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A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF CLINICAL MENTAL HEALTH
COUNSELING INTERNS' EXPERIENTIAL REFLECTIONS ON THE
POPULAR FILM, *MOONLIGHT*: AN INTERSECTIONAL ACTIVITY
IN MULTICULTURAL COUNSELOR EDUCATION

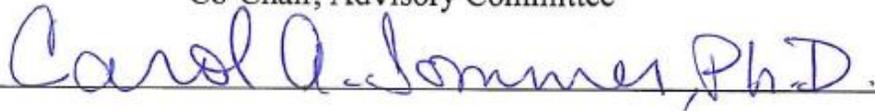
BY

JOSHUA A. ELLIOTT

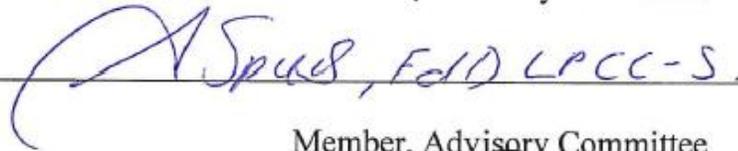
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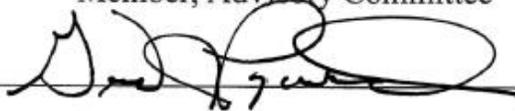
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A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF CLINICAL MENTAL HEALTH
COUNSELING INTERNS' EXPERIENTIAL REFLECTIONS ON THE
POPULAR FILM, *MOONLIGHT*: AN INTERSECTIONAL ACTIVITY
IN MULTICULTURAL COUNSELOR EDUCATION

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DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION

2019

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family members who have always made me feel like I could conquer the world. To my mother, who sacrificed immensely to ensure that my childhood was filled with inspiration and happiness even in times of despair, your love and encouragement has contributed to the self-esteem that I needed to complete this journey. I love and appreciate you more than I can express. To my late mamaw, who provided me with unwavering love, devotion, and prayers, your impact on my life I will forever cherish. To my late father, who would boast that I would be someone someday, this accomplishment is for you. I hope that you are proud of the person I strive to be.

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First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my committee for their investment in the success of this study and of me as an emerging counselor educator. I value the patience, guidance, and encouragement each of you have provided to me during this doctoral journey. The time and effort each of you have contributed to my professional development is very much appreciated.

Secondly, I would like to thank my husband, Nathan, for his overwhelming support and love during these last five years. Your encouragement inspired me to pick myself up during times that I wanted to quit and for that I will always be grateful. Without you, this accomplishment could not have been achieved at this time in my life. I am so proud to have you by my side and appreciate all that you do to build me up. I love you, sugar bear!

I would also like to thank my best friend, Amanda. Your commitment to checking on my well-being and prompting me to take care of myself during this process has meant more than you will ever know. You're the best friend a guy could have!

Finally, I would like to express my immense gratitude to my "professional wifey," Lauren. We have connected so much on this journey together and I appreciate the strong bond we have formed through the ups and downs of our professional development. You inspire and encourage me to be the best counselor educator I can be. You are the true definition of resilience and I cannot overstate the profound impact you have had on my identity as a counselor educator. Thank you for everything!

ABSTRACT

Counselor educators and supervisors have the incumbent responsibility to ensure that CITs are sufficiently prepared to engage in counseling work with clientele from diverse backgrounds. Extant literature has demonstrated the use of film to teach CITs about racism and antiracism, promote exploration and awareness of racial attitudes, and examine the interactions of culturally diverse individuals. Films have also been utilized to assist CITs with acquiring knowledge about certain categorical cultural and social populations. Despite the recognition of popular film as a beneficial media to facilitate cultural learning in counselor education, there exists a gap in the literature regarding the experiences and understandings of CITs exposed to media, specifically film, that explicitly portray the dynamic interactions of intersectional identities through a lens of development. Additionally, no studies in the counselor education field have focused on the experiences of more advanced counseling students enrolled in clinical courses such as practicum and internship who have been exposed to multicultural or intersectional films. In this study, a basic interpretative qualitative approach was employed to explore the experiences and perceptions of mental health counseling interns exposed to the popular film, *Moonlight*. Five final themes emerged as a result of this study. 12 master's level counseling interns engaged in a focus group interview, completed written reflection responses, and participated in member checks to discuss their experiences and perceptions of the film. Interpretations of themes were presented to conceptualize and discuss implications for counselor education and supervision, suggestions for integrating *Moonlight*, or other similar films, into curriculum, and directions for future research.

Keywords: film-based pedagogy, intersectionality, multicultural counselor education

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Chapter I: Introduction

Identity has always been a core concept in the helping professions, as both the helper and client have distinct identities that influence their perception and experience of the world and of others. This notion has had a tremendous impact on the counseling profession and was instrumental in the development and progress of the multiculturalism movement, which many scholars refer to as the fourth theoretical force in the counseling field. Furthermore, the counseling profession is currently considering the emergence of the fifth-force, social justice counseling, as a theoretical model that should be used to inform how counselors understand, treat, and advocate for clients. The established necessity of multiculturalism within the counseling profession coupled with the progressive movement towards integrating tenets of social justice practice warrants the attention of all licensed counselors, counselors-in-training (CITs), and, most arguably, counselor educators and supervisors.

Counselor educators and supervisors have the incumbent responsibility to ensure that CITs are sufficiently prepared to engage in counseling work with clientele from diverse backgrounds. The task of preparing CITs is not a static endeavor, nor is it entirely achieved by professing and teaching the tenets and principles of theories relevant decades ago. Human identity, interaction, and socialization are constantly evolving with the shifts and transformations of modern society and culture, whether they be local, national, or global. Just as the professional associations and credentialing bodies that represent the counseling community must routinely assess standards and best practices considering new knowledge and the context of cultural change, so too must counselor education programs. For this reason, counselor educators are called to stay abreast of multicultural

and social justice developments within the profession and carefully consider their implications on pedagogical and supervisory practice. Additionally, counselor educators must convey these ideas to their students. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and examine the experiences and perceptions of CITs exposed to an experiential activity utilizing a popular film, *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016), as a means of investigating its pedagogical potential in multicultural counselor education. What follows is a brief overview of the literature relevant to this study and an introduction to the methodology utilized for executing the research process.

Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies

The complexity of identities and their societal implications are at the crux of the recently developed Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC; Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016). The MSJCC were developed as a revision to the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) created by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) and have been formally endorsed by the American Counseling Association (ACA). The MSJCC provide a conceptual framework aimed at implementing multicultural and social justice competencies into counseling theories, practices, and research (Ratts et al., 2016). The MSJCC emphasize the intersections of identities and the interplay of how power, privilege, and oppression influence the counseling relationship (Ratts et al., 2016). Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough (2015) presented the following developmental domains in competency attainment: (1) counselor self-awareness, (2) client worldview, (3) counseling relationship, and (4) counseling and advocacy interventions. Within the first three developmental domains lie aspirational competencies that impact a counselor's ability to

effectively work with diverse clients, including attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and action (Ratts et al., 2015; 2016). Further exploration of the MSJCC and its implications for counselor educators will be presented in the literature review.

The MSJCC not only reinforce the significance of the aspirational competencies regarding attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, and skills, which were originally included in the conceptual framework proposed by Sue et al. (1992), but also introduce the importance of a fourth aspirational competency: action (Ratts et al., 2016). The language and directives of the MSJCC illuminate the notion that pluralistic identities exist in all individuals (both counselors and clients) and that the human experience of intersecting identities is socially influenced by power, oppression, privilege, and marginalization. The recognition and emphasis that systems of power and oppression affect the day-to-day experiences, beliefs, opportunities, and interactions of humans has remarkable implications for counselor education. Perhaps the most noteworthy is the direct connection that the MSJCC have to intersectionality theory and the subsequent need for counselor educators not only to understand its tenets but also be well-prepared to instruct CITs on its origins, applications, and implications for practice.

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality theory has its historical origins in social justice and human rights movements and is characterized by its motivation to combat marginalization and oppression (Bowleg, 2008, 2012, 2013; Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013; Cho, 2013; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Historically, intersectionality theory was conceptualized through the confluence of Black feminism and critical race theory (Carbado et al., 2013). More specifically, intersectionality manifested from the works of

Crenshaw (1988, 1989, 1991) and Collins (1986, 1990, 2004) each of whom are recognized for their revolutionary work in their respective disciplines of legal and sociological scholarship (Chan, Cor, & Bland, 2018). More about the contributions of Crenshaw and Collins and their impact on the historical development of intersectionality theory are explored in the review of literature.

More recently, intersectionality theory has expanded its applications to interdisciplinary fields (Bowleg, 2012; Warner, 2008) such as law, sociology, psychology, counseling and education (Chan et al., 2018). Although intersectionality is comprised of and espouses multiple perspectives, perhaps its most foundational intentions are to 1) challenge the notion that cultural identity can be reduced to one set of values associated to one identity; 2) address the impact of multiple cultural identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, ability, social class, spirituality); and 3) address social inequalities that are perpetuated by institutional oppression (Shields, 2008; Walby, Armstrong, & Strid, 2012).

The guiding principles of intersectionality theory have also been noted for their applicable influence on the counseling relationship and conceptualization of cultural and social identities of the counselor and client (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014; Ratts et al., 2015; 2016). These developments in diversity and multicultural counseling research naturally beget developments in diversity and multicultural counseling practice, which is informed by standardized curriculum. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs' (CACREP) primary mission is to develop and enforce standards that ensure students develop a professional counselor identity and master the knowledge and skills necessary to practice effectively. A brief overview of how the CACREP

standards have transformed to include and emphasize the influence of intersectionality is provided in the literature review.

Experiential Pedagogy as “Best Practice” in Counselor Education

Before delving into pedagogy specific to multicultural and social justice counseling courses, it should be noted that there has also been much professional dialogue among counselor educators about what constitutes “best practices” in teaching counseling curriculum. In 2016, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) Teaching Initiative Taskforce released their report titled “Best Practices in Teaching in Counselor Education.” This living document provides suggestions to instructors and program administrators based in the current literature and research while focusing the student, or learner, at the forefront of the discussion (ACES, 2016). One specifically suggested model and theory for adult learning contained within this report serves as a nice entry point for conceptualizing what constitutes teaching practices that benefit the CIT. The taskforce identified and presented the most recognized and influential adult learning theories (ACES, 2016). Perhaps the most relevant to this particular study is experiential learning theory (ELT).

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is an approach to learning that is grounded in the works of Dewey, Piaget, and Lewin. Reduced to its core, experiential learning is focused on “learning through reflection on doing” (Felicia, 2011, p. 1,003). ELT posits that experience serves as a key role in creating knowledge (Bergsteiner, Avery, & Neumann, 2010) and rejects the notion of students playing a passive role in the education experience (Monk, 2013). Kolb (1984) typified experiential learning as a process that constantly changes with new experiences that requires reconciliation of conflict between

two opposing views of the world. ELT is also distinguished as a holistic process that encompasses human adaptation to all aspects of life, including education (Kolb, 1984). Counselor educators have access to a wide range of teaching strategies which exemplify ELT (ACES, 2016) such as case studies, role plays, fishbowl exercises, media exposure, and fieldwork. Greater access to such teaching strategies may contribute, in part, to the wealth of research that has been conducted in the counselor education field on the effects of experiential learning activities (Collins & Pieterse, 2007; Fawcett & Evans, 2012; Greene, Barden, Richardson, & Hall, 2014; Shen, 2015; Villalba & Redmond, 2008).

ELT is a valuable pedagogical model that may be used by educators to affirm the role that experience has in the learning process. This emphasis on experiential learning as a “best practice” in counselor education (ACES, 2016) is elucidated by its practical use with CITs and validates it as a method worthy of inquiry in this study. The use of the film *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016) in this study served as an experiential learning activity; however, its context is unique as the portrayal of the protagonist, Chiron, is one that presents an opportunity for counselor educators to engage CITs in an experience with an overtly intersectional character. Experiential pedagogy utilized in this manner may prove beneficial for promoting the multicultural competence of CITs. Yet to fully assess its potential in this endeavor, an understanding of pedagogical approaches to multicultural and diversity education is helpful and is briefly discussed in the following section.

Pedagogical Approaches to Multicultural and Diversity Education

As documented by the emergence of the 2016 CACREP standards (CACREP, 2015) and the endorsement of the MSJCC by the ACA, ensuring that CITs have foundational cultural and social competency is a targeted objective of the counseling

profession that is reflective of contemporary culture itself. Ever-changing global and cultural demographics necessitate that informed citizens possess more than a superficial understanding of cultural differences, because they inform and influence our experiences as pluralistic beings. As ethical and respected members of the helping profession, counselors are surely not exempt from integrating such an evolved understanding of differences into their practice – conversely, counselors have a greater responsibility to do so as it is now an inherent theoretical component of the professional counselor identity. Whether emerging counselors are aware of and internalize this component of professional counselor identity is crucially dependent upon the education and training they receive as CITs.

Pedagogical approaches for developing multicultural sensitivity and competency in counselor education has been an area of research interest (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Cheshire, 2013; Greene et al., 2014; Haskins & Singh, 2015; Malott, 2010; Priester, Jones, Jackson-Bailey, Jana-Masri, Jordan, & Metz, 2008; Sammons & Speight, 2009; Seward, 2014; Sommer, Rush, & Ingene, 2011). There is much consensus in the counselor education literature to support the use of experiential learning theory as an effective means of promoting counselor self-awareness in relation to cultural identity and experience (Collins, Arthur, & Wong-Wylie, 2010; Fawcett, Briggs, Maycock, & Stine, 2010; Kim & Lyons, 2003; Pierce & Wooloff, 2012; Pieterse, 2009; Sammons & Speight, 2009; Villalba & Redmond, 2008). In Priester et al.'s (2008) analysis of instructional strategies, they discovered that experiential activities, such as reaction papers to a work of art, a book, or a film (p. 35) were among the most utilized didactic interventions in multicultural counseling courses.

As research and practice suggests, the use of media, specifically film, is no longer a novel pedagogical device in the field of multicultural counselor education. However, the concepts, theories, and foci illuminated in multicultural counselor education is very much dependent upon the content of the films chosen for viewing. Extant literature has demonstrated the use of film to teach CITs about racism and antiracism (Pieterse, 2009), promote exploration and awareness of racial attitudes (Soble, Spanierman, & Liao, 2011), and examine the interactions of culturally diverse individuals (Villalba & Redmond, 2008). Films have also been utilized to assist CITs with acquiring knowledge about certain categorical cultural and social populations (Shen, 2015; Walters & Rehman, 2013).

Despite the recognition of popular film as a beneficial media to facilitate cultural learning in counselor education, there exists a gap in the literature. Little has been published in counselor education research regarding the effects of utilizing popular film to illuminate the intersection of identities, privilege, and marginalization. More narrowly, few published articles in counselor literature have explored the use of film to assist CITs with conceptualizing the experiences of individuals who are characterized by two or more marginalized identities.

Methodology Overview

The following section commences with a brief overview of the purpose and significance of the research study, recruitment efforts and sampling procedures, as well as a synopsis of the qualitative methods integrated into the research design. The grand research question, as well as protocol questions utilized to guide the study, and data analysis methods are described. The section ends with discussion of the writer's voice

and analytical framework, as they were integral and influential components of the study and subsequent analysis of data.

Purpose of the Study and Grand Research Question

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore and examine the experiences and perceptions of CITs exposed to the popular film *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016). It was my intent to uncover their perceptions of *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016) as a pedagogical tool. The grand research question and overall goal of the study was to identify, “What are the experiences and perceptions of counseling interns exposed to the film *Moonlight* in a multicultural context?”

Significance of the Study

The study addressed a gap in research regarding the experiences and understandings of CITs exposed to media, specifically film, that explicitly portray the dynamic interactions of intersectional identities through a lens of development. Also, uniquely this study was focused on the experiences of more advanced CITs enrolled in a clinical mental health counseling internship course. This study has the potential to inform counselor educators and supervisors of the possible affects, experiences, and perceptions *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016) elicits in one group of CITs in their clinical phase of training. This information may be helpful for those counselor educators and supervisors interested in assessing the pedagogic power of popular films as a means of facilitating CITs’ awareness of their own intersectional identities, as well as those of their clients.

Design of Study

The design of this basic qualitative study integrated the use of various qualitative research methods. The research process was comprised of three specific points of data

collection, including a focus group interview, written reflection forms, and member checking activities that elicited additional participant data. The focus group interview was conducted after participants jointly viewed the film, *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016), in order to facilitate the reflection and sharing of their experiences and perceptions of the film. Each participant completed a written reflection form that provided an opportunity to personally reflect upon their experiences in relation to the film's protagonist. This specific data collection point permitted participants to share information they may not have wanted to disclose within the focus group. The last data collection point was the member checking process, where participants were able to review, revise, and expand upon their responses in the focus group interview. Trustworthiness was established through multiple strategies, including the regular use of a reflexive journal, creation of memos, production of an audit trail, peer debriefing, and member checks. The significance of these strategies and how they were employed within this study are detailed in the chapter on methodology.

Recruitment and Study Sample

The selection of participants for this study was accomplished through a purposeful sampling process. Participants were sampled from a clinical counseling course within a CACREP accredited program at a medium-size regional university in the southeastern portion of the United States. Recruitment efforts were comprised of three strategies. First, I met with potential participants enrolled in a clinical mental health counseling internship course at this university and delivered a mini lecture on the multicultural and social justice counseling competencies and intersectionality theory. For a detailed outline of this mini-lecture please see Appendix A. Following the mini-lecture,

I orally described the purpose and design of this study and answered any questions that the potential participants had regarding the study. I then passed out copies of the informed consent form (see Appendix B) for their review and answered questions they had about the benefits and risks of the study. I then directed potential participants who may be interested in the study to contact me by using the contact information provided on the informed consent form.

A recommended number of participants for a focus group interview is between six and 12 (Litchman, 2013), so the minimum number of participants for this study was set at six. A sample consisting of less than six participants is not desirable as having too few participants may inadvertently cap or limit the data production of the study. I did not include more than 12 participants in the focus group interview as to do so would have increased the risk of reduced participant engagement and increased distraction (i.e., side-conversations) (Hays & Singh, 2012). The sample was comprised of 12 participants who had already completed a course in multicultural counseling, were enrolled in a clinical course, and were willing and able to express their experiences and perceptions of the film *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016). I was intentional about recruiting participants of diverse social and cultural backgrounds to the level that was possible provided the demographics of potential participants enrolled in clinical courses during the 2019 spring semester.

Protocol Questions

The focus group interview is an applicable method to use when researchers desire to understand a group of participants' reactions to a shared experience (Hays & Singh, 2012). The questions posed by the researcher are essential to yield interactive participant expression of feelings, thoughts, and perceptions. The interview protocol utilized in the

focus group interview was derived in an attempt to gather information that would help the researcher to attend to the grand research question. The protocol questions were also informed by the nature of the multicultural and social justice counseling competencies developmental domain areas of counselor self-awareness, client worldview, and counseling relationship. The interview protocol for the focus group interview contained six questions: 1) “How would you describe your experience during the film?”; 2) “What do you believe informs your experience of the film?”; 3) “How do you perceive Chiron’s experiences in the film?”; 4) “Please describe any changes in feeling or emotion that you experienced during the film.”; 5) “How do you perceive the film in relation to your role as an intern?”; and 6) “How do you perceive the use of this film in counselor education?”

Reflection forms also contained questions that prompted participants to reflect upon how their experience with the film affected them and how they perceived themselves in relation to the film’s main character. The questions outlined on the written reflection form were as follows: 1) “How do you perceive your personal experiences are like Chiron’s, based on your intersecting identities?”; 2) “How do you perceive your personal experiences are different from Chiron’s, based on your intersecting identities?”; and 3) “How has your experience in this study affected you?” Additionally, demographic information was gathered from participants (see Appendix C).

Data Analysis

Traditional qualitative methods were utilized to analyze the data for themes. I critically reviewed and coded the focus group interview transcript and participants’ written reflection forms. I engaged in the three-step process of open coding, analytical coding, and theme construction as I assessed the data elicited from the first two data

collection points. I analyzed the data with both the grand research question and interview protocol in mind. I also evaluated data from my unique researcher lens, which is influenced by my own intersectional experiences, philosophical underpinning, paradigmatic proclivity, and preferred methods of qualitative research. Additionally, as warranted for qualitative inquiry, reflexive strategies were employed throughout data analysis to understand the impact that I had on the research, as well as the impact that the research process had on me.

Writer's Voice

My connection to this study is of a personal nature and has prompted the use of the first-person singular perspective to discuss and analyze the data. Not only is this a permissible form of researcher voice as detailed in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2010), but is also encouraged in certain situations. The suggestion of using personal pronouns is particularly important when considering attribution and its potential to be ambiguous. The APA (2010) manual cautioned, “Inappropriately or illogically attributing action in an effort to be objective can be misleading” (p. 69) and explicitly recommended, “To avoid ambiguity, use a personal pronoun rather than the third person when describing steps taken in your experiment” (2010, p. 69). In the process of joining participants in the creation of knowledge, the qualitative researcher must develop as a research instrument (Xu & Storr, 2012). Accepting this role as a research instrument necessitated that I engage in critical thinking and reflexivity to accurately gauge the extent of my influence and conscientiously describe contributing factors in a personal and transparent manner. To approach this important process from a third person perspective felt disjointed and potentially

deceptive; therefore, I decided to remain committed to my first-person approach to analysis.

Researcher's Lens

Much like the way counselors' and counselor educators' own personal histories, worldviews, and attitudes have the potential to influence their conceptualization and delivery of counseling services, a researcher's lens is also colored by his or her own ideas, experiences, and philosophical underpinnings. My subjective researcher's lens is influenced by several factors, including my own subjective intersectional identity, philosophical assumptions about reality and knowledge, constructionist and critical research values, and aspirational multicultural and social justice counseling competencies. Each of these dimensions are instrumental in the way that I conceptualize counseling, counselor education, and scholarly inquiry and therefore warrant further exploration, as they surely influenced how I analyzed the data.

Subjective intersectional identity. My experience within and in interaction with the world is influenced by my cultural and social positionalities. As a White male, I recognize that I have identities that are characterized by an inherent privilege that shape my existence with others in not only American, but global society. I understand that these identities and their associated social locations of power have been systematically established by the historical perpetuation of dominant group normalization and oppression of non-dominant cultural norms. Although my racial identity development has progressed with experience, reflexivity, and critical introspection, I was not always aware of the privileges my visible identities afford me – even as I started my career as a counselor. In retrospect, this realization is frightening as I wonder if my naiveté ever

inadvertently resulted in actions that left clients feeling misunderstood or further oppressed. This realization also encourages my motives as a counselor educator and researcher who hopes to facilitate greater identity development in my students so that they do not find themselves pondering the potential effects of their own deficient self-awareness.

I do believe that my experience with my own marginalized identities contributed, in part, to my openness to explore my privileged identities because I was able to recognize that I did not have the same advantages regarding my identity as an effeminate boy who was raised in poverty by working class parents. The feelings of rejection and judgment that I experienced as a child and teenager left me feeling misunderstood, insufficient, and broken.

My vocational identity is also of importance. After completing my master's program in mental health counseling, I became a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor in the commonwealth of Kentucky, as well as a Nationally Certified Counselor. I have also worked in both private and nonprofit sectors and held positions as an outpatient counselor and a home-based counselor. A significant portion of my clinical hours required for independent licensure were obtained during my time providing home-based counseling services, in which I had the opportunity to counsel many clients whom were socially and culturally different than myself.

I have always stated that my leaning towards qualitative methodology has been directly influenced by my identity as a counselor. As a mental health counselor, I am invested in understanding my clients on a deeper level – one that considers their histories, meanings, and contexts in totality. This desire to know and understand an individual's

experience as thoroughly and in-depth as possible not only colors my researcher's lens, but directs the research that I desire to conduct. I believe that qualitative differences of perception and experience illuminate the complexities of humanity, which cannot simply be reduced to generalizable knowledge. Even within homogenous groups there exists heterogeneity and I firmly believe those nuances are worthy of exploration.

Philosophical assumptions. A researcher's philosophical views on ontology, epistemology, and axiology are important to consider in the context of the research process. These personal assumptions shape how a researcher develops their research questions and design and influence the frame through which data are analyzed. My understanding of reality is that there are many realities, each of which is uniquely and subjectively constructed by an individual's experiences with themselves, others, and their cultural and social milieus. I do not adhere to the notion that there is one objective truth or reality. As it relates to knowing and knowledge, my views are similar. I do not believe that individuals inherently possess preprogrammed knowledge, but rather that the process of knowing is characterized by interaction and construction. It is my assumption that interactions with one's history, perceptions, surroundings, culture, group statuses, and social affiliations produce experiences of phenomenon. The meanings of these experiences are then constructed by the experiencer. This philosophical stance infers the possibility of unlimited knowledge that is contextual, rather than universal. Considering my allegiance to these lines of thinking, the idea that my axiological assumptions are also rooted in subjectivity may not be a surprise. I do not believe that the thoughts, experiences, biases, or worldviews of the qualitative researcher can or should be quarantined. Rather I recognized that I was functioning as both a research instrument (Xu

& Storr, 2012) and a co-constructor of knowledge; and, that my subjectivities would have a profound influence on how I attend to those roles.

Constructionist and critical research values. Constructionist ideas also affect how I conceptualize research. Humans are diverse beings with subjective experiences. I conceive individuals' realities to be as subjective as their experiences and inherently influenced by the self-created narratives individuals produce to make sense of those experiences. Considering these assumptions are fundamental to my personal and professional identity, they also manifest in my role as a researcher. For this reason, I am particularly drawn to phenomenological and narrative lines of thought. I perceive the participants of this study as more than mere subjects to be assessed, but as learners with experiences and stories to share. I am humbled that I was able to utilize this study as a platform to showcase their voices.

Values inherent in critical education and research also resonate with me personally and accentuate my focus as a researcher. I personally believe and recognize that privileged individuals within society and, more narrowly, affiliated with academic institutions have been granted much power when identifying topics worthy of investigation and presenting analytical narratives of participants' experiences or attestations. I believe that some of this exercised power by privileged and powerful academics has been at the expense of participants, who have had unique aspects and contexts of their voices muted in research literature, specifically in the findings of quantitative inquiries. As a researcher, I value efforts aimed at balancing the researcher-participant relationship and engaging participants in the co-construction of knowledge to ensure that research findings authentically represent their voices.

Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies. As a counselor educator who continually seeks out opportunities for professional growth and cultural awareness, I have become a strong proponent of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC). The MSJCC's nuanced and emphasized approach to generating cultural and social awareness of ourselves, as counselors, and our clients encapsulates my views on the importance of considering identity in totality. I strongly believe that in order to move towards understanding and empathizing with another individual - a primary responsibility of counselors, that one must strive to know how situations, relational-dynamics, cultural heritage, and social positionalities affect and inform that individual's experiences and perceptions. Unfortunately, it is my belief that this type of understanding cannot be truly achieved with a purely cognitive approach to learning. To exist is to feel and to feel is to know, so per my own views one cannot know or understand cultural and social experience without experiencing it. For this reason, I believe that CITs must be engaged affectively with cultural and social stimuli to develop multicultural competence. Additionally, I firmly support the professional view that counselors should be advocates for clients in many instances, but especially when individual and systemic levels of oppression, perpetuated by societal and cultural standards and resultant disenfranchisement, attribute to clients' problems. However, I believe that before a counselor's identity as an advocate can effectively develop, they must first have foundational awareness, knowledge, and skills related to the provision of multicultural counseling. This stance unquestionably influenced my decision to design a research study that subjects CITs to the intersectional experiences of a character via the use of film and influenced my analysis of the data.

Limitations of the Study

As mentioned previously, the participants in this study were recruited using purposeful sampling strategies and were master's level internship students located within the primary researcher's university. The nature of qualitative research is not conducive to the goal of producing generalized results, so this study did not yield conclusive findings about a particular population. Rather, this qualitative study produced an understanding of counseling interns' experiences and perceptions of the film *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016). The findings contain thick descriptions of these experiences so that others may have sufficient information about this context to discern if these results will be transferable to similar contexts. Other limitations were detailed as they became apparent throughout the research process and are presented in the final chapter.

Conclusion

The information contained within this chapter has provided a brief overview of the topics foundational to the construction of this research design and has introduced the methodology that was utilized in executing the study. The field of counseling undeniably must evolve with the societal and cultural environments in which it exists if counselors desire to be effective with clients. For this reason, counselor educators have the responsibility of integrating pedagogical strategies that promote the development of multicultural counseling competence in their CITs. Experiential pedagogy is a "best practice" teaching method that could be contextualized for multicultural counselor education. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the experiences and perceptions of counseling interns exposed to the film *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016) via their involvement in a focus group interview and member-checks, as well as completed

written reflections forms. The data was analyzed through the researcher's lens and with the use of traditional qualitative methods. The purpose of this chapter was to give the reader a "snapshot" of the study design and highlight concepts from which the study topic emerged; however, to gain full insight into the rich foundations that inform the research topic, a review of the literature will prove helpful and is provided in the next chapter.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Multicultural competence in counselor education has not always been as explicitly defined and promoted as it is today. As with any evolving educational field, counselor education programs exist on a continuum where future knowledge, events, theoretical development, and inquiry inevitably influence the present quest for understanding and application. Modern research and development in social and educational sciences produce a socio-temporal understanding of information and contribute to the foundational knowledge base of a field or subfield. New understanding emerges by posing inquiries related to the contemporary cultural milieu; however, to truly conceptualize the trajectory of novel inquiry one must have a solid recollection of historical underpinning related to the topic, and subtopics, at hand. As the ageless adage goes, “you cannot know where you are going until you know where you have been.” In order to best conceptualize the contemporary multicultural counselor education themes, their influence, and implications, it is necessary to survey the historical development of multiculturalism in counselor education and its impact on the present.

Historical Overview of Forces in Counseling and Psychology

Considering their status in the society at the time, racial and ethnic minorities were not represented in the counseling movement during its inception and early development (Jackson, 1995). The social and professional exclusion of racial and ethnic minorities meant that the counseling field was developed from the point of view of early practitioners whose perspectives were influenced by Anglo-Eurocentric culture and experience. Without representation not only did the needs and concerns of minorities go

unheard, but the theories, techniques, and interventions developed reflected, and arguably reinforced, a narrowed approach to counseling (Speight, Myers, Cox, & Highlen, 1991).

The Anglo-Eurocentric foundation of early psychology and counseling development went relatively unquestioned regarding the first two major theoretical forces in the mental health professions. The first (psychodynamic) and second (cognitive-behavioral) forces, although instrumental in conceptualizing foundational premises and implications of human nature and behaviors of individuals, did not attend to the pronounced and far-reaching effects that culture has on the counseling relationship and clients' perceptions of self and the world.

In the 1970s and 80s, the emergence of the third-force, existential and humanistic, began a conversation about and acceptance of the influence that subjective experience has on an individual. This force also rejected both psychoanalytic and cognitive-behavioral explanations of human development and questioned the stability of improvements clients experienced from these treatments (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014). The renowned American psychologist, Carl Rogers (1951), argued that "such methods are, in my experience, futile and inconsequential. The most they can accomplish is some temporary change, which soon disappears, leaving the individual more than ever convinced of his inadequacy" (p. 33). The humanistic perspective perceives an egalitarian therapeutic relationship between client and counselor as central, and emphasizes the importance of self-awareness, believing in the potential of every human being, personal responsibility, the innate good in people, freedom, and personal insight (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014).

The humanistic-existential perspective although widely accepted by many psychologists and counselors was not exempt from criticism. Humanistic-existential

counselors who operate from an intrapsychic perspective have been accused of making a fundamental attribution error (Prilleltensky, 1994). Staunch humanist practitioners may place too much emphasis on internal and personal explanations for behaviors without regard to how culture shapes client experiences (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014). Additionally, the humanistic tradition does not consider external factors which presents a limitation. External factors, such as cultural and sociopolitical forces, influence client experiences and how clients construct meaning (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014).

Although the first three forces may have dominated professional attention and debate, there were other movements and challenges behind the scenes. In the United States, the 1960s were a time of social unrest, political turbulence, and racial tension. White establishment was openly questioned by Black and White Americans, and racist political beliefs, institutions, and policies were challenged. This historical period in American society served as the impetus for the emergence of the multicultural counseling perspective (Arciniega & Newlon, 2003; Jackson, 1995; Robinson & Morris, 2000).

During this period, counseling professionals became critical of White racist policies and practices within the profession (Pope-Davis, Coleman, Liu, & Toporek, 2003; Sue & Sue, 1977). Many African American counseling professionals called for the end of racist counseling theories and practices that dehumanized racial and ethnic minority clients (Robinson & Morris, 2000). In 1969, William Banks, a professor at the University of California, Berkley, spearheaded the formation of the Association of Non-White Concerns in Personnel and Guidance (Jackson, 1995). The association's primary purpose was to ensure that minority issues were being addressed in the counseling profession and in 1972 it launched the *Journal of Non-White Concerns* (McFadden &

Lipscomb, 1985). In 1985, the association was renamed the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) and the journal was renamed the *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* (Parker & Myers, 1991). These changes reflected the growing need for multicultural counseling to be more inclusive of other underrepresented racial and ethnic groups such as Asians, Latino/as, and Native Americans (Lee, Blando, Mizelle, & Orozco, 2007).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, psychology and counseling scholars noticed that trends in the fields indicated that change was occurring. Adler and Gielen (1994) highlighted some of global trends that suggested that the monocultural emphasis in psychology would likely be shifting:

Following a brief review of global society, it is argued that (a) at present American psychology routinely neglects perspectives and findings developed in other countries; (b) this is true even if foreign contributions appear in English; (c) this state of affairs differs from the situation prevailing in the hard sciences; and (d) in response to the multicultural movement and global developments, mainstream psychology in the United States and elsewhere will become less ethnocentric in the near future. (p. 26)

The recognition of such global changes, along with the efforts of AMCD, helped to facilitate movement towards more culture-centered perspectives and theories (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014). Thompson, Ellis, and Widavsky (1990) purported that cultural theory may be a solid basis for a new force in psychology and counseling. Specifically, Thompson et al. (1990) critiqued social science for its adherence to dualism and advised that “Although sometimes useful as analytic distinctions, these dualisms often have the unfortunate result of obscuring extensive interdependencies between phenomena” (p. 21). Overall, multicultural counselors do not condone the “one size fits all” approach to counseling that psychoanalytic, cognitive-behavioral, and humanistic-existential forces

promote. This reductive approach does not effectively attend to the cultural variables ever present in all human beings' experiences.

The purview of the multicultural movement also encouraged dialogue regarding the counseling relationship which is affected by the client's and counselor's unique histories, backgrounds, and cultural influences. The need to be mindful of a client's culture and worldview was professionally formalized by the creation and adoption of the multicultural counseling competencies (Sue et al., 1992). This aspirational framework highlighted the importance of counselors developing cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills to efficiently work with diverse clients. The multicultural counseling competencies decreed that counselors must be aware of their values, beliefs, biases, and worldviews as well as those of their clients; knowledgeable about their cultural background as well as that of their clients; and skilled using culture-specific counseling strategies (Sue et al., 1992).

Despite being currently recognized as an important component of counseling that must be routinely infused into counselor education curriculum, multiculturalism has been met with some resistance in the profession (Goodman, 2001; Pedersen, 1991; Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2010; Ratts & Pedersen, 2014; Weinrach & Thomas, 2004). Some believed that multiculturalism was competing with already established psychological theories in ways that threatened the counseling and psychology professions (Weinrach & Thomas, 2004). The universalist perspective countered the notion that cultural differences should warrant subjective treatment considerations and favors one practice of counseling and therapy that apply equally to all populations (Weinrach & Thomas, 2004). Others asserted that multiculturalism is too complicated (Ratts &

Pedersen, 2014) and that more research is needed on multicultural competencies, standards, methods, and approaches (Ponterotto et al., 2010).

Although some professionals criticized the arrival of multiculturalism as too complex, other professionals welcomed multiculturalism as a necessary theoretical model especially because cultural and social demographics continued to expand in the United States. The discussion and study of humans as cultural beings, distinct from one another, highlighted some of the primary differences that influence experience with the world and self. Clients' problems are not without context and understanding the subjective experiences of diverse individuals has resulted in a much-needed conversation about social positionality and the influence of oppression on lived experiences. However, multiculturalism attends to the cultural differences in the counseling relationship and the need to employ culturally appropriate counseling strategies; the philosophical and practical foci are not extended beyond the confines of the counseling office.

Social justice counseling, on the other hand, addresses the societal and cultural contexts that create, exacerbate, and perpetuate some client problems and is considered the fifth force in counseling and psychology (Ratts, D'Andrea, & Arredondo, 2004). In part, the current force also reconciles the critique of multiculturalism being too focused on racial and ethnic concerns over other dimensions of identity such as sexual orientation, gender, social class, religion, and disability (Pope-Davis, Ligiero, Liang, & Codrington, 2001).

The Evolution of Multicultural Counseling Competencies

Multicultural competence in the field of counseling has been an ever-developing area of interest for practitioners and educators alike for decades. Throughout the passage

of time and the associated theoretical forces, there has been a steady movement toward defining baseline standards of practice that ensure that all counselors are adequately equipped to provide ethical and sensitive treatment. Such standards are useful in not only protecting client welfare, but also in legitimizing counseling as a helping profession suitable to assist all clients with their subjective needs considering their unique experiences and presenting identities. In order to truly understand the relevancy of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) (2015), a historical survey of the evolution of multicultural counseling competencies is needed.

Multicultural Counseling Competencies as the Foundation

The predecessor to the MSJCC, The Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) (1992), were developed per the request of Thomas Parham, then president of the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD). The taskforce consisted of Derald Wing Sue, Patricia Arredondo, and Rod McDavis (1992) who cited the increasing diversification of the United States population as the most compelling rationale for the development of the MCC. Arredondo (1999) elaborated on the motivation to pursue such an ardent task, by highlighting their concern that, “at best, counselors-in-training had only one course in multicultural counseling with little to no consideration of race, culture, and ethnicity in the other required course work. In effect, the profession was preparing individuals for unethical and potentially harmful behavior” (p. 102).

The MCC was also characterized by five operating premises (Arredondo, 1999). First, counseling is inherently cross-cultural (Arredondo, 1999). The counselor and client are both cultural beings and the process of counseling is an intersectional relationship

influenced by both parties' cultural and social selves. The second premise is that all counseling happens in a context influenced by institutional and societal biases and norms (Arredondo, 1999). Arredondo (1999) also advised that the relationships described are primarily between a White counselor and clients of ethnic racial identity status, which constitutes the third premise. The fourth operational premise is that clients of Asian, Black/African American, Latino, and Native American heritage are most often marginalized and represent demographics for which counselors have been least prepared to serve (Arredondo, 1999). Lastly, Arredondo (1999) emphasized the notion that counseling is a culture-bound profession.

The MCC supports a three-stage developmental sequence of beliefs and attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Sue et al., 1992). Each of the three stages is equally important, and underemphasizing or overemphasizing one of these three areas of multicultural competence can impede counselors' abilities to provide culturally competent counseling (Sue & Sue, 2013). Ratts and Pedersen (2014) recommended a three-stage developmental sequence from beliefs and attitudes (commonly referred to as awareness) to knowledge to skills and provided the following rationale:

Counselors who lack awareness will find it difficult to develop knowledge and culturally appropriate interventions and skills. Similarly, an overemphasis on awareness in the absence of knowledge and skill can lead to awareness becoming an end in itself, which is nonproductive. There is also a danger when counselors overemphasize obtaining knowledge and facts to the point where they are not able to connect their gained knowledge with awareness and skills to see how all the information is relevant. Just as risky is when counselors attempt to develop skills without the necessary awareness and knowledge needed to determine whether their skills make things better or worse. (p. 90)

The relevancy of the three developmental stages espoused by the MCC may be even more apparent when the stages are operationalized.

Awareness equips counselors with the basis for accurate opinions, attitudes, and assumptions. Awareness also presumes an ability to correctly compare alternative viewpoints, relate or translate priorities in a variety of cultural settings, recognize constraints and opportunities in each cultural context, and ascertain a clear understanding of one's own limitations (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014). Knowledge represents the factual information necessary to expand beyond awareness toward effective change in multicultural settings. A primary objective of the knowledge stage is to understand cultures in their own terms, based on appropriate assumptions. This stage also represents the ability to identify and locate reliable sources of information to understand unfamiliar cultures (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014). Lastly, Ratts and Pedersen (2014) asserted that “multiculturally competent counselors are skilled in planning, conducting, and evaluating the multicultural contexts in which they work” (p. 91). Assessment skills are imperative to adequately identify the needs of other cultures. Counselors are also expected to interact, counsel, interview, advise, and manage their tasks with effectiveness in multicultural settings (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014).

Within the three developmental stages, previously discussed, the MCC detailed three specific competencies that should be developed. The first competency was referred to as counselor awareness of own assumptions, values, and biases. Attitudes and beliefs within this competency mandated that counselors be aware of and sensitive to their own cultural heritage, as well as emphasized the need for the counselors to respect and value differences (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014). Counselors' knowledge and understanding about how oppression, racism, discrimination, and stereotyping affected them personally, and in their work, was central to the knowledge stage of this competency (Sue et al., 1992).

Also, explicit in the knowledge domain was that White counselors specifically understand how they may have directly or indirectly benefited from individual, institutional, and cultural racism as suggested by White identity development models (Sue et al., 1992, p. 482). In regard to the skills stage for this competency, Sue et al. (1992) advised that culturally skilled counselors constantly seek to understand themselves as racial and cultural beings and are actively seek a nonracist identity (p. 482).

The second competency detailed in the MCC was understanding the worldview of the culturally different client. Counselors' understanding of how their own cultural backgrounds, experiences, attitudes, values, and biases influence psychological and counseling processes (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014). Specifically, Sue et al. (1992) suggested that culturally skilled counselors are aware of their stereotypes and preconceived notions that they may hold toward other racial and ethnic minority groups. This was deemed imperative as biases can negatively skew the counselor's attempt to understand client worldviews. In regards to cultural knowledge, counselors are not only expected to seek out information about a particular group they are working with, but also to understand how race, culture, ethnicity and so forth may affect personality formation, vocational choices, manifestation of psychological disorders, help-seeking behaviors, and appropriateness or inappropriateness of counseling approaches (Sue et al., 1992, p. 482). Skills related to this dimensional competency required counselors to familiarize themselves with the latest findings regarding mental health and mental disorders of diverse groups and to seek out educational experiences to augment their knowledge, understanding, and cross-cultural skills. (Sue et al., 1992). Additionally, counselors were

encouraged to engage with minority communities outside the counseling setting (Sue et al., 1992).

The final competency area of the MCC was developing appropriate intervention strategies and techniques. Attitudes and beliefs conducive to this competency included respect for clients' religious and/or spiritual beliefs about physical and mental functioning, respect for indigenous helping practices and minority community intrinsic help-giving networks, and value for bilingualism (Sue et al., 1992, p. 482). Knowledge relevant to this competency included recommendations for an understanding of how generic characteristics of counseling may clash with the cultural values of various groups and an awareness of institutional barriers that prevent minorities from using mental health services. Foundational knowledge of minority family structures, hierarchies, values, and beliefs and awareness of discriminatory practices at the social and community levels that may be affecting the psychological welfare of the population being served were also suggested (Sue et al., 1992, pp. 482-483). The skills competency area, unsurprisingly, purported numerous objectives for the culturally skilled counselor. Included in this area was an emphasis on engaging in a variety of verbal and nonverbal helping responses, using institutional intervention skills to assist client with determining whether a "problem" stems from racism or bias in others, and seeking out consultation with traditional healers or religious and spiritual leaders when appropriate (Sue et al., 1992, p. 483). Culturally skilled counselors were also expected not only to understand the technical aspects of traditional assessment and testing instruments, but also their limitations in terms of cultural transferability. Counselors were also encouraged to work to eliminate biases, prejudices, and discriminatory practices, as well as assume

responsibility in educating their clients to the processes of psychological intervention (Sue et al., 1992, p. 483).

Operationalizing the MCC

After the publication and dissemination of the original MCC, a noted work in progress, there was criticism from the profession (Arredondo, 1999). Namely, there was concern that the White population was not included as a cultural group nor were other social-identity groups who have been under-represented in the profession and marginalized in society, including sexual minorities and people with disabilities (Arredondo, 1999). Furthermore, questions were raised about contacts other than White counselor and ethnic minority client pairings, such as White counselors with White clients, counselors of Color with clients of Color, and counselors of Color with White clients (Arredondo, 1999).

In response to these critiques, the 1994-1995 AMCD president, Marlene Rutherford-Rhodes, requested that the Professional Standards and Certification Committee provide additional clarification to the competencies and to specify enabling criteria. In the revision, Arredondo et al. (1996) established a distinction between the terms “multicultural” and “diversity” whereas “multicultural” focused on ethnicity, race, and culture and “diversity” referred to other individual, people differences including age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical ability or disability, and other characteristics by which someone may prefer to self-define (p. 44).

The revised MCC were also accompanied by explanatory statements aimed to advance the definition and clarity of the domains of awareness, knowledge, and skills (Arredondo, 1999). The explanatory statements were also intended to “take the

profession further along in the process of institutionalizing counselor training and practices to be multicultural at the core” (Arredondo et al., 1996, p. 56). To illustrate the impact of an explanatory statement, consider the two samples that Arredondo et al. (1996) provided for the competency related to the culturally skilled counselor believing that cultural self-awareness and sensitivity to one’s own cultural heritage is important:

- Can identify the culture(s) to which they belong and the significance of that membership including the relationship of individuals in that group with individuals from other groups institutionally, historically, educationally, and so forth.
- Can identify the specific cultural group(s) from which counselor derives fundamental cultural heritage and the significant beliefs and attitudes held by those cultures that are assimilated into their attitudes and beliefs. (Arredondo et al., 1996, p. 57)

Arredondo et al. (1996) utilized the Dimensions of Personal Identity Model (DPIM; Arredondo & Glaurner, 1992) as a key reference in the conceptualization and discussion of human diversity in relation to the MCC. The DPIM communicates several premises including: a) we are all multicultural individuals, b) that we all possess personal, political, and historical culture, c) that we are affected by sociocultural, political, environmental, and historical events; and that (d) multiculturalism also intersects with multiple factors of individual diversity. The DPIM articulates multiple dimensions that may contribute to an individual’s sense of identity and worldview within a sociopolitical context and shines light on the fact that individuals can be oppressed for more than one dimension of their personal identity (Arredondo, 1999).

The DPIM is comprised of three dimensions. The “A Dimension” lists characteristics that serve as a profile for all people, with most characteristics being ones that an individual is born with or into, thus making them fixed or unchangeable (Arredondo et al., 1996). Characteristics in the “A Dimension” include age, culture,

gender, ethnicity, language, physical disability, race, sexual orientation and social class (Arredondo et al., 1996, p. 46). The “B dimension” includes educational background, geographic location, income, marital status, religion, work experience, citizenship status, military experience, and hobbies/recreational interests (Arredondo et al., 1996, p. 46). This dimension may represent the “consequences” of the “A” and “C dimensions”, as what occurs to individuals relative to their B Dimension is influenced by some of the permanent characteristics of the “A Dimension” and the major historical, political, sociocultural, and economic legacies of the “C Dimension” (Arredondo et al., 1996, p. 52). The “C Dimension” is characterized by historical moments/eras (Arredondo et al., 1996, p. 46). Arredondo et al. (1996) articulated that this dimension “grounds us in historical, political, cultural, and economic contexts indicating that events of a sociopolitical, global, and environmental form have a way of affecting one’s personal culture and life experiences” (p. 49).

The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies

Congruent with the theoretical progression of the counseling field, espoused professional counseling competencies have started to integrate social justice as a foundational process central to the helping relationship. AMCD president, Carlos P. Hipolito-Delgado (2014-2015), commissioned a committee to revise the 1992 MCC on two charges: “a) to reflect a more inclusive and broader understanding of culture and diversity that encompasses the intersection of identities and b) to better address the expanding role of professional counselors to include individual counseling and social justice advocacy” (Ratts et al., 2016, p. 29). The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) is the product of this initiative and was approved by

the ACA governing council in 2015. Although the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) developed by Sue et al. (1992) were monumental, the revisions provided by Ratts et al. (2016) were warranted by the undeniable evolution of consumers. From the 1980s to the mid-2010s, Americans were experiencing a shift in collective consciousness toward a realization of sociopolitical injustice. This shift was overwhelmingly evidenced by the reactions of masses protesting the unfair treatment of others, such as the riots in Ferguson and Baltimore, the Occupy Wall Street and #metoo movements, and challenging the traditional standard of marriage. The people in these demonstrations had verbalized their concerns and, as a profession dedicated to serving people, counselors were called upon to recognize marginality and its impact on clients' lives.

Theoretical foundations. The conceptual framework of the MSJCC is undergirded and given context by four important aspects of counseling practice for both counselors and clients (Ratts et al., 2016). The first is understanding the complexities of diversity and multiculturalism on the counseling relationship (Ratts et al., 2016). The second is recognizing the negative influence of oppression on mental health and well-being (Ratts et al., 2016). Understanding individuals in the context of their environment represents the third aspect. The final aspect is the integration of social justice advocacy into various modalities of counseling (Ratts et al., 2016).

Ratts et al. (2016) contended that the social construction of identity was more complex than had been originally conceptualized by the nascent multicultural counseling literature and that a more extensive approach was necessary to develop understanding of identity. Relatedly, Ratts et al. (2016) rejected single-lens perspectives on multicultural

competence in which single variables of identity (such as race or sex) are viewed as solitary aspects of social identity without consideration for other identities. The wide-angle lens approach of intersectionality is advocated by the MSJCC as a precursor to understanding the health experiences of marginalized individuals (Ratts et al., 2016).

Inextricably related to social group identity is the issue of oppression. The MSJCC reiterates the existence of multiple oppressive forms, such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ageism, and ableism that can occur across individual and systems levels (Ratts et al., 2016). Ratts et al. (2016) highlighted that oppression at the individual level can be based on dehumanizing interpersonal interactions with others (MacLeod, 2013) and oppression at the systems level can manifest itself in the form of rules, policies, laws, and institutions that create inequities for marginalized individuals (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). The phenomenon of minority stress is also featured as a theoretical underpinning of the MSJCC that reinforces the biopsychosocial influence of oppression and subsequently supports the consideration given to it in the conceptual framework (Ratts et al., 2016, pp. 32-33).

The MSJCC committee underlined the necessity of a multilevel approach in order to adequately understand the interactions of intersectionalities, to recognize the influence of oppression on mental health, and to advocate the integration of a socioecological perspective (Ratts et al., 2016). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) seminal work introduced a framework for understanding how individuals shape and are shaped by their environment – one which has great utility for counselors. As socioecological models have become popular for their targeted health interventions (Stokols, 1992), their use by counselors may help to better conceptualize the extent to which individuals and their social

environments influence each other (McMahon, Mason, Daluga-Guenther, & Ruiz, 2014). Additionally, a socioecological lens may assist counselors with exploring the degree to which oppressive environmental factors influence the well-being of clients (Conye & Cook, 2004). Ratts et al. (2016) supported the inclusion of this perspective, claiming, “By using the socioecological model as a framework, counselors can determine in partnership with clients whether interventions should occur at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, public policy, and/or international/global levels” (p. 34).

Emerging from the recognition of intersectional identities, the influence of oppression on client well-being, and the interrelational influence of individual and social environment, the final theoretical concept informing the conceptualization of the MSJCC is social justice advocacy. Ethically, counselors are obligated to consider both multiculturalism and social justice in their work with clients (ACA, 2014; Durham & Glasoff, 2010). Clients from marginalized groups expectedly bring problems into counseling; however, the counselor must have the ability to determine whether individual counseling or community-based intervention is needed (Ratts et al., 2016). Although this process of determination begins with the client (Lewis, Lewis, Daniels, & D’Andrea, 2011), competency in social justice advocacy is required in order to effectively help clients at both individual and systems levels.

Conceptual framework of the MSJCC. The conceptual framework attempts to illustrate the complexity of intersectional identities and the ways in which power, privilege, and oppression transpire between counselors and clients in regard to their privileged and marginalized statuses (Ratts et al., 2016). In alignment with the understanding that power, privilege, and oppression exist within and in connection to

social and environmental contexts and identities, there is an assumption that these variables influence the counseling relationship to varying degrees. The MSJCC categorize privileged and marginalized statuses into four quadrants to express the different types of interactions that can occur between counselor and client: privileged counselor-marginalized client, privileged counselor-privileged client, marginalized counselor-privileged client, marginalized counselor-marginalized client (Ratts et al., 2016). Ratts et al. (2016) provided a visual representation of the conceptual MSJCC model to augment comprehension and is presented in *Figure 1*.

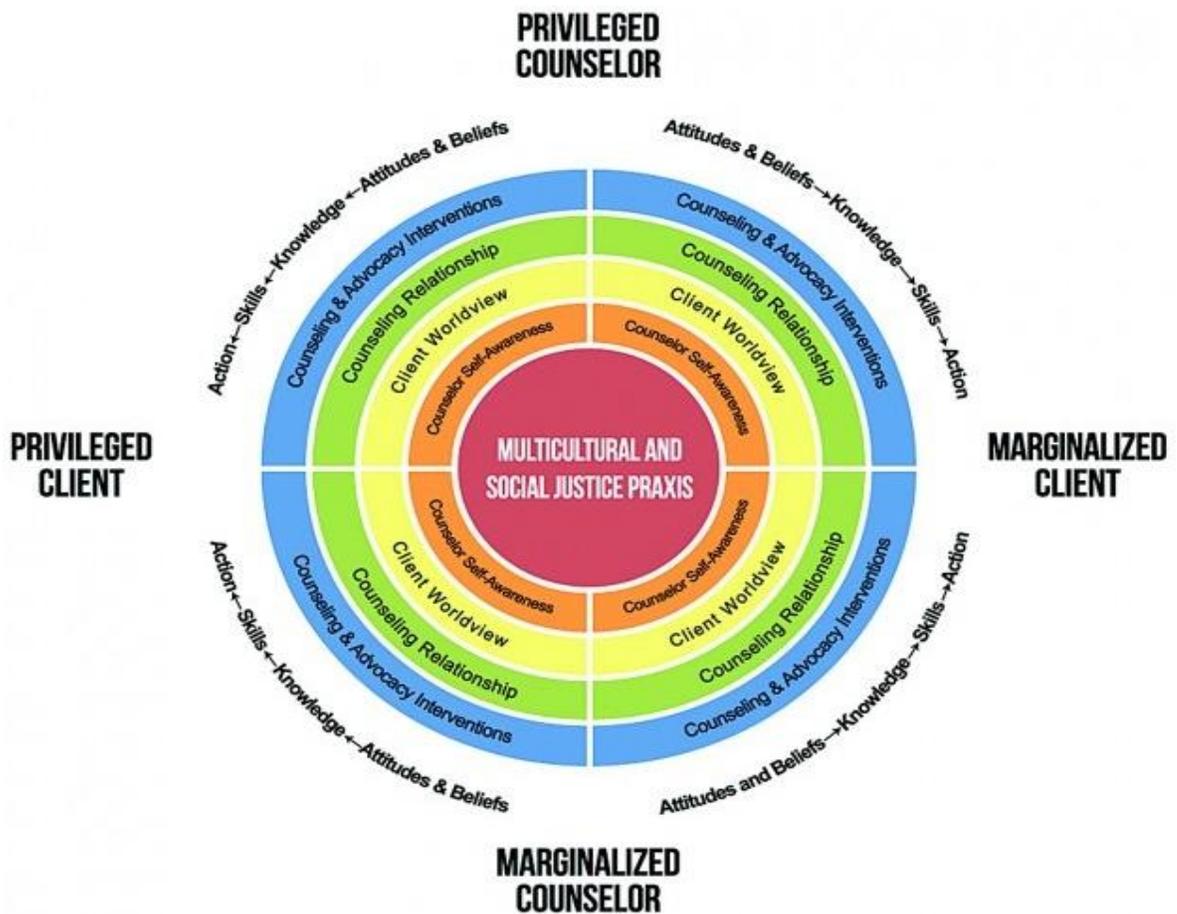


Figure 1. Multicultural and Social Justice Praxis. Note. From Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (p. 4), by Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillian, Butler, and McCullough, 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/competencies/multicultural-and-social-justice-counseling-competences.pdf>

Quadrants: privileged and marginalized statuses. Ratts et al. (2016) described the privileged counselor–marginalized client quadrant as a “relationship that exists when clients from marginalized groups are recipients of counseling from counselors who are members of privileged groups. In such a relationship, counselors hold social power and privilege over clients by virtue of their privileged status” (Ratts et al., 2016, p. 36). The privileged counselor–privileged client quadrant is characterized by “the interaction between counselors and clients who share a privileged status. In such a relationship, counselors and clients share social power and privilege in society” (Ratts et al., 2016, p. 36). In the marginalized counselor–privileged client quadrant, clients hold social power and privilege (Ratts et al., 2016, p.36-7). The final quadrant, marginalized counselor–marginalized client, “represents the interactions that occur between counselors and clients who share the same marginalized group identity” (Ratts et al., 2016, p. 37).

These quadrants are not meant to represent comprehensive interactions between counselors and clients, but rather are meant to capture a particular moment in time between the two parties (Ratts et al., 2016). This distinction is salient because, as noted by Jones and McEwan (2000), identities that may be prevalent at one moment in time may not be prevalent at another moment due to the fluid nature of identity. It should also be noted that there is always the possibility that either party will identify simultaneously with being in more than one quadrant because of their status as members of both privileged and marginalized groups (Ratts et al., 2016). Similarly, either party may perceive their interaction being on entirely different quadrants (Ratts et al., 2016). In essence, identification with a particular quadrant is likely to be situational and scenario-dependent.

Developmental domains. Similar to the original MCC, the MSJCC contains domains within each quadrant that contribute to multicultural and social justice practice. The developmental sequence is as follows: a) counselor self-awareness, b) client worldview, c) the counseling relationship, and d) counseling and advocacy interventions (Ratts et al., 2016). Counselor self-awareness represents the initial developmental stage, as the journey toward multicultural and social justice competence commences as an internal process within the counselor (Roysircar, Arredondo, Fuertes, Ponterotto, & Toporek, 2003; Sue et al., 1992; Sue & Sue, 2013). Ratts et al. (2016) summarized the rationale for the established sequence:

Counselors must strive to become aware of their cultural values, beliefs, and biases. This internal awareness then extends to counselors' understanding of clients' worldviews and, subsequently, the ways in which culture, power, privilege, and oppression influence the counseling relationship. In turn, this process allows for counselors to determine, in collaboration with clients, interventions and strategies that are multiculturally responsive and that promote social justice through advocacy. (p. 37)

The significance of the socioecological perspective, detailed in the previous section, is evidenced by its integration within the counseling and advocacy interventions domain.

MSJCC competencies. Contained within each of the first three developmental domains, there are four aspirational and developmental competencies embedded. The competencies include: a) attitudes and beliefs, b) knowledge, c) skills, and d) action. The first three competencies, attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, and skills (AKS) have been maintained from the original MCC and the fourth, action, was incorporated, as suggested by scholars (Arredondo et al., 1996; Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2010; Nassar-McMillian, 2014), to operationalize AKS (Ratts et al., 2016). In the following paragraphs, brief descriptions of how the attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and action (AKSA)

competencies fit into each of the developmental domains are offered, yet for a comprehensive understanding of the model readers are encouraged to access the MJSCC.

Within the *counselor self-awareness* domain, the AKSA competencies serve to guide marginalized or privileged counselors in developing awareness of themselves as members of marginalized and privileged groups. In regard to attitudes and beliefs, (Ratts et al., 2016) advised that competent counselors have awareness of values, beliefs, biases, and different statuses they maintain as members of marginalized and privileged groups. They also noted that “such counselors are also conscious of the privilege they possess or lack in society and how this status influences their worldviews and life experiences” (Ratts et al., 2016, p. 38). Additionally, competent counselors recognize that developing self-awareness is a life-long process and should seek out opportunities to learn more about themselves, as well as use such awareness to evaluate their strengths and limitations in working with clients from marginalized and privileged groups (Ratts et al., 2016). Regarding knowledge in this domain, competent counselors have an understanding about how their own personal assumptions, values, beliefs, and biases contribute to the formulation of their worldviews (Ratts et al., 2016). Competent counselors are able to conceptualize the ways in which privilege and oppression impact their experiences and communication style (Ratts et al., 2016). They are also well informed of relevant resources that will facilitate greater awareness of their values, beliefs, biases, and social group statuses (Ratts et al., 2016).

Skills in this domain include reflective and critical thinking skills that permit competent counselors to gain insight into their values, beliefs, and biases as members of marginalized and privileged groups; comprehension skills that allow explanation of how

social group identities and statuses influence their worldviews and experiences; and, analytical skills that permit them to compare and contrast their group statuses and experiences to those of other individuals (Ratts et al., 2106). With regard to action in this domain, competent counselors approach learning about their assumptions, values, beliefs, biases, culture, and social group identities with proactivity (Ratts et al., 2016). Competent counselors actively seek out professional development opportunities to learn more about themselves in the context of their group statuses and engage with communities to learn how power, privilege, and oppression influence their experiences (Ratts et al., 2016).

Within the *client worldview* domain, the ASKA competencies highlight the ways in which marginalized and privileged counselors gain insight into the worldviews of marginalized and privileged clients (Ratts et al., 2016). The attitudes and beliefs competency within this domain emphasize a curiosity for learning about the worldviews and experiences of clients related to group status and an understanding of how clients' identity development influences their respective worldviews and experiences (Ratts et al., 2016). Similarly, to the process of developing self-awareness, learning about clients' marginalized and privileged statuses is a life-long endeavor (Ratts et al., 2016). A solid comprehension of the within-group differences among marginalized clients is also a foundational aspiration within this competency (Ratts et al., 2016). Aspirational statements that describe knowledge regarding this domain include being educated on relevant theories, concepts, research, and data pertaining to marginalized and privileged clients' worldviews and experiences (Ratts et al., 2016). Acquiring knowledge of how the dynamics of stereotypes, discrimination, power, privilege, and oppression affect marginalized and privileged clients is also suggested (Ratts et al., 2016).

Skills in this domain include reflective and critical thinking skills that permit competent counselors to gain insight into their values, beliefs, and biases as members of marginalized and privileged groups; comprehension skills that allow explanation of how social group identities and statuses influence their worldviews and experiences; and, analytical skills that allow counselors to interpret how marginalized and privileged clients' experiences are connected to presenting problems (Ratts et al., 2016). Action in this domain encourages competent counselors to seek out opportunities and professional development trainings to learn more about clients' worldviews and experiences. They also immerse themselves in the context of their group statuses and engage with communities to learn how power, privilege, and oppression influence their experiences (Ratts et al., 2016).

Within the *counseling relationship* domain, the primary agenda of the MSJCC is to assist counselors with utilizing gained awareness to better understand how counselors' and clients' privileged and marginalized statuses have an influence on the counseling relationship and the ways in which power, privilege, and oppression can benefit and/or hinder the counseling relationship (Ratts et al., 2016). The attitudes and beliefs competency within this domain reinforce the need for counselors to understand how counselors' and clients' cultural values, beliefs, biases, and group statuses affect the counseling relationship and recognize that counselors' and clients' identity development also shape the relationship they have with clients (Ratts et al., 2016). They also demonstrate an ability to identify how their strengths and limitations differ depending on the group status of the client with whom they are working (Ratts et al., 2016). With regard to knowledge, competent counselors ascertain information about theories and

concepts that explain how counselors' and clients' group statuses differentially influence the counseling relationship and have knowledge about how issues of culture, power, privilege, oppression, and identity development strengthen and hinder the counselor-client relationship (Ratts et al., 2016).

With regard to skills, competent counselors present with a level of comfort when discussing how stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, power, privilege, and oppression influence the therapeutic relationship and are proficient at initiating such conversations (Ratts et al., 2016). Competent counselors also possess and employ cross-cultural communication skills to effectively facilitate discussions and analytical skills to interpret how privileged and marginalized clients' worldviews and lived experiences shape the counselor-client relationship (Ratts et al., 2016). With regard to action in this domain, counselors are encouraged to engage in professional development opportunities that strengthen their abilities to create safe, welcoming, and culturally affirming counseling relationships and environments for all clients (Ratts et al., 2016). Competent counselors accept that the counseling relationship extends beyond the traditional office setting and addresses issues of power, privilege, and oppression in the community to reinforce the counselor-client relationship (Ratts et al., 2016). Competent counselors also seek to partner and collaborate with prospective community allies to learn more about effective counseling strategies and models relevant to their clients' needs. They also demonstrate just application of ethical codes in culturally relevant ways (Ratts et al., 2016).

The fourth and final developmental domain, *counseling and advocacy interventions*, represents the arrival point of counselors who are attuned to their values and beliefs, are sensitive to the worldviews and cultural experiences of clients, and

understand the different ways that power, privilege, oppression, and social group statuses shape the counseling relationship (Ratts et al., 2016). Progression through the first three developmental stages should illuminate the specific multicultural and social justice approaches appropriate for their particular client. Competent counselors employ culturally relevant interventions and strategies to effect individual and community level change (Ratts et al., 2016). Ratts et al. (2016) advised that multicultural and social justice competent counselors “understand that when culturally responsive counseling is integrated with social justice advocacy, they become better equipped to address clients’ concerns” (p. 42).

As described previously, the infusion of intersectional theory in the MSJCC is explicit and sets a new standard for truly conceptualizing the experiences, attitudes, worldviews, and beliefs of individuals through the lens of multiplicity. That is, experiences at intersections of identities contextually and systematically shape those identities and their associated features. In order to lend credence to and fully appreciate the importance and complexity of intersectionality theory, further discussion is merited.

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality has been referred to as a “buzzword” in professional literature and this occurrence is partly due to the concept being heralded as one of the most important contributions to feminist scholarship (Davis, 2008). Although in this modern age, intersectionality has been applied to and examined from multiple scholarly disciplines such as politics (Yuval-Davis, 2007), international law (Crenshaw, 1988; Grabham, Cooper, Krishnadas, & Herman, 2008), education (Bhopal & Preston, 2012),

physical health (Bowleg, 2012), mental health (Oexle & Corrigan, 2018; Rosenfield, 2012) and others, the origins of its visibility are worthy of examination.

The Influence of the Black Feminist Movement and Women of Color

Intersectionality was introduced in the late 1980s as a heuristic term to direct attention to the problematic dynamics of difference and consensus of sameness in the context of antidiscrimination and social movements politics (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). Specifically, the term was originated from the works of Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, a strong proponent of the Black feminism and antiracism movements. Crenshaw (1991) contended that “the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite – that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (p. 1242). Crenshaw (1991) also purported that the feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and the antiracist efforts to politicize the experiences of people of color promote a notion that these are mutually exclusive terrains. Crenshaw (1991) advised that her objective was to advance the visibility of women of color and their experiences, specifically in the areas of employment and violence, because they typically were left marginalized in both the feminist and antiracist discourses as they are shaped to respond to one or the other. Intersectionality challenges single-axis thinking as phenomenon that undermines legal process, disciplinary knowledge production, and struggles for social justice (Cho et al., 2013).

Crenshaw’s efforts to highlight the experiences of Black women during the late 1980s were not unique. Patricia Hill Collins (1986, 1990, 2004), former head of the department of African-American Studies at the University of Cincinnati and a past

president of the American Sociological Association council, was also a noted leader in the Black feminism movement. Collins (1986) discussed Black women's long history of marginalization within academic settings and called to attention their distinctive analyses of race, class, and gender from the "outsider within" status. Collins (1986) conceptualized Black feminist thought as resultant content produced by Black women whose lives have been shaped by historical and material conditions. Collins (1986) noted that although commonalities of perceptions among Black women may be influenced by common experiences, the diversity of class, region, age, and sexual orientation shaping Black women's lives has resulted in different expressions of these common themes (p. S16). Like Crenshaw, Collins (1986) also underlined the interlocking nature of race, gender, and class oppression and professed that Black feminist thought treats the interaction among multiple systems of oppression as the object of study.

Gloria Anzaldúa, an American scholar of Chicana cultural theory, feminist theory, and queer theory, is also noted for making contributions to the advancement of intersectionality theory (Chan et al., 2018; Mahraj, 2010). In her best-known, semi-autobiographical book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa (1987) explored and examined the invisible "borders" that exist between Latinas/os and non-Latinas/os, men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals, and other groups. As an identified Chicana lesbian feminist and resident of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands, Anzaldúa (1987) detailed her personal, subjective experiences with marginality and its influence on her intersectional identity. Mahraj (2010) summarized that Anzaldúa's identity is developed, "... through reclaiming the region's histories of exploitation and violence, articulating that oppression's specifically gendered and racialized elements, and

embracing the fluidity of border-crossing through the use of multiple languages and numerous forms of artistic and spiritual expression” (p. 5). Anzaldúa also described what she coined “othering:” an act of definition within a subordinated group to establish that a group member is unacceptable, an “other,” by some criterion (Lengermann & Niebrugge, 2003, p. 227-228). Lengermann and Niebrugge (2003) stated that Anzaldúa’s description of “othering” is a representation of how individual subjectivity is, in part, influenced by evaluation of self and others against the mythical norm of a dominant society (in the United States, examples include White, thin, male, and heterosexual).

The Influence of the Queer Theory Movement

Anzaldúa is perhaps the first to positively use the term “queer” approximately two years before its popularized emergence through the works of Butler (1990) and Sedgwick (1990), but she is one of many that have contributed to the unique, and relatively new, area of study. Queer theory has developed through political activism and the need to raise awareness about the existence of lifestyles and identities previously not acknowledged in mainstream cultures (Bates, 2012). Although there has been debate about the merits of assigning a specific definition to queer theory (Jagose, 1996), the critical examination of heteronormativity, homophobia, and heterosexism are at the crux of the movement. The narratives and analyses of many scholars regarding the lived experiences of queer individuals, loosely defined as individuals who reject rigid societal and cultural expectations of “normal” sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression, inevitably demonstrate a continuum of marginalization.

Although queer theory and queer studies are areas of current exploration, these areas would have not had materialized if it were not for the efforts of many individuals to

illuminate the existence, tolerance, and acceptance of queer identities in larger society. The homophile movement, initiated in the late 1800s, set up educational programs and worked towards political reform to increase tolerance of homosexuality, and, in some cases, to decriminalize it (Jagose, 1996, pp. 22-23). This movement was not without criticism from within the homosexual community, but its legacy is best summed up by D'Emilio (1983):

Retrospectively, there is a tendency to characterise the homophile movement as conservative rather than revolutionary, and therefore as the antithesis of gay liberation. It is worth remembering that in its radical origins it raised issues similar to those championed by gay liberation, but in a different context and with different effects. (p. 3)

The gay liberation movement signified a change in attitude within the community and resulted in a more radicalized shift to reject the mea culpa approach and implement a more militant expression of political disquiet (Jagose, 1996). Many attribute the cultural shift away from assimilationist policies to the occurrence of the Stonewall riots (Jagose, 1996), which serves as a mythological date for the origin of embracing gay identity, individually and collectively, and unapologetically mobilizing and asserting political power to combat oppressive systems that marginalized the group. Altman's (1972) discussion on the relations between American gay liberation and the other counter-cultural challenges to dominant culture provides unique insight into this historical discourse. Although different in their causes or principles, he advised that the Black liberation, the Women's movement, and the youth revolt were similar to the gay liberation movement as all movements were unified in their opposition to oppression perpetuated by the dominant culture (Altman, 1972).

Similar to the experience of marginality felt by Black women in both the women's and antiracism movements, lesbians also experienced marginalization in both the women's and gay liberation movements. One significant feminist critique perceived militant lesbianism as potentially undermining feminist gains (Friedan, 1965). Others dismissed lesbianism as foundationally antithetical to the feminist agenda (Jagose, 1996). The gay liberation movement, largely spearheaded by gay men, tended to ignore the repeated interventions by lesbians to consider or adopt marginal models that would accommodate feminist demands (Jagose, 1996). Bebbington and Lyons (1979) challenged male gay liberationists, "the discussion of homosexuality and feminism is the opportunity . . . to confront your role as men in a patriarchal society and to recognize the ways in which your sexism oppresses us, as lesbians" (p. 8). Rich (1986) further contextualized the intersectional experience of being gay and a woman stating: "Lesbians have historically been deprived of a political existence through 'inclusion' as female versions of male homosexuality. To equate lesbian existence with male homosexuality because each is stigmatised is to erase female reality once again" (p. 318)

Some have argued that queer identity is intersectional, since most queers face multiple aspects of discrimination due to other social identity locations, as women, people of color, as poor people, as transgender people, and sexual subversives (Rosenblum, 1994). Just as single-axis thinking regarding race as a universal category of identity fails to address class, gender, ethnicity, and ability identities, so do gay and lesbian movements that only identify same-sex partner choice as the definition of community (Rosenblum, 1994). Within any identity category whose aim is to bring attention to a universal point of existence, there exists a continuum of privilege and

marginalization similar to that of dominant culture because there are always intersections of other, less socially empowered identities.

As detailed in this section, the conceptualization, identification, and discussion of intersectionality stems from the analyses of narratives shared by people occupying the margins of society. These narratives suggest that identity cannot be simply reduced to or comprised by single-axis categorization without obscuring the subjective realities of its authors. To do so only serves to further marginalize individuals and perpetuate a sense of dominion which is the antithesis of intersectionality theory.

Basic Tenets

Intersectionality is not a simple conceptual or theoretical concept; in fact, it is quite complex (Collins & Blige, 2016; McCall, 2005). Intersectionality has been defined in a variety of ways by scholars over the years, yet some generally accepted tenets transcend disciplinary boundaries and characterize the framework. Collins and Blige (2016) posited that “intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences” (p. 2). However, the expansion and reach of intersectionality has grown exponentially in recent decades and now extends to multifaceted dimensions that necessitate thematic examination.

Collins and Blige (2016) have synthesized the fundamental tenets of intersectionality into six themes: social inequality, power, relationality, social context, complexity, and social justice. Each of these themes can be directly correlated with aspects of multicultural and social justice counseling tenets. *Social inequality* is emphasized in many, but not all, contemporary definitions of intersectionality (Collins & Blige, 2016). Intersectionality is unique in its analysis of social inequality, as it

encourages understanding of such processes based on interactions among various categories and posits that social inequality is rarely the result of a single factor (Collins & Blige, 2016). Social inequality can have an impact on a client's ability to access and participate in counseling services and may contribute to the client's experiences of struggle in certain aspects of their functioning. This recognition of social inequality should be integrated in the therapeutic lens of counselors, so that they may elicit a client's understanding of their worldviews have been influenced social inequalities. This strategy may provide practical guidance, as the counselor and client work to determine what type of advocacy and counseling strategies may best benefit the client.

Secondly, Collins and Blige (2016) advised that "intersectional frameworks understand *power* through a lens of mutual construction" (p. 26). Intersectionality contends that interactions occur within a context of connected systems and structures of power (Collins & Blige, 2016; Hankivsky, 2014). Hankivsky (2014) noted that such structures of power produce interdependent forms of privilege and oppression shaped by colonialism, imperialism, racism, homophobia, ableism, and patriarchy. Collins and Blige (2016) iterated that no pure forms of racism or sexism exist within intersectional frameworks, but that power relations of racism and sexism gain meaning in relation to one another (p. 26). Power relations are to be analyzed via their intersections (racism, sexism) and across domains of power, especially structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal (Collins & Blige, 2016). Although examining how power works in each domain can illuminate dynamics of a larger social phenomenon, in actual social practice, domains overlap and no one domain is more significant than another (Collins & Blige, 2016). The MSJCC call for the counselor to gain knowledge about the far-reaching

implications of power systems and structures, including the immanent power differential that characterizes the counselor-client relationship. Competent counselors work to reduce the effects of power and to foster a counseling relationship that is balanced and affirmative of client's autonomy.

Relationships and power dynamics between social locations and processes are thought to be linked and people can experience privilege and oppression simultaneously (Hankivsky, 2014; Smooth, 2013). This concept of *relationality*, or interconnectedness, is important to the analytical intersectional framework. Collins and Blige (2016) stated that relational thinking rejects binary thinking and is less occupied with what distinguishes entities, but more interested in assessing their interconnections. For this reason, the theme of power is better conceptualized as a relationship. The quadrants of the conceptual MSJCC model represent the possible client-counselor pairings based on their respective group statuses and, in doing so, illuminate the intersectional theme of relationality.

An important caveat of the relational quadrants espoused by the MSJCC is the idea that counselors' and clients' relational experiences with one another are uniquely subjective and informed by the context of their interactions. The theme of *social context* is an intertwined concept that cannot be undermined when speaking of intersectionality theory. Collins and Blige (2016) asserted that "Using intersectionality as an analytic tool means contextualizing one's arguments, primarily by being aware that particular historical, intellectual, and political contexts shape what we think and do" (p. 28). In order to adequately understand the experiences of individuals, a grounded comprehension of how history and politics influence the power relations that ultimately impact those experiences at various intersections of identity across a myriad of domains. The

sociohistorical and sociopolitical understanding of a client's group status experience is highlighted as an integral aspirational competency in the MSJCC framework. Also, important for the counselor to acknowledge, is that individuals may be in the same general social contexts yet hold divergent interpretations of it (Collins & Blige, 2016).

As illustrated by the four presented themes, intersectionality theory is inherently characterized by *complexity*. In fact, Collins and Blige (2016) advised that this level of complexity routinely complicates analyses and results in frustration for scholars, practitioners, and activists alike (p. 29). Attempting to understand the internal and external influences of identities is a process of construction and deconstruction that must attend the variables of social inequality, power, relationality, and social context. Intersectionality analysis is not simple because the world is not simple, and ultimately the theoretical aim is to understand experiences situated in a complex world. This nuanced complexity is reflected in the MSJCC framework and, although a laborious and on-going task, a counselor's attention to these intersectional themes must be a priority if they are to move toward competent practice.

The final, and perhaps the most contentious, theme is *social justice*. Fairness is an elusive concept in unequal societies, as some rules may appear just when they in fact may be differentially enforced through discriminatory practices (Collins & Blige, 2016). Fairness is also questionable when rules themselves may appear to be equally applied to everyone but still produce unequal and unfair outcomes. Collins and Blige (2016) proposed the example of voting to highlight such elusiveness, stating "in democratic societies, everyone has the 'right' to vote, but not everyone has equal access to do so" (p. 29). Existing power relations, informed by both historical, current political, and social

contexts, perpetuate, both overtly and covertly, social inequalities. Although social justice is not a mandatory for intersectionality, many proponents of applying this analytical framework are critical of the status quo (Collins & Blige, 2016). The appreciation for social justice is made explicit in the MSJCC, as the addition of the developmental action domain stresses its relevance to the multicultural counseling process.

Interdisciplinary Applications

As mentioned in the introduction of this section, intersectionality theory has developed so greatly in recent decades that it is now considered an analytical tool rather than a concept (Collins & Blige, 2016). The analytical framework is a flexible tool used to explore complex social problems and has been utilized to critically examine discrimination experiences of intersectional identities across an array of domains. Although intersectionality theory has been used as a lens for conceptualizing and understanding problems in the political, legal, and medical spheres, its use in educational settings and within the social sciences are perhaps most relevant to this study.

Intersectionality theory has been used to evaluate and interpret the experiences of interacting identities among children. King, Merrin, Espelage, Grant, and Bub (2018) investigated the relationship between suicidal ideation, peer victimization, and school connectedness among students who identified as nonheterosexual and presented with a disability. Nadan, Spilsbury, and Korbin (2015) advocated for the employment of intersectionality for understanding the complexity of cultural factors that may inform future research of the maltreatment of children. Alper, Katz, and Clark (2016) argued that an intersectional, asset-oriented approach to study the lived experiences of youth and

their families may open doors for research that prioritizes the rights of children and adolescents in a digital age.

In terms of educational studies, intersectionality has been utilized to understand the experiences of individuals in particular settings. Kvasny, Trauth, and Morgan (2009) explored the interconnected experiences of gender, race, and class regarding power relations in information technology education and work. Powers and Duffy (2016) shared research conducted in a teacher education course on culturally relevant pedagogy where students, through engagement of TO activities, explored the multiplicity of their and their future students' identities. Anaya (2011) researched the intersectionality between graduate student identity, motherhood, and women of color in higher education.

This brief sampling is but a minute representation of intersectionality in extant literature. Adequately reviewing the depth and breadth of such research is beyond the scope of this study; however, studies specific to the use of intersectionality as a pedagogical framework will be presented and discussed in a later section as it explicitly pertains to the focus of this research. Although intersectionality is not a simple theory to dissect and explore, it is a necessary component of diversity education that warrants educators' attention and effort.

Pedagogical Approaches to Multicultural Counselor Education

Considering the ever-developing purview of multiculturalism, intersectionality, and social justice principles that inevitably affect the dynamics of the counseling relationship, the need for counselors to possess culturally responsive counseling and advocacy strategies cannot be minimized. Subsequently, counselor educators have an immense responsibility to their CITs. Although the amount of importance placed on

multicultural and social justice competence may appear to be an overwhelming task, counselor educators have an ethical obligation to ensure that CITs are graduating from their programs with the foundational awareness, knowledge, skills, and propensity toward action necessary to effect positive change in the lives and communities of their diverse clients. Apart from having cultivated these competencies in and for themselves, counselor educators must seek out and apply pedagogical approaches that promote similar attainment in their CITs.

Counselor educators have a plethora of pedagogies from which to engage their students, but many times an approach is not pure. In reality, many counselor educators infuse numerous learning theories and models that intersect at the point of praxis. The proposed study discussed within these pages is representative of an amalgamation of learning theories and pedagogies, each of which warrant their own explication in order to comprehend how they may work in collaboration within the multicultural counselor education classroom. Although there are numerous types and models of pedagogical practices that may be useful in multicultural counselor education, the following section will discuss three pedagogical approaches that are most relevant to the proposed study. First, I will provide an overview of the inception of critical education and its germaneness to multicultural education. Next, I will provide a discussion on the use of intersectionality as a pedagogical framework through which to conceptualize educational practice. Thirdly, I will provide an in-depth discussion on experiential pedagogy and learning, specifically emphasizing Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle. Lastly, I offer a brief review of the affective domain of learning and its usefulness in multicultural and diversity education.

Critical Pedagogy

As detailed in the MSJCC, multicultural competence requires a solid understanding of identity which is understood to be comprised of many facets always in interaction with each other. No longer is it permissible for counselor educators to simply teach students on categorical facets of identity (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender) without contextualizing their dynamic interplay with other forms of identity. Failing to emphasize a multi-axial conceptualization of identity may have negative consequences, such as obscuring particular intersections and reinforcing prescriptive practices (Yoon, Jérémie - Brink, & Kordesh, 2014). Inherent within the discussion of identity are the issues of power, privilege, and oppression all of which are necessary points of education and reflection in the multicultural counseling classroom (Chan et al., 2018). Although not always comfortable (Elliott & Sommer, 2017), multicultural and diversity education is a collaborative and transformative process that challenges and changes students' existing perception of self-concept (Chan et al., 2018; Denson, 2009; Ford, 2012). Multicultural education, especially provided its three-pronged focus on identity, power relations, and social justice, can very much be considered a form of critical education.

The term "critical" has many different meanings and reflects various ideals within educational spaces. For the sake of this study, critical education as it relates to culture is of key relevance. One of the most noted and influential figures in the theoretical constitution of critical pedagogy is Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (Collins & Blige, 2016), whose classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* examined how education has the ability to disenfranchise or empower students (Freire, 1970). Freire garnered worldwide attention in the early 1960s for his implementation of a new pedagogical approach for

literacy in Brazil that enabled 300 illiterate peasants to write and read within 45 days (Foley, Morris, Gounari, Agostinone-Wilson, 2015). Freire was interested in an education that would contribute to finding solutions to the problems faced by the Brazilian people, but believed that these solutions were not to be imposed upon the people or discovered for them; rather, they were to be discovered with the people (Foley et al., 2015). Foley et al. (2015) stated: “He (Freire) proposed an education that would enable people to reflect upon themselves, their responsibilities, and their role in the new cultural climate, but mostly to reflect on or realize their own power of reflection” (p. 119). Freire’s pedagogy vehemently advocated for the investigation of the students’ thematic universe. Thematic universe refers to the thinking and language students’ use in accessing their realities, which was believed to not only expand the students’ thinking but also their action (Foley et al., 2015). Freire considered this examination of a student’s thematic universe as a prerequisite for overcoming the banking model of education – a model derived from the assumption that teachers possess knowledge and that students are empty vessels that need to be filled (Collins & Blige, 2016; Foley et al., 2015).

The practice of engaging students in the assessment of their own thematic universe is conceptually analogous to the process of multicultural counselor education, as counselor educators have a duty to guide CITs in their development of self-awareness and understanding of their own worldviews (Ratts et al., 2016). As mentioned previously, multicultural education can be a catalyst for internal reflection and self-directed change - both of which extend beyond the reductionistic view of students as depositories of knowledge. Although counselor educators may assist CITs with accessing information to

promote knowledge of specific social and cultural identities, they recognize that CITs have their own cultural and social experiences from which they learn.

Counselor educators also welcome CITs to share and process their own constructed knowledge and its origins - a strategy embodied within critical pedagogical method. Critical pedagogy also traditionally incorporates and emphasizes Freire's concept of "cultural power" (Foley et al., 2015). Cultural power is characterized by two primary foci: a) the need for teachers to make students' experiences an object of discussion and legitimize them with the goal establishing the conditions for active expression, and b) the need for teachers to contribute to the critical process of experiences with the goal of revealing their strengths and weaknesses (Foley et al., 2015, p. 120). The first focus of cultural power is, essentially, implicitly endorsed by ACES (2016) per their recommendations to utilize pedagogical approaches such as experiential learning and transformational learning theories – both of which place the CITs' experiences and reflection of experiences at the forefront of the educational agenda. Also, this focus of cultural power is aligned with the aspirational competencies espoused by the MSJCC. The second focus of cultural power reinforces the notion that multicultural competence, including understanding of one's own values, beliefs, biases, worldviews, group statuses, and their interactions with others, is a life-long endeavor (Ratts et al., 2016) and that counselor educators are not exempted. Simply having the degree or credentials necessary to teach a multicultural course does not equate full competence in the area. Additionally, when counselor educators are transparent about their own experiences, strengths, and limitations, it not only humanizes them as fellow learners, but

also helps to mitigate the inherent power differential within the educator-student relationship.

Critical pedagogy rejects the notion that teaching is, or should be, a politically neutral act. In fact, critical pedagogy proposes that teachers “should act as transformative intellectuals” (Foley et al., 2015, p. 116). The social transformation for which teachers are to struggle for is inspired by the goals of democracy, freedom and justice (Foley et al., 2015). This pedagogical premise is explicitly conducive with the intentions of multicultural and social justice competency within the counseling profession, which similarly rejects the notion that counseling should be apolitical (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014) and encourages counselors to advocate for elimination of socially and culturally unjust barriers that impede clients’ well-being (Ratts et al., 2016).

For these reasons, among others, counselor educators have advocated the inclusion of critical pedagogy in multicultural education (Haskins & Singh, 2015; Pieterse, 2009; Soble et al., 2011). Critical pedagogy has been supported as instructional practices that facilitate learners’ comprehension of societal privilege and oppression (Haskins & Singh, 2015; Soble et al., 2011). Specifically, critical race pedagogy has been utilized to address the influence of White hegemonic societal practices in Western civilization and the subsequent implications it has on the lived experiences of marginalized racial and ethnic groups (Haskins & Singh, 2015; Soble et al., 2011). The integration of critical pedagogy in multicultural counseling courses may encourage counselor trainees to intentionally reflect upon and critique any personal notion of color-blindness, which left unattended may elevate the risk of perpetuating culturally insensitive practices as professional counselors (Haskins & Singh, 2015).

Intersectionality as a Pedagogical Framework

As explored previously, the foundations of intersectionality theory emerged out of women's experiences of marginalization within Western feminism (Collins & Blige, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1984/2000; Lorde, 1984/2007; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). However, currently its application across other disciplines continues to swell. Although historically guilty of taking a singular approach to identities, scholarship in counseling and psychology has experienced the permeating effects of intersectionality theory (Case & Lewis, 2012; Chan & Erby, 2018; Chan et al., 2018; Cheshire, 2013; Cole, 2009; Ecklund, 2012; Shields, 2008; Watts-Jones, 2010).

Case and Lewis (2012) provided their reflective account of the benefits and challenges of utilizing critical laboratory feminist pedagogy and an intersectional framework to teach two courses, Black Issues in LGBT Psychology and Psychology of Gender, Race, and Sexuality. Similarly, Cheshire (2013) argued for a pedagogical approach based on intersectionality theory to educate CITs about LGB issues rather than through specialized courses that promote a single-axis approach to difference and diversity. Ecklund (2012) presented a case study analysis to demonstrate the applicability of intersectionality theory on therapeutic practice with a child and his family, citing that the intersectional identities of the psychologist, the child, and other family members have an overt impact on the therapeutic progress. Watts-Jones (2010) detailed her technique referred to as location of self to encourage counselors to have an open dialogue concerning intersectional relations of power and privilege as part of the family counseling process. Comparably, Chan and Erby (2018) proposed insights regarding the application of intersectionality theory in practices and research with intercultural queer couples.

Despite increased scholarship addressing intersectionality theory, there continues to be a gap regarding formalized or conceptual strategies for integrating intersectionality into pedagogical practice. Recently, Case (2017) along with fellow contributors have created *Intersectional Pedagogy: Complicating Identity and Social Justice*. A primary goal of the volume is to “provide an intersectional pedagogy model for effective teaching and learning about intersectional theory, complex intersections of identity, and the systemic consequences of those social locations” (p. 8). Case’s (2017) 10-point pedagogical model operationalizes the use of intersectionality by summarizing best practices based on related literature and data-based research.

Case (2017) posited that:

effective intersectional pedagogy conceptualizes intersectionality as a complex analysis of both privileged and oppressed social identities that simultaneously interact to create systemic inequalities, and therefore, alter lived experiences of prejudice and discrimination, privilege and opportunities, and perspectives from particular social locations. (p. 9)

Case’s (2017) model espouses the importance of teaching intersectionality across a wide variety of oppressions, ensuring that social identities routinely neglected in the curriculum, such as sexuality, ability, gender identity, and immigrant status are given as much consideration as gender and race typically do. Thirdly, the model highlights the aim to uncover invisible intersections and subsequently assessing the consequences of invisibility for the privileged and the oppressed (Case, 2017). Case (2017) also purported that the inclusion of privilege as an essential aspect of learning about intersectionality theory and includes learning goals of consistently deconstructing privileged identities and the roles that privilege plays in maintaining oppression.

The model calls on educators to analyze power in teaching about intersectionality and expand the boundaries of teaching multiculturalism, diversity, oppression, and discrimination (Case, 2017, p. 9). Case's (2017) intersectional pedagogy model involves educator personal reflection on intersecting identities, biases, assumptions, and the ways in which these variables impacts the learning community. Similarly, the model encourages students to reflect upon and write about their own intersecting identities and how they have shaped their lives, psychology, perceptions, and behaviors (Case, 2017, p. 9). Intersectional pedagogy "promotes social action to dismantle oppression through student learning that extends beyond the classroom walls" (Case, 2017, p. 9). Embraced through the model is the explicit value for the voices of the marginalized and oppressed, a tenet manifested by maintaining critical analysis of the ways in which power and privilege limit individual perspectives of and experiences with oppression (Case, 2017). Lastly, intersectional pedagogy infuses intersectional studies across the curriculum, disciplines, and courses (Case, 2017).

Experiential Learning Theory

The phenomenon of experience represents a common theme among multiculturalism, critical pedagogy, intersectionality theory, social justice, and counselor self-awareness. The power of experience cannot be understated when it comes to the effect that it has on influencing knowledge attainment and comprehension. Although, upon first glance, the use of experiential learning theory in conjunction with critical pedagogy and intersectionality may appear to be a daunting endeavor, the three theoretical learning models actually can be utilized harmoniously because they are all characterized by critical reflexivity. As detailed in the previous sections, critical

pedagogy gets its namesake for being explicit with its intention to reflect on and challenge “normative” ideals about education, experience, and knowledge.

Intersectionality promotes a critical examination of the internal processes and external influences that impact identity development at intersections of being; it also challenges oppressive and marginalizing forces from a multilevel approach. As this section will present, experiential learning theory is comprised of pedagogical practices aimed at initiating critically intrapersonal introspection and facilitating a personal journey of knowledge production.

Key figures and foundational concepts. The role of experience as it pertains to knowledge has been long debated as a point of philosophical contention between rationalists and empiricists. Rationalists posited that the only reliable knowledge is that which is gained through pure reasoning, whereas, conversely, empiricists supported the notion that abstract concepts that cannot be experienced cannot be known (Rychlak, 1981). Rychlak (1981) noted that German philosopher Immanuel Kant bridged the gap in the epistemological debate by suggesting that both rationality and experience are contributors to the construction of knowledge. The relationship between knowledge and experience was of immense interest to American philosopher John Dewey and a focus of his well-known book *Experience and Education* (1938). Dewey’s work, although produced approximately eight decades ago, is recognized as a foundational text for modern experiential pedagogical thought and therefore merits inclusion in this study.

Dewey (1938) criticized traditional education systems for designing and implementing curricula that was overly focused on content alone without regard to process. Although condemning of traditional education, Dewey (1938) was also skeptical

of progressive education for its potential to be too reactionary and to take a liberal approach for the sake of freedom itself. Dewey's (1938) theory of experience rests on the belief that experience arises from the interaction of two principles – *continuity and interaction*. The principle of continuity “means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (Dewey, 1938, p. 27). The principle of interaction can be summarized as the notion that an individual's experience is a result of interaction between self and the environment (Dewey, 1938). Dewey (1938) went on to assert that two factors are associated with experience: objective and subjective internal conditions and that “any normal experience is an interplay of these two sets of conditions” (p. 39). Dewey's philosophical exploration of experience as it relates to education is foundational to the experiential learning theory so many educators utilize today.

Another conceptual contributor to experiential learning theory is Piaget (1970, 1977). Known for his model of learning and cognitive development, Piaget (1970) detailed two processes of learning that are relevant to the development of knowledge. The first process, assimilation, is essentially the active organization of experience (Fosnot, 1996). Fosnot (1996) described assimilation as an “individual's self-assertive tendency, a tendency to view, understand, and act on the ‘surround’ with one's own activity or ideas in order to preserve one's autonomy as a part within a whole system” (p. 16). Disequilibrium, described as a state of occurrence when an individual cannot assimilate his or her experiences into preexisting schemes (Bodner, 1986; Piaget, 1977), is a Piagetian concept that has applicability to learning situations, especially ones of an affective nature as will be discussed further in this section. Accommodation, the second

process, is characterized by the modification of existing mental structures or schemes to fit newly assimilated data (Bodner, 1986, Piaget, 1970). Successful accommodation restores an individual's equilibrium (Bodner, 1986; Piaget, 1977). Although initially conceived as relevant to infantile cognitive development, assimilation of sensory patterns to preexisting mental structures or schemes is a process that transcends other developmental stages of life (Bodner, 1986).

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, although now over 30 years old, is still largely considered to be one of the most prominent theoretical models in education highlighting the nature of experiential learning theory (ELT) (Pugh, 2014; Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015; Vince, 1998). Kolb (1984) advised in his renowned and highly cited text, *Experiential Learning*, that the cycle of experiential learning is strongly influenced by the works of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget, as previously outlined. Per Kolb (1984), learning is defined as "the process by whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (p. 41). In his text, Kolb (1984) presented characteristics of experiential learning. He advised that ELT, unlike behaviorist theories of learning, operates from a different set of assumptions and that learning is best conceived as a process, rather than outcomes (Kolb, 1984). Specifically, Kolb (1984) noted, "Ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and re-formed through experience...concepts are derived from and continuously modified by experience. No two thoughts are ever the same, since experience always intervenes" (p. 27). Kolb (1984) goes on to posit that from an ELT, the tendency to define learning in terms of outcomes can become a definition on nonlearning. He supports this assertion by explaining that in

the sense of process, that failure to modify ideas and habits as a result of experience is maladaptive (Kolb, 1984, p. 27).

Kolb (1984) also contended that ELT is characterized by the notion that learning is a continuous process grounded in experience. Kolb's (1984) thoughts on this characterization were profoundly influenced by the work of Dewey (1938). In contemplating the impact that continuity of experience has on human nature, Dewey (1938) noted,

As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts. He does not find himself living in another world but in a different part or aspect of one and the same world. What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow. The process goes on as long as life and learning continue. (p. 44)

In addition to directing attention to sense of continuity in consciousness and experience as secure and predictable, Kolb (1984) stated that one must recognize the external influence of “unforeseen circumstances, miscommunications, and dreadful miscalculations” (p. 28). The tension between expectation and experience is a notable concept, as Kolb (1984) emphasized that when experience violates expectation “the rents that these violations cause in the fabric of my experience are magically repaired, and I face the next day a bit changed but still the same person” (p. 28). The understanding of learning as a continuous process grounded in experience implicates that “all learning is relearning” (Kolb, 1984, p. 28) and that students have held beliefs that have been utilized when faced with situations that warranted it.

Significant in the characterization of ELT is the idea that the learning process requires resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world (Kolb, 1984). Kolb (1984) derived this characterization after carefully examining

the dialectics illuminated in the works of Lewin, Dewey, Piaget, and Freire. In respect to these thinkers' espoused dialectics, Kolb (1984) recollected that Lewin emphasized the conflict between concrete experience and abstract concepts; Dewey detailed the tension between impulse and reason; Piaget conceptualized the twin processes of accommodation and assimilation; and, Freire's concept of praxis illuminated the dialectical nature of learning and adaptation (p. 29).

This reoccurring theme of learning being, by its nature, a tension and conflict saturated process has a great impact on Kolb's experiential learning cycle, which will be discussed in the subsequent subsection.

The next characterization, that learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world, is heavily influenced by the previously discussed assertion that learning has an aim of resolving dialectical tensions (Kolb, 1984). According to ELT, learning "is not the special province of a single specialized realm of human functioning such as cognition or perception. It involves the integrated functioning of the total organism – thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving" (p. 31). Kolb (1984) recognized and applauded the wealth of research conducted and disseminated on processes and subprocesses of human adaptation, as they had contributed to a vast amount of knowledge concerning human behavior; however, he argued that no one process or subprocess could adequately deduce human behavior and that "we must in some way put together all the pieces that have been so carefully analyzed" (p. 32). ELT supports learning as a major process of human adaptation that extends beyond the classroom and transcends human settings and life stages (Kolb, 1984). Based on this realization, Kolb (1984) specified that learning

encompasses more limited adaptive concepts, such as creativity, problem solving, decision making, and attitude change.

As indicated by the previous passages, learning is a complex process that exists in relation to multiple contexts. Another contextual dimension of learning that characterizes ELT is the involvement of transactions between persons and their environments (Kolb, 1984). Learning processes are not simply contained in the classroom, but rather are interfaced with an individual's "real world" environment (Kolb, 1984, p. 34). Kolb (1984) built upon Dewey's sentiment (1938) that the transaction between subjective experience and objective environmental conditions "implies a more fluid, interpenetrating relationship" (p. 36), that once "they become related, both are essentially changed" (p. 36).

In his final characterization of ELT, Kolb (1984) postulated the importance of constructionism in learning processes. Knowledge results from the transaction between social knowledge and personal knowledge (Kolb, 1984). Kolb (1984) defined social knowledge as "the civilized objective accumulation of previous human cultural experience" and personal knowledge as "the accumulation of the individual person's subjective life experiences" (pp. 36-37). Essentially, this epistemological perspective of learning suggests that students approach knowledge creation with foundational systems of existing knowledge, social and personal, that intersect in a unique manner. For this reason, educators should not expect students to experience course material uniformly, but rather should be cognizant of the subjectivity inherent in knowledge construction.

Kolb's experiential learning cycle. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle is characterized by a four-stage model comprised of progressive elements aimed at

facilitating a transformation of experience (Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015). In sequence, the elements are concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Pugh, 2014). These instrumental elements are supported by the characterization of learning as a process that requires resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes (Kolb, 1984). Specifically, Kolb (1984) advised that the first dimension places concrete experiences and abstract conceptualization at opposite ends of a continuum and that the other dimension situates active experimentation and reflective observation in a similar fashion. “Thus, in the process of learning, one moves in varying degrees from actor to observer, and from specific involvement to general analytic detachment” (Kolb, 1984, p. 31). Kolb (1984) proclaimed that the ways in which conflicts among the dialectically opposed modes of adaptation are resolved is a determinant factor in the level of learning that occurs. Resolution by suppression of one mode and/or dominance by another typically results in learning that is “specialized around the dominant mode and limited in areas controlled by the dominated mode” (p. 31). In this section, each element of the experiential learning cycle (pictorially represented in the Figure 2) will be presented in sequence, along with practical implications for educators.

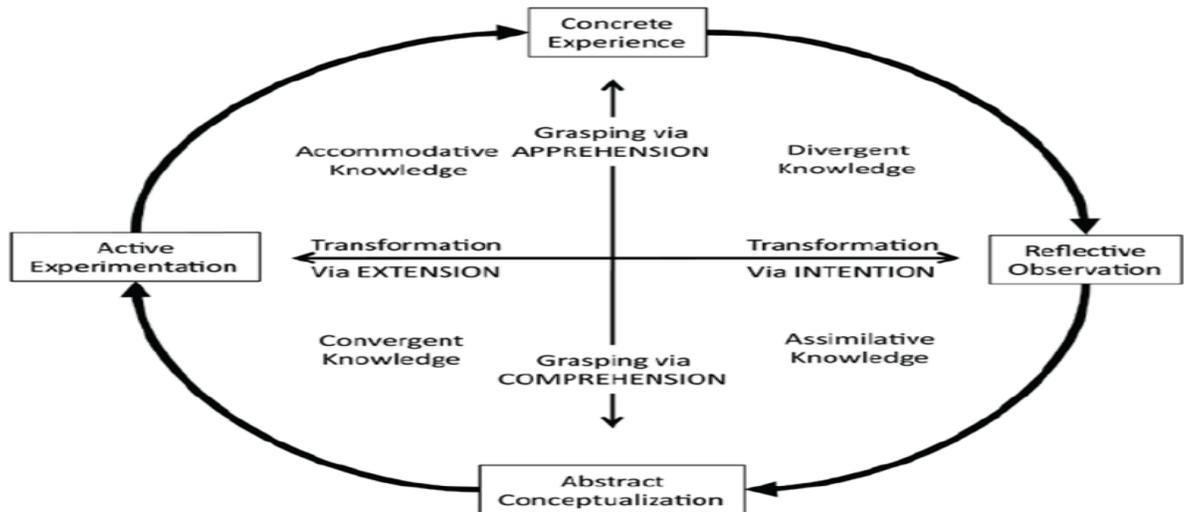


Figure 2. Model of Experiential Learning Process. Note: From *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (p. 42), by Kolb, 1984, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. Copyright 1984 by Prentice-Hall.

Within the concrete experience stage of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, educators engage learners with a concrete experience that serves as the basis for reflection. Risner and Ward (2004) advised that concrete experiences are used to assist learners with addressing learning objectives from personal involvement with human situations. This personal involvement is linked to the affective domain of learning, a process of learning that should be understood by experiential educators and that is discussed in the subsequent subsection. The assertion is the students learn from feeling rather from thinking in some specific experiences and will hopefully admire the uniqueness and complexity of reality (Risner & Ward, 2004). However, an openness to new situations is an ideal condition in order for the concrete experience stage to be an effective impetus for learning (Risner & Ward, 2004). Concrete experiences can include field experiences, in-class exercises, speaker panels, films, books, storytelling, and small-group processes (Pugh, 2014).

The second stage of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle is reflective observation, during which the goal is for the learner to reflect on and observe their experiences from many perspectives. Pugh (2014) asserted that opportunities for reflection should be offered to the learner both during and after engagement in the concrete experience. Critical thinking is essential to self-reflection and should be actively promoted by the educator (Pugh, 2014). Educators must also strive to ensure an atmosphere of safety in the classroom so that learners may openly and honestly express their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes regarding the concrete experience (Pugh, 2014). One effective means of reflection may be assigning a reflection writing assignment where learners respond to guiding questions aimed at detailing their unfiltered thoughts, feelings, attitudes, values, and opinions of the concrete experience and abstract idea (Pugh, 2014). As reflective observation is an imperative component of ELT and an aspirational requirement before moving into the realm of abstract conceptualization, exploration of reflexivity as a pedagogical device is merited.

As detailed in the areas of critical education, intersectionality theory, and experiential education, reflexive practice is an integral and necessary ingredient that contributes to the effectiveness of self-directed critical inquiry (Collins & Blige, 2016; Freire, 1970; Kolb, 1984). In relation to this study, Nagata's (2004) discussion of self-reflexivity in relation to intercultural experiences provides some nice points for consideration. Nagata (2004) stated,

Self-reflexivity can be understood as having an ongoing conversation with one's whole self about what one is experiencing as one is experiencing it. To be self-reflexive is to engage in this meta-level of feeling and thought while being in the moment. The strength of being reflexive is that we can make the quality of our relationships better at that time in that encounter, without having to wait for our next interaction. (pp. 140-141)

Risner and Ward (2004) espoused that, ideally, “learners will use impartial and careful evaluation to see implications and connections, appreciate different points of view, and look for the meaning of things” (p 3). Without the promotion of self-reflexivity, concrete experiences may become less powerful and fall within the stagnant arenas of non-learning (Kolb, 1984) or reproduction of knowledge (Freire, 1970) assumed to be implanted by the educator by means of concrete experience assignment.

The third stage of the experiential learning cycle, abstract conceptualization, is focused on the learner’s ability to “create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories” (Kolb, 1984, p. 30). Abstraction is a complex concept best conceptualized in comparison to concrete experiences. Concrete experiences elicit a sensory transaction with something tangible, whereas abstract concepts “lack bounded and clearly perceivable referents, even if they might evoke situations, scenes, introspection and emotional experiences” (Borghi et al., 2017, p. 263). For example, a film can be visually, audibly, and even physiologically experienced by a learner, but the meaning-making and subsequent conceptualization of abstraction that results from this concrete experience is inherently self-referential and self-constructed. Abstract conceptualization is informed by the assimilation and distillation of reflections and permits the emergence of new implications for action to be drawn (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). As each learner comes to the classroom with extant personal and social experiences (Kolb 1984), their produced abstraction will be subjective and cannot be reduced to any certain generalizable outcome.

The final stage of the experiential learning cycle is active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Although the temptation to characterize this stage as learning by doing, Risner and

Ward (2004) cautioned that there is more depth to than stage than meets the eye. Specifically, Risner and Ward (2004) asserted that student learning involves "...an opportunity to extend beyond the immediate learning objective by trying the new knowledge or skill in another application or environment. They impact their environment by taking risks and accomplishing things...students use theories to make decisions and solve problems" (p. 3). Kolb and Kolb (2009) stated that, within this stage, the derived implications of abstract conceptualization can be "actively tested and serve as guides in creating new experiences" (p. 299). This inherent stage of active experimentation and subsequent action is perhaps what makes the inclusion of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle the most relevant for contemporary multicultural and social justice education – with the goal to develop an ability and desire within competent counselors to engage in action.

Affective Domain of Learning

As previously mentioned, experiential learning stimulates processes not only within the cognitive domain of learning, but also within the affective domain. In regard to multicultural and social justice counseling competency, which reinforces the need for competent counselors to continually employ reflexive strategies to become aware of attitudes, beliefs, values, and worldviews (Ratts et al., 2016), the affective domain of learning is an area of scholarly inquiry (Mayes, Dollarhide, Marshall, & Rae, 2016). The affective domain represents one of the three separate domains of human development (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964). The affective taxonomy, similarly to the cognitive taxonomy, conceptualizes five educational objective levels on a continuum of internalization- the organizational principle used to categorize learners' interest,

appreciation, attitudes, and values regarding newly processed information (Krathwohl et al., 1964). The initial educational objective is *receiving* and is characterized by the learner having a willingness to pay attention to new information (Krathwohl et al., 1964). This educational objective is regularly an integral part of multicultural and diversity education. The second objective in the hierarchy is *responding* and in this stage the learner reacts voluntarily or complies with directives to react to information that has been received (Krathwohl et al., 1964). This educational objective is conducive to the pedagogical strategy of promoting learners' reflection of concrete experiences. The third objective, *valuing*, is characterized by acceptance of, preference for, and commitment to the processed information (Krathwohl et al., 1964). This objective is pertinent, as valuing experiences and information outside of one's own worldview is a foundational competency for competent multicultural counselors. The fourth objective, *organization*, is characterized by the rearrangement of the learner's existing value system to permit internalization of new value regarding learned information (Krathwohl et al., 1964). The task of making meaning and valuing new information may warrant the modification or elimination of existing ideas about knowledge. The final objective, *characterization*, is where the newly valued, accepted, and preferred information is incorporated into the learner's generalized set of values from which life is encountered and processed (Krathwohl et al., 1964).

The range of affective constructs inherent in Krathwhol et al.'s (1964) conceptual model include a learner's *interest, appreciation, attitudes, values, and adjustment*. Bohlin (1998) illustrated (see *Figure 3*) the interaction and overlap of these constructs across the five educational objective levels.

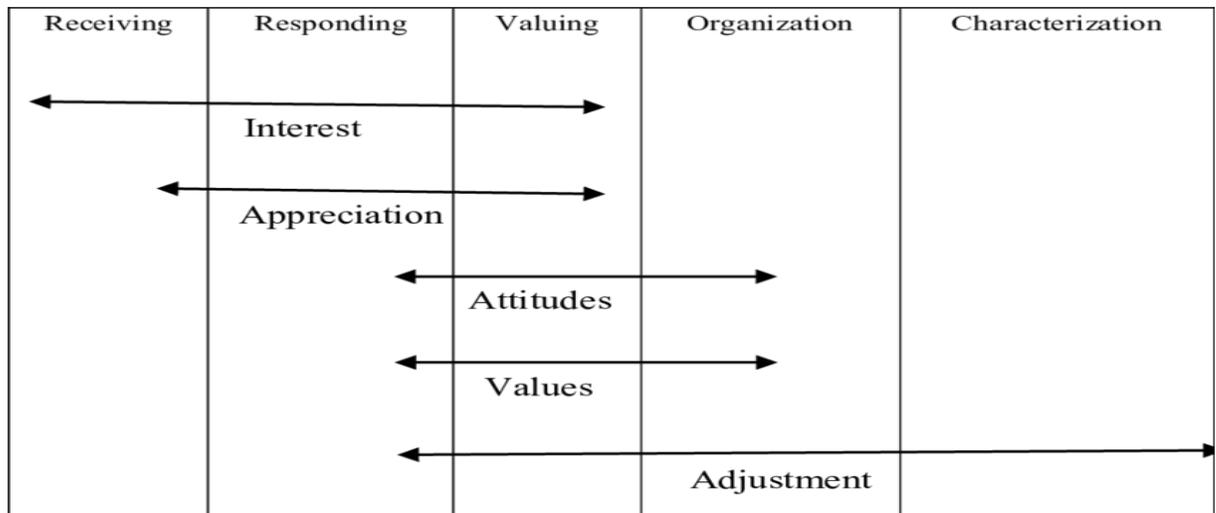


Figure 3. Range of Constructs in Krathwohl et al.'s Taxonomy Continuum. Note. From The affective domain: A model of learner-instruction interactions. 20th Annual Proceedings of Selected Research and Development Paper Presentations at the 1998 Annual Convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (p. 40), by Bohlin, 1998.

The significance of this interactive process of stimulating affective mechanisms within the learner as they progress through the educational objectives from *receiving* to *characterization* cannot be understated in the context of multicultural counselor education. Introduction to such issues as diversity, cultural and social identities, oppression, privilege, power, and marginalization will elicit feelings and emotions, because these issues are inextricably interwoven into learners' subjective experiences. Although no learning, regardless of content or goal, occurs in a purely cognitive manner, the multicultural educator, especially, should anticipate and encourage the affective processes of learning.

The Use of Film as a Pedagogical Device in Experiential Multicultural Education

Experiential pedagogies have been routinely infused into multicultural counselor education curriculum (Kim & Lyons, 2003; Pedersen, 2000; Torres, Ottens, & Johnson,

1997). Numerous experiential activities have been employed by multicultural counselor educators, such as games (Howard, Tran, & Hammer, 2013; Kim & Lyons, 2003), service-learning activities (Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004; Tomlinson-Clarke, & Clarke, 2010), and food-based activities (Sommer et al., 2011). Among the most utilized experiential activities by counselor educators in multicultural courses, and the most relevant one to this study, is film. Popular films, which constitute an applicable concrete experience (Pugh, 2014), have great potential for stimulating the affective processes of learning (Elliott & Sommer, 2017) and facilitating counselors toward aspirational multicultural competence (Greene et al., 2014; Shen, 2015). Before surveying the extant literature on the use of film and popular movies in multicultural counselor education, a brief examination of how film compliments the experiential nature of learning is obligatory.

The Power of Films as a Teaching Tool

Film has been acknowledged as a potentially powerful teaching tool (Champoux, 1999; Russell, 2009). Some of film's pedagogical impact can be attributed to its inherent ability to help learners develop a greater, and more personal, understanding of curriculum content (Kracauer, 1973; Russell, 2009). Technical strategies, such as lens techniques, camera movements, camera angles, framing of shots, and film editing create engrossing views not found in reality (Carroll, 1985). Balázs (1952) asserted that close-up shots allow a person to peer into reality in an uncommon way and Pudovkin (1929) noted that this technique permits the director to bring attention to details that may otherwise go unnoticed with ordinary vision. Long shots provide images that allow viewers to see content in a broader environmental context and focusing techniques can emphasize or de-

emphasize components of a scene to attribute create saliency (Champoux, 1999). Film editing allows the director and production team to intentionally collate scenes to create a viewer experience that transcends simply recording physical reality (Dancyger, 1997). Sound, including dialogue and music, also have the unique potential to add artistic effect to the film and, subsequently, increase the effects it has on the viewer (Weis & Belton, 1985).

Through the use of technical and production mechanisms, films can promote powerful experiences within the viewer. Rouse (2016) noted that movies “can draw us in and induce a peculiar involvement: they absorb us” (p. 45). This process of becoming absorbed facilitates a holistic process of experience engagement. Blasco, Blasco, Levites, Moreto and Tysinger (2011) reported that the use of movies can be an effective strategy to “reach people’s affective domain, promote reflective attitudes, and link learning to experiences” (p. 175). Furthermore, movies provide learners with opportunities to translate life stories from the film into their own lives (Blasco et al., 2011). The film experience may also serve as emotion memory for learners to develop attitudes based on personal reflection (Blasco et al., 2011), but should not be used to impose a particular attitude.

In regard to using film to specifically augment multicultural and diversity-related education, Elliott and Sommer (2017) stated:

Viewing a film and engaging in reflective processing provides a safe entry into difficult conversations as students may use the characters’ situation as a point of departure for discussing challenging topics that might not otherwise be addressed. As students move through their own identity development and strive to understand the frame through which each views the world, film-based activities provide as close to a real-life interaction as may be possible. This can prove beneficial in helping students confront biases as yet unacknowledged or explore personal identities that may shape the way they interact with others. (p. 95)

These points are also applicable when integrating the use of film in multicultural counseling courses (Sommer, Kholomeydik, Rush, & Elliott, 2018). Additionally, Sommer et al. (2018) noted that “Students, as direct observers, experienced the events portrayed in each film as if it was happening in the present moment. Such immediate experience appeared to help facilitate the development of emic perspective for most students” (p. 62).

Current Literature on the use of Film in Multicultural Counselor Education

Other counselor educators have attested to the pedagogical potential of film in multicultural counselor education (Greene et al., 2014; Pierce & Wooloff, 2012; Shen, 2015; Soble et al., 2011; Villalba & Redmond, 2008). Greene et al. (2014) assessed the impact of experiential pedagogy, via film and subsequent debriefing and processing strategies, on counselor trainees’ development of multicultural counseling self-efficacy (MCSE) and multicultural counseling competence (MCC). Findings from their investigation indicated that MCSE and self-reported MCC were both increased as a result of the pedagogical use of film (Greene et al., 2014). Shen (2015) instructed counselor trainees in a multicultural counseling course to select a cultural movie to view and conceptualize a character from the film as a potential client. Students were then asked to compose a paper in which they, considering the character’s demographics and contextual information from the film, discuss potential concerns the client could encounter, analyze the client’s racial/cultural identity development, and develop an appropriate treatment plan for the client (Shen, 2015). Shen (2015) reported that students indicated that they felt their worldview was broadened and assumptions challenged.

Pierce and Wooloff (2012) offered a tripartite instructional approach for using movies, in conjunction with reading, self-assessments, and role-plays to teach identity development to graduate counseling students. Soble et al. (2011) examined whether brief video interventions could elicit changes in White university students' racial attitudes. Findings, which included decreased color-blindness and increased White empathy and White guilt, supported the notion that exposure to institutional racism via film engendered greater awareness of racism and self-awareness of White students as privileged beings (Soble et al., 2011). Villalba and Redmond (2008) found that use of the film *Crash* to be advantageous in a multicultural counseling course. The authors posed questions to student participants to provoke discussion and evaluation of the effectiveness of the experiential learning activity and were advised that participants felt the learning activity led to greater multicultural understanding (Villalba & Redmond, 2008).

More recently, Frick, Thompson, and Curtis (2017) conducted a study to examine the effects of using film as part of a sexuality and counseling course. Frick et al. (2017) specifically explored how 27 students' awareness, knowledge, and skills were influenced by the use of two films, *For the Bible Tells Me So* and *Normal*. The experiences of LGBTQ individuals and their families are central to each film. Results from their study indicated that exposure to these films were useful experiential activities that served to increase students' cultural competencies, expanded their cognitive learning into affective learning, and increased their empathy for the LGBTQ communities (Frick et al., 2017).

In an intriguing study related to social justice counseling competency, Nittoli and Guiffrida (2017) engaged a multicultural counseling course in the viewing of two films, *Crash* and *Precious* as an impetus to discuss race, culture, privilege, and social justice.

Findings from this study indicated that implementation of popular films, in conjunction with reflective learning activities, are effective in promoting students' multicultural and social justice counseling competencies (Nittoli & Guiffrida, 2017). The educators also advised that participants reported that the activity was successful in bringing to life the multicultural course concepts and stimulating difficult, but necessary, conversations about race, ethnicity, privilege, and power (Nittoli & Guiffrida, 2017).

Potential Challenges and Suggestions for Incorporating Film-Based Pedagogy

Although research has demonstrated that film-based activities and assignments can elicit opportunities for personal understanding and growth, they are not without their challenges. Potential problems from these challenges can, however, be mitigated with effective planning and preparation (Elliott & Sommer, 2017; Frick et al., 2017). Elliott and Sommer (2017) suggested the following:

Educators should have a clear reason for the activity, and this should be carefully articulated in the course syllabus. As with most activities, when facilitators and participants clearly understand the activity and how it is to be completed then all parties can focus on the content of the activity and not get lost in the logistics of it when it is in use. Educators must remember that based on the students' awareness of and comfort with their personal identity development, the content in films that address issues related to race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and socioeconomic status can "evoke negative reactions and defensiveness" (Sommer et al., 2018, p. 63). Therefore, individual students may struggle at different levels with the content and discussion in activities like these. Some may need additional time with faculty outside of the classroom. (p. 96)

Frick et al. (2017) echoed a similar precaution, stating that counselor educators should understand the wide range of values represented by students, which "may be deeply entrenched depending upon the environment in which they were raised and educated" (p. 197).

Educators have an incumbent responsibility to ensure an environment of safety, where all values are welcomed and accepted without ridicule (Elliott & Sommer, 2017; Frick et al., 2017). Frick et al. (2017) suggested emphasizing to CITs that although students may present with divergent and potentially conflicting beliefs and values, an inherent responsibility of being a graduate student is to develop the ability “to rationally and intentionally consider issues from multiple perspectives so that tentative decisions can be based on a broad body knowledge, not just opinion” (p. 198).

Although these disclaimers suggested by Frick et al. (2017) may potentially reduce defenses of CITs to the point where productive discussion can be facilitated, they do not entirely absolve the potential for difficult, and possibly conflictual, conversations. However, the potential for conflict does not negate the benefits of engaging in reflective exchange and should not prevent the dialogue from being initiated. Rather, educators are called upon to prepare themselves to handle such situations (Burton & Furr, 2014; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009; Watt et al., 2009). Watt et al. (2009) recommended that educators anticipate the potential of “resistant reactions” (p. 49) and understand emerging defensive mechanisms in order to assist CITs, through respectful dialogue, with exploring the determinants, referents, and implications of such.

Sue et al. (2009) advised that all educators could benefit from experience and training in facilitating difficult dialogues about race so that paralysis in the moment does not inadvertently reinforce the perspectives of privileged students at the expense of marginalized students. Additionally, it is recommended that educators, themselves, are aware of their own susceptibility to their values, beliefs, and biases regarding race and actively work to mitigate the negative effects of such in facilitating dialogues (Sue et al.,

2009). Educators should demonstrate an emotive state that indicates they are comfortable with mediating difficult dialogues; if they do not, students may perceive this as a signal that a topic is inappropriate or can be avoided (Sue et al., 2009). In order to achieve the objective of comfortability, Sue et al. (2009) recommended that educators engage in experiential opportunities outside the classroom that “involve interaction and dialogue with people (a) who differ in race, culture, and ethnicity and (b) in real-life settings and situations” (p. 189). Acquisition of knowledge about group dynamics and processes, how to distinguish between content and process, strategies for promoting listening and understanding among individuals, and acknowledging and validating strong feelings may improve an educator’s ability to effectively facilitate difficult dialogues (Sue et al., 2009).

The considerations outlined in this chapter thus far were instrumental as I contemplated which popular film could be utilized as a concrete experience within an ELT framework. I meticulously reviewed films whose lead characters’ intersectional experiences were salient. I believe that in order for this learning activity to be useful, the selected film needs to effectively stimulate the affective domain of learning. After much deliberation, I arrived at the decision to utilize a film that I had previously conceptualized as potentially beneficial in these pedagogic regards: *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016).

Moonlight: A Film that Illuminates Intersectional Identities

The recent study conducted by Nitolli and Guiffrida (2017) is representative of the progressive direction of multicultural counselor education. Nittoli and Guiffrida’s (2017) efforts to use film as a broaching mechanism to issues of power and privilege emphasize the significance of intersectional and critical education – an integral modification that counselor educators must become comfortable with deploying in their

classrooms if they are to truly encourage CITs to conceptualize and attend to the intersectional identities of future clients (Chan et al., 2018).

In this vein, the presented study contributes to the literature regarding the explicit, intentional, and purposeful use of film that illuminates the subjective experiences of individuals comprised of intersecting identities. This strategy promoted the self-reflexivity necessary to aid CITs with the expansive conceptualization of identity as an interactive and fluid process. The film that was critically examined and selected as a concrete experience in this study was *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016).

Moonlight (Jenkins, 2016) is a coming-of-age drama film written and directed by Barry Jenkins, based on Tarell Alvin McCraney's unpublished semi-autobiographical play *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue*. The film has received accolades from critics and audiences. In 2017, the film was awarded a Golden Globe for Best Motion Picture-Drama and Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Supporting Actor, and Best Adapted Screenplay. Additionally, the film has been the focus of some peer-reviewed scholarship (Copeland, 2018; Kannan, Hall, & Hughey, 2017; McWhirter, 2018; Randolph, 2017). In his review, Copeland (2018) articulated the impact of the film: "In its avoidance of clichéd dehumanizing representations of Black male sexuality, *Moonlight* humanizes Black queer men through confronting day-to-day issues such as poverty, addiction, and childhood struggles" (p. 688). In terms of pedagogical potential, Copeland (2018) stated, "In contemporary educational settings, *Moonlight* provides an intense exploration of Black masculinity in the context of the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality" (p. 689). Kannan et al. (2017) offered similar appraisal of the *Moonlight* with their commentary:

With complexity, the film trades in and tests racial stereotypes and understandings of black families; relishes in the heterogeneity of black and Latinx identities; displays cultural contradictions at the heart of racism, heteronormativity, and hegemonic masculinity; and refuses to shy away from topics of love, lust, and loss. Together, the film is an epic—a sweeping homage to social transformation and to the nobility and negativity of the human condition. (p. 287)

The film focuses on the protagonist, Chiron, who struggles with intersecting identities across developmental life-periods. Specifically, the film illuminates Chiron's experiences as a gay, Black male living in poverty with his drug-addicted mother. The film is comprised of three chapters each titled after the protagonist's nickname or identity assigned at specific temporal and developmental moments. This structural framework showcases the "fragility, mutability, and complexity of a person's identity over time" (Screenprism, 2017). In chapter one, "Little," the viewer is introduced to a young Chiron as he struggles to understand the categorical identity descriptions forced upon him by individuals in his environment. The tension of this struggle peaks during a scene where Chiron questions his mentor, Juan, "am I a faggot?" Although Chiron hungers for self-awareness, societal and community expectations of masculinity make this a complicated task. In chapter two, "Chiron," the viewer is shown Chiron's experiences with bullying, his mother's dependence on him for monetary support, and his first same-sex intimate moment (with Kevin) and subsequent perceived rejection. In this chapter, the viewer is also exposed to the resultant affective consequences of these experiences, as manifested by Chiron's behaviors. In the final chapter, "Black," the viewer bears witness to Chiron's created adult identity and his fragility as he is reunited with Kevin and honestly reflects upon the suppression of identity that he perceived as invalidated.

Aside from the affective stimulus provided by Chiron's narrative of experience, the production of the movie itself works to facilitate emotive reactions in the viewer. It

does this through an array of techniques, some of which were elaborated upon by Champoux (1999), Pudovkin (1929), and Dancyger (1997) in the previous section of this literature review. In terms of camera use, techniques are intentionally employed to depict Chiron's experience in the moment. For example, circular shots are used to emphasize feeling of social inclusion and contrasted with shots of Chiron isolated in frames to demonstrate his experience of exclusion. Disjointed visual and sound effects offer a representation of surrealism in moments that may be perceived by Chiron as being outside his realm of expectation or ability to comprehend (Screenprism, 2017). The content and process of *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016) collaborate in tandem to absorb the viewer into the lived experiences of Chiron, and in doing so provide an emic perspective of his intersecting identities in transaction with various environments, which constitutes a strategy for promoting the viewer not only to conceptualize Chiron's realities across time, but also, hopefully, to reflect upon their own identities in relation to Chiron's.

Conclusion

Summary of the examined literature clearly delineates a progression in theoretical thoughts about human nature being influenced by a myriad of factors, including subjective experience, personal cultural and social identities which intersect, and individual and systemic levels of power and oppression. The understanding of these factors has prompted the counseling profession to revise and espouse competencies necessary to effectively understand and work with diverse clients, which has subsequently promoted a long-overdue shift in the direction of multicultural counselor pedagogy. An experiential pedagogical approach, when explicitly fused within an intersectional and critical framework, may provide a potentially effective method for

facilitating CITs' movement towards the aspirational competencies advocated by the MSJCC. Films, in particular, when intentionally selected present a device that illuminates the benefits of experiential, intersectional, and critical practice. In the following chapter, I will outline the methodology, and my reasons for choosing such, that were employed to study the experiences and perceptions of counseling interns exposed to the feature film *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016).

Chapter III: Methodology

Qualitative research has been referred to as an indispensable part of the methodological repertoire of the social sciences field (Lichtman, 2013). This method of inquiry uses various traditions of gathering data in order to understand human behavior in the context of natural settings (Lichtman, 2013). Unlike quantitative research, where the primary purpose is to examine cause and effect and test hypotheses, qualitative researchers seek to understand and interpret social interactions as dynamics that influence causal relationships. The subjective nature of qualitative research allows for researchers to utilize numerous strategies to cultivate data; however, flexibility does not negate responsibility. Qualitative researchers must exercise diligence in conceptualizing and identifying the most appropriate technique(s) to collect data (Lichtman, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Seidman, 2013). Selection of technique is largely dependent upon the research question and the researcher's knowledge of the topic of study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Seidman, 2013).

In this study, I proposed the use of a qualitative research design to examine the experiences and perceptions of CITs, specifically counseling interns, exposed to the film *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016) in a multicultural context. The selection of qualitative design as the method of inquiry was based upon the limited amount of counselor education literature and research available regarding the use of films to highlight and promote reflection upon the complexity of intersectional identities, specifically in a multicultural context. The rationale for a qualitative design selection is reinforced by Creswell (2009) who advised "...if a concept or phenomenon needs to be understood because little research has been done on it, then it merits a qualitative approach" (p. 18). As the study

was explicitly interested in *how* the participants experienced and perceived a particular situation (exposure to *Moonlight*) and *why*, its intent aligned with an espoused purpose of qualitative research – “to describe, understand, and interpret human phenomena” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 7).

A constructivist informed qualitative research approach using basic interpretive analysis guided this exploratory study. The primary goal of this study is to ascertain an understanding about the experiences and perceptions that counselors-in-training have in relation to watching the film, *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016). Basic qualitative analysis falls within the scope of constructivist methodology because it aids in understanding how people come to describe or explain themselves and the world in which they exist (Merriam, 2009).

Researcher’s Worldview

McLeod (2001) reinforced the necessity of understanding one’s philosophical assumptions within the *domain* of qualitative research when he advised, “It may be possible to do good quantitative research without knowing much about the epistemology of the philosophy of (social) science, but good qualitative research requires an informed awareness of philosophical perspectives” (p. 203). Furthermore, Morrow (2005) emphasized that a focal criterion for evaluating the rigor and quality of a qualitative study is its anchoring paradigm. Hays and Singh (2012) stressed the interrelatedness of philosophical perspectives of science, research paradigms, and research traditions in qualitative inquiry (p. 33). These explicated foundations served as a guide for me to conceptualize my researcher worldview, preferred research paradigm, and selected research methods.

Philosophical Assumptions

A researcher's stances on core philosophies of science are very telling and serve a directive role in the development of research goals and objectives, the formulation of their research design, and the perception of how involved a researcher should be in the data collection process. Hays and Singh (2012) posited that core philosophies of science include ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetoric, and methodology. They echoed Creswell's (2006) sentiment that the interaction of these core philosophies "overlap and build upon each other to describe the relationship between the knower and the known in qualitative inquiry" (p. 34).

Ontology

Ontology refers to the nature of reality and a researcher's core philosophical beliefs about what constitutes and contextualizes reality may have a profound effect on research design and purpose. My own philosophical understanding of ontology has transformed over time and with critical reflection of my experiences with myself and others. My experiences and thoughts inform my belief that reality is indeed subjective and contextual. I believe that individuals perceive and experience lived situations through divergent lenses that have been influenced by their histories, values, attitudes, and belief systems. I also am a strong proponent of the notion that reality (as a perception) is malleable and can undergo modifications dependent upon an individual's experience at any given time. Cultural and social contexts also color an individual's perception of events, allowing for two individuals to have dissimilar realities even when they occupy the same space at any given moment. As perception is a key determinant in defining reality, one cannot simply devalue or reject another's positional reality simply because it

is not congruent with their own. For these reasons, I am unable to endorse the notion that a universal truth exists or that reality is an objective experience.

Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the knowledge acquisition process for the phenomenon of interest and essentially is occupied with “how we know what we know” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Hansen, 2004; Ponterotto, 2005). Similar to my assumptions on ontology are my philosophical beliefs on epistemology - that contexts and influence are important to consider. My views are humans inherently possess the capacity and operative systems to construct knowledge. I believe that experiences serve as the impetuous process to knowledge construction, but even our experiences are influenced by perception. Kant’s (1959) comments contained within *Critique of Pure Reason* resonate with me,

But though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience. For it may well be that even our empirical knowledge is made up of what we receive through impressions and of what our own faculty of knowledge ... supplies from itself. If our faculty of knowledge makes any such addition, it may be that we are not in a position to distinguish it from the raw material. (p. 25)

Axiology

Axiology also plays a pivotal role in regard to how my values interface with my conceptualization of the researcher and participant relationship. The process of knowledge construction from a research perspective appears, to me, to be based on co-creation influenced by the participants’ and researcher’s interactions. Although I do recognize the researcher’s contributions to be significant, I do not believe that they should be elevated above the participants’ contributions. As the researcher, I will strive to interact with my participants in such a way that they feel that their involvement is appreciated and that their unique offerings are of value. The study cannot be fully

realized if I am without participants, and for this reason I worked to give my participants the recognition they deserve. Through face-to-face interactions, my goal was to generate with my participants a body of constructed knowledge that is valuable to the multicultural counselor education field. Within these face-to-face interactions, I sought to join, elicit, and honor the participants' behaviors, thoughts, and emotions. The explicit goal of the study was to comprehend what those behaviors, thoughts, and emotions were as experienced by the individual participant. A researcher's axiology has a determinative effect on the types of questions being asked and information that is sought (Hays & Singh, 2012). My desire to know, understand, and honor my participants' experiences was the operational premise for the construction of my open-ended and reflexivity-inducing questions. By embracing this more subjective mode of inquiry that places significant emphasis on the words and stories of participants, I intended to gain greater insight into participants' constructed realities (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Lichtman, 2013). When intentionally and mindfully designed, and implemented, interviews have proven effective at obtaining detailed information about personal feelings, perceptions, and opinions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Rhetoric

Rhetoric, the ways in which information is expressed and shared, is an intrinsic component of research and merits the researcher's philosophical attention (Hays & Singh, 2012). As I mentioned in the introduction, a huge objective of this study was to illuminate the voices of CITs and permit them to conceptualize and articulate their incurred experiences in order to expand the profession's understanding of their knowledge. As my aim was to truly elicit the perceptions and experiences of my

participants, I attempted to honor their natural forms of expression. During the focus group interview process, I was mindful of the language I used in order to prevent implicitly influencing my participants' choice of words. I also included numerous quotations in my explication of themes to ensure that my participants' authentic voices were fully represented in the data analysis. The idea of representing participants' voices through numbers and other contextually and personally voided expressions does not reverberate with my values as a researcher because to do so detracts from the quintessential meanings constructed by the participants. Personally, I fail to see the significance of data without personal context and believe that the level of manipulation exerted by the researcher in those instances strips the data of authenticity. Keeping in mind my perception of the researcher as an equal partner, rather than an expert, in the process of knowledge co-construction, the need to highlight the participants' contributions was compulsory. As a qualitative researcher, the emerging themes that I analyzed were informed, both contextually and expressively, by the accounts of my participants. Although my influence on the research study was inextricable, I do believe that being transparent about its impact, and my attempts to keep it in check, were necessary. For this reason, I contended that the use of first-person rhetoric in the analysis of data was not only acceptable but warranted.

Methodology

In terms of my philosophical views on methodology, which are greatly apprised by beliefs in other core philosophies of science, my allegiance is unequivocally situated within qualitative inquiry. In my own personal and professional journeys related to knowledge and understanding, I have become keenly aware of the external influences

that tend to define what is truth or objective fact. From a critically conscious perspective, I recognize that some of the key influencers of knowledge occupy spaces of privilege and may, either inadvertently or directly, diminish contextual visibility and expression of those who are the object of study. As an individual who constantly attempts to develop awareness regarding my own privileged statuses and understand their impact, I appreciate the commonalities that converge at the intersection of qualitative and social justice perspectives. Lyons et al.'s (2013) description of how these two perspectives coverage is meaningful. Lyons et al. (2013) advised that practitioners of social justice and qualitative research “place a premium on context and environment” and encourage a “healthy and reciprocal relationship between researcher and relevant constituencies” (p. 12).

Additionally, Lyons et al. (2013) stated that social justice and qualitative perspectives emphasize “reflection on or management of the influence of contexts” as well as “an emic and inductive understanding of experiences, concepts, and samples/communities” (p. 12).

These tenets are not as conducive to the use of other research methods, namely those of a quantitative nature. The information that I sought and knowledge that was constructed because of this study was not explicitly concerned with its generalizability. In fact, the purpose was quite the opposite, as I see tremendous value in knowing and expressing the subjective voices of people. As detailed in the literature review sections on the Black feminism and queer rights movements, not everyone's lived experiences and idiosyncratic realities can be reduced to those of the majority. The goal of proposing universal or objectivistic theories was antithetical to my research motivations, and therefore a qualitative methodology better served my end goal of illuminating my participants' voices.

Preferred Research Paradigm: Social Constructivism with Critical Paradigmatic Influence

Research paradigms can conceivably be thought of as belief systems based on the core philosophies of science (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). There are several recognized paradigms, including positivism, social constructivism, critical theory, and more, and a researcher may adhere differentially to these paradigms contingent upon their various ideas about the research process and ideas about scientific pursuit (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 39). Patton (2002) advised that positivists are primarily interested in empirically verifying existing theory through hypothesis testing with ultimate goals that include the operationalization of construct measurement, replication of methods across disciplines, and the generalization of knowledge to a population. Provided my explicated philosophical views in the previous section, the positivistic paradigm has inherent objectives that clash with mine. Although a progressive form of positivism, post-positivism still holds onto the notion that an objective reality or universal truth exists (with the recognition that they cannot be fully understood or measured) (Patton, 2002), and therefore was in tension with my philosophical view that realities and truths are characterized by subjective multiplicity.

Upon examining whether my philosophical perspectives corresponded wholly with a specific research paradigm, I was faced with the realization that they do not. Initially, my reaction to this understanding was a bit overwhelming; however, upon extensive reflection, I concluded that I, as my participants, cannot be entirely reduced to one hard and fast set of assumptions. I am multifaceted and complex and, therefore, so are my affinities concerning research beliefs. Although my convictions surrounding

research fall within a postmodernist approach, they are not easily encapsulated by social constructivism, which by its very nature postmodernism endorses. Grbich (2004) asserted that postmodernism takes the stance that “any borders (disciplinary, research approaches, country, and culture) are [also] constructions that can be crossed, incorporated or reconstructed” (p. 18). In the following paragraphs, I discuss how some of my philosophical underpinnings are represented by social constructivism, while others are more appropriately aligned with critical research paradigms.

Constructivist thought can be viewed on a continuum from “radical to more socially based orientations” (Sexton, 1991, p. 11). Radical constructivists argue the non-existence of true knowledge or reality. Social constructionists, on the other hand, are concerned with the manners in which individuals utilize language to assign meaning to their experiences (Sexton, 1991). The difference between constructivism and constructionism is sometimes misunderstood. According to Wentworth and Wentworth (1991) constructivism is focused on the individual processes happening within a social environment. Guterman (1996) differentiated constructionism as having a focus on knowledge within social exchanges and providing a more concise description of how individuals construct realities in relationships. Although constructivism and constructionism have distinctive foci, both were applicable to my study. Once being exposed to *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016), participants conceptualized their intrapersonal experience of the situation. Once engaged in the group interview, participants worked to construct knowledge of their experience within a social environment. Constructivists conjecture that truth is a quality of a construct or construction and to the extent that they enable the constructor to make sense of the realized elements (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

My ontological perspective that many realities exist is a constructivist view; however, I also believe that these realities can be influenced by privileged and oppressive experiences, which is more congruent with critical research notions. My epistemological perspective that knowledge is co-constructed between researchers and participants is reflected in both social constructivist and critical research paradigms (Hays & Singh, 2012). Although my axiological perspective, in general, includes a value for acknowledging social injustice and promoting change (a view espoused by critical paradigms (Hays & Singh, 2012)), it was not an explicit motivator for this study. My identities as an ever-aspiring multiculturally competent counselor and counselor educator, to a certain degree, influence my desire for participants to stimulate processes of learning that ultimately create movement towards social justice counseling competence (as suggested in the MSJCC), but the objective of my study was to co-construct the knowledge that was derived from my participants' experiences. I could not assume or misinterpret participants' experiences based on what I was hoping would transpire as a result of their involvement in the study.

In terms of rhetoric, my perspectives again align, to a certain degree, with both paradigms. I do believe that participants' voices should be a central focus of the data analysis (critical), but do recognize that the setting and researcher, myself, have an undeniable presence and subsequent impact on the social exchange that will occur with participants (constructivism). For this reason, I was cognizant of my role as the researcher and made certain that my responsibilities were detailed and comprehensible (see subsequent subsection). I also worked to ensure that the participants' voices were not only verified via member checks, but also by including many example narratives from the

study to support the themes and constructs that I unveiled. In terms of methodology, I philosophically support the constructionist value of co-creating contextually relevant and trustworthy data (Hays & Singh, 2012) that may be transferrable across other similar settings, with similar participants and concrete experiences. Also, I support the critical value of minimizing exploitative research processes (Hays & Singh, 2012) and for this reason intentionally designed my study to include three data collection points that (a) engaged participants in social interaction to co-create knowledge of their intrapersonal experiences, b) engaged participants in a less social fashion via written accounts of experiences and perceptions only shared with the researcher, and c) engaged participants in a review and commentary of emerging themes to permit their subjective verification that the data authentically presented their co-constructed knowledge of experiences. As detailed in this section, I, to varying levels, connect with both the social constructivist and critical paradigms and believe that both sets of beliefs influenced the design and analysis of this study.

Preferred Research Traditions: Basic Qualitative Study

In relation to discussing how to choose a qualitative methodology, scholars have emphasized the importance of ensuring that a researcher has foundational awareness and understanding of the philosophical tenets that underpin a research paradigm (Hays & Singh, 2012; Merriam, 1998; Merriam, 2009). After processing my philosophical values and examining the most common qualitative research paradigms, I elected to utilize a basic qualitative study design. A basic qualitative study is also sometimes referred to as a basic interpretive study, but I will be using the former, in the direction of Merriam (2009) who noted “Since all qualitative research is interpretive, I have come around to preferring

labeling this type of study a basic qualitative study” (p. 22). Merriam goes on to advise that constructionism underlies the basic qualitative study and reinforces the notion that the basic qualitative “researcher is interested in understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved” (p. 22). The meaning is constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998). Merriam (2009) summarized the most common interests of basic qualitative researchers as “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 23).

As mentioned previously, all qualitative research is interpretive; however, other forms of qualitative research design have additional and specific foci (Merriam, 2009). The case study paradigm is focused on cultivating an in-depth understanding about the experiences of an individual within the bounds of time, period, activity, and place (Plummer, 2001). Ethnography is a paradigm in which the researcher describes and provides interpretations about the culture of a group or system (MacDonald, 2001). Grounded theory is an approach used to generate theory that is grounded in data regarding participants’ perspectives for a particular phenomenon (Fassinger, 2005). Although I respect and can see the value of each of these methodologies, the aim of this study was not to gain a deep understanding of one individual, or to explicitly understand culture as in an ethnography, or to develop a theory. It was, however, my goal to gain intentional insight about the intrapersonal experiences of counselors in training as they participated in the experiential activity of watching *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016). A basic qualitative study design corresponded with the purpose of my research.

Role of the Researcher

In all forms of qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). In qualitative research, a primary goal of the researcher is to understand his or her participants' experiences, thus humans' responsive and adaptive nature make them an ideal instrument. Merriam (2009) elaborated on the advantages of researchers serving as research instruments, "...that the researcher can expand his or her understanding through nonverbal as well as verbal communication, process information (data) immediately, clarify and summarize material, check with respondents for accuracy of interpretation, and explore unusual or unanticipated responses" (p. 15).

Despite these benefits, when researchers act as the primary instrument in their studies, they must account for personal shortcomings and biases. Merriam (2009) recommended that biases and "subjectivities" should be identified and monitored as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation processes (p. 15). I recognized that the biases and proclivities that I brought as a researcher were informed by a variety of social and cultural identities and past educational and clinical experiences. These variables have greatly influenced who I am and, to a certain extent, undoubtedly played out in how I processed and understood the data I collected. However, I recognized the propensity for individuals to find what they may seek, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and therefore utilized strategies that kept me transparent and responsible for monitoring and assessing my thoughts and feelings about the data collection process, involvement with participants, and the data analysis efforts. I accomplished this objective by engaging in critical self-reflexive activities (to be explored in a future section).

Additionally, I have a set of beliefs about knowledge, how it is created, the purpose of research, and my role within the research process. This set of beliefs has not only influenced the selection of my research paradigm but guided my participation in the co-construction of knowledge during the analysis phase of the research process.

In addition to working with the data, I also interacted with the participants. The participants and I engaged in social transactions aimed at collecting and reviewing their experiences within the study. Although this study was not analyzed through a narrative framework, participants detailed stories in conceptualizing and making meaning of their experiences. As the research instrument, I strived to be sensitive to the participants' choice of sharing their experiences without overtly shaping them by my own assumptions. In order to achieve and maintain this balance, I relied upon my experiences as a professional counselor and discussion facilitator, as well as my training in qualitative methodology.

Sample

This study utilized a purposeful sample of counselor education master's level students from a CACREP accredited program located at this researcher's university. The university is a medium size regional institution located in the southeastern portion of the United States. Although this strategy fell within the domain of convenience sampling, ease of access to participants was not the only criteria considered. Marshall (1996) noted that within purposeful sampling, "The researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question" (p. 523). For the purpose of this study, advanced counselors-in-training were the identified group of participants that were recruited. Specifically, I worked to recruit counselors-in-training currently engaged in the clinical component of their training and enrolled in internship courses. Although similar studies

have occurred in the context of multicultural counseling courses, I sought to understand the experiences and perceptions of more advanced CITs actively providing services to clients. In discussing the role of interns, Baird (2008) advised “The role of intern occupies a gray area somewhere between student and professional. As an intern, you will still have many things to learn, but you may also be counted on to possess certain knowledge and skills” (p. 18). This “gray area” that Baird (2008) described may extend beyond the role of the intern and inform their experiences of transition from predominant learner to predominant doer. As a researcher, I was keenly interested in how, if at all, these experiences informed the participants’ experiences and perceptions of *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016).

CACREP (2016) standards require an infusion of multicultural counselor education across the curriculum, so offering this research opportunity to participants was perhaps even more ideal as it reinforced the notion that multicultural counseling competence is to be ever-developed within and outside of classrooms. Furthermore, offering an opportunity to engage in this study, outside of the expected course, provided a unique context in which to elicit the experiences of participants and adds variety to the current counselor education literature. As noted, participants involved in previous studies that explored their experiences with film, had been enrolled in a multicultural or social counseling course during the research period (Frick et al., 2017; Nittoli & Guiffrida, 2017; Shen, 2015; Villalba & Redmond, 2008).

The setting for this study was ideal as it met all the criteria noted by Rossman and Rallis (2003). These authors advised that an “ideal site is one where (1) entry is possible, (2) there is a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, structures of

interest . . . , (3) You are likely to be able to build strong relationships with the participants, and (4) Ethical and political considerations are not overwhelming” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 136). As a result of my involvement in the counselor education program, entry was easily accessible. This site also offered numerous potential participants with varying levels of curricular and lived experiences from which to draw my sample. I anticipated that I may have knowledge of some of the individual participants, at least at a casual, if not professional level. With this setting, I was able to anticipate ethical, political, and logistical concerns and was able to plan as needed to avoid potential difficulties.

I recruited participants via the use of strategic efforts. I met with potential participants enrolled in internship courses during the fall 2018 and spring 2019 semesters. There was one section of clinical mental health counseling course offered during the 2018 fall semester and one offered during the 2019 spring semester. I served as a guest lecturer and presented a 30-minute informational session on the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies and an overview of intersectionality theory and its applicability to counselors’ work with clients (see Appendix A). After the informational session, I provided both a review of the study as detailed on the participant informed consent form, found in Appendix B, and an oral description of the study. I answered any questions that potential participants had about the study. Finally, I made my contact information available and asked interested individuals to contact me if they were willing to volunteer for the study. The intentionality of meeting with potential participants face-to-face and providing them with educational and practical information for their work with clients exhibited my desire for them to benefit from the study. This process stripped away

my anonymity as a researcher and offered potential participants an opportunity to inquire about aspects of the study that may have remained unknown and subsequently caused them to not consider volunteering. This recruitment strategy initiated the type of egalitarian and balanced researcher-participant interactions warranted for the co-creation of knowledge. Additionally, pizza and refreshments were provided at the viewing of the film. All participants who participated in the focus group interview, completed the written reflection form, and participated in the member checking process received a \$10 gift card of their choice for their contributions to the study.

Planning for contingencies was a necessary component of research design. If recruitment efforts yield a significant pool of prospective participants, I considered the possibility of utilizing a stratified purposeful sampling method. In this case, the strata would have included various levels of clinical experience, and the selected participants would have represented each stratum, which in this study would have been the number of semesters of experience as an intern. If more than 12 individuals had advised that they would like to volunteer for the study, then I planned on conducting two focus group interviews – each of which would have been composed of a minimum of six participants. An explanation for the rationale of sample size is discussed in the following section.

Data Collection and Procedures

The grand research question for this study was, “What are the experiences and perceptions of CITs exposed to the film *Moonlight* in a multicultural context?” My research design incorporated three sources of data collection. During the initial component of the study, after participants had consented to participation and completed the demographic information form (Appendix C), all participants watched the film

Moonlight (Jenkins, 2016) together at a specified location on campus. Immediately following the end of the film, I engaged participants in a focus group interview. The focus group is a natural data collection method in clinical and educational settings and offers “unique opportunities for generating data from interactions among participants who share a common experience or are homogenous in some manner” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 252). Also of note, Kress and Shoffner (2007) advised that participants selected for exploratory studies should best represent the population of interest. The use of a focus group format fit with my study, as participants were homogenous in terms of their identities as CITs enrolled in a clinical applications course, representative of the population of interest, and shared the experience of watching the film together. The focus group format was intentionally utilized for its interactive nature. “This format often serves as a catalyst for participant disclosure, connecting with others, and expanding on or challenging perspectives in a synergistic manner” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 252). As a researcher, my adherence to social constructivist tenets informed the use of the focus group interview.

My goal was to recruit between six and 12 participants for the study. The purpose of the study was to elicit and understand the experiences and perceptions of *Moonlight* through the process of social knowledge co-construction. The number of participants was a critical factor in creating an atmosphere of openness and security. Brotherson (1994) reminded researchers that having too few participants in a focus group may cause some individuals to feel exposed, whereas too many may risk side conversations. Lichtman (2013) also cautioned that groups of a size much larger than 12 participants may garner fewer valuable results. This is because participants may be more hesitant to share feelings

within larger groups and some participants require more time to adequately respond to questions (Hays & Singh, 2012). Larger groups may also impede the researcher's ability to maintain sufficient and even accurate field notes of larger focus groups (Hays & Singh, 2012). Per these suggestions, I capped my focus group at 12 participants as it represented an ideal sample size for my focus group interview.

Prior to the presentation of the film, I reviewed a few items with the participants. First, I provided each participant a copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix B) which described the roles and rights of the participants, summarized the potential benefits and risks of their participation, and reiterated that they could withdraw from the study without penalty at any time. In this form, I also provided contact information for the IRB director at the university as well as contact information for the counseling center, should they experience distress as a result of their exposure to the film. After participants had consented to the study, I then had them complete a participant demographic form (see Appendix C). This form elicited demographic information such as age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and religious/spiritual orientation. It also asked participants to denote which semester of internship they were currently enrolled in. In this form, participants were requested to indicate if they are willing to be contacted for follow up such as member checks and if so, to provide their preferred method of contact.

For the focus group interview, I prepared an interview protocol comprised of six questions (see Appendix D) per the guidelines of Hays and Singh (2012) who advised having at least three but no more than eight interview questions (p. 254). These interview questions included: 1) "How would you describe your experience during the film?"; 2) "What do you believe informs your experience of the film?"; 3) "How do you perceive

Chiron's experiences in the film?"; 4) "Please describe any changes in feeling or emotion that you experienced during the film."; 5) "How do you perceive the film in relation to your role as an intern?"; and 6) "How do you perceive the use of this film in counselor education?"

In facilitating the focus group interview, I worked to remain mindful of strategies that promote a fruitful and meaningful participant experience. I exercised caution when directly participating in the focus group discussion as Kress and Shoffner (2007) noted that "discussion should flow naturally with few interjections overall from the facilitator" and that "participants should interact with one another, not the facilitator" (p. 255). I also employed probing questions to encourage deeper interaction among participants that facilitated articulation and expression of potentially divergent attitudes, beliefs, and experiences (Kress & Shoffner, 2007). I also remained present and genuinely interested in participants' responses and intentionally observed nonverbal behaviors. I also mentally prepared myself to deal with or shift conversation flow if conflict of opinions or experiences threatened to disrupt the focus group interview. I relied on my training and experience as a counselor, group facilitator, and discussion facilitator to intuitively guide me through this experience.

The focus group interview was audio-recorded as well as video-recorded. I utilized two digital audio recorders and set them to record concurrently to reduce risk of technological errors that may have hindered collection of data. I positioned my password-protected laptop to record the focus group interview. The latter strategy provided me with opportunities to revisit the experience of the focus group and assess for nonverbal and interactional data that I had missed in the moment while facilitating the process. Per Hays

and Singh's (2012) suggestion, I turned on recording devices approximately five minutes before beginning the interview to allow participants to get used to their presence.

Although the focus group interview fit the specific needs of this study, it should be noted that focus group methods may not actually offer the same depth as individual interviews (Berg, 2004). Neither will focus groups produce the rich contextual data of observations (Berg, 2004). Since focus groups can be limiting if not used with other data collection methods (Hays & Singh, 2012), I incorporated a written reflection component in the study design that served as the second data source. Written materials are distinct from the focus group, as they offer a less invasive manner to collect data. In expanding on the benefits of written materials as a data source, Hays and Singh (2012) articulated, "This lack of invasiveness may be important if you are researching a sensitive topic; writing can give participants the opportunity to express themselves in a more private manner and/or have more time to reflect on a phenomenon" (p. 284). As *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016) showcases issues related to sexuality, bullying, substance use, poverty, and internalized homophobia, it was important to have a data collection source that provided participants personal space to explore and reflect on these sensitive topics. The written material was titled "Written Reflections on *Moonlight*" (see Appendix E) and included three specific open-ended questions aimed at facilitating participants' reflexive awareness of subjective identity in regard to their experience with the film's protagonist. Questions contained on the written reflections form read as follows: 1) "How do you perceive your personal experiences are like Chiron's, based on your intersecting identities?"; 2) "How do you perceive your personal experiences are different from

Chiron's, based on your intersecting identities?"; and 3) "How has your experience in this study affected you?"

In the version provided to the participants, each question was listed on an 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper to ensure that participants had adequate space to express themselves. The "Written Reflections on *Moonlight*" forms were disseminated after the focus group had formally ended. Participants were allotted as much time as they needed to respond to the questions but were asked to turn them in before leaving the setting. Participants were also advised that they could elect to answer whichever questions they chose and did not have to complete the exercise at all if they chose not to do so. By incorporating this means of data collection, my hope was to supplement the knowledge created by the social interaction of the focus group with insight into individual participants' experiences and perception related to identity.

In an effort to maximize the trustworthiness of the study finding, I regularly maintained adequate notes and reflections throughout the data collection process. Under the qualitative assumption that data analysis had the potential to be initiated following preliminary data collection efforts, I wrote memos following each data collection point to describe and analyze findings as they developed (Hays & Singh, 2012). Memo-writing is a procedural task in qualitative research that allows the researcher to connect and engage with the data to a depth that would be difficult to achieve otherwise. Birks, Chapman, and Francis (2008) illuminated the power of memoing, stating, "Through the use of memos, the researcher is able to immerse themselves in the data, explore the meanings that this data holds, maintain continuity and sustain momentum in the conduct of research" (p. 69). Although a number of authors have offered suggestions for writing memos (Glaser,

1978; Richards, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), I was most drawn to Charmaz's (2006) recommendation that the best approach to this process is to "do what works for you" (p. 80). I maintained a running list of memos, identified by affiliated data source, in a word processing program. For myself, this format was of logistical ease, as recording or writing my thoughts in a traditional journal may have proven more cumbersome to include in an audit trail. Hays and Singh (2012) advised that an "audit trail provides physical evidence of systematic data collection and analysis procedures. Typically, an audit trail can be kept in a binder or a locked file cabinet" (p. 214). The memos that I wrote were better organized using a word processing program, as I could print the pages, add them to an audit binder, and then delete the files from my password-protected laptop computer.

In addition to maintaining memos regarding data collection points, I also kept an electronic reflexive journal to record my thoughts and feelings about how I was being impacted by the researcher process. Per Hays and Singh's (2012) recommendation, I specifically reflected upon and recorded my reactions to participants (identifying them only be pseudonyms) and settings involved in the research. Also, the act of reflecting on my thoughts about data collection, analysis procedures, and hunches about potential findings were imperative to build sincerity. Within my reflexive journal, I wrote descriptions of how data collection methods, sources, and analysis changed throughout the process. A greater discussion on the use of reflexive journals and the overall importance of reflexivity is addressed in a future section of this chapter.

Data Analysis

As mentioned in the previous section, I initiated the process of analysis during data collection. Simultaneous data collection and analysis is not only an acceptable strategy, but the preferred method for qualitative data analysis (Merriam, 2009). I personally transcribed the interview myself and did so verbatim. My decision to include every single word articulated by myself and every participant was informed by the possible detriments of not transcribing verbatim. Poland (1995) cautioned that transcripts that have been altered may lack in terms of neutrality, comprehensiveness, and transferability. I also included involuntary utterances, such as coughs, cries, and laughs. Although sometimes utterances may be misleading, they were in fact meaningful. I also incorporated exhibited nonverbal communication, such as fidgeting, pointing, and hand gestures, in the transcript. My personal connection with the data, my ability to decipher participants, and my immediate recollection of observational data were essential factors that warranted the process of transcription as my own to undertake.

In a similar vein, I did not be using a computerized program to analyze the collected data. I manually analyzed the data using basic qualitative techniques. The goal of data analysis was to make meaning of the collected data and thus produce the findings. Merriam (2009) advised that “Findings can be in the form of organized descriptive accounts, themes, or categories that cut across the data, or in the form of models and theories that explain the data” (p. 176). In my study, I analyzed the data to find emerging themes that cut across the data. The purpose of my study was not to deduce a theory or model from the findings, but rather to present the voices of my participants via the

constructed themes that represented their expressed experiences and perceptions related to the study.

A primary goal of qualitative data analysis is what Merriam (2009) deemed category construction, but what others have frequently referred to as theme construction. This process started with me reading through the focus group transcript and jotting down “notes, comments, observations, and queries in the margins” (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). In deciding which portions of the transcript warrant notation, I looked for bits of data that struck me as interesting, potentially relevant, or important to the study. This process of notating pieces of data is known as *coding* (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) recommended that in the process of coding, the researcher should “Think of yourself as having a conversation with the data, asking questions of it, making comments to it, and so on” (p. 178). Initially, I identified and notated any segment of data that I thought *might* be useful – a type of coding known as open coding (Merriam, 2009).

After open coding the entire transcript, I started the process of analytical coding. Analytical coding is a process characterized by more than simply finding ways to describe the open coding results, but rather is a process of “coding that comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning” (Richards, 2005, p. 94). I reviewed and re-reviewed my open codes to identify and group them based on reflected similarity and interpreted connectedness. I maintained a running list of these groupings and kept it attached to the transcript. After I had finished analytical coding of the focus group transcript, I then completed the same processes of open and analytical coding with each of the written reflections I had collected from participants. I maintained a separate listing for the codes derived from the written reflections. I worked to remain mindful of the open

and analytical codes from the focus group transcript as I analyzed the written reflections, routinely checking to see if similar codes appeared in each.

Once the respective listings had been created, I then merged them into one master list of concepts derived from both sets of data. I recognized that this master list will constitute “a primitive outline or classification system reflecting the recurring regularities or patterns” (Merriam, 2009, p. 180) in my study. The patterns represented in the master list became the themes in which subsequent items were sorted. I recognized that themes were conceptual elements that subsumed or spanned many individual examples of the theme. As this process was complex, I kept Merriam’s (2009) guidance in mind as I worked to excavate themes that captured some recurring pattern: “It should be clear that categories (themes) are abstractions derived from the data, not the data themselves” (p. 181). I was also mindful of the notion that qualitative data analysis calls for constant comparison of codes and themes as new data is analyzed and integrated.

Once I had derived the tentative themes from the data, I then worked to sort all of the schematic evidence into their respective themes. I created lists of each theme name and then placed all units of coded data according to their theme. I made sure that the unit placed in each theme-specified file folder contained identifying information such as participant pseudonym. This allowed me to return to original data sources (transcript and written reflections) to review the context of the quote. As themes emerged and data became saturated - “the point at which you realize no new information, insights, or understandings are forthcoming” (Merriam, 2009, p. 183), I shifted from inductive to deductive mode.

According to Merriam (2009), my next task was the naming the themes. In constructing these themes, I was cognizant of the criteria they should meet. Merriam (2009) highlighted five important standards for which I aspired. First, themes needed to “be responsive to the purpose of the research” (Merriam, 2009, p. 185). In order to successfully meet this criterion, I sought to construct themes that were answers to my research question. Secondly, themes were to “be exhaustive” (Merriam, 2009, p. 185), meaning that I had be able to put all important data into a theme or subtheme. The third criterion was that themes should “be mutually exclusive” (Merriam, 2009, p. 185). If one exact unit of data was able to be placed into multiple themes, then I knew that more refinement was necessary. The fourth criterion advised that themes should “be sensitizing” (Merriam, 2009, 186). In achieving this standard, I worked to ensure that names of themes unquestionably demonstrated their nature. Lastly, themes were to “be conceptually congruent” (Merriam, 2009, p. 186). Merriam (2009) warned that this latter criterion is possibly the most difficult for researchers to apply and recommended displaying sets of themes in the form of a chart or table to more comparatively assess them for level of abstraction, as well as “how well all of the parts fit together” (p. 187). This suggestion is one that I honored and is represented in table format, which can be found in Appendix G.

Presentation of the findings is a critical component of the research process. As I intended to illuminate the voices of my participants, which have a multiplicity of experiences and perceptions, I worked to connect with my participants and truly learn from their subjective perspectives. In an attempt to tease out the meaning within the data through analysis and interpretation, I worked to construct crystallization. Crystallization,

a term historically and typically utilized in the works of ethnographic researchers (Ellingson, 2009), is now considered a strategic process used to facilitate deeper and richer understandings of other forms of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Ellingson, 2011, 2014; Stewart, Gapp, & Harwood; 2017). Crystallization rejects the commonly utilized validation strategy of triangulation. Richardson's (1994) metaphorical description illustrates the rationale for this stance, and reads,

In postmodernist mixed-genre texts, we do not triangulate, we crystallize . . . the central image for "validity" for postmodern texts is not the triangle – a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central imagery is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. (p. 522)

Ellingson (2009) asserted that crystallization makes use of various methods of analysis and knowledge creation pulled from all along the continuum of qualitative research. The salience of this characterization suggests a practical application within the nature of basic qualitative research, as, it too, employs methods from across the continuum of qualitative research. Ellingson (2009) also noted that crystallization calls upon researchers to exercise creativity as they work to offer a depth of understanding through numerous "forms of representing, organizing, and analyzing" (p. 10) the assembled details of their collected data. Although, I recognized that constructing crystallization would be a laborious task, I believed that by fully participating in reflexivity throughout the research process I could strengthen the credibility and authenticity of my findings.

In order to adequately construct crystallization, I worked to provide as much information in as many forms as possible. My research design to have each participant complete a written reflection form, in addition to the focus group interview, provided me with multiple sources of data to analyze. This increased wealth of information helped me

to present findings that represented a complete knowledge of the experience being described. The use of thick descriptions was necessary to crystallize the findings of my study. Hays and Singh (2012) advised that thick descriptions constitute more than the “basics of facts, feelings, observations, and occurrences” (p. 213) and include inferences into the meaning of data. In producing thick descriptions as a neophyte researcher, it was helpful for me to keep some guidelines in mind. Specifically, I will use Denzin’s (1989) noted components of thick descriptions to steer me in this process. Denzin (1989) advised that thick descriptions should “give context of an act,” “state the intentions and meanings that organize the action” and “trace the evolution and development of the act” (p. 33). Perhaps, most importantly, Denzin (1989) stated that thick descriptions should ultimately present the action observed as a text that can then be interpreted. Not only did the use of thick descriptions assist me with establishing trustworthiness and facilitating crystallization, it provided me with an additional way of thinking about data interpretation and reporting (Geertz, 1973; Hammersley, 2008).

Reflexivity

The concept of reflexivity is foundational to qualitative and constructionist research and a key component of crystallization. Woods, Macklin and Lewis (2016) defined reflexivity “as the researcher’s self-awareness and understanding of what they bring to the research act; their capabilities, knowledge, experience, values, hopes, fears, as well as their epistemological and ontological assumptions” (p. 387). As a qualitative researcher, I served in several crucial roles, including research instrument (Merriam, 2009; Xu & Storr; 2012), participant recruiter, focus group facilitator, transcriptionist, data analyzer, and knowledge co-constructor. My enmeshment with the research process

was one that was undeniable and warranted routine reflexivity. In addition to being one of the benchmarks for determining the credibility and trustworthiness of a qualitative research design (Hays & Singh, 2012), reflexivity of the researcher can be viewed as a lens into the research process itself (Stake, 1995).

Considering the imperative nature of reflexivity, I worked to cultivate awareness of my assumptions, biases, and perceived notions and their impact on my study findings and overall process of conducting the research (Jankowski, Clark & Ivey, 2000). I initiated this process with the establishment of my analytical framework for interpreting the data and by disclosing my ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions. I ensured continuity of the reflexive process by carefully taking notes and personal memos of my affective reactions, thoughts, and suspicions that emerged as I facilitated the focus group interview and reviewed the participants' written reflections. I maintained a reflexive journal that details my thoughts about how exactly the research process was impacting me (Hays & Singh, 2012). The reflexive journal did not simply aid me in recognizing and sharing my internal process as a researcher regarding this specific study, but it has also been one of the key ingredients in me becoming a stronger qualitative researcher and helping me to see myself in this light as well (Watt, 2007).

I integrated peer debriefing into my research process. Peer debriefing is defined as a reflexive strategy in which research team members "serve as a mirror, reflecting the investigator's responses to the research process . . . serving as devil's advocates, proposing alternative interpretations to those of the investigator" (Morrow, 2005, p. 254). Peer debriefing, by providing external accountability, complemented the internal accountability for which I strived with my reflexive journal entries and research memos. I

participated in peer debriefing with a dissertation committee member. Merriam and associates (2002) advised that a peer review processes are “built into the dissertation committee” (p. 26).

Another strategy that I employed to hold me accountable as the researcher was to conduct member checks. Member checking is a key technique for establishing trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Consultation with participants to test the “goodness of fit” (Hays & Singh, 2012) of developing findings helped to ensure that my analytical skills were accurately portraying the intended meanings of the participants. I integrated member checking at three distinct points in the research process. First, I prompted clarifications from participants during the focus group interview itself by using probing questions such as “Can you give me an example?” and “Can you elaborate on that?” These probing questions allowed the participants to provide more context to their initial responses or clear up any uncertainty perceived by me. I also utilized member checks after transcription of the interview has been completed. I emailed each participant individually with the completed transcript attached. I requested that they complete two tasks. The first task was to review the transcript for accuracy with the encouragement to make corrections directly to the transcript. The second request was for participants to make notes to expand on any responses he or she would like to say more about in the existing transcript. The participants’ responses to transcripts will make for nice evidence during the audit process. Lastly, I encouraged participants to review the emerging themes that I had constructed from the data and garnered their feedback regarding the authenticity, subjective validity, and confirmability of the themes. The inclusion of member checks served to treat the participants’ voices as equally important in the co-

construction of knowledge and provided me with evidential points of reference upon which to reflect.

Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations

The nature and size of the counselor education program in which this study was conducted posed a potential risk of individual participants or dissertation committee faculty identifying participants based upon demographic information or specific quotes. In an effort to mitigate this threat to confidentiality and protect all participants, I was proactive with protecting participants' anonymity and confidentiality. There was no identifying demographic information connected to the interview transcript, written reflection responses, or direct quotes contained within the final dissertation. In regard to determining the use of direct quotes, I evaluated the possibility of a participant being identifiable based on the content. For direct quotes that presented an increased likelihood of participant identification, I did not include the direct quote in the dissertation and instead omitted words in order to ensure anonymity. I had sole access to participant names. This information was kept under lock and key at a location off campus. I have identified each participant by a self-assigned pseudonym. Five years past dissertation defense, I will destroy all transcripts, data, and participant information.

Another dimension of ethical consideration for qualitative research is participant autonomy. In an effort to engage participants without concern of external influence or pressure, I elected to conduct this study during semesters that I did not instruct internship courses at this university. Additionally, potential participants were not be forced or pressured to participate in the study as part of their clinical course requirements. Rather, potential participants were provided the opportunity to learn about the scope and purpose

of this research study and then to make the decision to reach out to me via the provided contact information to indicate if they wanted to participate.

The purpose and design of this study was carefully considered in regard to beneficence. I contended that this study design does not present any greater harm for participants than may be experienced in their daily life, specifically as counselors-in-training who are engaged in critical self-reflection throughout program curriculum. However, if participants felt that their reactivity to the affective stimulus (film) was overwhelming, they were notified of their right to end their involvement at any time. Beneficence means “doing good” for others. As detailed in the informed consent form, participants may benefit by gaining insights into their own experiences with multicultural content that facilitates professional growth and improved counseling competence. In terms of the community, this study had the potential to shed light on experiences of CITs exposed to an intersectional film which may prove useful for counselor educators determining activities to integrate into curriculum that will promote multicultural and social justice competence.

Lastly, this study was designed to honor and adhere to the inherent tenets of social constructivist research. Ethically, the co-construction of knowledge cannot be conducted by the researcher independent of their participants. The inclusion of multiple member checking procedures throughout the research process permitted participants to clarify the meanings that represented their experiences and perceptions and validated the findings as authentic and credible. This strategy also allowed participants to engage in the meaning-making process from a more leveled and collaborative position. Participants will also be provided the results of the study upon request.

Conclusion

This section has detailed my worldview as a researcher including my philosophical positions on reality, knowledge, values, rhetoric, and methodology – all of which validated my choice to use a basic qualitative study design. This study utilized a focus group interview, written reflection materials, and member-checks to elicit data regarding the experiences and perceptions of counseling interns exposed to the film *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016) in a multicultural context. I used the three-stage coding method to analyze data for emerging themes and consulted with participants to ensure that themes were indeed representative of their experiences. I intentionally engaged in reflexive activities to strengthen the rigor and trustworthiness of my findings.

Chapter IV: Findings

This chapter presents the results of the basic qualitative study conducted to explore the grand research question: “What are the experiences and perceptions of counseling interns exposed to the film *Moonlight* in a multicultural context?” The findings that emerged from this study were constructed in collaboration with the participants who engaged in a focus group interview, composed written reflections, and completed member checks. The objective of examining participants’ experiences with and perceptions to *Moonlight* may contribute to limited counselor education literature regarding the use of film to assist CITs with conceptualizing the experiences of individuals who are characterized by two or more marginalized identities. Furthermore, the participants’ experiences may be used to inform guidelines for thoughtfully and effectively integrating intersectional films into counselor education curriculum.

Despite the potential implications of this study, I reiterate that the findings of this study are in no way absolute fact. The findings may not be valid for every group of counselors-in-training who may be exposed to *Moonlight* or any other intersection films. Although these results are not generalizable, they are transferable to other groups of counseling interns that share similarities with the ones that I have interviewed. As a reminder, the purposeful sample for this study was composed of counseling interns enrolled in a CACREP-accredited university located in the southeastern region of the United States. Participant demographic information is presented later in this chapter.

The presentation of my findings is saturated with direct quotes from participants. This intentional method was utilized in an attempt to illuminate individual participants’ voices. Although the emerging themes were co-constructed between me and the group of

participants, individual participants' contributions to the focus group process were imperative and thus deserved to be represented. In addition to including direct quotes from the focus group interview, quotes from written reflections and member checks have also been incorporated into the presentation of findings. I perceived each data collection point as meaningful and worthy of equitable inclusion and examination in this study.

Based upon my thorough examination of the data and confirmation with the participants via individual member checks, five major themes emerged. Each major theme contained sub-themes and all of these, as well as supporting quotations from participants and an in-depth discussion of the analytic process, will be expounded upon later in this chapter. The five major themes are: (1) Participants suggested that their experiences of *Moonlight* were characterized by emotional turbulence; (2) Participants suggested that their experiences of *Moonlight* were informed by their subjective levels of exposure to and identification with aspects of diversity; (3) Participants suggested that *Moonlight* has the potential to influence counseling interns to monitor and manage their emotional reactions to clients' stories; (4) Participants suggested that *Moonlight* has the potential to promote empathy and understanding of clients' diverse experiences; and (5) Participants suggested that *Moonlight* has the potential to promote counselor self-awareness. As noted earlier each of these themes will be later discussed in detail.

Background of Participants

There were 12 graduate-level counseling interns who participated in this study. All participants identified as female. All participants were enrolled in the clinical mental health counseling internship course at their university at the time of data collection. Eleven participants actively engaged in the focus group interview, while one remained

silent. All 12 participants completed the written reflection portion of the study.

Participants' ages ranged from 24 to 44 years old. In order to safeguard participant anonymity, participants were permitted to self-select pseudonyms.

Claire was 25 years of age, identified as a heterosexual Caucasian, and was enrolled in her second semester of internship. She also identified as agnostic and had not viewed *Moonlight* prior to the study. Gap tooth, abbreviated GT, was 29 years of age, identified as a heterosexual, and was enrolled in her second semester of internship. GT did not identify her racial, ethnic, or religious background and had not viewed *Moonlight* prior to the study. Giselle was 25 years of age, identified as a heterosexual Caucasian, and was enrolled in her second semester of internship. Giselle also identified as Catholic and had not viewed *Moonlight* prior to the study. Hazel was 24 years of age, identified as heterosexual and Caucasian, and was enrolled in her second semester of internship. Hazel also identified as Catholic and had not viewed *Moonlight* prior to the study. Hippy mom, abbreviated HM, was 44 years of age, identified as heterosexual and Caucasian, and was enrolled in her first semester of internship. HM also identified a member of the Church of Latter-Day Saints and had not viewed *Moonlight* prior to the study. Jessica was 25 years of age, identified as heterosexual and Black, and was enrolled in her third semester of internship. Jessica also identified as Baptist and had viewed *Moonlight* prior to the study.

KJ was 25 years of age, identified as homosexual and Caucasian, and was enrolled in her second semester of internship. KJ also identified as Catholic and had not viewed *Moonlight* prior to the study. Lady Rayne, abbreviated LR, was 25 years of age, identified as heterosexual and Caucasian, and was enrolled in her second semester of internship. LR also identified as spiritual and had not viewed *Moonlight* prior to the

study. Liz was 26 years of age, identified as bisexual and Caucasian, and was enrolled in her second semester of internship. Liz also identified as “spiritual, not religious” and had not viewed *Moonlight* prior to the study. Mike was 31 years of age, identified as heterosexual and Caucasian, and was enrolled in her third semester of internship. Mike did not identify with a religious or spiritual orientation and had not viewed *Moonlight* prior to the study. Victoria was 25 years of age, identified as heterosexual and Caucasian, and was enrolled in her first semester of internship. Victoria did not identify with a religious or spiritual orientation and had not viewed *Moonlight* prior to the study. Violet was 26 years of age, identified as homosexual and Caucasian, and was enrolled in her second semester of internship. Violet did not identify with a religious or spiritual orientation and had not viewed *Moonlight* prior to the study. A table containing demographic information has been included for convenient reference and can be found under Appendix (F).

Analysis

After the focus group interview was completed, I listened to the audio recordings and video recording concurrently in order to correctly identify each participant as the source of the verbal data provided. I also reviewed the video recording for instances of nonverbal communication, making notes of relational and physical context. Once I felt comfortable that audio and video recordings were intact and I had been able to successfully identify all participants’ voices, I then proceeded to transcribe the focus group interview manually. During manual transcription, I bolded words spoken by participants that I found interesting. This strategy provided me with some of my initial open codes, but not all of them. Once I had completely transcribed the focus group

interview, I revisited the audio recordings again and edited the transcript to ensure that it reflected the participants' expressions verbatim. After completing the transcription of the focus group interview, I then reviewed each participants' written reflection forms. Although these sources of data were already in textual form, I decided to organize and type out all of the participants' responses to the three questions asked in the written reflection forms. This not only permitted me with an opportunity to become even more familiar with the data, but also allowed me to organize individual responses in a structure that permitted for easier coding of data as they related to the specific questions. I titled this document "master list of written reflections."

Once I transcribed all data, I then initiated the process of open coding. This process consisted of me reading the focus group interview transcript and identifying words or phrases that stood out. I marked these words and phrases by underlining or circling them and then made notes in the margin to generically label their essence. I also found myself noting repetition and patterns that I found were immediately evident. After completing this process of open coding for the focus group transcript, I then completed open coding for the master list of written reflections.

After open coding both documents, I started the process of analytical coding. In this second round of coding, I first reexamined the focus group transcript and its associated open codes in the context of all information gathered. During analytical coding, I worked to categorize open codes through the process of interpretation and reflection on meaning. After reviewing and reviewing open codes multiple times, I began to identify shared perceptions and similarity of experience. I then ascribed category names to groups of interconnected open codes. I then repeated this process of analytical

coding for the master list of written reflections. I utilized the constant comparison method during the analytical coding of the master list of written reflections, routinely returning to the list of analytical codes or categories associated with the focus group transcript to assess for points of commonality and divergence.

Following completion of the analytical coding process, I then engaged in the third round of coding – theme construction. During this process, I reviewed the compiled list of analytical categories multiple times to assess their levels of abstractive relatability to each other. During the second cycle of theme construction, I began to recognize that some sub-themes were contextually similar and warranted refinement of major themes in order to ensure that a particular sub-theme could only be subsumed by one major theme. This process resulted in the collapse of some themes and the expansion of others. Ultimately, at the end of this phase of coding, I had arrived at six tentative emerging themes, which I labeled: (1) Participants suggested that their experiences of *Moonlight* were characterized by emotional turbulence; (2) Participants suggested that their experiences of *Moonlight* were informed by their subjective levels of exposure to and identification with aspects of diversity; (3) Participants suggested that *Moonlight* has the potential to influence counseling interns to monitor and manage their emotional reactions to clients' stories; (4) Participants suggested that *Moonlight* has the potential to promote empathy and understanding of clients' diverse experiences; (5) Participants suggested that *Moonlight* has the potential to promote counselor self-awareness; and (6) Participants suggested that elements of *Moonlight* may be distracting for some students.

Once emerging themes had been identified, I embarked upon the member checking process and constructed a google form that listed the six themes described

above. I emailed each participant individually, encouraging them to review the themes, indicate whether they felt each theme authentically represented the experiences and perceptions of the group, and to provide commentary regarding their positions. Eight participants completed the electronic member check survey. All eight of the participants endorsed the first five themes and provided commentary, which will be presented later in this chapter, that affirmed those themes as being representative of the group's experience of *Moonlight*. However, the first two participants to respond to the member check survey rejected the sixth theme. Immediately, I became alerted of the possibility that phrasing of the theme was in itself confusing. I emailed those two participants to provide contextual information that informed the construction of sixth theme. Those two participants responded to me advising that they misinterpreted the theme, but with the contextual information provided they agreed that the sixth theme did represent the group's experience. Following these exchanges, I edited the member check survey and added contextual information in parentheses to demonstrate to participants what data informed the theme construction. Despite adding this information, another participant rejected the sixth theme and deemed it unrepresentative of the group experiences.

Provided the uncertain and mixed responses from participants regarding the sixth theme, I knew that I needed to revisit the coding process. Upon further examination of this theme, I determined that its associated sub-themes were actually categorically similar to other major themes. For this reason, the sixth theme was collapsed and themes one and five were expanded to respectively include the sub-themes: experiences characterized by plot confusion and recognition of potential limitations and sensitivities. This process of

analysis effectively resulted in the refinement of data and construction of themes that resonated with participants.

These findings are based upon the genuine experiences of the participants that engaged in the focus group interview. The words of the participants are showcased in a way that serves to preserve the authenticity of the experiences and perceptions described. In reporting the words of the participants, I have maintained the gender of the participant speaking. Some participants shared other demographic information, such as religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and race, that I also maintained in order to preserve the context from which participants' experiences and perceptions may have been informed. The following is an in-depth discussion of the five themes and sub-themes, including quotes from the focus group interview, written reflections, and individual member checks.

Theme 1: Participants Suggested That Their Experiences of *Moonlight* Were Characterized by Emotional Turbulence

This major theme describes the overall experiences detailed by the focus group participants immediately following their viewing of the film. All participants, in either the interview or the written reflections, shared their personal and subjective reactions during the film exposure. For the majority of participants, experiencing numerous types of feelings throughout the film was commonplace. Some participants identified experiencing feelings and reactions that were similar in context, while others described experiencing feelings and reactions that were characterized by polarity. Some participants utilized verbiage that indicated elevated intensity of emotions and reactions at distinct moments during the film. A few participants reported feelings of confusion related to the

plot of the film. Despite the fact that participants reported experiencing subjectively different emotions and reactions at varying levels of intensity, the general consensus was that *Moonlight* is a film that promotes a dynamic, rather than a static, emotive journey for its viewers. This major theme was supported by four sub-themes, each of which will be presented and explored in-depth.

Sub-theme: Experiences characterized by dismay. Many participants described their experiences of the film using language that reflected distress, specifically in the context of being surprised by the twists and turns of Chiron's story. Some participants expressed emotions related to the behaviors of Chiron's drug addicted mother, Paula. Giselle advised that "it like broke me when his mom called him out," referencing a remark Paula made to her drug dealer, and Chiron's mentor, Juan, regarding the way Chiron walked. Giselle goes on to reference Paula again later in the interview when discussing the negative perspectives and opinions perpetuated about homosexuals, stating "like what kind of views do you have on that? So, I was watching this and his mom did that. It was like she was so uneducated and not putting him in a secure environment in many different aspects." Giselle's comments reiterate that she experiences a sense of dismay or shock regarding how Chiron's own mother is discussing him. Similarly, Jessica also reflected on the feelings she experienced regarding Paula's treatment and care of Chiron. When describing her reactions to seeing Chiron boil a pot of bath water and use dish liquid for soap, Jessica questioned Paula's whereabouts stating "And where was she? You know what I mean? Like, I don't know maybe it's just like the mother in me like coming out in that scene, but it just got all over me. That he didn't have nobody

to give him a proper bath for God's sakes." This statement suggested that from a maternal perspective she is shocked that Chiron is having to care for himself at such a young age.

Two participants described feeling an emotional reaction following Chiron's arrest that resulted from him using violence against a long-time bully. Claire reported that she "was upset that he, you know, was taken to jail because it was like he finally stood up for himself." Although Claire later goes on to evaluate the potential positive impact that the arrest may have had on Chiron, her initial reaction, as evidenced by this comment, reflects one of disapproval. LR also advised that she felt "sad" because Chiron had "got in trouble." Giselle further reflected on the betrayal that Chiron suffered at the hands of his love interest and friend, Kevin, who succumbed to peer pressure and beat up Chiron. Giselle expressed "but it's just like it just made me so mad that Kevin did that because that just messed with Chiron more than anything." In the context of Kevin and Chiron having experienced an intimate exchange a day prior to Kevin assaulting Chiron, Giselle's angry reaction appears to be influenced by the unexpected nature of Kevin's decision.

Sub-theme: Experiences characterized by mixed emotions. Many of the participants expressed either directly or indirectly that they experienced numerous types of emotional reactions throughout the film. One participant described this phenomenon explicitly on two separate occasions. LR advised that while watching the film and experiencing the characters, "you may be angry at them one minute and feeling bad for them the next." She contextualized this notion of experiencing inconsistent feelings when reflecting, like Claire, on Chiron's arrest, stating "I feel like we all cheered when he stood up for himself then sad again because he got in trouble."

Other participants made comments throughout the interview that reflected shifts in emotions. GT, for example, when considering Chiron's lack of maternal support shared, "Yeah I thought he must have felt really unloved, you know. I mean that's just heart-breaking, but I almost thought he probably doesn't know what it is, you know, to be loved." Later on when GT was discussing Chiron's use of marijuana for the first time, she stated, "I was kind of like actually go for it. Like enjoy yourself for a little bit (chuckles)." Although GT does not explicitly identify a feeling associated with Chiron's marijuana use, her stance of wanting Chiron to "enjoy" himself infers an affirmative emotional response that is unlike the saddening response she had to Chiron's lack of love. Mike's reactions to the film echoed the same fluctuation as GT's. Initially when discussing her overall experience of the film, Mike advised, "I was just going to say that it was, uh, it, it was sad. I did not cry, but I did want to cry so I held it back, but if I was at home I probably would have." Following GT's affirmative response to Chiron's marijuana use, Mike stated, "Like be a kid. You're dealing with way too many adult things. Get high! Have fun with Kevin." Mike's shift in expression was accompanied by a change in affect as well. During the former comment, Mike was observed to be looking toward the table as she focused on her words; however, during the latter comment Mike was observed to inflect her voice to demonstrate approval and excitement.

HM detailed an overall sense of intrigue when the group of participants were asked to describe their experiences during the film. Within her first comment to the group HM stated: "I was just like fascinated with it . . . then it was just like this curiosity, like oh my gosh what is going to happen to this kid?" Although HM may have maintained an overall curiosity during the film, subsequent comments indicate that she experienced

other more dismayed reactions similar to those presented in the first sub-theme. In an exchange with other participants, HM reflected on the adversity Chiron experienced and stated, “It’s just like heart-wrenching when he went to the one guy and was like ‘do you sell drugs and sell them to my mom?’” HM’s use of an adjective that so thoroughly described a painful moment leads me to infer that HM may have experienced distress in relation to Chiron’s perceiving Juan (his mentor) in a different light after learning that he provides his mother with drugs. For contextual purposes, it is important to note that this particular interaction between Chiron and Juan resulted in a disruption in their relationship. The termination of this relationship left Chiron without emotional support or interpersonal connection, which appears to have further affected HM. In this excerpt HM stated, “But like you wanted him to have at least one friend that he could talk to or that understood something . . . I just kept like hoping there would be that one person maybe that he could find.” HM’s encounters with a myriad of feelings support the prevalence of the mixed emotion sub-theme, as well as the major theme of experienced emotional turbulence.

Sub-theme: Experiences characterized by varying levels of intensity. This final sub-theme emerged to reflect the varied intensity of emotions articulated and demonstrated by participants. Although the majority of the participants agreed that their experiences were largely characterized by dismay, the manner in which participants expressed these experiences were divergent. Some of the participants’ emotional reactions were expressed with more forceful language than others were. When asked to discuss their overall reactions to the film, Hazel reported that there were moments where she could feel herself getting “pissed off.” Although Hazel’s reaction falls within the

category of anger and is contextually different from GT's use of "heart-breaking" and HM's use of "heart-wrenching," all of these adjectives suggest an increased elevation in emotion.

Another means of assessing and identifying an increase in emotion is to evaluate emotional descriptions for the presence of adverbs, as these added words or phrases are typically used to modify or qualify an adjective in an attempt to express a relation of degree. For example, when Giselle stated that "it was really sad whenever Juan ended up dying," her use of the word "really" served to qualify how sad she was when witnessing this portion of the film. Similarly, LR's statement that she found the overall experience of *Moonlight* to be "very stressful" incorporated the same type of qualification in order to express an increased degree or level of emotion. Another example of using an adverb to qualify emotion can be found in Violet's written reflection about how the study affected her, as she wrote: "Honestly, I am extremely emotional. I literally didn't want to speak for fear of crying." Violet's reflection arguably provided even greater context to assess intensity of emotion as she indicated a fear that her emotions would manifest in a physical manner.

Other participants did experience physical manifestations of intense emotions during the study. Hazel, when discussing how portions of the film had pissed her off, reported, "And for me, I had like a body response throughout. I was sitting here, I was like really tense . . . yeah, I was like crossing my arms." Mike demonstrated an intense emotional reaction as well when she became tearful and was unable to finish detailing her experience during the film. Jessica normalized Mike's reaction by stating "the first time I watched it, I did cry." The participants' physical responses definitely illuminated an

increased intensity in emotion and unquestionably reiterated the affective influence that *Moonlight* can have on its viewers. As described by LR, overall the participants' experiences of the *Moonlight* were reminiscent of "an emotional rollercoaster."

Sub-theme: Experiences characterized by plot confusion. Throughout the focus group interview, there were numerous instances where participants explicitly advised that they were confused about *Moonlight*'s plot. Some of the comments made by participants were in relation to the structure of the film, which presented Chiron's narrative through three distinct chapters, which in doing so left periods of Chiron's life unaccounted for. This lack of certainty regarding some of the film's plotlines resulted in exchanges among participants. For example, when HM and Giselle were discussing a portion of the film where Chiron appears to be disappointed in Juan for selling drugs to his mother, Paula, Claire interjected, "Do we know what happened to that guy?" Mike then advised, "He died, but it didn't like really show how."

Following Mike's comment, Jessica questioned whether Juan was actually Chiron's biological father. Jessica questioned:

Wait, that's his dad. Like didn't the mom state that? Like in an indirect way when they were in front of the car and he was telling her that . . . yeah when they were like arguing with each other in front of the car the mom stated are you gonna raise him? You tell him why he walks like that. I just thought like maybe actually he was like his dad. You know?

Giselle provided her perspective on Jessica's question, stating:

I thought she was doing that because he was confiding in him so much and leaving home and staying with him. Like she probably thought like "oh you can raise him better than I can." He's coming to you rather than me. So that's what I got from it.

Another instance during the focus group interview that suggested confusion among participants was in relation to Chiron's time spent incarcerated. Following KJ's

comment about Chiron's getting "buff," Giselle commented, "And it never states how long he was in jail either." LR then offered, "I think it was just juvie. So maybe like the rest of the time of high school."

In another moment, Jessica expressed being frustrated with the film for not painting a clear picture regarding the bullying Chiron experienced in school. Jessica stated:

I was kind of upset with the movie that they like didn't really go into more depth about why the kids picked on him so bad. I mean I never, even the second time watching it, I still don't understand why they picked on this kid so bad. You know? Just like because he was small, I mean when they were picking on him when he was little, I get it like he was kind of like the runt of the bunch when they were playing football, like I get that. But as he got older, I guess in like high school or middle school, I don't understand like why the kid with the dreads was so infatuated with just picking on him so bad, like you know? What happened or what transpired between like then when he was a little kid to like middle school or high school or whatever age he was at? Like I just never understood that about the movie.

To Jessica's question, Victoria responded, "Well they kept using like the term faggot."

Jessica then stated, "Aaahhh yeah." Later on in the discussion, following Jessica's comments about the fight that occurred between Chiron and Kevin (Chiron's love interest), Giselle inquired, "Was Kevin, whenever he was little in the first part, was Kevin the one that he was wrestling with?" Jessica responded with an affirmative "Mmmhmm."

There were also some questions regarding Chiron's relocation to another state in the film. Mike queried, "And I was confused. How did they end up in Atlanta? Something about his mom? Jessica offered her perspective, stating, "He went to juvie in Atlanta and he just stayed there." Mike then asked, "So, he got shipped from Miami to Atlanta?" Jessica responded affirmatively, "To Atlanta, yeah" to which Mike commented "That doesn't happen." Mike further questioned, "But the mom ended up there in rehab

too?” Jessica replied, “No, no the mom ended up in rehab in Miami. Like in Florida, wherever he was previously.” Mike reiterated her confusion, stating, “I’m just curious how they ended up there. And all he said after all that stuff happened, there was like no more elaboration.” Mike’s concluding remarks again highlighted her critique of the film: “I wish they had like more substance in between. I didn’t like that it was like here’s this kid then boom teenager then boom adult. There’s way more to the story.”

All eight participants who completed member checks endorsed that this theme reflected the group’s experience and perception of *Moonlight*. Participants made additional comments during the member-checking phase that reinforced this theme. Hazel responded to this theme by stating, “I agree with this because I went through a lot of emotions while watching this movie such as sadness, anger, fear, and happiness.”

Claire noted:

The film created many emotional responses in myself and other group members. I found myself becoming angry with the biological mother but also feeling sympathy for her as well. The emotion I experienced the most throughout the film was anger towards those that harmed the main character.

GT expressed, “I feel that viewing the video elicited multiple feelings for the situations and characters.” Victoria echoed the same sentiment, advising: “My emotions were all over the place, up and down, left and right.” In her confirmatory statement, Liz reinforced an idea that was detailed by LR in the focus group interview. Liz noted, “I definitely felt like I was on an emotional roller coaster during the film and felt so connected to the experiences and emotions of the main character.”

Theme 2: Participants Suggested That Their Experiences of *Moonlight* Were Informed by Their Subjective Levels of Exposure to and Identification with Aspects of Diversity

As detailed in the methodology section, I intentionally incorporated a question in the focus group protocol to elicit participants' reflections on what they believed informed their experiences and perceptions of *Moonlight*. It was my desire to engage participants in a way that moved their reflection and processing from that of their experiences with the film content to their own experiences with themselves, their lives, and lived experiences with others. From the participants' responses to this question, along with commentary made throughout the focus group interview, emerged a theme characterized by various levels of exposure to aspects of diversity, subjective degrees of identification with aspects of diversity illustrated in *Moonlight*, and personal accounts about how participants have been vicariously exposed to diverse cultures and identities that differ from their own.

Subtheme: Limited exposure to diverse populations. For quite a few participants their personal experiences and exchanges with individuals from other cultural and social groups appear to be limited. This is not surprising considering that the university the participants attend is located in a portion of the southeastern United States and has a strong history of recruiting students from rural geographical locations. The racial and ethnic background of the participants in this sample is very similar to the largely monocultural demographics of the university and surrounding area. Most of the participants were very forthcoming regarding their lack of or limited exposure to other populations, and some reflected these experiences directly during the interview before the question was posed for discussion.

At the onset of the group interview, HM contextualized her experience of curiosity during the film by mentioning her lack of exposure to individuals like Chiron. Although a portion of HM's excerpt was presented under the previous theme, it bears repeating and reexamination in the context of this sub-theme. HM stated:

I found myself experiencing both of what they are describing, and really over all I was just like fascinated with it, because this is not a life, you know, that I have like ever, you know, exposed to. Yeah, I mean, completely different lifestyle and then it was just like this curiosity, like oh my gosh what is going to happen to this kid? How is he going to turn out growing up in this circumstance? And I don't think that I pictured it; it was different than I pictured it ending, for sure.

Within the context of the entire quote from HM, her fascination with Chiron's character and anticipation of what will become of him is directly influenced by her lack of exposure to a "completely different lifestyle." Her subsequent questions also indicate that they were conceptualized from a place of uncertainty and unfamiliarity. Although she doesn't explicate how she thought the film would turn out, she does indicate that the way in which she perceived it would unfold was not what actually did.

Giselle and LR also made comments that indicated their lack of personal exposure to aspects of diversity within the first few minutes of the interview. Giselle, when thinking about Chiron's circumstances, contrasted her life experiences by stating "I mean I went to a Catholic school from preschool to eighth grade and I rode the school bus and like I didn't see anything like that." Despite the fact that Giselle does not detail exactly what aspects of Chiron's experiences or identities she has not been exposed to, the comment does come directly after HM's which infers it could be related to Chiron's lifestyle or circumstances. When discussing how her experiences of the film and her efforts to relate to Chiron, LR mentioned her limited exposure to diversity in this

comment: “but by no means did I grow up in that kind of environment and the diversity in my hometown was like .001.” Although LR does find an entry point for relating to and understanding parts of Chiron’s struggles, which will be explored in a subsequent sub-theme, she clearly prefaces her exploration with an acknowledgement she had limited exposure to diversity growing up. GT echoed this sentiment in her written reflection entry, as she wrote, “I am very unfamiliar with that culture, he was raised in. I am unfamiliar with inner city life and being African-American.”

Further support for this sub-theme can be seen in an exchange between Victoria, Giselle, and HM as they discuss the schools they attended during childhood. Victoria broached the topic with this statement:

Just like because I am from a rural county, you know, in eastern ***. So, there wasn’t that many African Americans and it’s not like I was racist, but I wasn’t, you know, emerged into it and like seven years later I have a Black goddaughter. But like seven years ago, and it’s not like anything bad but like I just wasn’t around people of that like race.

Giselle related to this Victoria’s disclosure by responding: “I relate to that because my freshmen year, I lived with my mom and there were two African Americas in the whole high school in *** county, ****. “ To which, Victoria added: That was two more than in *** county.” HM then shared her experiences with moving from a previous state at the age of eight and her attempt to understand the lack of diversity in her new community. HM advised that she “when I went to my elementary school, I was like ‘do they not let Black people come to this school?’ So, I asked my parents that, like ‘where are they?’” It bothered me!” The conversation between these three participants not only served as an opportunity for them to collectively reflect upon their finite level of exposure to racial

diversity during childhood but also served to reiterate limited exposure as having an influence on their experiences of *Moonlight*.

Subtheme: Personal identification with aspects of Chiron's identities. Perhaps one of the most influential factors that contribute to one's ability to understand the experiences of another is having relatable experiences or identities. A convergence of similar experiences permits a unique type of empathy, one which may be more cumbersome to establish when interpersonal connections are characterized by a lack of commonality. Chiron is a complex character who presents with intersecting identities and is faced with a plethora of social problems. Although nearly all of the participants in this study were unable to personally identify with Chiron's experiences as a Black person, some participants evaluated their own personal experiences and discovered entry points for relation to aspects of Chiron's identities.

Moonlight captures Chiron's struggle to know, understand, and accept his sexual orientation. He frequently faces adversity within his environment based on others' perceptions of his masculinity and overt discrimination for being different from the other males. For two participants, the primary identity dimension of sexual orientation presented a significant point of connection with Chiron's struggles. In the focus group interview, KJ shared:

I think I mostly related to the LGBT part of the film. And when he was getting picked on. I think when you don't have a lot of, like, if you don't accept it yourself yet. Words hurt a lot more than what people say later on when you're very self-aware and don't really care. Uh, so I think I saw that a little bit when he was getting picked on.

From KJ's statement, she identifies an overt connection with Chiron based on similar experiences with sexual orientation and its associated discrimination. This connection

also allows KJ to evaluate, possibly based on her own experiences with self-acceptance, the pain that Chiron endures from the verbal assaults on his orientation and presentation. KJ's adds to this point of connection in her written reflection post, stating, "I, like Chiron, am gay. I think that his confusion on what he feels is similar to my own when he was young. Although not picked on by my peers, I know how hurtful it can be when your family member says something derogatory." Violet also expressed her identification with Chiron's sexual identity experiences. In her written reflection post, she articulated:

I think when Chiron experienced his first sexual experience with a man it really touched me – I being homosexual had a similar first sexual experience and then found myself mocked for enjoying it. I also found that being gay and from a poor SES really resonated with me. My family basically disowned me and I was told that I was a sinner which I found similar to when Chiron was called a faggot.

These excerpts suggest that participants whom identified with Chiron's sexual orientation experienced and perceived the film through a uniquely subjective and personal perspective that induced reflection about their own experiences with others' judgments and discrimination. It should be noted that neither of these participants reported feeling confused or shocked by what Chiron was experiencing in regard to his sexual orientation, which differs from the responses of some of the self-identified heterosexual participants.

Moonlight also highlights Chiron's experiences with and attempts to navigate the impact of poverty throughout this childhood. The viewer bears witness to Chiron being harassed by his mother, Paula, for money and his struggles with food insecurity. For one participant, Chiron's experiences and identification with financial hardship resonated. For example, Giselle stated:

I mean I grew up in a very poor household, me and my mom. I moved out of mom's house when I was 15, we were on food stamps, she struggled. Like she lost her job from taking pills from the pharmacy. It was just like

all of that stuff I relate to cause I remember like not really feeling secure at home and stuff like that.

Giselle's identification with the hardships that accompany living in at a lower socioeconomic status provided her a unique lens from which to experience the film and the financial insecurity that impacted Chiron's lived experiences. LR, Mike, and Violet also alluded to their own experiences with growing up with financial restraints; however, these participants did not detail to what extent their socioeconomic status impacted their specific experiences.

In regard to Chiron's experiences with issues such as exposure to substance abuse, familial conflict, feelings of isolation, and bullying many participants were able to relate. Experiences with being bullied resonated with some participants and, in part, informed their experience of the film. For some, like Claire, a history of bullying was the only intersecting experiences she shared with Chiron. GT recognized the experiences she had in common with Chiron, but qualified their intensity, when she wrote: "When Chiron is being bullied, he struck an emotional chord within me, because I was bullied as a child and teen, although not to that extent." Jessica emphasized the same sentiment in her written reflection, stating: "I was also bullied as a child and adolescent so I can relate to him in that way as well." When conceptualizing her personal experiences that were similar to Chiron's, LR mentioned "bullying from step-siblings." In Liz's written reflection entry, she provided some poignant personal background information to contextualize possible rationale for her and Chiron both being victims of harassment. Liz wrote:

What I identified most with in the film was Chiron's shyness and how he was a quiet, easy target to others. When I was growing up, I was very shy and introverted. I could see on his face when he was so quiet that he had

so much he was feeling and needed someone to say it to. I was bullied by my friends in middle school, so I definitely relate to that aspect of his identity.

Liz's comments suggested that her experience and perception of *Moonlight* may have been informed by her own personal experiences as a shy and introverted person. This connection with Chiron is unique, as it is not based on the traditional and categorical identifiers typically associated with identity and rather emphasized a similarity in personality type and physical presence.

Moonlight captured the impact of familial dysfunction and the impact that it had on a young Chiron. The viewer frequently sees Chiron with limited emotional support and essentially no affection from others. Chiron's difficult relationship with his mother was relatable for some participants whose own familial background served as an influence on their experience of the film. Giselle, whose comments about difficulty with her mother were previously presented, elaborated on the impact that on her perspective while watching the film. Giselle stated:

It was just like all of that stuff I relate to because I remember like not really feeling secure at home and stuff like that. So, it's just like growing up around that and then like everybody mentioning clients and stuff like that, when you're immersed in it, in different aspects like your values change and you just see things from a different aspect.

Giselle elaborated on this experience and the influence it had on her understanding of Chiron in a written reflection entry, which reads: "I feel that I have been through hardships with my home life regarding a lack of love and security from my mom. I felt that I related to the desire to find who I am despite what I was going through." Upon evaluation of Giselle's comments in the focus group and her written entry, one could surmise that her own journey of self-acceptance without the desired level of support from

her mother permits her to perceive Chiron's experiences differently than she feels her co-participants do.

Other participants, namely HM, LR, and Mike also shared the impact that familial situations had on them in a way that informed their perceptions of Chiron's experiences with his mother. HM connected to Chiron's pressure to manage issues that a mother typically would, stating: "I could relate to his difficult relationship with his mom. My own mother has struggled with mental health issues that caused me to have to step it up as a teenager." Mike shared her connection to Chiron's isolation when she wrote: "Growing up, I was a middle child that was lost behind the chaos of my brother's mental illness following my parents' divorce." LR also disclosed personal experiences regarding her unstable relationship with her biological father, his substance use, and the longing for a connection with a parent that did not materialize. In her written reflection, LR shared:

As a child, during the rare and brief visitations with my biological father, I had several experiences that reminded me of Chiron's life. Lack of food in the home, poor hygiene practices, bullying from step-siblings, and drug use. When drugs were being used there were rules about where you could go in the home, who you could be around, there was this tension of trouble and fear that I felt even at the age of 8. I don't know that I always understood what was going on, but I knew it didn't feel right. Then, there was also the wanting that relationship and connection with my parent, but not getting that because of drug use/socioeconomics/ family issues. I saw this in Chiron's life, and I imagine he must have felt very similarly at times: lacking a presence.

LR's comments represent a two-way reflective process that informed her experience of the film. Her own subjective experiences and identification with familial problems are elicited by exposure to Chiron's relationship with his mother; however, those same elicited memories of her past serve to guide her active conceptualization of Chiron's experiences.

As detailed in both Giselle's and LR's account of familial issues, exposure to substance abuse or addicted parents also represents an experience that informed some participants perception of the film. Hazel and Jessica also found Chiron's exposure to drug use as a point of personal connection. In her written reflection entry, Hazel wrote: "I perceive my personal experiences are like Chiron's, because I grew up surrounded by substance abuse. I can relate with Chiron by not letting my family history define me and by not letting myself fall into the same cycle." Jessica, although she did not delve into the impact that that her mother's substance use had on their relationship, stated "My mother is relatable to him and his mother because she suffers from drug addiction and mental health issues."

In sum, participants' experiences and perceptions of *Moonlight* are variably informed by their subjective levels of experiences with certain social problems and identification with Chiron's identities. In a practical sense, this phenomenon suggests that *Moonlight* has the demonstrated potential to resonate with a wide range of viewers regardless of their intersectional identities.

Subtheme: Vicarious exposure to diverse individuals and experiences. The emergence of the vicarious exposure subtheme was informed by the participants' explicit response to the aligned protocol question. When posed with the question (What informs or influences your experience and how you perceive the film?), numerous participants advised that their experiences or perceptions had been informed through vicarious exposure to situations or experiences endured by Chiron. There were two primary means in which this vicarious exposure occurred: 1) through participants' work with clients and 2) through participants' access to educational experiences.

As mentioned, participants' interactions with clients provided an impetus for understanding the social issues illuminated by the film along with their effects. Claire was the first to respond to the question and provided the following comments:

I did not grow up with a similar experience, but I work with a lot of the population who had similar childhoods. I work with families who had their kids removed so you can kind of see that generational situation with like the drugs and abuse and all that kind of thing. So that's been primarily my experience with it so that kind of informed me as I watched.

Similarly, GT, Victoria, and HM advised that their clinical work with clients influenced their perceptions as they experienced and made sense of the film. GT stated:

I think what shaped my viewpoint, like a lot, was that I think about the kids that I work with and so I was kind of thinking of my clients and their issues kind of thing. Like this probably how my client feels when they go home. It may not be the exact same situation but it's very similar with the drugs and everything. So, I just felt really bad for him when I was thinking about my clients.

Victoria advised:

Mine was mostly with adolescence because I work with adolescents the most. So then like I have all these mouthy adolescents and then I have to, like, take a step back and realize, like, what they have been through, you know? Like why are they being like how they are now, you know?

HM reiterated the subtheme of clinical work informing participants' perceptions when she shared:

I definitely feel like, um, (sigh), I have worked with a range of populations with my case management job and also in practicum and internship and I can see it from all three just how that relates to my clients and the things they're living through, the trauma. You know, how that has affected their abilities to rise above what's happen to them and maybe that's why they're stuck or why they are what they are now. Looking to see how their past has affected them.

GT, Victoria, and HM articulated that the way in which they perceived and attempted to understand Chiron was, to a degree, influenced by their understanding of young clients

experiencing similar hardships. The participants suggested that their previous clinical, affective, and cognitive efforts to understand the impact of social problems, such as parental drug use, on their juvenile clients had shaped their perspective in such a manner that they filtered Chiron's experiences through that perspective. The practical experience that the participants via exposure to work with clients appears to also have implications regarding their ability to empathize with Chiron, which will be described more in another theme.

The concept of education as a means of vicarious exposure to diversity was articulated by GT:

Education does put you out there and exposes you to different things, so, and definitely counseling education. So, and just, like you know, you can't get mad at people- like I'll go back home my family will make a joke or something and I know that I can't get mad because, you know, they don't understand if they're not educated on it, so. But I am mad and I'd like to say something. But, like yeah, you know?

Although GT attributes education as having an active influence on how she experienced *Moonlight*, she continues to discuss how it is difficult to manage reactions toward others who may not have received such education. The shift in direction of GT's comments may indicate that she has internalized new values and perspectives on education which guides how she interacts with the world, and the film. Upon examining the shift in conversational focus, I surmised that instances in which participants critiqued or harshly evaluated perceived miseducation or non-education may, to a degree, indicate that they have internalized and applied "an educated" perspective on cultural and social differences. For example, when Giselle discussed the negative connotation associated with homosexuality she stated, "like people are so uneducated when it comes to like homosexuality and stuff like that . . . so I was watching this and his mom did that. It was

like she was so uneducated.” Following Giselle’s comments, Jessica chimed in to agree. When she discussed how some of her family members perceive homosexuality, Jessica said: “It’s crazy. Like even just in general, like I feel with my grandparents like I don’t think they fully understand, and they probably never will even though I try to educate them.” Jessica also stated, “Until you go out and get an education and get you know like cultured, as I like to call it, get immersed into life then you’re like you’re not gonna know. You’re not gonna be woke; you’re just gonna stay sleeping.” The critiques made by GT, Giselle, and Jessica about others’ unmodified perspectives on issues of diversity, from an inductive reasoning standpoint, indicate that they believe having more “educated,” open, or progressive views on diversity is not only a preferable perspective to possess, but one in which they view the world. From this supposition, the internalization of a more “educational” perspective on diversity, traditionally cultivated through both direct and vicarious exposure to cultures, informed these participants’ experiences and perceptions of *Moonlight*.

All eight participants who completed member checks endorsed that this theme reflected the group’s experience and perception of *Moonlight*. Additional comments were made by participants during the member-checking phase that reinforced this theme. Liz responded to this theme, stating, “Yes, I was definitely swayed by my own exposure because I was able to connect on certain levels based on what I have gone through that is similar.” GT advised, “I think everyone has their own experiences with the events portrayed in the movie as well as the characters and their actions. We also all have experiences with clients that may come through our perceptions of the film.”

Theme 3: Participants suggested that *Moonlight* has the Potential to Influence Counseling Interns to Monitor and Manage Their Emotional Reactions to Clients' Stories

The theme emerged as a result of the participants' consistent comments about the lived and potential experiences of hearing clients' stories and their concerns regarding their reactions. The participants' affective reactions to *Moonlight* appeared to prompt memories of clients' stories that had also impacted participants emotionally. The participants' exchanges contained an emphasis on management of emotions in order to not inadvertently negate clients' experiences or opportunities to share their stories. There are two subthemes that supported this major, overarching theme.

Subtheme: Identification of emotional reactions in relation to the counseling relationship. *Moonlight* served as an impetus for affective and cognitive stimulation. Participants, as detailed in previous themes, experienced a myriad of emotional reactions at varying levels of intensity. Some participants' experiences and perceptions of the film were informed by personal lived experiences related to Chiron's hardships with familial conflict, bullying, and exposure to substance abuse and its systemic effects. Other participants' experiences and perceptions were informed by previous clinical work with clients whom struggled with similar issues as Chiron. Throughout the focus group interview, as well as evidenced in the written reflections, there are numerous instances that indicated that *Moonlight* had evoked memories of clients and their stories.

In regard to Mike's physical and emotional reaction when questioned about her experience of *Moonlight*, where she motioned for the interview to continue while she collected herself, she noted:

But earlier when I got emotional, um, there was a kiddo that reminded me just like this kid. His mom was a, uh did crack and his mom would come and visit him and the whole reason he starting trapping was to fuel his mom's addiction. And she was actually the one who set him up with the drug dealer to get him going when he was 12 years old. And like now he's in the pen for 30 years for what he's done, but he was like a scrawny kid. He was tiny, tiny like that kid, just like that kid, like everything about him.

In this passage, Mike saw Chiron's struggles as similar to a client with whom she had previously worked. Mike's experience during the film prompted memories of that client and produced a moment of re-experiencing for Mike. Mike was initially flooded with emotions when she initially tried to recount the specifics of her client's story. Mike's reactions suggest that she experienced feelings of despair and sorrow for the client and his circumstances.

Giselle and Victoria also demonstrated the notion that the film's content evoked memories of certain clients with whom they had worked. In response to Jessica's comments that questioned Paula's presence in Chiron's life and her own reactions to the film from a maternal perspective, Giselle provided a client scenario in an attempt to normalize the impact that substance abuse may have on parenting practices. Giselle recounted:

And like in that moment watching that, and you're like talking about taking a bath and doing everything by himself; I have a client, she's 12, and she told me about how she would have to get up for school in second grade by herself and take a bath, shower, and walk to a neighbor's house to get her hair dried and go to school. Cause her mom wasn't there and stuff just like that. And I had an emotional feeling to that because I thought about my client and how alone she was and had to make her own food and stuff in second grade.

Victoria responded: "I have a 13-year-old that took care of like his seven and five-year-old sisters. And like he was, you know, the sole provider. Like he did everything for them, and he was 13." Although Giselle started off her comments trying to promote

understanding of Paula's ineffective parenting being explicitly impacted by her addiction, she finds herself re-experiencing an "emotional feeling" for the 12-year-old client she had previously served.

When Jessica discussed the message that she is taking away from her emotional reaction to *Moonlight*, she emphasized the potential for counseling to be emotionally draining. Jessica detailed her takeaway message as follows:

I think it also taught me that my heart is just always going to be like hanging by a thread because every client is going to have, like, different places that they come from. But I'm always going to have that sense of like, like I did with this movie, like I just want to cry, you know? But like I can't. Like I pretty much set myself up to want to cry until I retire. (chuckles). Like in a lot of good ways, but also, I mean like that's our reality. We are going to be hearing stories like this and even worse stories than this movie and we're going to be time and time again being put in this situation. And that is like our reality, you know?

Jessica's experience with Chiron's story elicited a perception of reality that appeared to be both revealing and distressing. Although Jessica does not detail a specific account of a client's story or circumstances, she does reflect on the powerful impact that client stories will have on her as a counselor. Jessica's realization may be informed by previous experiences with clients that she did not share, but she clearly explicated that this realization has been informed by her reaction to *Moonlight*.

Following Jessica's remarks, Giselle discussed a memory of a client's circumstances and how it personally resonated with her own lived experiences. Giselle shared:

You're gonna hear stories that are similar to yours. Like I talk to them (pointed at other participants) in group chat. Like I had a client last week who is going through court and mom's going to lose custody and mom was abusive and stuff. And I freaked out. I honestly felt like I was going to have a panic attack because I said I didn't want to work with kids at first, because I didn't want to feel something, like a similar story but I freaked

out because it was like feelings of like “oh God, this is so similar.” But whenever I talked to the client, she said “you haven’t talked to your mom in umpteen years, so I am just going to start from the beginning.” And she told me everything and it was like the best feeling. I had like a therapist “aha” moment and I was able to see what stage of grief she was in and I just remember talking to my supervisor and she was like “when you have scenario that is similar to yours this is whenever you find your place.

Through her words, Giselle reaffirms Jessica’s supposition that counselors will hear distressing stories from clients that provoke emotional reactions. However, Giselle’s nuanced account of her experience with this client illuminated the realization that sometimes clients’ stories may be very similar to the counselor’s own lived experiences. The dynamic exchange between participants regarding their experiences of *Moonlight* permitted some participants to openly conceptualize the emotional impact that client stories have already had and will continue to have on them throughout their careers as mental health counselors. As the participants worked to make sense of this realization, they provided statements that contributed to the emergence of the next subtheme for this major theme.

Subtheme: The need to be strong in the counselor role. The inclusion of this subtheme was merited by participants’ comments made in conjunction with their exchange about emotional reactions to client stories. The realization that clients’ stories have the potential to stimulate, sometimes intense, emotional reactions within the participants guided a conversational shift aimed at examining the implications this may have in sessions with clients.

The transition from speaking about participants’ subjective emotional reactions to client stories to examination of emotional management can be pinpointed in the commentary made by Jessica. At the conclusion of her statement regarding her “heart

hanging by a thread” due to the distressing client stories she can expect to hear throughout her career, Jessica made the comment: “I mean I think we are ready for it in a way, but we have to continue to grow as like a counselor so that we don’t take that stuff home.” I utilized a probing question and responded, “Grow in what way?” The following is Jessica’s reply:

Um, just like growing with being able to handle people’s stories, you know? I believe that people leave imprints on your life and your path and we’ve taken on a profession where we are going to get these imprints regardless if we are asking for them or not. And so just being able to, like you know, categorize that and put that aside and (be like) okay “I’m here, I’m Ms. (NAME),” but when I leave I am now (Jessica) and being able you know to differentiate the two individuals because if not it’s going to make me a puddle of tears.

In the passage, Jessica further contextualized the impact that clients’ stories have upon counselors when she discussed the involuntarily imprints left by clients. However, Jessica then offered a potential solution in the way of categorizing or separating her selves. The language that Jessica used when identifying the parts of her that needed to be separated were characterized by dichotomy. “Ms. (LAST NAME)” reflected an authoritative or professional component of Jessica, whereas “FIRST NAME” reflected a more vulnerable, authentic component of Jessica. The characterization that Jessica proposed carries inferences related to expectations of emotional reaction. Jessica suggested that the more authentic and genuine aspect of her identity (referenced with her first name) is capable of reducing her “to a puddle of tears” when exposed to distressing client stories, and that for this reason she must work to compartmentalize that aspect of herself and maintain a more professional manner (referenced with her last name and prefix).

In response to Jessica’s examination, GT responded, “That’s true. I feel like we are really emotional, like, caring people but then when you’re put in this situation in

order to help the people you have to be hard. (laughs) I'm sorry, strong, strong." In this moment, GT appeared to be making sense of Jessica's comments about separating emotional self from professional self. GT does this by identifying a specific risk that may surface if participants (counselors) are not hard or strong: ineffectiveness. GT's comments appeared to have resonated with Jessica, as she responded, "Yeah, you can't be just like tears. You have to be like emotionally strong. Like every story you hear you can't just like cry. You know, just melt down and cry in front of them."

In response to GT, Jessica identified with the adjective "strong" to conceptualize how participants (counselors) should be with their clients. Jessica further operationalized the meaning of "strong" when she stated affirmatively that you cannot just melt down and cry in front of the clients. This exchange reinforced the notion that participants believe counselors should be able to conceal intense emotional reactions from their clients in order to be effective helpers.

Later in the interview, LR revisited this idea when she provided the following commentary:

GT was talking about like not getting emotional and, like I said I can't remember where I heard it, but they said when your client is in that moment, when they are telling you their story, like you can't get emotional because that's not your moment and if you do, you're taking away from it.

LR's comments reinforce the notion agreed upon by GT and Jessica regarding the inappropriateness of counselors becoming emotional in session with clients after hearing their stories. LR also contextualizes this inappropriateness by insinuating that an emotional reaction from a counselor impedes on the client's "moment." LR's suggestion was echoed by Giselle's response: "I was going to say that earlier. Somebody taught me and I was thinking about because it is about the client. If you're showing your reaction

and your, or you know, taking part in like your cry-fest, then that's for you, not for the client." Again, Giselle reiterates the distraction that counselor over-reactivity may have for clients and the counseling relationship. Following Giselle's comments, Mike interjected to describe her own attempts to manage emotional reactions with clients. Mike noted:

I can say personally that I left juvie several times crying or I would like call someone to come give me a break because I could not emotionally take anymore. Um, and just for that very reason – like I didn't want to get into a moment where I am sitting here bawling my eyes out and be like "oh shit, all these other kids are still here. Why's everyone looking at me?"

Mike provided a practical example of managing her emotional reactions by safeguarding her clients from being exposed to it. Mike also reiterated the assumption that her emotional response may be distracting for or detracting to the clients she served. Mike's comment about others (clients) looking at me may also indicate that she wanted to safeguard herself from embarrassment. Although not explicitly stated by Mike, there is an inference that can be drawn that she may feel embarrassed because crying in front of clients is wrong or inappropriate.

One participant, Hazel, referenced the idea of being strong in her written post aimed at discussing how the study has affected her. Hazel wrote: "This movie helped me see the importance of being supportive as a therapist and keeping your emotions hidden, because it won't be helpful to the client." Hazel's comments infer difference between "being supportive" and expressing emotions in a way that characterize the two as being contraindicated. Hazel's comparison of the two variables again reinforced the narrative that counselor emotional concealment equates more effective and helpful treatment for

clients and, therefore, counselors should be strong and manage overt emotional displays while in sessions with clients.

All eight participants who completed member checks endorsed that this theme reflected the group's experience and perception of *Moonlight*. Additional comments were made by participants during the member-checking phase that reinforced this theme. Liz advised, "Yes I agree that this film was eye opening and good practice for how I should perceive and respond to stories of clients." GT noted, "I feel that watching movies such as *Moonlight* will allow for counseling interns to measure the strength of their reactions to traumatic events such as physical violence, drugs, sexuality, etc." Claire stated, "The film exposes some difficult topics that can be overwhelming to listen to. When you are prepared and have experience being exposed to difficult topics it is easier to set aside your own emotions." Lastly, Hazel shared:

I agree with this, because the movie can help us realize how much support clients who come from similar backgrounds need and how us showing our emotions will not help the client, but only make the focus on us rather than them.

Theme 4: Participants Suggested That *Moonlight* has the Potential to Promote Empathy and Understanding of Clients' Diverse Experiences

The emergence of this theme was informed by participants' comments that reflected increased understanding of others' experiences. Some comments made by the participants presented perceptions regarding the experiences of clients who may be exposed to situations that may be considered typical in the helping profession, while other comments made by participants presented perceptions regarding the complexity of navigating intersections of identities and experiences. The two distinct, but overlapping patterns are further explored in their respective subthemes.

Subtheme: *Moonlight* promotes an understanding of experiences that may affect a wide range of clients. Throughout the focus group interview, and in some of the written reflections, some participants produced comments that were contextualized by understanding clients' experiences with certain types of issues. One topic that was brought up by Mike centered around the perception that younger clients may have to engage in illicit activities to support themselves. Mike noted:

Like we can preach and try to teach like you know new thoughts to our clients, but the reality is if you're the sole provider, you're 13, what job are you going to get? You can get one on the street. They don't care how old you are and you're gonna make money. And you're gonna be glorified.

Mike's comment suggested that despite counselors' attempts to redirect young clients, if they are unable to attain employment and they must provide for others then they will the option of trafficking drugs. It should be noted that Mike's comment was made in the context of an exchange between participants regarding Chiron's engagement with trafficking drugs, which suggested that the film content served as the impetus for Mike's comment.

Although she did not detail the specific types of experiences a client could endure, Giselle stated, "Like it really kind of opens your eyes to a lot of different things that a client could go through." This comment was shared before Giselle elaborated on Chiron's multiplicity of obstacles, which is detailed in the next subtheme. Later in the interview, during an exchange with Jessica, Giselle commented on Paula's drug use. Giselle stated, "But the mom was also on drugs, is the thing. Her inhibitions and motherly instincts are gone. Or fogged. She obviously didn't have money for herself to do anything for herself

because she was asking her child for money.” Giselle’s comment suggested an attempt to understand why Paula was acting the way she did.

Similarly, LR commented on Paula’s drug use. LR articulated:

I was thinking about like, like how much the mom changed. Like in my eyes at first she seemed very stable which in reality she was probably using even then, but as her stability changes I felt it was very unfortunate because he was starting to go through puberty and trying to figure things out and it was just this increase in crisis and that stability kept decreasing. No wonder he had a break.

In this comment, LR reiterated that she was thinking about Paula’s evolution while abusing drugs and the impact that it had on Chiron. Again, this suggested that *Moonlight* served as a catalyst for contextualizing and understanding characters’ experiences with issues such as substance abuse. In a later exchange with Jessica, LR commented on participants’ scrutinizing reactions to the teenagers that bullied Chiron. LR advised:

But I think that all of these kids are raised in the same environment, their parents are doing the same drugs, which of course not everybody. They have the same pressures. I mean they’re all experiencing it; you have no idea what’s going on at home with these other people. While I try to sympathize with bad guys, like the guy that was selling drugs that was a little easier. Like looking bad all of these kids probably had fucked up home lives so (shrugs shoulders), what do you expect?

Liz responded to LR’s comment with the following statement: “Like the kid that is the bully might be getting beat up by like his stepdad at home.” Then Victoria added, “Or worse, even like sexually molested and that’s why he’s taking out the bold term like faggot and his sexual frustrations.” The exchange between LR, Liz, and Victoria reflected a consensus that Chiron’s bullies may be experiencing hardships themselves.

In a latter portion of the focus group interview, LR, Liz, and Victoria have a similar exchange of comments. LR initiated the exchange with:

I think that it's important for us to remember that everybody has a background, everybody has a history, and it's easy to dislike the bad guy but they're going through something too. Like it's easy to hate the mom but it's an addiction and that's just as real as anything else.

To which Liz responded, "Everyone was a kid once and got turned into whatever they are as an adult." LR affirmed Liz's response by replying, "They have their own set of experiences that dictate who they are now." Victoria then concluded this aspect of the exchange by summarizing, "Everyone has their own demons." These comments suggested a perception among three participants that individuals are impacted by their histories.

Following a comment made by Giselle, which highlighted the complexity of Chiron's struggles (again presented in the next subtheme), Victoria made the following comment:

Not only like just culturally but like also like common to what we will see every day like abandonment, like drugs, bullying, sexuality, you know? All those things and how it effects like not having male figures in your life and just things like that. I think it will definitely help other people understand and have like a better understanding of how other people are growing up.

Victoria's comment was aimed at detailing the common issues that counselors may see regularly in their work with clients.

When referencing the fact that Kevin assaulted Chiron despite previously exploring and creating an intimate connection with him, Giselle commented on her perception of that type of betrayal. Giselle asserted, "That's mental abuse. It's just like you show yourself in this like very intimate, vulnerable moment with somebody and then beat them up." Giselle's comment appeared to be an assessment of experience, as it likened the betrayal to mental abuse. Mike then interjected to comment on her perception

for Kevin's behaviors, stating, "I think it was like another facet of bullying. Like I think that Kevin was afraid that if he didn't then he was going to be the culprit." Mike's comment was aimed at contextualizing the motivation behind Kevin's assault on Chiron.

Numerous comments made by participants in their written reflections also suggested that participants felt more aware of issues that may affect their clients. Hazel wrote, "This study made me feel more comfortable working with clients who grew up around substance abuse and trauma." HM asserted that her participation in the study "has raised my awareness of those who live differently than I do and have different values or lifestyles. As counselors, we need to be sensitive and we need to take our client's life histories and experiences into consideration." KJ advised that her participation has encouraged her "to always know that there is more than meets the eye when it comes to people in general and clients I work with." Lastly, Victoria wrote, "I see things differently as a counselor. I see more empathy for the teens that I work with. I feel more diverse seeing this film with the abandonment to the sexuality issues."

Subtheme: *Moonlight* facilitates conceptualization of intersectional complexity. The emergence of this subtheme was informed by participant comments that demonstrated acknowledgement or critical thinking about the complexity of identity, specifically Chiron's. Although, as detailed in the previous subtheme, participants made numerous comments about certain aspects of identities, problems, and experiences the following comments were contextualized by content that illuminated the multiplicity of and interactions with various identity factors.

When reflecting upon Chiron's experiences in the film, Claire expressed, "He like overcame so much adversity like, you know, race, bullying, sexuality, like drugs,

socioeconomic. Pretty much everything that you can throw a person that you have to overcome.” After I questioned the group’s perception of Chiron’s experiences in the film,

Giselle responded:

I feel like he had a lot of things going on and he really didn’t know how to like process one thing at a time because it was multiple things at once . . .and I just felt like there were so many different layers to him that he probably couldn’t even figure out what was going on.

Mike then added, “Like constant crisis.” Later on, GT echoed Giselle’s sentiment when she stated:

I think that it’s no wonder that he had like such an identity problem because I noticed that he was like named like several different names or nicknames throughout the film and also like someone else was talking about he had so many different layers and different things he was dealing with at once.

During the group interview, some participants were trying to make sense of why bullies were targeting Chiron for his sexuality when he was not overtly expressive with his mannerisms. As this portion of the discussion proceeded, Giselle interjected:

Like when, you know, like whenever people, like, you have the assumption that they might be like homosexual and stuff like that. They probably like fed off of that and especially in the inner-city area that they lived in they would look at that like it’s a weakness and take you for it.

Victoria qualified Giselle’s statement with the comment: “Especially boys.” A bit later in the interview, Jessica redirected the conversation back to the topic of Chiron’s sexual orientation but does so within the context of race and gender. Jessica shared the following:

It’s also really hard like in African-American households, like just being like homosexual like in general and you bring it up, it’s not something that’s like okay. So, if that at home is like, you know, has a negative connotation, you know what I mean? Like when you go out in the world then you’re gonna express that same type of hatred against something that

you never really been educated on. Cause it's just very frowned upon and talked bad about, you know, so especially if you're a guy too.

Jessica continued her explanation by saying:

Yeah, and you're already growing up in a rough environment and to throw like being a homosexual on top of it it's like whoa like you're an African-American male; you're growing up in these rough streets, and now you wanna throw this on it? It's kind of like a recipe for disaster, you know?

In order to clarify Jessica's comments, I utilized the probing statement: "Like a combination of not meeting certain cultural expectations and then also trying to find acceptance?" Jessica responded affirmatively, noting "Yeah, from just anybody. But like it's not gonna be like a lot of people, not in our culture, like my culture, are gonna give it you." Following this comment, GT reminded the group of other instances in the film in which Chiron's masculinity was questioned when she noted, "Like even his principal was like you're not a man." In order to provide context, Chiron's principal was portrayed as an African-American woman. Following these comments, the group directed conversation toward analysis of their personal experiences with family members who harbor negative perspectives on homosexuals, which has been presented in a previous theme section.

Toward the end of the focus group interview, I introduced the last protocol item which was how do you perceive the use of this film in counselor education? Giselle utilized this question as an opportunity to reiterate her previous statements regarding her conceptualization of Chiron. Giselle maintained:

Like it really kind of opens your eyes to a lot of different things that a client could go through. Like I said earlier, there's a lot of different layers to him and there was a lot of different battles that he was struggling with at once and it's just like I feel like this would be good to use because you have the socioeconomics thing, you have the drugs, you got him being an African American in an inner city school. It's just shows a lot of different

cultural differences that we don't really recognize or some of us do recognize with. But it's just very good movie with a lot of depth.

All eight participants who completed member checks endorsed that this theme reflected the group's experience and perception of *Moonlight*. Participants made additional comments during the member-checking phase that reinforced this theme. In Liz's confirmatory statement, she noted, "Yes I was definitely made aware of cultures different than mine in specific examples through the film." Mike simply replied that she strongly agreed. Victoria advised, "This film definitely promotes empathy and could show people how to care for others that have been thru similar issues." GT's statement that "The movie provides an understanding of the way the characters feel when placed in the positions they are in" also reinforced the notion that *Moonlight* permits viewers to experience Chiron's story through his perspective. Claire echoed GT's sentiment in her confirmatory statement. Claire stated, "The film provides a visual representation of struggles and cultures that the counselor may not have been exposed to and allows them to gain perspective." Lastly, Hazel noted that she agreed "because this movie showed us how important it is to be culturally competent so you can understand a client's culture and have no bias."

Theme 5: Participants Suggested That *Moonlight* has the Potential to Promote Counselor Self-awareness

The emergence of this theme was informed by comments made by participants that reflected greater self-awareness of their experiences, limitations, and biases. There are two subthemes that supported this major theme, recognition of potential limitations and recognition of biases each of which is explored in the follow sections.

Subtheme: Recognition of potential limitations and sensitivities. During the introductory phase of the focus group interview, when asked what informed their experiences and perceptions of the film, many participants discussed their various levels of exposure to aspects of diversity. However, following the film and conclusion of the focus group interview, participants were given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in relation to how they were similar to and different from Chiron based on their subjective intersectional identities. Responses from these writing prompts highlighted, for some, an explicit recognition of cultural and social issues and conditions with which they have never experienced. HM wrote, “It was difficult for me to relate to Chiron because our personal experiences and identities don’t intersect that much.” Similarly, Giselle noted, “I am unfamiliar with inner city life and being African American.” KJ, who also self-identified as gay, advised, “I don’t know what it is like to struggle with sexuality on top of everything else he has going on.” GT wrote, “I did not ever have to face racial oppression, growing up with unloving or drug-addicted parents, never struggled with sexual identity issues or heavy bullying.”

During the focus group interview, a couple of participants discussed ways in which the film could facilitate counselor self-awareness. Victoria, when asked about the pedagogic potential of using the film *Moonlight* in counselor education, she stated that the film might be of assistance in regard to assessing one’s qualifications. Victoria stated:

Knowing your limitations. Like knowing that you’re not qualified to work with a certain client, you know? Like you can’t relate to what they have been through. It’s not like you don’t want to, it’s like you think someone else that you work with could be more beneficial.

Following Victoria's statement, Mike made a comment regarding the need to be mindful of how one's limited exposure to certain client circumstances may influence counselors' reactions. Mike advised:

Or like, its sometimes like providing the client kind of like, I'm not going to say flat affect, but like when they might bring up something like, say, they have bed bugs or something making sure that we are not responding with a (gasp), you know? Like being self-aware of how we are handling ourselves or our face even just because we express so much through our face and it can really shut a client down.

Mike also discussed the potential benefits of the film. Mike advised that the film might help counseling interns with "identifying what we are comfortable with hearing and identifying like better ways to care for ourselves." Similarly, HM expressed that the film may aid counseling interns in identifying their sensitivities. HM noted:

I think too this will help us to know some of our triggers. You know there might be a situation in one of these videos, you know, where maybe you've been abused or something and when you see a situation then you know whether or not you could handle it.

Some participants suggested that not only does *Moonlight* have the potential to assist counseling interns with thinking about their sensitivities, but also that exposure to the film may actually stimulate them. In this regard, some participants offered areas for caution. Mike advised that the film could be triggering for viewers who have experienced similar traumatic events as Chiron and although the film may be impactful it is likely an experience that one "would like probably really need to personally soak up. So that could be like a disclaimer for other people who are, you know, maybe have that similar history." Jessica cautioned that the language might be offensive to some individuals, specifically the use of racial expletives. Jessica noted:

Like I know African Americans that take offense to that. They would not like this movie because it is said, you know what I mean? Like my dad refuses to use that word. Period. Like cannot be used around him.

Subtheme: Recognition of biases. In addition to discussing the film's potential to promote recognition of one's limitations and sensitivities, two participants also indicated that the film might help viewers to identify and acknowledge their biases.

Claire articulated this notion explicitly when she stated the following:

I think it will also help you identify like biases that you may have. Like if you're watching a film and you're like "oh I don't really like that, I don't really agree with that," you know, maybe you shouldn't work with that population, you know, if you're not able to put that aside, if it really strikes that reaction in you. That's something to kind of look at too.

During the focus group interview, Liz reflected that she found herself identifying a bias as a result of her reaction to a character in the film. Liz shared:

And for me, a trigger is like seeing a bad parent or come up in that movie, like the mom. Like I couldn't stand to see a kid like go through that but I can realize that, from seeing the movie, I realize how I felt about her so when I have a client, I have to really keep in mind that I can't just really hate their bad mom or whatever. I have to kind of put it in check, I guess.

All eight participants who completed member checks endorsed that this theme reflected the group's experience and perception of *Moonlight*. Participants made additional comments during the member-checking phase that reinforced this theme. Liz purported, "I was definitely made more self-aware of my viewpoints after the film and our group discussion." Victoria noted "This film made me more self-aware of my limitations as a counselor. Also helps me understand what I need to learn." GT agreed that "Self-awareness was present when counselors looked at their reactions to the video."

Claire detailed:

The film exposes some difficult topics such as substance abuse, neglect and physical abuse. The film also brings up topics such as sexuality and

race. If a person watches the film and is offset by the topics then that is a clue that they need to examine their biases.

Lastly, Hazel articulated, “I agree with this, because it helped me realized how important it is to be self-aware about my culture and values in order to not let them influence my judgment when working with clients.”

Trustworthiness

As detailed in the methodology section, I integrated a number of strategies into this research design in an effort to improve trustworthiness of the study and to reduce the impact of researcher bias. I participated in peer review discussions with a committee member who served as temporary chair while my original dissertation chair was on sabbatical leave. Our conversations were focused specifically on the analysis process and my thoughts and feelings regarding such. I was open and honest about my initial perspectives following the preliminary review of my data. As the values I had regarding the importance of this topic could not be completely absolved, I knew that I needed to process them in a way that helped me to prevent them from narrowing my impressions on and perspectives of the data. These conversations aided me with focusing on the value of the data, regardless of my personal feelings about the potential benefits of using *Moonlight* as a pedagogical device. Through peer reviews, I also was able to overtly process my relationship with the data and challenge myself to evaluate my efforts of analysis from a multi-perspective.

Throughout the study, I also engaged in memoing. Although the design of my study resulted in a rather condensed time frame for collecting data, as two of the three data collection points occurred in the same day, creating memos provided a means of documenting points of data collection for an audit trail. I did not utilize a reflective

memoing approach, as I shared my personal impressions and perspectives in a reflective journal, which will be discussed later. Rather, I completed status or progress report memos to indicate when significant points in the study occurred. Memoing allowed me to reiterate the timeline of the study events and establish transparency.

Reflexivity was practiced through the use of a reflexive journal. Throughout the process of the study, I maintained an electronic journal where I detailed thoughts, feelings, and impressions regarding the research process, its obstacles, and data analysis. This process allowed me to experience some cathartic release of emotions, as there were numerous times during this process that I felt discouraged, particularly when I had to delay data collection a whole semester due to an oversight with the research protocol that required revision and re-submission to the IRB for review. Another specific period that I reflected on in the journal was the initial lack of participant interest in the study. The following journal excerpt illuminated this process:

So far, I have had one participant reach out to confirm their interest in the study. Unfortunately, I can't move forward until I have six and I feel guilty for keeping the one participant in limbo. I can't help but wonder if *Moonlight* appears to be too controversial for some of the students. Perhaps they're not comfortable with the disclaimer I provided in the informed consent form. Or maybe the idea of sharing their perspectives in an open group format is frightening. Maybe they feel unfamiliar with multiculturalism or the lecture on intersectionality. Again, I do not feel as though I presented the material as enthusiastically or clearly as I could have due to illness. Maybe I left them with more questions than answers? I still hold onto hope that this study will come to fruition because I believe *Moonlight* is a powerful film and that there could be many benefits to understanding interns' perspectives. I have also been questioning my decision not to teach internship this semester. I wonder if I had done so if I would be facing the same obstacles to recruitment. I would have greater rapport with some students which may have opened doors. However, I must remind myself that I wanted to honor my critical research values and eliminate the power differential as much as possible in order to cultivate participant freedom to be vulnerable. Serving as their instructor, with

evaluative power, would have complicated this goal – as well as the ethics of the study.

Through the process of journaling, I was able to question many variables that may have prevented an enthusiastic response from prospective participants that I had so dearly hoped for – such as my presentation abilities during the mini-lecture, whether the study topic was “too controversial” for participants, and whether the time commitment of four hours was just not something busy students were willing to commit to. In all honesty, by processing the latter concern of participants’ availability I was able to conceptualize a strategy to accommodate their schedules and ultimately move forward with the study.

Reflexive journaling also allowed me to organize my thoughts during the analysis phase of the study. After collecting data from the focus group and written reflections, I found myself a bit surprised by some of the participants’ comments and about certain directions the group conversation had went. I not only found myself again questioning whether I did a poor job of discussing intersectionality in my mini-lecture, but also found myself questioning the quality of the particular participants’ experiences with their multicultural counseling class. Upon in-depth examination of my subjective reactions to the data in the context of my values, I came to realize that my preoccupation with cultivating multicultural counseling competence was obscuring my focus as a researcher.

The following journal excerpt highlighted this realization:

Balancing my role as the researcher with my inclination to go into educator role was a bit of a struggle. I definitely noticed the tension building in me during the discussion, as I felt that there were so many opportune times to interject with multicultural or intersection education that may have assisted the participants with better conceptualizing the questions being posed. However, I was able to effectively refrain from interjecting and utilized extra caution when formulating my probing questions as to ensure that they were not leading. I did find myself caught up for a few moments about how the focus group would have gone had the

participants felt more familiar with some of the terminology related to intersectionality theory, or with the multicultural and social justice counseling competencies. This was a mind trap that I had to shake quick, as again my study was not focused on how informed participants were of intersectionality theory, but rather on how they experienced and perceived the film.

By journaling, I was able to arrive at this insight and make the appropriate reconciliation that although I had presented a mini-lecture as part of my recruitment efforts; I was not the participants' instructor. The expectations that I may have for my students were not relevant because the study was about their experiences and perceptions; it was not about measuring participants' competence. This realization was a humbling one, because it shed light on an instance where my passionate views were, proverbially speaking, blocking me from fully engaging in the data analysis.

Aside from providing me with a platform to recognize and assess my own insecurities and subjectivities, the reflexive journal also provided me a medium to speculate on meanings of data before and during the analysis phase. I noted my immediate reactions after reviewing the audio files, video file, and written reflection forms. This allowed me an opportunity to divulge my immediate perceptions, questions, and ponderings before transcription or coding started. These entries provided a point in which to return and re-evaluate once I started the coding process. Additionally, reflexive journaling was a way to reflect upon and "play" with the open codes as I worked toward categorizing them into analytical codes, and subsequently as I worked to conceptualize themes.

In my opinion, the most effective and imperative strategy used to enhance trustworthiness was the integration of participants' voices. The primary purpose of the study was to illuminate the experiences and perceptions of counseling interns after being

exposed to the film *Moonlight*, and I could not have authentically done so without their words. Participation in this study was not an easy undertaking and their contributions bear repeating. Participants willingly watched a film that captured and illustrated the effects of trauma, neglect, bullying, low socioeconomic status, sexuality, homophobia, substance abuse, and mental illness. Participants then acted with immediacy to participate in a group setting to share their reactions, emotions, and thoughts. Participants were not afforded time to process their feelings or thoughts independently. Participants processed their affectional reactions all while audio and video recording devices captured the experience.

For this reason, the findings section is comprised of quotes, stories, and questions that were articulated by participants and presented in a way that is untainted by researcher conjecture or overly-manufactured context. I utilized probing and summarizing techniques during the focus group to intentionally elicit elaborations and certainty that I was understanding participants. Participants were then emailed the focus group transcript for their review and permitted to submit corrections and elaborations as they saw fit. Participants also provided feedback on the emerging themes, which resulted in the collapse of an entire theme. These deliberate efforts to elicit and honor participants' voices facilitated the production of a study that is informed and confirmed by those who gave their time, and sometimes comfort, to assess the impact of *Moonlight* as a pedagogical device.

Chapter V: Discussion

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to examine the experiences and perceptions of counseling interns exposed to the film *Moonlight* in order to understand its impact as a pedagogical device in multicultural counselor education. As the findings of this study are qualitative in nature, they are not regarded as actual fact, nor are they generalizable to a large population. The reported experiences and perceptions contained within this study are unique to each individual participant in the context of a group setting. Although results are not generalizable, they can be transferable to similar situations. The nuanced and detailed descriptions provided regarding the data collection methods and analysis can help readers evaluate whether findings can be applicable to their own settings. Some of the themes that emerged from this study reinforced extant literature regarding the use of film, while other themes illuminated areas of knowledge that have yet to be fully incorporated into the counselor education literature. In the following section, I will present interpretations of the constructed themes, which have been detailed in chapter 4. Then I will provide an explanation regarding this study's implications for counselor educators, supervisors, and counselors-in-training. The latter portion of this chapter will provide discussion regarding limitations and offer areas for future research.

Interpretation of Findings

As detailed in the previous chapter, I integrated numerous strategies of reflexivity in order to effectively monitor and assess the influence that my own positionalities were having on the research process and construction of findings. In an effort to illuminate the authentic voices of the participants, I intentionally reserved my interpretations of the data

for this section and permitted the findings to genuinely reflect the participants' expressions within their original contexts. In order to maintain the coherence of the study's structure, I will present interpretations for each emergent theme that resulted from this study.

Participants Suggested That Their Experiences of *Moonlight* Were Characterized by Emotional Turbulence

As detailed in the findings section, participants in this study reported experiencing numerous emotions throughout the film and indicated that these reactions varied greatly in terms of intensity. These findings confirmed that *Moonlight* definitely served as a pedagogical device that profoundly stimulated participants' affective reactions and thus met the criteria of a concrete experience. The reactions characterized by the participants demonstrated that they could feel the pain and sorrow of the film's protagonist, Chiron. This phenomenon reinforced the power of films and expanded on the legitimization of their pedagogic potential. Rousse's (2016) notation that movies "can draw us in and induce a peculiar involvement: they absorb us" (p. 45) was clearly manifested in this study. *Moonlight* is a film characterized by Chiron's struggles and experiences with pain and rejection while trying to find himself. To put it blatantly, *Moonlight* humanizes the intersectional journey of self-development and self-acceptance, which is oftentimes turbulent, from an emic perspective.

The sub-theme: experiences characterized by dismay indicated that participants found themselves shocked, sadden, or angered by some of the film's content. Although these types of emotions can be disruptive for some, they serve to challenge the viewer's

complacency. This notion of disrupted complacency is an idea that resonated with KJ as she discussed its relevance to the counseling profession. KJ noted:

I think it's important to like not be complacent. So, like watching movies and stuff like that, I think it should make us a little bit angry because that's gonna help us help others a little bit better. Yeah, to want to advocate because if you're just like numb to it it's just like another client. If you see something that really moves you, you're gonna want to help even more.

Some participants found themselves becoming angered as a result of Chiron being mistreated by others for being different, as well as when Chiron was incarcerated for enacting revenge upon his primary bully. This emotion appeared to have stem from participants' experienced tension regarding the perception of Chiron's treatment being unjust or unfair.

The sub-theme: experiences characterized by mixed emotions are central to the overarching theme of *Moonlight* producing an experience of emotional turbulence in its viewership. Participants' experiences of inconsistent and sometimes divergent affective reactions definitely indicated the film was stimulating and prompted participants to investigate and reflect upon a myriad of sources for their fluctuating emotions. The multiplicity of emotional reactions experienced by participants permitted them with a diverse means from which to perceive and understand elements of the film and Chiron. These contextual differences in perception within individual participants contributed to a rich constructivist exchange among the group.

The sub-theme: experiences characterized by varying levels of intensity highlighted that participants qualified the numerous and divergent emotions and perceptions that they experienced by degree of intensity. One participant, Hazel, reported physical symptoms of anger, while others found it difficult to navigate some of their

overwhelming emotions at times. Although the display of intense emotions sometimes is perceived and judged as weaknesses in our society, the counseling field recognizes the benefits of assessing causes for increased reactivity. Although participants' increased intensity of emotions may have proven uncomfortable, it facilitated a greater reflection of participants' subjective experiences in order to understand their reactions – a feat that may not have been achieved if participants were not emotionally moved by the film. Instances in the findings support this interpretation - namely, Violet's disclosure, in her written reflection, that her own personal experiences with familial rejection over her sexuality made it difficult to fully engage in the focus group. Mike's tearful reaction to the film begot her examination of the emotional impact a previous client's story still had on her.

The final sub-theme, experiences were characterized by plot confusion, also warranted exploration. This sub-theme captured the participants' questioning of the plotline and attempts to fill in the missing pieces of Chiron's narrative that were not explicitly illustrated in the film. The process of collaborative understanding and meaning-making that occurred in the focus group demonstrates constructivist action in work, similar to that documented by Nittoli and Guiffrida (2017). The speculations offered by participants were calculated attempts, using the contextual information available, to make sense of issues that were characterized by uncertainty and to learn from one another. The process that unfolded in the focus group interview was reminiscent of a traditional group supervision session. Most participants assumed an active role in the meaning-making experience and offered their own perspectives and understanding of the film in order to respond to others' questions. In consideration of these findings, *Moonlight* served as a

catalyst for active learning, promoted constructivist engagement within the group, and efficaciously promoted the affective stimulation of participants.

Participants Suggested That Their Experiences of *Moonlight* Were Informed by Their Subjective Levels of Exposure to and Identification with Aspects of Diversity

As established in the previous chapter, participants' responses within the focus group interview and in their written reflections indicated that their experiences and perceptions of the film were informed by their subjective level of exposure to diversity, both directly and indirectly. Previous exposure to issues of identity, various life-obstacles, and sociocultural groups colored the perspectives of the participants and provided them with a uniquely personal platform from which to make sense of their feelings related to film content. Some participants recognized and articulated that their experiences and perceptions were informed by a lack of exposure to certain aspects of diversity, particularly racial diversity.

Discussion of the participants' experiences and perceptions encouraged each participant to reflect up on the construction of their own worldview. By recalling and examining their subjective experiences with African-Americans, some participants demonstrated an ability to recognize and understand that their views of the world, and *Moonlight*, were arguably influenced by a lack of exposure to individuals and groups different from those they in which they identified. The critical reflexivity stimulated within participants, and the group, by this study permitted them to intentionally assess the foundations of their knowledge. The study also reinforced the notion that counselors' conceptualization of clients and their associated experiences and needs are partially informed by the foundational knowledge or lack thereof held by the counselor.

Other participants explicated that their experiences and perceptions of the film were informed by personal identification with Chiron's identities and experiences. For these participants, a foundation of their knowledge was explicitly influenced by their subjective and direct experiences with sexual orientation. For KJ and Violet, their personal experiences as gay people afforded them with a unique entry point of personal connection with Chiron. Personal identification with Chiron's struggle with self-acceptance and discrimination not only allows gay viewers to genuinely empathize with Chiron's experiences but presents an opportunity for them to compare and contrast their own lived experiences with Chiron's. Within this process of comparison is the potential to examine how sexuality interacts with other subjective identities and environments, thus promoting a more intersectional exploration of the issue. In their written reflections, both KJ and Violet contextualize how their experiences with sexuality diverge from Chiron's based on other facets of their identities and environments. KJ reiterated that her racial and socioeconomic identities did not serve to complicate her personal struggles with sexuality as they did for Chiron. Violet highlighted that her sexual identity did not present a major concern for her until she came out, which starkly contrasts with Chiron's experiences as he was ridiculed before even recognizing that he was attracted to the same-sex.

Although some participants could not personally relate to Chiron's racial and sexual identities, they were able to identify other personal areas of commonality. *Moonlight* depicts Chiron's navigation of social problems such as poverty, familial conflict, substance abuse, and bullying. For some participants, personal identification with one or more of these social problems served to inform their understanding of the Chiron and the film. Similar to the issue of sexuality, some participants who personally

identified with Chiron's exposure to social problems also examined how their experiences were different from Chiron's experience. This reoccurrence among participants indicates that *Moonlight* has an undeniable reach regardless of viewers' demographics and encourages viewers to critically examine how their own personal experiences with issues of diversity inform their perception and understanding of the film and Chiron.

The final subtheme that supports this major theme relates to participants' vicarious exposure to aspects of diversity. In this subtheme, participants espoused the influence that clinical work with clients and higher education each had on informing their experiences and perceptions of *Moonlight*. Although some participants experienced difficulty with relating to certain positionalities occupied by Chiron, their direct experience with clients contextualized their worldviews in a way that prompted a sort of connection by proxy. This phenomenon appears to have especially informed participants' perception of Chiron's experience as a child of a drug addict and trauma. This finding illuminates a unique benefit of integrating cultural films into clinical practice courses, as participants' foundational knowledge of social and cultural issues have been shaped, to a degree, by their, albeit short, lived experiences as a counselor. Although students who may be exposed to cultural films in the multicultural counseling course might identify exposure to and identification with certain aspects of diversity as informing their perceptions and understandings, many have to cultivate hypothetical scenarios in which they speculate how they may understand diverse clients. However, the integration of *Moonlight* or other cultural films in internship courses has the potential to elicit

worldviews of students that have been informed, to a certain degree, by applicability rather than conjecture.

Throughout the focus group discussion, some participants made comments that elucidated their experiences with higher education had also informed their experiences and perceptions of the film. This understanding is perhaps not surprising, as most institutions of higher education have a strong track record of endorsing the value of diversity and multiculturalism in a global context. This endorsement is often manifested through institutions' public recognition and celebration of diverse groups that have a presence on campus and have historically contributed to society. Academic departments also reiterate the importance of cultural knowledge and sensitivity through lectures, readings, and assignments. However, participants explicated more than just how exposure to diversity in higher education had informed their perceptions of the film; participants, from this informed worldview, also offered societal critiques of individuals, in the film and in their personal lives, who held negative impressions of homosexuality. I surmised that instances in which participants critiqued or harshly evaluated perceived miseducation or non-education might, to a degree, reflect that they have internalized and applied "an educated" perspective on cultural and social differences. This finding has great significance in that it suggests that students who have internalized the educationally cultivated value of multiculturalism might be more open to receiving and appreciating the film's content. Conversely, students who have not internalized the same values may not be as open to the film's content, as their worldview might be anchored by beliefs and understandings that might elicit affective or cognitive withdrawal.

Participants Suggested That *Moonlight* has the Potential to Influence Counseling Interns to Monitor and Manage Their Emotional Reactions to Clients' Stories

As detailed in the previous chapter, this theme emerged as a result of the participants consistent comments about the lived and potential experiences of hearing clients' stories and their concerns regarding their reactions. Data from the focus group interview and the written reflections highlighted numerous instances that indicated that *Moonlight* had evoked memories of clients and their stories. Recalling memories of clients' stories were difficult for some participants and resulted in emotional responses. In conjunction with hearing participants' stories of clients, some participants concluded that hearing distressing narratives would be a common occurrence in the counseling field. The group's internalization of this reality prompted further exploration of the implications.

Novel to this study, participants worked together to make sense of their emotional reactions to *Moonlight* and how they were similar to emotional reactions evoked by clients' stories. Upon examining their paralleled emotional responses, participants collaboratively concluded that emotional management of the counselor is imperative as they believe that oversharing reactions may prove a disservice to clients in the moment. Although one might infer that this finding stigmatizes counselor emotional reactivity, the finding also illuminates that participants believed that clients' need to be heard and honored should be prioritized over counselors' need for emotional expression. From a relational and intersectional perspective, this idea of counselors needing to prioritize clients' needs suggests that participants recognize, to a degree, the power differential inherent in the counseling relationship. Participants' comments indicated an

understanding that counselors have the potential power to “take away” clients’ moments, albeit unintentionally, by sharing their emotional reactions and therefore should assume control in order to prevent such offenses.

This theme also indicates that *Moonlight* provided participants with a testing ground to collaboratively examine their overreactions to the painful stories that they have heard and will likely continue to hear throughout their careers. The potential for other counselors-in-training, regardless of their clinical experience, to recognize and internalize this reality should be characterized as a benefit, as it prompts and allows for emerging counselors to emotionally and mentally prepare for this reality. These findings are illustrative of the third stage of the experiential learning cycle espoused by Kolb (1984). In the third stage of ELT, abstract conceptualization, learners typically work to “create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories” (Kolb, 1984, p. 30). Participants’ construction of emotional management as a necessary counselor aspiration represents an integration of the personal observations related to emotional reactivity of clients’ stories into a theory that attempts to postulate the effects of said emotional reactivity in the presence of clients. Participants’ theories might be perceived as logically sound to them, which is not surprising – as within ELT, meaning-making and subsequent conceptualization of abstraction is inherently self-referential and self-constructed (Borghi et al., 2017).

With regard to this purposeful sample of counseling interns, *Moonlight* facilitated an exploration among participants aimed at applying the knowledge that they had constructed to their current and future clinical work with clients. In ELT, the stage of experimentation follows abstract conceptualization and is characterized by “an

opportunity to extend beyond the immediate learning objective by trying the new knowledge or skill in another application or environment” (Ward, 2004, p. 3). Although this study did not conduct follow up surveys with participants to learn about how their involvement in this study affected their work with clients, the opportunity for experimentation was readily accessible by participants as they were all currently serving as counseling interns.

Participants Suggested that *Moonlight* has the Potential to Promote Empathy and Understanding of Clients’ Diverse Experiences

Moonlight proved to be a useful mechanism that prompted participants to think deeply about an array of experiences and issues that may impact individuals in our society. Specifically, *Moonlight* stimulated conversations regarding the pressure that young individuals, or clients, experience when they find themselves in circumstances that necessitate them taking care of themselves or family members – namely when young individuals assume role of sole provider and engage in drug trafficking to make ends meet. The numerous reprisals of this notion, combined with detailed stories of participants’ clients whom experienced similar circumstances, illuminated that some participants actively worked to better understand young people’s motives for selling drugs. Participants’ attempts to understand and empathize with young drug traffickers’ experiences suggests that students exposed to *Moonlight* might also question their biases and prejudices regarding the issue of drug trafficking in an effort to understand prospective clients rather than judge them.

Furthermore, findings suggested that *Moonlight* encouraged participants to work together to understand how Chiron’s mother, Paula, was changed by her use of drugs. By

doing so, some participants demonstrated a change in perspective – from questioning and judging Paula’s absence in Chiron’s life to recognizing the detrimental effect that her drug use had on her and Chiron. This exchange is indicative that *Moonlight* might serve to assist some students with better understanding the experiences of individuals who are addicted to substances and the impact that it has on family systems.

Participants also reflected on the influence that one’s historical experiences have on their current behaviors and affects. This reflective exchange emerged as participants discussed their anger and frustration aimed at Chiron’s bullies. Participants’ speculations about the nature of the bullies’ home lives and histories indicated that they were open to looking past their judgement of the bullies’ behaviors in an effort to understand the origins of or potential sources for those behaviors. This suggests that students’ exposure to *Moonlight*, in conjunction with constructivist dialogue, might engender in-depth conceptualization and contextualization of characters’ backgrounds, which then may be transferable to their understandings of future clients’ behaviors, in the context of their histories. Such findings build upon previous research which testifies to the potential for multicultural film-based activities to increase students’ understanding of multicultural issues (Villalba & Redmond, 2008).

Throughout the study, participants recognized the interactivity and complexity of Chiron’s identities and problems. Participants’ comments described Chiron as being a “multilayered” character who “had a lot going on” which resulted in him being in “constant crisis.” Participants identified that race, socioeconomic status, environmental safety, sexual orientation, and gender expression all constituted areas of concern and struggle for Chiron. Through examination of Chiron’s cultural and social positionalities,

participants were able to more effectively conceptualize the totality and weight of Chiron's experiences, along with their impacts on his well-being. Participants discussed the pressure that Chiron experienced from others to "be hard" and the consequences that he suffered for not meeting such expectations, such as ostracization and violence. These patterns in the findings suggest that *Moonlight* is an effective stimulus for conversations regarding intersectional identities, marginalization, and oppression; and, therefore indicate that the film has the potential to be an efficacious pedagogical device in the realm of multicultural and social justice counseling. This finding supports Nittoli and Guiffrida's (2017) assertion that intersectional film-based learning activities may stimulate difficult, but necessary, conversations about race, privilege, and power. Additionally, participants' attempts to understand and empathize with Chiron's struggles with sexuality reinforce Frick et al.'s (2017) findings that exposure to film-based activities with LGBTQ characters may serve to increase students' empathy for the LGBTQ community.

Participants Suggested That *Moonlight* has the Potential to Promote Counselor Self-awareness

In addition to assisting participants with examination of their worldviews, as previously discussed, *Moonlight* also prompted participants to explore other specific areas of awareness. These areas included perceived limitations, potential sensitivities, and biases. The recognition of perceived or actual limitations can be both an enlightening and an uncomfortable experience. However, it is a common and expected occurrence among counselors-in-training who are learning about a plethora of client-related issues. After all, one cannot strive to improve upon perceived deficiencies if they are not aware of them. In

regard to this study, some participants identified their lack of exposure to diversity or their inability to relate personally to Chiron's experiences as short-comings. Some participants perceived these limitations as potentially meaning that a counselor is not qualified to work with certain clients if they cannot relate to them.

Participants also concluded that *Moonlight* might assist counselors-in-training with identifying subjective sensitivities, such as being uncomfortable with depictions and descriptions of sexuality and with offensive language – both of which are contained in the film. Furthermore, some participants advised that the film might aid students in recognizing their subjective biases. Although only one participant (Liz) voluntarily expressed a bias that she recognized in herself while watching the film, the affirmative nods from other participants suggested that they might have also been internally processing any of their biases that emerged. The importance of these findings lies in the fact that *Moonlight* served as an impetus to generate critical reflection regarding what constitutes competence and what indicates preparedness. These areas of contemplation are pivotal for neophyte counselors to incorporate within themselves as they transcend their careers and develop their professional counselor identity. Findings from this study reiterate Shen's (2015) findings that multicultural film-based pedagogy may broaden students' worldviews and challenge their assumptions. Participants' reports that their participation in this study facilitated a feeling of being better prepared for work with diverse clients align with findings from Geene et al.'s (2014) findings that students exposed to multicultural film-based activities reported greater multicultural counseling self-efficacy.

Implications for Counselor Education and Supervision

Counselor educators have the tremendous responsibility to ensure that counselors-in-training are sufficiently prepared to engage in counseling work with clientele from diverse backgrounds. As mentioned previously, the task of preparing counselors-in-training is not a static endeavor and cannot be entirely achieved by professing and teaching the tenets and principles of theories relevant decades ago. Human identity, interaction, and socialization are dynamic and move in tandem with the shifts and transformations of modern society and culture. For this reason, counselor educators must stay abreast of multicultural and social justice developments within the profession and carefully consider their implications on pedagogical practice. The findings discussed in this chapter have numerous implications for counselor educators and supervisors.

Implications for Counselor Educators

First, the findings of this study suggest that counseling interns greatly benefited from their experiential engagement with *Moonlight*, and may also experience similar benefits when engaged with other multicultural and intersectional films. A list of potential films for counselor educators to consider have been included in Appendix H. Historically, research regarding the use of film in multicultural counselor education has largely been deployed within the multicultural counseling classroom. However, as espoused by the multicultural and social justice counseling competencies, “the development of multicultural and social justice competence must be regarded as a lifelong process” (Ratts et al., 2016, p. 30). The process of restricting multicultural and intersectional pedagogic practices to the confines of the multicultural counseling classroom does a disservice to counselors-in-training, as doing so does not adequately

model the imperative process of continual self-awareness and multicultural skill development. For this reason, counselor educators might want to strongly consider employing multicultural and intersectional pedagogy in a multitude of counseling courses offered to counselors-in-training to both reinforce and model the importance of lifelong learning. Considering that participants in this study found *Moonlight* to be helpful with conceptualizing and understanding the impacts of parental substance abuse on Chiron's experiences, the integration of *Moonlight*-based activities into curriculum for substance abuse counseling and/or family systems/family counseling courses might also be of pedagogical value.

Findings from this study also suggested that participants found their exposure to *Moonlight* helpful in regard to their multicultural counseling training. It is noteworthy that these findings emerged despite participants characterizing their experiences of *Moonlight* as turbulent and sometimes uncomfortable. According to one participant, intense and uncomfortable emotions can serve to disrupt complacency of the viewer and evoke within them a desire to assist clients. Through discomfort, participants were able to learn about themselves and strive to better understand the cultural and social issues of others. As counselor educators, we sometimes fear introducing counselors-in-training to controversial or potentially emotionally triggering content; however, this study suggests that the benefits of doing so might be worth the risk. In addition to normalizing the idea that "learning about privileged and marginalized clients may sometimes be unfamiliar and uncomfortable experiences" (Ratts et al., 2016, p. 39), counselor educators who intentionally integrate the use of this film, or others similar in content, might provide their students with an opportunity to experience and learn to navigate these experiences

in a controlled environment. In lieu of allowing students to conceptualize and process their experiences of difficult film content, counselor educators who employ the use of this film might produce relevant opportunities to discuss the importance of vicarious traumatization, self-care practices, and having strategies for emotional management.

Despite the proposed benefits of disrupting complacency and evoking strong emotional reactions in students, the pedagogical use of films that portray difficult scenes related to cultural identities, oppression, and social problems does pose risks that counselor educators should carefully contemplate and prepare for (Elliott & Sommer, 2017; Frick et al., 2017). Counselor educators considering the integration of *Moonlight*, or similar films, into their curriculum should have a well-organized and justified reason for doing so. It is imperative that counselor educators have a firm understanding of the potential benefits and risks that the conceived film-related activity might pose for their students and explicitly and clearly articulate these, as well as the rationale for the activity, to their students (Sommer et al., 2018).

As detailed in this study, exposure to *Moonlight* not only elucidated affective responses from participants about their subjective experiences and perceptions of the film, but also yielded responses regarding the potential challenges that others may encounter when exposed to the film. Participants advised that some viewers might be sensitive to the depiction of sexual relations and/or offensive language – specifically the use of racial epithets. Other participants raised the concern that viewers with trauma histories may be triggered by the film’s content. For these reasons, counselor educators would be wise to include a detailed disclaimer in the course syllabus, as well as a verbal disclaimer that is reiterated numerous times in the course prior to the film-related activity.

Below is the disclaimer that was included in the informed consent for this study, which may be helpful for counselor educators to consider as they formulate their own disclaimers:

Moonlight may serve as an impetus to stimulate powerful emotions that may be uncomfortable. The film contains some explicit language, depictions of violence, sexual imagery, and scenes that allude to illicit substance abuse. Depending on your sensitivity to these types of elements, you may find your experience distressing. The film also has inherent themes of poverty, family discord, bullying, discrimination, internalized homophobia, Black queerness, and intersectional experience of race and sexuality. Contingent upon your own intersectional identities, subjective experiences, and personally-held values and beliefs, this film may trigger a level of emotional and/or physical discomfort

Additional resources should also be made available for students should they become overly distressed during the film, such as contact information for campus counseling centers and instructor availability to process reactions in a private setting.

Moonlight and, presumably some, other intersectional films highlight issues that can sometimes be polarizing for audiences. Topics such as race, gender, religion, and socioeconomic status can sometimes evoke negative reactions and defensiveness (Sommer et al., 2018). Frick et al. (2017) advised that values held by students “may be deeply entrenched depending upon the environment in which they were raised and educated” (p. 197). In order to mitigate these concerns and create a space of openness, counselor educators should consider establishing a constructivist classroom (Nittoli, 2016). Creating such a classroom experience entails the process of ensuring that all students understand that perspectives on the to-be-broached topics vary greatly and that all values are welcomed and accepted without ridicule (Elliott & Sommer, 2017; Frick et al., 2017, Nittoli, 2016). Educators should also emphasize that becoming mildly agitated in response to other students’ opinions and perspectives might be a normal reaction, but

that graduate students are also expected to develop the ability to rationally and deliberately consider issues from multiple perspectives so that their decisions are informed by a broad body of knowledge rather than solely based on opinion (Frick et al., 2017).

Counselor educators need to approach intersectional and multicultural film-based activities with culturally responsive competency. Counselor educators serve as a role model for counselors-in-training and therefore must be able to share their own narratives regarding their journey of identity development. When this process is characterized by transparency and cultural humility it has the potential to model strategies for effectively communicating about inherently personal and, sometimes, polarizing issues. Effective counselor educators should strive to reduce students' hesitancy regarding conversations about identities, marginalization, oppression, privilege, and power by willingly leading the charge. Should a counselor educator fumble on his or her professional obligation to transparently and honestly broach issues of diversity, they run the risk of inadvertently signaling that such topics are not appropriate or beneficial to discuss. For this reason, counselor educators should consider taking an active participant role in the constructivist classroom and contribute to the meaning-making process by being as vulnerable as they expect their students to be. Not only does this strategy model the process of openness and critical reflexivity to the students, but also balances the educator-student relationship by removing oneself from a purely directive and evaluative role, which might negatively impede students' willingness to be transparent and genuinely introspective.

Participants in this study were provided opportunities to reflect upon the film, which allowed them to elaborate on what they learned. By allowing participants to

complete a written reflection form and participate in member checks, additional information was collected from participants who, for various reasons, found it difficult to share in the focus group interview. Counselor educators who desire to engage students in a truly meaningful learning experience should strongly consider designing a multifaceted film-based activity that allows for critical self-reflexivity. Although group discussion might serve as the catalyst for students' co-construction of knowledge related to the film and multicultural and social justice counseling tenets, some students might prefer a less invasive means of reflecting upon their experiences. Reflective-based written and asynchronous online discussion assignments can be utilized in conjunction with the traditional group discussion format (Nittoli, 2016). The development of multicultural and social justice counseling competence is a personal journey for counselors. These journeys are as divergent as the counselors who embark upon them, so by providing counselors-in-training with opportunities to engage in self-discovery and questioning without the external pressures of their peers' presence, counselor educators can honor students' vulnerabilities and potential needs for private reflection. Additionally, a well-constructed written reflection assignment allows counselor educators to pose questions related to sensitive topics and issues that might not be as openly addressed by students in a public forum. Some questions to consider integrating into written reflection assignments include:

1. What personal biases or prejudices were activated by your exposure to this film? What steps do you feel you need to take to ensure that these biases and/or prejudices do not negatively impact your work with diverse clients?

2. In which facets of your identity do you possess privilege? What kind of power do you feel is associated with your privileged identities? How might you leverage your privilege and power to better serve marginalized clients?
3. In what ways have you been marginalized by society? How do these experiences compare to characters in the film? How might your personal experiences with oppression influence your approach to clinical work with clients?
4. What has informed your experiences and perceptions of the film? How has your worldview been shaped? How has it changed?
5. Please assess your perceived competence in each of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies domains. Which of these developmental domains do you perceive as being areas for growth? What are your plans for nurturing and developing competence in regard to those domains?

Lastly, this study was designed to understand counseling interns' experiences of *Moonlight* due to the film's rich portrayal of intersectional identity. As noted by Copeland (2018), "In its avoidance of clichéd dehumanizing representations of Black male sexuality, *Moonlight* humanizes Black queer men through confronting day-to-day issues such as poverty, addiction, and childhood struggles" (p. 688). *Moonlight* provided an emic perspective on the complexity of intersectional experiences, which absorbed the participants and facilitated greater understanding of how facets of identity interact with each other and the environments and people with whom an individual comes in contact. Although participants found their experience in the study rewarding, I believe there is much potential for enhancing the use of *Moonlight* as explicitly intersectional activity in

counselor education. As I did not instruct the multicultural counseling course completed by participants, the amount of exposure they had to intersectionality theory cannot be fully assessed. Counselor educators who plan to use *Moonlight*, or similar films, in their courses could intensify its pedagogical potential by ensuring that students have a firm and clear understanding of intersectionality theory prior to implementing the film-based activities. By infusing and routinely highlighting the six fundamental themes of intersectionality, which include social inequality, power, relationality, social context, complexity, and social justice (Collins & Blige, 2016), throughout the course curriculum, counselor educators can prepare students to critically assess films from an informed, intersectional framework.

Implications for Supervisors

Current literature regarding the use of film in multicultural counselor education remains sparse; however, current literature regarding the use of film in counselor supervision is virtually non-existent. Although it has been suggested that the use of movies might help supervisees with cultivating empathy and understanding psychological phenomenon (Aasheim, 2012), I was not able to find one published research article on the use of popular movies in supervision. Despite the fact that I did not serve as the participants' university supervisor, they were currently enrolled in a master's level clinical mental health counseling internship course and were responsible for providing clinical services to clients. In this film-based study, participants' identities as counselors were further developed than participants from previous research studies. For this reason, the study presents implications and considerations for counselor supervisors.

Among the five themes that emerged from this study, perhaps the most significant for supervisors is theme (3): Participants suggested that *Moonlight* has the potential to influence counseling interns to monitor and manage their emotional reactions to clients' stories. A contributing factor to the construction of this theme was the consistent pattern of *Moonlight* evoking memories and stories of clients with whom the participants had worked. The implications of this finding could be paramount for both university and clinical supervisors. Supervisors could integrate multicultural and intersectional movies into the supervisory process in order to stimulate supervisees' understanding and connection with current clients' stories, which might encourage supervisees to critically evaluate their pre-existing conceptualizations of clients' identities, needs, and strengths. Additionally, supervisors who implement cultural and intersectional films into the supervisory process might facilitate the elicitation of supervisees' biases and judgments regarding certain aspects of diversity. Doing so, could permit greater focus within the supervisory relationship regarding reconciliation and/or bracketing of such issues in order to prevent client harm and to promote culturally responsive clinical practice.

Participants in this study engaged in a focus group interview following their exposure to *Moonlight*. This intentional data collection format was ideal for cultivating a constructivist space for knowledge co-creation and shares some parallels to the group supervision format. Supervisors who provide group or triadic supervision might find specific benefits for integrating the use of film into their processes, as the nature of their supervisory relationships with supervisees are characterized by a multiplicity of perspectives and ideas. Such elements are consummate with the constructivist goal of questioning and learning from multiple sources in order to construct knowledge.

Moonlight's representation of typical social problems, such as bullying, neglect, substance abuse, and poverty might allow it to connect with multiple supervisees simultaneously, depending on the types of issues their respective clients face.

Study Limitations and Considerations

This study was designed, implemented, and analyzed using qualitative perspectives and methods. As previously disclaimed, the results of this study are not intended to be generalizable to large populations. The findings presented in this study might be transferrable to other groups of counselors-in-training and counselor educators and scholars contemplating the use of *Moonlight* as a pedagogic device in counselor education should carefully consider the following limitations.

The geographical location of the university in which the participants attended is situated in the southeastern region of the United States and considered a rural setting. Students who are from or are living in a more urbanized area might present with different levels of exposure to diversity and the types of social problems compared to the participants in this sample. Similarly, other participant demographics will surely play a role in the transferability of this study. As this study utilized a convenience sampling approach due to accessibility of qualified participants, the diversity of sample is representative of the diversity of the program from which the participants were recruited. This sample was comprised of only females and all of them, but two, identified as Caucasian. Three of the 12 participants identified as non-heterosexual. Participants with varied racial identities and backgrounds would likely increase the richness of discussion and processing as the diversity in perspective might yield additional insights and perceptions to be shared and understood by others. The inclusion of male participants

might offer additional emic insights and perceptions regarding masculinity in the context of the film.

Another limitation of this study relates to participants' area of specialization in counseling. Participants involved in this study were enrolled in a clinical mental health counseling internship course, which means that they were providing counseling services in psychiatric hospitals, foster care agencies, outpatient clinics, and clients' home. Their experiences and area of specialization undeniably informed their perceptions and experiences of the film. For this reason, findings may not be transferrable with groups of counseling students or interns with disparate specializations such as school counseling, rehabilitation counseling, or marriage and family counseling.

A third limitation of this study, which is significant to consider, is that participants willingly volunteered to be involved with the study. Participants' receptivity to engage in this study may reflect a possession of beliefs or values that permitted them to conceive the purpose of the study as beneficial in some regard. Their openness to participate may also indicate a baseline level of comfort regarding issues of diversity, such as sexuality, race, and socioeconomic status, and social problems, such as bullying and substance abuse. As this study served to investigate the pedagogic potential of *Moonlight* in a multicultural counseling context, it is assumed that many readers might be interested in integrating the film, and associated assignments, into their course curriculum. Although I do believe that doing so would promote the tenets of multicultural counseling competency, it should be noted, that by requiring students to view the film, some students may not be as receptive to viewing, receiving, or appreciating its content due to discomfort or dissimilar values that might be stimulated by the issues portrayed in

the film. The presence and articulation of such dissimilar values or discomfort will likely alter the feel of the discussion in a way that makes it less comparable to the findings presented in this study.

As is well known, CACREP requires that all of its accredited master's programs integrate standards that promote students' competence in the realm of social and cultural diversity. Although these standards are required to promote consistency regarding the expectations and evaluations of multicultural counseling competence across CACREP accredited programs, their presence does not ensure consistent quality across programs. As with any other counseling course, students' experiences in multicultural counseling courses can vary greatly and are contingent upon a number of variables including the instructor's engagement, developed curriculum, and expectations for student learning. In this study, some participants expressed disappointment in their experiences with the multicultural counseling course that was offered, citing that it lacked engagement and left them feeling underprepared for working with diverse clients. For this reason, findings may not be transferrable to all settings as the quality of the multicultural counseling course offered at other institutions might result in students feeling more or less prepared to work with issues of diversity.

Another limitation of this study is characterized by the role that I played. I did not serve as the clinical instructor for this group of participants. Although I did present a mini-lecture to prospective participants as part of my recruitment efforts, I had very limited time to build rapport with participants and was not responsible for evaluating their participation in the study. As counselor educators are afforded more time to build rapport and connect with students, their experiences with facilitating discussions about

students' reactions to *Moonlight* might yield contextually different results. Although having a greater connection with students may allow some to feel more comfortable with sharing their reactions, the evaluative nature of the counselor educator role might encumber others.

Lastly, I did not conduct pilot testing of the focus group interview protocol with participants. Although I did work to clearly construct protocol items and had them reviewed by dissertation committee, the nature of the study only having one focus group experience did not permit me with an opportunity to modify questions after I assessed how they were received by participants. If this study had integrated the use of multiple focus group interviews, the protocol could have been more thoroughly evaluated for understandability and modifications could have been made to improve the quality of the questions posed to future participants.

Counselor educators should consider that students with more introverted personalities might be hesitant to fully engage in a public classroom discussion. The topics that *Moonlight* broaches are inherently characterized by sensitivity, complexity, and vulnerability, which might induce greater anxieties among those students who are not comfortable sharing experiences and opinions publicly. Participants in this study were asked to provide their raw reactions to the film immediately following their exposure to it. Although most participants were able to take on this task, one participant remained silent during the focus group interview and three participants engaged in the focus group considerably less than their co-participants. Considering these occurrences, counselor educators might want to offer alternative, less invasive means for students to reflect upon the film, such as posting reflections to electronic discussion boards. Counselor educators

might also want to consider integrating the film through a flipped classroom approach, where students watch the film outside of class and come to class ready to discuss their reactions. This approach would permit additional and private time for students to absorb the film content and contemplate their feelings; however, this approach might prevent the presentation of raw reactions.

Another consideration that is worth pondering is how positionalities held by the researcher or counselor educator might influence participant or student response. As the researcher of this study, I did not serve as the participants' clinical course instructor. However, I found myself reflecting on how participants' perceptions of me might, if at all, affect their participation in the focus group. I am a White, gay male and have collected some evidence, albeit anecdotal, that some people tend to immediately assume that I am gay based on my voice tonality and effeminate mannerisms. Although I cannot verify that my presence or the participants' perceptions of me influenced their affirmative responses regarding Chiron's sexual orientation in the film, I was left wondering if participants' responses would have been altered if I had been more stereotypically masculine in my gender presentation.

Future Research

As presented in the review of literature chapter and comparison of findings to current literature section of this chapter, the research on the use of film in multicultural counselor education is somewhat limited. This realization indicates that there are numerous areas of knowledge currently underdeveloped and that the direction for future research is boundless. In this section, I will first propose how others might expand upon the findings of this study in order to further contextualize and understand the pedagogical

value of *Moonlight* in counselor education and supervision. I will then identify and recommend areas for future research regarding the use of film-based pedagogy in multicultural counselor education.

First, future researchers interested in the pedagogic potential of *Moonlight* could design studies that utilized more diverse participant samples. As mentioned in the limitations section of this chapter, the participants in this study were females and almost entirely racially homogenous. Studies that produce knowledge regarding the experiences and perceptions of the film from male and gender non-conforming participants would provide greater insight into *Moonlight*'s ability to affectively stimulate learning regardless of gender identity. Additionally, studies that illuminate the experiences and perceptions of racial minority participants could offer greater comprehension of the film's ability to resonate with participants within a cross-cultural context.

Additionally, future researchers could build upon this study by recruiting participants whose counseling specializations vary from the participants in this study. Although counseling programs have overlap in their content and training on foundational knowledge, the unique training provided within specialization tracks, such as rehabilitation counseling, trauma counseling, and school counseling, might inform participants' experiences and perceptions of the film in such a way that qualitatively different knowledge is constructed by those groups.

The participants in this study worked to conceptualize how the film related to their current clinical practice and resulted in some participants identifying certain efforts they should make, as counselors, to improve the services they provide to their clients. Future researchers could build upon the results of this study by designing studies that

extend the data collection process. Researchers could implement the use of *Moonlight* with counseling interns, regardless of specialization, early in the semester and then conduct additional data collection near the end of the semester to understand if and how their experiences and perceptions of *Moonlight* impacted their clinical work with clients.

The timing and structure of this study required participants to share their experiences and perceptions of *Moonlight* directly following its showing. The design of this study solicited participants' immediate and raw reactions; however, timing and structure of courses might vary greatly from university to university and from instructor to instructor. Future research could be conducted to examine whether and how course structure and/or timing of participants' responses might influence findings. Specifically, researchers could evaluate how using *Moonlight* in a flipped classroom structure might influence participants' level of engagement in a constructivist discussion. Researchers could assign participants readings to complete, web-based lectures to review, and *Moonlight* to view prior to the group discussion or focus group interview. It would be interesting to understand how participants might respond to the film when given more time to reflect upon its content and mentally and emotionally prepare themselves to participate in the group process.

In regard to the use of film-based pedagogy in multicultural counselor education and supervision, there is also opportunity for research developments. First, I echo Nitolli's (2016) call for future research related to examining the use of popular film as a means of focusing on the aspirational competencies of multicultural and social justice counseling developmental domain four: counseling and advocacy. Development and pursuit of this type of research would not only serve to close a glaring gap in the

literature but would also promote a better understanding of whether film-based pedagogy could serve an effective use in moving students from awareness and skill development to action.

Furthermore, future researchers might consider the untapped scholarly realm of film-based supervision activities. Clinical practice very much constitutes an experiential means of learning and applying knowledge for counseling interns, but I would be curious to understand how counseling interns might perceive and receive supplemental film-based experiential within the supervisory process. Another interesting area for future study could be designed to assess the perceived effectiveness of film-based activities in regard to illuminating counseling interns' unrecognized cultural and social biases.

Finally, this basic qualitative study produced findings that elicit hypotheses that could be further explored. Future studies could integrate quantitative or mixed methods approaches to validate the hypotheses of this study. Specifically, researchers could design a study that evaluates the differences of pretest and posttest measure outcomes. This strategy could provide facilitate a quantified understanding of how exposure to *Moonlight* might influence students' abilities to empathize with others, identify their biases and sensitivities, and conceptualize intersectional identities.

Conclusion

The experiences of counseling interns exposed to film-based pedagogy in a multicultural context had yet to be examined in the counselor education literature and research on the use of film-based pedagogy in multicultural counseling courses remains limited. Findings that emerged from this basic qualitative study provided insights related to counseling interns' perceptions and experiences of the popular film *Moonlight* and

suggest that its pedagogical use has numerous benefits. *Moonlight* is a dynamic intersectional film that has the potential to disrupt complacency among its viewers by evoking varied emotional reactions related to issues of injustice, bullying, and discrimination. Participants indicated that their strong affective reactions might have contributed to their desire to critically analyze the film's content.

Divergent understandings of the film prompted collaborative and constructivist exchanges among participants in order to filter impressions and make-meaning of their experiences, as well as the experiences of the film's characters. *Moonlight* elicited participants' memories of clients, which facilitated greater conceptualization of clients' needs, motives, and experiences. Participants also recognized their own emotional reactions in relation to current and future clients, which elucidated a group consensus that emotional management falls within the realm of counselor responsibility in order to prevent "taking away" moments from clients. *Moonlight* also encouraged participants to critically examine their own positionalities, their level of exposure to aspects of diversity, and how their subjective worldviews informed their experiences of the film. Participants advised that they garnered greater self-awareness and understanding of diverse clients. These findings illuminate the notion that *Moonlight*, when used in film-based pedagogical practice, is an experiential activity that facilitates the affective domain of learning and contributes to counseling interns' increased understanding of and perceived preparedness to work with diverse clients.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Recruitment Effort: Mini-Lecture Outline

Recruitment Effort: Mini-Lecture Outline

Ice Breaker: Dimensions of Identity

After introducing myself to the class, I will ask students to retrieve a piece a paper and write down all of the identity categories that they occupy. After approximately 5 minutes, I will then provide the class with information on the dimensions of identity (primary identities that are fixed and less changeable; secondary identities are more mobile). I will then provide students with a second piece of paper with two circles on it and ask them to categorize their previously listed identities into primary and secondary subgroups. This personal exercise is intended to generate students' thoughts about the identities that influence their experiences with the world, others, and self.

Overview of Intersectionality Theory

After completing the ice breaker activity, I will provide the class with an overview of intersectionality theory, highlighting the following key principles:

1. Promotes an understanding of human beings as being shaped by the interaction of different social locations (Hankivsky, 2014).
2. Interactions occur within a context of connected systems and structures of power (Hankivsky, 2014).
3. Through such processes, interdependent forms of privilege and oppression shaped by colonialism, imperialism, racism, homophobia, ableism, and patriarchy are created (Hankivsky, 2014).
4. People's lives are multidimensional, complex, and cannot be explained by single identity categories.
5. Relationships and power dynamics between social locations and processes are linked.
6. People can experience privilege and oppression simultaneously.
7. Intersectionality is oriented towards transformations, building coalitions among different groups, and working towards social justice.

Provide Overview of MSJCC Conceptual Model

Following the overview of intersectionality theory, I will discuss its implications for counseling practice and introduce the MSJCC conceptual model (Figure 1, p. 35). I will review the following:

1. Highlight counselor-client quadrants
2. Highlight developmental domains: awareness, knowledge, skills, action
3. Highlight aspirational competencies: attitudes and beliefs, client worldview, counseling relationship, and counseling and advocacy strategies

Q&A

After reviewing all content, I will then accept questions from students.

Invitation to Participate in Study

After questions have been answered about the presented content, I will then provide a brief overview of my research study and pass out participant informed consent forms (Appendix B) for their review. I will answer any questions that students may have about the study or information on the informed consent form. I will encourage all students interested in participating in the study to reach out to me via the contact information on the consent form.

Appendix B

Participant Informed Consent Form

Participant Informed Consent Form

Study Title

A Qualitative Investigation of Counseling Interns' Experiential Reflections on the Popular Film *Moonlight*: An Intersectional Activity in Multicultural Counselor Education

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of counseling interns' experiences and perceptions of the film *Moonlight* as a pedagogical activity in multicultural counselor education. Specifically, the researcher is interested in learning about your affective and cognitive reactions to the film and how you perceive these reactions in relation to your role as a counseling intern.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To be eligible to participate in this study, you must be currently enrolled in a clinical experiences course (COU 880: Practicum or COU 881: Internship in Counseling). You must also be willing and able to watch the popular film *Moonlight*, to effectively reflect upon your experiences and perceptions in relation to the film, and to articulate these experiences and perceptions in a group setting.

Participation Procedures and Duration

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in at least one focus group interview after watching the film *Moonlight*. You will also be asked to complete a written reflection exercise which is comprised of three open-ended questions regarding your experiences and perceptions of the film content. These three components (film presentation, focus group interview, and written reflection exercise) will occur in sequence at the time of the study. The time commitment for this portion will be approximately four hours. This portion will take place on a date and time to be determined by investigator's and participants' availability. Participants will be invited to participate in an electronic and/or in-person member checking process during the Spring 2018 semester.

Audio and Video Recordings

The researcher will record the focus group interview discussion by using digital audio recorders and his personal password protected laptop. The interview will be transcribed by the researcher, but all identifying information other than gender and course enrollment (whether you are in practicum or internship) will be excluded from the transcript. Only the researcher and his committee chair (Dr. Carol Sommer) will have access to raw data gathered during this study. The focus group transcription, audio recordings, and video recording will be stored on the researcher's password-protected laptop computer. Once transferred to the computer and transcribed, the original interview recording will be erased from the recorders. Any names used and recorded during the interview will be changed to pseudonyms when recordings are transcribed. Pseudonyms will also be utilized when discussing the written reflections in the analysis section of this study. All data gathered during this study will be destroyed by December 2021.

Data Confidentiality or Anonymity

Data collected during this study will be maintained as confidential and no identifying information such as names and other identifiers (e.g., university, clinical site) will appear in the findings of this study. Only the researcher and his committee chair will have access to the raw data gathered during this study.

Storage of Data

The researcher will take every precaution to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of any records produced from this research. Any information pertaining to this study will be transferred and stored on the researcher's password-protected laptop computer. Any hand-written notes and memos completed during the interviews will be destroyed immediately upon transferring the content into electronic form. All other data obtained as a result of this research study will be destroyed in December 2021. Only the researcher and his committee chair (Dr. Sommer) will have access to the raw data gathered and materials generated during this study. Your name and any other identifying information will not appear in any manuscript, publication or presentation that the researcher will produce based on this study.

Risks or Discomforts

Moonlight may serve as an impetus to stimulate powerful emotions that may be uncomfortable. The film contains some explicit language, depictions of violence, sexual imagery, and scenes that allude to illicit substance abuse. Depending on your sensitivity to these types of elements, you may find your experience distressing. The film also has inherent themes of poverty, family discord, bullying, discrimination, internalized homophobia, Black queerness, and intersectional experience of race and sexuality. Contingent upon your own intersectional identities, subjective experiences, and personally-held values and beliefs, this film may trigger a level of emotional and/or physical discomfort. Should you experience discomfort that is too overwhelming, you have the right to discontinue participation in the study without question. If this experience results in distressed feelings and thoughts that cannot be reconciled independently, the ECU Counseling Center offers counseling services that may assist you with processing these difficult emotions and thoughts. The ECU Counseling Center offers free services to ECU students and is open Monday – Thursday (7:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.) and Friday (7:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.) during the semester.

Benefits and Incentives

Potential benefits of your participation may include the cultivation of personal insights that facilitate your professional growth and multicultural counseling competence. Additionally, pizza and refreshments will be provided at the viewing of the film. All participants who participate in the focus group interview, complete the written reflection form, and participate in the member checking process will receive a \$10 gift card of their choice (Amazon, Target, or Starbucks) for their contributions to the study.

Voluntary Participation

Participating in this research study is completely voluntary. At any point in this research study, you may resign your participation or elect not to answer any question without

penalty. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the researcher will reserve the right to use information that you may share prior to your decision.

If you do not understand any portion of what you are being asked to do, or the contents of this form, the researcher is available to provide a complete explanation. Questions are welcome at any time.

IRB Contact Information

For one’s rights as a research subject, you may contact the following: Director, Institutional Review Board, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, KY 40475, (859) 622-3636 or at gus.benson@eku.edu.

Study Title: A Qualitative Investigation of Counseling Interns’ Experiential Reflections on the Popular Film *Moonlight*: An Intersectional Activity in Multicultural Counselor Education

Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project entitled, “A Qualitative Investigation of Counseling Interns’ Experiential Reflections on the Popular Film *Moonlight*: An Intersectional Activity in Multicultural Counselor Education.”

I have been informed of any and all possible risks or discomforts.

I have read the statements contained herein, have had the opportunity to fully discuss my concerns and questions, and fully understand the nature and character of my involvement in this research project as a human subject, and the attendant risks and consequences.

Participant’s Signature

Date

Principal Investigator’s Signature

Date

Researchers’ Contact Information

Investigator:

Advisor:

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Appendix C

Participant Demographic Sheet

ID Pseudonym: _____

Participant Demographic Sheet

Age: _____ Race/Ethnicity: _____

Sexual Orientation: _____ Gender: _____

Course Enrollment (Practicum or Internship): _____

Program Specialization: Circle one: Clinical Mental Health Counseling School
Counseling

If enrolled in Internship, is this your first, second, or third semester? _____

Religious/Spiritual Orientation: _____

Have you viewed the film Moonlight prior to this study? Circle one: Yes No

May we contact you for follow up and/or member checking? Circle one: Yes No

How do you want to be contacted? Phone E-mail Other (Please specify)

Phone number: _____

E-mail: _____

Please provide any additional information you would like me to know about you.

Thank You!!

Appendix D
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

- 1) “How would you describe your experience during the film?”
- 2) “What do you believe informs your experience of the film?”
- 3) “How do you perceive Chiron’s experiences in the film?”
- 4) “Please describe any changes in feeling or emotion that you experienced during the film.”
- 5) “How do you perceive the film in relation to your role as an intern?”
- 6) “How do you perceive the use of this film in counselor education?”

Appendix E

Written Reflections on *Moonlight*

Written Reflections on *Moonlight*

1) “How do you perceive your personal experiences are like Chiron’s, based on your intersecting identities?”

2) “How do you perceive your personal experiences are different from Chiron’s, based on your intersecting identities?”

3) “How has your experience in this study affected you?”

Appendix F

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Religious Affiliation	Semester in Internship	Seen <i>Moonlight</i> before?
Claire	25	Caucasian	Straight	Agnostic	2nd	No
Gaptooth (GT)	29	Unidentified	Straight	Unidentified	2nd	No
Giselle	25	Caucasian	Straight	Catholic	2nd	No
Hazel	24	Caucasian	Straight	Catholic	2nd	No
Hippy Mom (HM)	44	Caucasian	Straight	LDS	1st	No
Jessica	25	Black	Straight	Baptist	3rd	Yes
KJ	25	Caucasian	Gay	Catholic	2nd	No
Lady Rayne (LR)	25	Caucasian	Straight	Spiritual	2nd	No
Liz	26	Caucasian	Bisexual	Spiritual	2nd	No
Mike	31	Caucasian	Straight	NA	3rd	No
Victoria	25	Caucasian	Straight	NA	1st	No
Violet	26	Caucasian	Gay	NA	2nd	No

Appendix G

Table 2: Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes

Table 2: Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Sub-theme
1. Participants suggested that their experiences of <i>Moonlight</i> were characterized by emotional turbulence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Experiences characterized by dismay. b. Experiences characterized by mixed emotions. c. Experiences characterized by varying levels of intensity. d. Experiences characterized by plot confusion.
2. Participants suggested that their experiences of <i>Moonlight</i> were informed by their subjective levels of exposure to and identification with aspects of diversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Limited exposure to diverse populations. b. Personal identification with aspects of Chiron’s identities. c. Vicarious exposure to diverse individuals and experiences.
3. Participants suggested that <i>Moonlight</i> has the potential to influence counseling interns to monitor and manage their emotional reactions to clients’ stories.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identification of emotional reactions in relation to the counseling relationship. b. The need to be strong in the counselor role.
4. Participants suggested that <i>Moonlight</i> has the potential to promote empathy and understanding of clients’ diverse experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Moonlight</i> promotes an understanding of experiences that may affect a wide range of clients. b. <i>Moonlight</i> facilitates conceptualization of intersectional complexity.
5. Participants suggested that <i>Moonlight</i> has the potential to promote counselor self-awareness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Recognition of potential limitations and sensitivities. b. Recognition of biases.

Appendix H

Table 3: Potential Multicultural and Intersectional Films

Table 3: Potential Multicultural and Intersectional Films

	Cinematic Films	
Film Title (Year)	Summary	Key Issues
12 Years a Slave (2013)	Solomon Northup, a free Black man from New York, is kidnapped and sold into slavery in the pre-Civil War era.	Racism, Historical Oppression
American History X (1999)	Story of a neo-Nazi who goes to prison after killing two Black youths who tried to steal his car. He struggles with his own prejudices but hopes to change his ways.	Racism, White Identity Development, Biases, Poverty, Criminality
Boys Don't Cry (2000)	Dramatic film that depicts the life and tragedy of Brandon Teena, a murdered trans male from Humboldt, Nebraska.	Gender, Sexuality, Transgenderism, Transphobia, Discrimination
Brokeback Mountain (2005)	An American neo-western romantic drama film that details the strained romantic relationship of two mountaineer men.	Gender, Sexuality, Heterosexism, Internalized Homophobia,
Circumstance (2011)	A wealthy Iranian family struggles to contain a teenager's growing sexual rebellion and her brother's dangerous obsession.	Iranian Culture, Sexuality, Gender, Islamophobia, Religion, LGBTQ, Intersectionality
Dear White People (2014)	A social satire that follows the stories of four Black students at an Ivy League college where controversy breaks out over a popular but offensive black-face party thrown by White students.	Racism, Biracialism, White Privilege, Intersectionality, Prejudices
District 9 (2009)	An extraterrestrial race forced to live in slum-like conditions on Earth suddenly finds a kindred spirit in a government agent who is exposed to their biotechnology.	Exclusion, Refugees, Equality, Displacement, Biases, Discrimination, Privilege
For Colored Girls (2010)	Based on Ntozake Shange's play "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf." Characters depict poems that provide a thought-provoking commentary on what it means to be a female of color in the world.	African American Culture, Gender, Feminism, Intersectionality, Colorism
Fruitvale Station (2013)	The film provides a dramatic depiction of the Oscar Grant's last day alive before being killed by a BART Metro officer in 2009.	Police Brutality, Racism, Discrimination, African American Culture, Poverty

Table 3 (continued)

Cinematic Films		
Film Title (Year)	Summary	Key Issues
McFardlan, USA (2015)	A struggling coach and teacher who has had to move around for different incidents in his career finally comes to one of the poorest cities in America: McFarland, California. There he discovers buried potential in several high school boys and slowly turns them into championship runners and brings them closer than even he could ever imagine.	African American Culture, Poverty, Educational Disparity
Milk (2008)	The story of Harvey Milk, California's first openly gay elected official, and his struggles as an American gay activist.	LGBTQ Issues, Gender, Sexuality, Equality, Discrimination
North Country (2005)	A fictionalized account of the Jenson vs. Eleventh Mines case, where a woman who endured a range of abuse while working as a miner filed and won the landmark 1984 lawsuit.	Gender, Feminism, Equality, Discrimination
The Other Sister (1999)	The story of a young woman with an intellectual disability as she seeks independence by procuring her own apartment and attending college.	Intellectual Disabilities, Feminism, Equity,
Pariah (2011)	An American art drama film that depicts a 17-year-old African American embracing her identity as a lesbian.	African American Culture, LGBTQ Issues, Feminism, Gender Roles, Intersectionality
Precious (2009)	In New York City's Harlem circa 1987, an overweight, abused, illiterate teen who is pregnant with her second child is invited to enroll in an alternative school in hopes that her life can head in a new direction.	African American Culture, Race Relations, Educational Disparity, Abuse, Feminism
Selma (2014)	This film chronicles Martin Luther King's campaign to secure equal voting rights via a march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in 1965.	African American Culture, Racism, Civil Rights, Discrimination, Equality
Slumdog Millionaire (2009)	A British dramatic film that depicts a Mumbai teen reflecting on his upbringing in the slums.	Indian Culture, Poverty

Table 3 (continued)

	Cinematic Films	
Film Title (Year)	Summary	Key Issues
Steel Toes (2006)	The story of a Jewish lawyer who represents a neo-Nazi on trial for the racially motivated murder of an East Indian immigrant.	Race Relations, Racism, Religious Intolerance, Discrimination, Criminality
TransAmerica (2005)	A pre-operative male-to-female transgender takes an unexpected journey when she learns that she fathered a son, now a teenage runaway hustling on the streets of New York.	LBTQ Issues, Transgenderism, Gender Roles, Coming Out
The Visitor (2007)	The story of a widowed Professor who finds a Syrian and Senegalese immigrant living in his apartment.	Immigration, Economic Injustice, Race, Class
	Documentary Films	
Dark Girls (2011)	Documentary exploring the deep-seated biases and attitudes about skin color—particularly dark skinned women, outside of and within the Black American culture.	African American Culture, Feminism, Gender, Colorism, Intersectionality
Harvest of Empire (2012)	A powerful documentary that exposes the direct connection between the long history of U.S. intervention in Latin America and the current immigration crisis.	Latino Culture, Immigration
Out in the Night (2014)	In a gay-friendly neighborhood of New York City, four young African-American lesbians are violently and sexually threatened by a man on the street. They defend themselves against him and are charged and convicted in the courts and in the media as a 'Gang of Killer Lesbians'.	LGBTQ Issues, Feminism, African American Culture, Intersectionality, Criminality, Minority Stress
Southern Comfort (2001)	The film documents the experiences of Robert Eads, a transgender man diagnosed with ovarian cancer.	Gender, Transgenderism, Sexuality, Poverty, Regionalism, Intersectionality
The Year We Thought about Love (2015)	Members of a Boston-based, LGBTQ youth theater troupe use their personal struggles as a basis to create theater for social change.	Gender, Sexuality, Minority Stress, LGBTQ Issues, Transgenderism, Intersectionality

Note. Reprinted from “The Use of Film as a Mid-term Evaluation in a Multicultural Counseling Course,” by C.A. Sommer, N. Kholomeydik, L.C. Rush, and J.A. Elliott, 2018, *Kentucky Journal of Excellence in College Teaching and Learning*, 15, pp. 66-70. Copyright 2018 by Kentucky Council for Post-Secondary Education Faculty Development Group. Reprinted with permission.