed themselves in the context of others at their program. Strong Woman shared with the other participants being "one of the first Native American in [her] program." The awareness of her ethnic/racial and age dissimilarities compared to her student peers was noteworthy to her experience. She viewed the differences between others in her program distance her. She explained, "I feel like I am by myself. I do everything by myself and nobody tells me. So, I feel like I have a lot of unanswered questions." Her feelings of isolation made her academic career challenging. Mercedes pointed out that she was the

only Latina in her program. Chad added being the only African American male in his program, too.

Eva shed light on her thinking for declining to assert with *lack of diversity*. Eva summarized her reasoning,

“The reason it did not happen with me in terms of the lack of diversity in my program because of geographically where I am now there are large minority population. Half of my cohort is White, so that is why I don’t necessarily feel that piece as strongly.”

Her own interpretation of *lack of diversity* insinuated ethnic/racial differences, thus, reframing from endorsing this theme. Aside from her denying the identification with *lack of diversity*, she illustrated another type of distinction by explaining,

“However, I will say being a little older than some of them and single parent that differentiates my experience drastically. It’s a different life for me-a different experience. A different balancing act, so that is probably where I feel that the most.”

She noticed a sense of disconnection with her peers but attributed to her age and motherhood. Her narrative helped in better understanding her unique position.

*Lack of diversity* gained more in-depth meaning by Sherri’s narrative. Sherri began her discussion commenting on the diversity she observed during the focus group interview. She also explained, “Often times within our society we see things polarized on the level of Black or White issues.” However, she wanted to augment the understanding of *lack of diversity* with focusing on the underline emotions that come from being the only one. She stated, “All of us have experienced some sense of isolation even within

our program.” Her concerns emphasized that focus on ethnic diversity can result in more isolation rather than alleviating those disheartening feelings. She noted, “I just find it interesting that we all have the same isolation and we all feel somewhat the same rejection. We don’t come together.” She expressed the significance of coming together and the importance of reaching out to students of color was a prominent learning opportunity from the focus group.

*Lack of diversity* represented those differences observed and experienced by participants. The nature of a heuristic conversation lends to ensuring the themes represent those aspects most connected with participants. Although Eva attempted to make a link with *lack of diversity*, her rejection of this concept sustained it as an incidental theme. Respecting participants’ right to provide feedback and preserve flexibility about the meaning of their experiences embodied a heuristic-phenomenological inquiry.

### ***Context Reflections***

The need to provide a context of the environment is important to understanding the space and any potential influences within the focus group interview. To understand the exposure of themes all components that influenced the interpretation and emergence need consideration. Discussions of these pieces here are aimed to increase transparency.

The focus group experience created an opportunity to hear each other’s stories and discover connections. The experience of knowing their intersections, *related understandings*, likely provided greater trust to share and deepened meanings. *Related understandings* appeared within the focus group as participants talked about feeling a

sense of comfort, knowing their group members could “get it.” Related understandings were demonstrated through verbal and nonverbal confirmations of agreement.

My personal influence related to the incident with the White male strangers was important to note. Participants witnessing I was bullied out of my reserved space for the focus group meeting by the White male strangers could have significance to their experience. The participants were observers of the incident then referenced the injustice of it within the focus group interview. My feelings related to the incident were apparent while I attempted to maintain focus on the participants’ stories.

Reflecting all parts included considering *related understandings* and my personal influence. *Related understandings* may have been natural occurrence as you bring a group together; however, acknowledgement of the dynamic evolved from this need attention. My personal influence connected to the incident participants were in part involved in through their group experience. These notions add to understanding the *fullness* of the thematic analysis.

### **Recapitulating Unfolded Thematic Meanings**

The focus group interview created the setting to discuss themes to enhance the understandings of themes from individual interviews and any new areas of focus. The thematic analysis of group transcripts revealed in-depth descriptions of the following themes: ***“Second-guessing” Self,*** ***“Express Your Thoughts”- Your Voice, Significant Faculty Relationships,*** and ***Lack of Diversity***. Participants’ amazement with each other’s stories and the connections made with one another was described as meaningful to them. The focus group interview provided a rich context to many aspects that connected to participants’ lives.

### **Confirming Thematic Meanings: Member Check-in #2**

To ensure the deeper meanings connected to each participants' story was captured a member check-in (#2) completed to assess accurate representation of those components significant to their lived-experiences. Member check-in (#2) embodied the principle of inclusion through participants input throughout the study analysis. The member check-in (#2) completed by distributing each of the participants' interview transcripts, and theme summary document identifying all the themes along with those that emerged from the focus group. The theme summary document identified clearly which themes connected with the group (essential themes) and those that were individually focused areas (incidental themes).

The essential themes identified from individual and group interviews noted in themes summary document included: *"Expressing your thoughts"- your voice, "Second-guessing" Self, Significant faculty relationships, Navigating with microaggression, Sense of responsibility, Influence of family and personal values, and Desire for learning and educating others.* Incidental themes identified from individual and group interviews were as follows: *Lack of diversity, Aware of potential assumptions, Connecting with master's students and Transition from counselor to educator.* The document distinguished, in red, those themes brought up during the focus group interview. Themes expanded from focus group analysis interview were: *Second-guessing" Self," "Express Your Thoughts"- Your Voice, and Significant Faculty Relationships.* Incidental themes emphasized were as follows: *Lack of diversity.* Themes were defined further by using their interpretations from the focus group interview.

Participants completed the member check-in (#2) by email. This form of communication was used over other electronic connections due to participants' availability and ease of exchange. Participants were presented with all the information (theme document) and directions for providing input or confirmation of themes identified from data analysis. The following correspondence denoted some directions provided to participants in their individual email message for member check-in (#2),

“Member check-in: I am attaching documents (interview transcripts and data analysis of themes identified). Please take a moment to review and see if I am capturing those things that resonate for you. You will find all the themes. Themes in red represent those discussed during the focus group interview. I am completely open to making changes, as I want to capture your experience or any new things you think may be important. If you find an additional theme resonated for you, changes needed or confirmation, please share this with me to include it.”

The participants were given a week to review themes uncovered from their individual interviews and to provide feedback, as necessary.

### ***Results of Member Check-in (#2)***

Participants' responded being in agreement with the essential and incidental themes presented from the individual interview thematic analysis and subsequent changes made to reflect focus group interview. The following passages from their email messages affirmed their agreement with themes revealed with some minor additions:

**Sherri:** She stated, “It was great seeing you again at the national conference. I have reviewed the document and I believe it accurately represents the focus group!”

**Mercedes:** She described, “I can confirm that this document reflects my experience of what we discussed in the focus group. Particularly that we all seemed to share, in some manner or another, a sense of seconding guessing if we really fit in/ belonged in our doc programs.”

**Eva:** She stated, “I think you captured the themes very well, and I feel these themes reflect my experiences.”

**Strong Woman:** She indicated, “This is amazing. I am surprised with the results. When you say *big missing piece*, that really stands out for me like I really connect with it.” She affirmed, “Yes, I can agree with all the themes. I just can’t believe how we all had the same things happening.”

**Chad:** Chad stated, “I agree with the themes that you have here. The “belonging” is a biggie for me.”

The member check-in (#2) served as an opportunity to allow participants to provide input about thematic analysis from the focus group interview. The member check-in (#2) was grounded from my social constructivist paradigm that meaning can come from our experiences while being interconnected with others. My openness to encourage feedback during this stage was to safeguard participants’ experiences were their *truths* as MDS. Participants’ responses confirmed the essential and incidental themes as an accurate representation of their experiences.

### **Thematic Analysis of Focus Group Summary**

The writing and rewriting process within this chapter aimed at enhancing the meanings of participants' reflections to comprehend the *fullness* of their stories.

"Phenomenology, like poetry, intends to be silent as it speaks" (van Manen, 1990, p. 131). Presentation of themes above aimed to create a silence that clarifies. My data analysis of focus group interview incorporated van Manen's (1990) approach to obtain the essence of participants' lived experience through their counselor education doctoral program.

Thematic analysis from interview transcripts highlighted the following essential themes: "*Second-guessing Self*," "*Express Your Thoughts*"- *Your Voice*, and *Significant Faculty Relationships*. Incidental theme emphasized was *Lack of diversity*. Essential and incidental themes symbolized a core component that helped deepened the understandings of participants' most meaningful experiences, thus, illuminating the truth of participants' hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. The member check-in (#2) represented the last point within this chapter. This final step in the analysis process ensured participants' meanings represented their own truths to minimize obscuring their stories with my personal experience as a MDS.

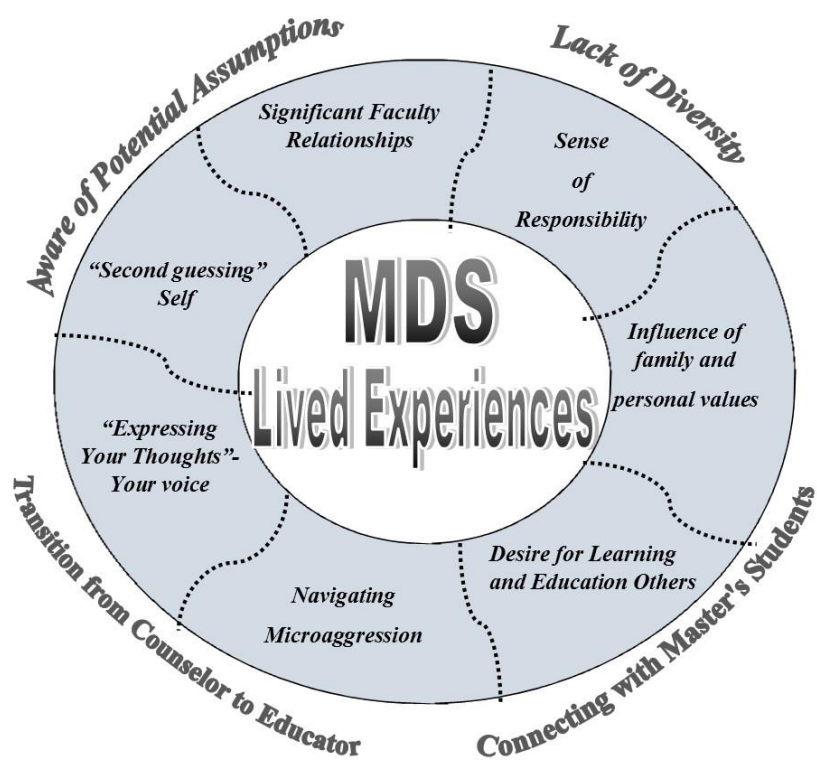


Figure 1. Minority Doctoral Student (MDS) Essential and Incidental Themes

## **Chapter VII**

### **Essence of Experience**

*“The unexamined life is not worth living.” - Socrates*

A hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry demands complete immersion into the phenomena to understand *fully* the meaning (van Manen, 1990) from the position of participants. Phenomenology represents an action-oriented research focused on exhaustive engagement through reflection to transform thinking that will lead to change. “Phenomenology is like poetry, it speaks partly through silence: it means more than it explicitly says” (van Manen, 1990, p. 131). Silence allows space for the unspoken to emerge, hence, thoughtfulness needed for writing and reading phenomenology work. Reader’s comprehension of phenomenological text is equally fundamental to apprehending meanings within and through the content. To achieve deeper understandings the researcher illuminates through their writing and rewriting that, which is obscure.

#### ***Approaching Understanding***

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lived experience of five minority doctoral students in their second semester and beyond within their counselor education program. Although I met with participants from December 2014 to June 2015, their reflections consisted of experiences throughout their experiences as counselor education doctoral students. The data collection procedures completed consisted of individual participant interviews, a follow-up check-in (#1) with each participant, focus group interview with all participants, and a final member check-in (#2). Individual participants and focus group meetings were semi-structured interviews

accomplished via telephone, Skype and in vivo. Member check-in #1 and #2 were completed via email. Their narratives provided moving disclosures that helped understand further their phenomenological experience as MDS. Their stories revealed their unique experiences while enhancing the understanding of the MDS phenomenon by highlighting previously unexplored aspects of a doctoral study.

Participants identified as racial/ethnic minority doctoral students or doctoral students of color. The participant selection was based on ability to be reflexive. They represented a diverse group of individuals from across the United States. Participants consisted of two female Latina/os (Hispanics), one male and female African American (Black), and one Native American (American Indian). The geographic distribution consisted of the following Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) regions: North Central (NCACES), North Atlantic (NARACES), Southern (SACES), and the Rocky Mountain (RMACES). All the participants identified with being a parent; however, the individual participants' children varied from young school age to adults. All of them described themselves as being older compared to their peers and viewed themselves as "non-traditional." A more comprehensive demographic section introduced in an earlier chapter (III).

This chapter will include a description of my journey with uncovering the most meaningful experiences of MDS through their counselor education program. I will highlight those aspects most significant to the evolvement of the study in connection to participants' human experience. Detailed accounts of participants narrative included in earlier chapters (III, and V). This chapter will include my reflexive experience in relation to participants with the aim to hear the spoken, unspoken and silence. I do not intend to

claim to expose all parts of a phenomenon; however, I want to move persistently closer to understanding the meanings of participants' experience. I will lead into a discussion grounded on my reflections in relation to participants. Implications of the study presented, along with limitations, reviewed. Recommendation for future research offered to generate ideas for investigating ways of improving the understandings of MDS through counselor education programs through their development.

### ***Recalling and Recollecting Dialog***

The thought of initiating a research project that epitomized the completion of a Ph.D. produced opposing emotions. I felt enthusiasm and nervousness with the task connected to embarking in a study that could contribute to the discourse of the counseling profession. I was filled with excitement thinking about the potential that my research could uncover a small part of human experience. My nervousness related to the many unknowns with my own abilities to produce a study worthy of addition to the academic literature.

My curiosity persisted with thoughts over wanting to select an area that had personal importance while also wanting to choose a topic potentially impactful to the counseling profession. I thought selecting to examine the lives of doctoral students of color could be meaningful to enrich the academic dialog and preserved a personal interest. However, my reaction with embarking in this study was full of hesitations due to the relationship of existing as a doctoral student of color and continual reservations with the method to accomplish the job appropriately.

I was amazed that there could be many different aspects of a person's life. The awareness of people's narratives informing science felt surreal. I wondered about the

acceptance of this method by other professionals when in reality the risk and vulnerability with sharing your story seemed momentous. I was fearful for the participants that would expose their stories and worried others would devalue these undiscovered truths. I recognized that I would be asking participants to be vulnerable when in reality I struggled with letting others hearing me. I felt scared about having to share with others my unspoken narratives. Learning about qualitative research allowed me to experience the merit that comes with rich descriptions that move you, even in the absence of statistical facts. This realization helped me recognize the need to illuminate the essence of lived experiences as rigorous and can substantially add to the academic world.

Becoming aware of Max van Manen's work helped me see the possibility with being able to engage in research that could be informative, interactive and credible. Learning more about doctoral students of color's experiences through their counselor education programs by using their stories seemed very appealing. I remembered numerous times sitting in the classroom, as a woman of color, holding on to the many hidden stories my personal pain and injustices with being different. I wondered if any of my peers and even faculty members understood truly the life of a person of color. Sitting at the table with fellow doctoral students at Idaho State University, I recalled having resentful feelings for their potential lack of cognizance. Then I acknowledged that their ambivalence could be attributed to their limited insights about the worldview of a person of color. I determined van Manen's approach could be enlightening to help recapture the essence of a phenomenon to inform and transform. I recognized all my fears with engaging or walking along with others were subsided with the sharing of my own story

and noticed the pricelessness that could come from undiscovered meanings was twofold. The opportunity to move individuals (readers) with knowledge and gain insights (participants) seemed key.

I hoped that my study could add to the discussion of doctoral students of color in counselor education programs. Finding out the gaps within the current literature would ensure the direction of my study to enlighten beyond the already completed studies. My review of the literature almost immediately began to show there were clear messages that stressed the importance with *increasing diversity*. The discourse within the counseling literature mentioned struggles with boosting ethnic and racial minorities within academia across all disciplines. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards and code of ethics, within the counseling field, urge for a diverse profession. Aside from the importance placed within the profession of counseling, there appeared to be minimal research focused on doctoral students of color. The dearth of research related to doctoral students of color inspired me make this the center of my dissertation. I felt motivated to initiate the study but my apprehension remained due to the ambiguity of the entire process.

The scarce literature related to doctoral students of color widened the possibilities to the areas of research and methods of investigation. My examination of different methods steered me toward a phenomenology inquiry. The exploration of stories beyond the simple reflection represented a core component of phenomenology. I found the approach paralleled aspects within the counseling relationship, which was appealing. A hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry consists of the “art of being sensitive-sensitive to the subtle undertones of langue to the way language speaks when it allows the things

themselves to speak....an authentic speaker must be a true listener” (van Manen, 1990, p. 111). The attention to meanings behind language can illuminate the many parts of a phenomenon. I believed being able to interact in this manner could provide a venue for meaningful discoveries that could educate and produce heartfelt descriptions. This reason led to the decision to design my study based on the principles of van Manen. “The methodology of phenomenology is more carefully cultivated in thoughtfulness than a technique” (van Manen, 1990, p. 131). The restrictive techniques found in other methods could inhibit the possibility to include thoughtfulness in the development of the procedures. These principles guided my procedures and analysis to the extent of seeking support even from Max van Manen personally, during my initial draft proposal. His feedback was informative and affirmed my commitment to his methodology for my study.

Narratives obtained through genuine conversations in a collaborative format with five participants: Chad, Eva, Mercedes, Sherri, and Strong Woman. Individual interviews were completed, transcribed, and analyzed to construct meanings of participants’ *truths* behind their human experience as doctoral students of color. My analysis was completed through multiple reviews of their stories. I discovered words, and phrases emphasized by their descriptions. I made attempts to include in the analysis were their tone of voice from the recordings and considerations of their silences within their stories. I joined excerpts with emerging themes to ensure characterizations remained based on participants’ stories. The importance of linking themes with excerpts was essential to communicate back with participants, and to ensure my own experience would not be leading the study. My continual memoing and reflexivity became a crucial

aspect to maintain diligence on their stories to restrict my own individual experience. I noticed re-reading their stories created an emotional response that I was not prepared for but acknowledged it through my memoing.

To ensure interpretations made of participants' experiences represented their own required time and courage to share those aspects most influential to their lives.

Participants were given the opportunity to review their individual transcripts and proposed themes (Essential themes: *Significant faculty relationships, Navigating with microaggression, Sense of responsibility, Influence of family and personal values*, and *Desire for learning and educating others*. Incidental themes: *Lack of diversity, "Expressing your thoughts" - your voice, "Second-guessing" self, Aware of potential assumptions, Connecting with master's students* and *Transition from counselor to educator*). During the follow up check-in, I reminded them of the value of providing feedback on the interpretations made of their doctoral experiences. All participants replied with agreement with themes presented. Their confirmation of thematic analysis interpretations provided a foundation for the follow-up discussion within the focus group interview.

I thought extensively about the many directions I could take for the focus group interview. I reflected deeply on my research question and acknowledged that I did not need to create a long list of questions, instead ground my discussion on themes discovered and other experiences participants would want to discuss. As a social constructivist, I saw the focus group interview as invaluable for obtaining the shared meaning of themes. I was privileged to be able to meet in vivo for the focus group interview with most of the participants (Eva, Strong Woman, Chad and Mercedes; Sherri

was Skyped into meeting). The benefit appeared to extend even to participants as they discovered during the focus group interview the identity of each other. To see them all come together filled me with joy. However, as I noted earlier, the joy was dulled with a racial aggression with a White stranger that led to giving up my meeting spot for the focus group interview during their presence. I understood the risks of my own vulnerability and theirs as doctoral students of color. Even though I initially worried my experience would consume the focus group discussion, I recognized my role was not to remove experiences instead to allow participants to make choices for themselves about their stories. This freedom of choice included reactions in response to witnessing the injustice and interpretations they made of it. During the focus group interview, participants were given the opportunity to select to add to the understanding of themes and/or identify other areas of attention. Descriptions of themes based on individual interview presented to orient them to the context of discourse.

The participants' focus group interview transcripts demonstrated the connection they made between theme and their own stories. The analysis of focus group interview included the review of transcripts while taking into account my notes taken about nonverbal behaviors during the meeting. I also replayed recordings to understand the silences within the conversation. The themes reflected by participants included: *“second-guessing” self*, *“expressing your thoughts”- your voice*, *significant faculty relationships*, and *lack of diversity*.

Participants did not weigh themes based on importance; however, transcripts confirmed their stories brought them closer to understanding each of their worlds. Chad described his identification with *“second guessing” self*, and *“expressing your*

*thoughts”-your voice*. He acknowledged “*second guessing*” *self* was a present struggle through his doctoral experience, although, he did not disclose this during his individual interview the importance was evident during the focus group. He similarly discussed the existence of “*expressing your thoughts*”-*your voice* as influential part to his doctoral student experience. The depth of his stories expanded to discussing identifying with feelings of self-doubt and fears with speaking up. He provided elaborate accounts to demonstrate these themes represented his experience; even though, they were not originally present in his individual interview.

Chad’s ability to voice the presence of “*second guessing*” *self* and “*expressing your thoughts*”-*your voice* with the group relayed an important message. Participants’ reactions augmented different aspects within their stories and provided a context for further understanding. Eva and Strong Woman described astonishment that as a “male” he would be troubled with “*second guessing*” *self*, and “*expressing your thoughts*”-*your voice*. Their *related understandings* of each other’s stories appeared to create a sense of *belonging* even within the group. Participants throughout the interview talked about “*getting it*”-understanding, thus, enhancing the sense of *belonging* even within the group experience resulting in whole-hearted stories. *Belonging* within participants’ narratives appeared to help with creating comfort and confidence, which evolved even within the group interactions.

The joining with each other through the focus group produced a level of trust that allowed them to be vulnerable and courageous about their stories. Mercedes related to “*expressing your thoughts*”-*your voice* substantiated the presence of safety within the group considering her disclosure with living in a “bubble” and freely afforded “White

privilege” was unlike the other participants. However, her willingness to generously display another aspect of “*expressing your thoughts*”-*your voice* through her narrative deepened the understanding of the theme plus affirmed the existence of trust among them and with me to share.

Participants emphasized the importance of *significant faculty relationships* as a resounding component for ensuring a successful academic career. They describe the barriers with the absence of a reassuring faculty-student relationship as disadvantageous to their development. The existence of *significant faculty relationships* measured on the ability to be unconditionally supportive without regard to race, ethnicity, gender or other physical characteristics. They added a faculty-student relationship outweighs supportive peer relationships; nonetheless, in the absence of a supportive faculty member connecting with a peer has the potential to be substantial to surviving academically.

Participants generated a discussion on *lack of diversity* about the existence of this in their lives. Mercedes, Strong Woman, Sherri, and Chad’s identification with ethnic/racial differences impacted their lives within their academic program due to the *lack of diversity*. Eva described being part of a program that had ethnic/racial diversity yet talked about her differences in the context of age and motherhood, which affected her. Sherri further defined lack of diversity to emphasize on the feelings of isolation linked to being different. Although Sherri made the link with focusing on similarities of underline feelings, Eva’s decision to decline identification with this theme exemplified van Manen’s principle of doing research with participants.

Themes are a means to create structure of the research and writing while acknowledging their limitations to grasping the fullness of the human experiences (van

Manen, 1990). In following this view, the earlier chapters categorized and defined themes to add order. “Ultimately the concept of theme is rather irrelevant and may be considered simply as a means to get at the notion we are addressing” (p. 79). Reflecting on the realization of focusing on those aspects that can move us closer to understanding participants’ worldview, I opted to present on those themes and aspects brought up from the focus group interview. My thoughtfulness with giving attention to the dialog from the focus group interview resonated on the existence of spoken and unspoken language that helped illuminate their experiences more intensely.

### **Limitations**

The value of exploration through a phenomenology with unspoken stories can have substantial value to the researcher and reader. Credibility, transferability, and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1995) were foundational to the preparation, proposal, conducting, writing, and presentation of study. I established trustworthiness by integrating continual self-evaluation through all stages of the study. This includes re-examination of procedures and ensuring the focus of the study remained on the research question. I also continually engaged with the inquiry auditor, David M. Kleist, as a means to increase credibility. The research question was used as a guide to help achieve rich understanding of the phenomenon. I shared the research question freely with participants to help direct the focus of conversations. Potential threats to trustworthiness were discussed during the screening phase of study, which helped provide an opportunity to address or clarify possible concerns. Exhaustive attempts to uphold trustworthiness can still yield limitations within the study, therefore, the following will give mention to potential restrictions of study.

The appealing parts with engaging with hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry could lead to apparent limitations with revealing a human experience. My eagerness with being able to capture the experiences of doctoral students of color in counselor education could ripple across my study. I had a strong desire to add to the discourse with the hope that there might be impact. I also worried about the potential influence of my own experience and transparency about my feelings connected to the incident prior to the focus group interview. Although attempts were made to address my feelings and experiences as woman of color, the potential risks with influencing participants necessitated mention.

Human science has been described as complex (van Manen, 1990). To recapture participants' stories to gain understanding has many intricacies. The semi-structured interviews were completed across a variety of mediums (telephone calls, Skype and in vivo). The member check-ins completed primarily via email. The data collection through technological medium can create barriers such as telephone calls can potentially miss nonverbals and distance a researcher. Skype interviews conducted face-to-face yet limited with the dependability on internet connection, which at times the calls were dropped or unreachable. The in vivo focus group meeting did not include all participants, as one was Skyped, to participate. The interactions within the focus group could have been impacted by the interactions between in vivo and video conferencing one participant. The use of email with member checks (#1 and #2) may have limited the amount of feedback received. Although this was the preferred means of communication due to conflicting schedules, it may have been limiting.

The totality with discovering all the realities of a phenomenon is impossible (van Manen,1990). Therefore, I was content that I would move as close as I could to the phenomenon. To understand participants' lived experiences, I embraced the realization that I would glean to as many parts of their experiences while accepting the likelihood of missing parts.

### **Implications**

The purpose of the study was to understand fully the human experience of doctoral students of color in counselor education programs. My inspiration for the study was twofold. I hoped to be responsive to the needs within the counseling profession to increase diversity at all levels, student to faculty members. I also was personally motivated to understanding the lives of other doctoral students of color.

### *Participants*

The richness gathered from the five brave participants had much merit to expanding the discourse. The in-depth descriptions of participants' lived experiences can have a greater impact beyond the text. The gained awareness of participants through their meaningful stories could lend to greater understanding of untold truths that support their own development. The potential gains for participants include the relationships established with each other and myself. The focus group interview provided participants with links to each other that combated their original sense of being alone. Although there were no set expectations placed with forming relationships with one another, participants established connections far beyond the extent of the study.

### *Counselor Educators*

The uniqueness of the participants' experience has a beneficial component by learning about the complexities linked to the lives of this group of students. Their stories spoke about successes and challenges within their counselor education programs. Participants made visible that they all came into their doctoral programs with the ***“desire for learning and educating others;”*** thus, setting the stage for a student that is self-driven for knowledge. I think knowing the apparent excitement students likely bring could help educators in creating an environment conducive of this reality.

Participants' stories emphasized supportive and trusting ***significant faulty relationships*** are instrumental to surviving a doctoral program. Participants described a yearning with wanting the support of faculty members. Support was described as *“taking me under his [/her] wing,”* which spoke to the ability of fully accepting their narratives while acknowledging of internal struggles with ***“second guessing” self*** and challenges with ***“expressing your thoughts”- your voice***. Participants described the internal challenges within ***“second guessing” self*** and ***“expressing your thoughts” – your voice*** related to their identities as doctoral students of color, thus, counselor educators ability to validate and explore the existence of these concepts could enhance the development of trusting relationships. ***Significant faculty relationships*** grounded on understanding and full regard for student development outweigh the need for connecting on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender or other physical characteristics.

### *Counselor Education Doctoral Students*

The multiple roles of participants had an influence to their academic career. I think it is noteworthy to mention that *belonging* emerged through the focus group

meeting. *Belonging* appeared to be interwoven within their narratives. Learning about the significance of *belonging* among participants could help emerging counselor educators to gain awareness of the sensitivity to the desire for connection. Participants' noted in the absence of a supportive faculty member a peer was highly treasured considering the feelings of isolation behind disconnection there is much potential for impact in reaching out.

#### *Doctoral Students of Color*

Participants described being amazed with the similarities within their stories. They acknowledged having to *navigate microaggressions*, which resulted with interpersonal struggles with speaking up, "*expressing your thoughts*"- *your voice*, and doubts about their abilities, "*second-guessing*" *self*. Participants gained insights about their shared experiences with other doctoral students of color provided a sense of comfort. Participants stories related to their fears could be meaningful for doctoral students of color to gain awareness about the lives of other ethnic/racial minorities to examine differences and similarities of their journeys.

#### *Other Allies of Doctoral Students of Color*

Participants communicated internal motivations for success outside of academia. They shared the common message of feeling a "*sense of responsibility*" and the presence of the *influence of family and personal values*, which grounded their decisions about their engagement within doctoral programs. Other allies refer to anyone driven to support doctoral students of color. The awareness of core values guiding participants desire to complete their program can be informative to better understanding the choices made. The influence of participants' values encouraged while other times inhibited

opportunities due to engrained loyalties to their families, their communities, or other underline beliefs. Potential opposing objectives between academic goals and personal values may have an impact by complicating their lives further.

The ability to understand another person's worldview has much value. This study gives attention to hidden stories that would otherwise remained concealed. The implications could possibly assist others beyond those listed above.

### **Future Research**

The results of the study uncovered the most influential stories of five doctoral students of color within their counselor education program. While the completion of this study adds to the academic discourse, the results represent only a piece to better understanding the intricacies unknown for ethnic/racial minority doctoral students. The review of the literature demonstrated a dearth of published studies with focus on doctoral students, hence, allowing room for further examination of this topic. A longitudinal follow up study post-graduation on the current participants would allow reflecting on their academic experience to assess the influence of time.

Qualitative and quantitative research could attend to doctoral students of color. For example, a Q-Sort study could include an initial focus group of ethnic/racial minorities then invite non-group members to rank order the concepts to reveal those areas of focus. Additionally, a Delphi method using counselor educators experts, based on a research agenda and years of experience can provide a different approach to examine further the needs of doctoral students of color. The research question should connect to defining aspects of supportive mentoring relationships with doctoral students of color within the counseling field. The replication of this study could also add value. By

maintaining the same methodology, phenomenology, but changing the procedures of data collection to consist of multiple semi-structured focus group interviews while maintaining member check-ins post interviews. These proposed ideas for future research are not a comprehensive list, instead, intends to spark further interest to the many possibilities in areas that warrant considerable attention.

### **Thoughtfulness...**

Introspection of the essence of experience outlined my phenomenological approach to investigating and presenting the results of the most noteworthy counselor education experiences of doctoral students of color. This chapter included a discussion of the intersection between the meanings of the spoken and unspoken narratives to move towards the worldview of participants. Presentation of limitations examined in the context with establishing trustworthiness to minimize risks. A review of potential implications conferred as valuable to readers, counselor educators and others interested with increasing diversity in academia.

The stories of participants remain deeply engraved in me to the extent that with every memory I transcend. For this gift, I want to thank Chad, Eva, Mercedes, Sherri, and Strong Woman for teaching me through action to be brave. You are forever imprinted in my memory and my heart. Gracias!

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**Appendix A**  
**Research Study Matrix**

## Research Study Matrix (Maxwell, 2013)

### GOALS

- To give voice to the narrative experiences of MDS in counselor education programs
- Utilize a reflexive process to understand MDS meaning of the phenomena experienced
- To identify essential themes of the experiences for MDS in counseling education programs

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Postmodern Philosophy Assumptions – (Commensurability)

- Social Constructivist
- Critical theory

Researcher

- Personal beliefs, values and attitudes related to the counselor education experience

Phenomenology – Max van Manen

- Themes: Lived space (spatiality); Lived body (corporeality); Lived time (temporality) Lived human relation (relational or communality);

- Professional Standards – CACREP Standards, AMCD, and ACA.

### RESEARCH QUESTION

*What is the lived experience of minority doctoral students during their counselor education programs?*

### METHODS

“the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is that there is no method!” (Van Manen, p 30, 1990)

#### Procedures

**Interviews** (video/audio recording)

- Gather lived experiences of MDS
- Memo writing and reflexive review

**Member Check-in #1**

- Reviewing interview recordings
- Exploration of essential/incidental themes

**Focus Group**

Reawakening - Review essential/incidental themes of the experiences and reflexive process to generate meaning of experiences

- Memo writing and reflexive review

**Member Check-in #2**

- Reviewing interview recordings
- Present essential/incidental themes

### TRUSTWORTHINESS

- Researcher's experience & transparency
- Researcher's influence toward experience
- Interpretation and meaning making
- MDS motivation to please researcher
- Researcher Relationship

## **Appendix B**

### **Initial Interview Process and Questions**

### **Initial Interview Process and Questions**

The following are procedures for communicating with participants for data collection.

Considering the needs of the participants, adjustments will be made. Focus made on gaining a rich understanding of participants experience in their doctoral programs.

**Researcher:** The goal is to be able to get your story connected to your experiences in your counselor education program. To better understand your story, at times I may guide the discussion with concrete questions to remain as close to the lived experience:

Please think about meaningful experiences while in your counselor education program.

1. What have been the most significant experiences that have affected you as a minority doctoral student (doctoral student of color) in your counselor education program?
2. How are you making meaning of these experiences?
3. How has this influenced your experience as a doctoral student?

**Follow up Member Check-in #1** – I will offer to share interview recordings and transcript to ensure accuracy and of the essence of their experience to identify themes. I will share emergent themes from data collected from the interviews and any other data provided by participants that connects to their experience. I will accept input from participants throughout this process and changes to themes based on new input will be shared with participants to ensure representation of their perceived experiences.

**Focus Group Interview** – This will be an opportunity to bring themes and meaning making information to the group process and discuss further their experience.

1. Questions for the focus group will evolve based on the previous encounters with participants.

2. Exit Thought: Participants will be given an opportunity to share any concluding thoughts from their experience as MDS (doctoral students of color) or participants within this study.

**Follow up Member Check-in #2** – I will share emergent themes from data collected from the focus group interview and any other data provided by participants that connects to their experience. I will accept input from participants throughout this process.

## **Appendix C**

### **Researcher Memo (Blog)**

### **Research Memo (Blog)**

**Research Question:** *What is the lived experience of minority doctoral students (students of color) during their counselor education programs?*

**Date:**

**Research Phase:**

**My reflections/experience:**