

CULTURAL AWARENESS: LATINOS PERCEPTIONS  
IN A MULTICULTURAL COUNSELING  
COURSE

A Dissertation

by

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## ABSTRACT

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This study explored the experiences and perceptions from a multicultural counseling course of Latino graduate counseling students at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). The purpose of the study was to understand the students' lived experience and its impact in developing their multicultural counselor identity and competencies. The research questions included the following: What course experiences and personal values do Latino graduate students identify as relevant to their multicultural counseling preparation? What psychological process do Latino graduate students use to make meaning of their experiences and values in their multicultural counseling preparation to serve the needs of culturally diverse clients?

The study used a transcendental phenomenological approach with a sample of Latino graduate counseling students, all from Mexican-American background. Emerging themes were related to two categories. First, values such as family ties, religion, work ethics and education emerged as playing an important role in professional identity. Second, processes such as conflict between having traditional cultural values versus valuing individualism. Lastly, the personal experience of hard-work leading to acceptance, embracing one's life, and to a predisposition towards multicultural competencies also emerged as important. Implications and recommendations for research and counselor education for Latino students are included.





## DEDICATION

Este trabajo está dedicado a ti, mamá, Oralia Castellano Vda. de Flores. Todos los días le doy gracias a Dios por haberme concedido el privilegio de ser tu hija. Gracias por ser una luchadora incansable, por ser el mejor ejemplo a seguir, por tu amor incondicional, y tus sacrificios personales trabajando para que saliéramos adelante tus cinco hijos. Si tuviera el talento para pintar un cuadro, hubiera pintado el 27 de abril de 1988, cuando llegaste de Montemorelos con Celyna, Edgar y Yasser. Te bajaste de ese autobús sin más que un morral en mano; ahora estoy segura que estaba lleno de miedos, incertidumbre, recuerdos, esperanza y fe. No imaginas cuánta alegría me da ahora verte con el morral de vida lleno de logros, satisfacción y alegría. ¡Lo peor ya pasó y lo mejor siempre está por venir! Te he admirado y respetado siempre. Eres la mujer más inteligente y sabia que conozco. La culminación de mi trabajo académico está dedicada a ti...y quien soy como hija, mujer, profesionista y persona, es por ti y para ti. Gracias por apoyarme día a día y por estar orgullosa de mí. Te amo Ma'!



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of the Problem**

A population projection report published in 2014 and based on data from the 2010 United States Census Bureau, indicated that the year 2044 will mark the point at which the United States of America (USA) will become a “majority minority” nation (Colby & Ortman, 2014).

According to these projections, the majority minority crossover will result in the non-Hispanic White population comprising less than 50 percent of the nation’s total population. This means no group will have a majority share of the total population, and the United States will become a “plurality of racial and ethnic groups.” The report on the projection of the size and composition of the population follows a trend from previous census projections and updates in 2010, 2013, and 2014 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2014). All previous projection reports support the idea that the USA will inevitably become more racially and ethnically diverse in the coming years (Colby & Ortman, 2014).

As racial, ethnic, and cultural plurality increases, so do needs of the diversely growing population of the USA. Specifically, adding to their projections report, Colby & Ortman (2014) detailed the fastest growing minority group over the next 46 years will be people from two or more races, followed by the Asian population, as the second fastest growing minority. The Latino American population is expected to increase 115 percent, from 55 million in 2014 to 119 million in 2060. Latino Americans are projected to be the third fastest growing group, according

to Colby and Ortman (2014). Previous data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2011) placed the Latino population as the fastest growing minority group. In addition, the growth of other minority groups such as Pacific Islanders and Native Americans will be modest, compared to the growth of people from Asian, Latino, or mixed races (U.S. Census Bureau 2010; Colby & Ortman, 2014).

While in the year 2014, Latino Americans were projected to account for 17 percent of the U.S. population, by 2060, this percentage is projected to increase to 29 percent. This will be more than one fourth of the total population in the USA. This census projection is consistent with a study previously conducted by Waters (2000), who researched issues of immigration, intermarriage and ethnic identity. Waters anticipated that by the year 2050, and under conservative assumptions of immigration and intermarriage, 21% of the population will be of multiple ancestry, with Hispanics and people of mixed race being the majority. Again, this growth will continue, and is changing the way health and human services professionals are offering and providing services to meet the needs of every population group (Malott & Paone, 2013).

One of the most prevalent needs for the increasing ethnically diverse population is appropriate access to human services, such as medical care and mental health. Studies have reported that minorities do not receive mental health services in the same proportion as Whites (Snowden & Yamada, 2005). Latinos are among the ethnic minority groups that are under-represented in the utilization of services. Addressing the healthcare and mental health needs of ethnic minority groups in a way that is culturally sensitive and appropriate has become the focus of service providers and researchers, among others.

In the field of counseling, current demographic trends call for professionals to be creative in adapting their practices for clients who are not from the dominant culture (Malott & Paone, 2013; Sue & Sue, 2016; Nelson, Bustamante, Sawyer, & Sloan, 2015). Adaptations to counseling practice can be developed from multicultural counseling competencies (MCC). These competencies can be as specific as understanding the significance of making eye contact for clients from diverse background who show respect by avoiding this visual contact. Another way of showing creativity in counseling ethnically diverse people is by identifying and utilizing stories and analogies during counseling interventions.

From a graduate education perspective, it becomes necessary to provide training opportunities to graduate counseling students that increase their multicultural counseling competencies. Ethnic minority graduate students in the USA may face some of the same barriers faced by their clients, including those related to finances, family, disability, lack of access to services, etc. Sue & Sue (2008) and Haley, Romero Marin, & Gelgand (2015) reported that counseling training programs have seen an increase in the number of students from ethnic minority backgrounds. Meeting the multicultural training needs of ethnic minority students in a way that is sensitive and appropriate will likely improve the quality of services offered to meet the mental health care needs of their clients (Gary, Kling, & Dodd, 2004; Anuar & Jaladin, 2016).

The provision of counseling and mental health services to culturally diverse clients requires extra competencies that must go beyond the basic counseling techniques and competencies (Kagnici, 2014). The 2016 Standards of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016), established ethical obligations for the counseling profession. Specific to the area of multicultural counseling, the counseling

profession has an ethical obligation to lead efforts in advocating for clients from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Inclusion services and training of counselors to provide services to culturally diverse individuals is an increasingly common area of need (Nelson, Bustamante, Sawyer, & Sloan, 2015; CACREP, 2016).

### **American Counseling Association**

In addition to CACREP specifications, the American Counseling Association (ACA) requires counseling programs to integrate multicultural competencies in their training curricula for counselor preparation programs (Chae, Foley, & Chae, 2006; Kagnici, 2014). The 2014 Code of Ethics of the American Counseling Association (ACA) reflects this multicultural competence effort as well. The preamble of the ACA Code of Ethics states “professional values are an important way of living out an ethical commitment.” This preamble cites the following core professional values for the counseling profession in Table 1.

Table 1

#### *ACA Professional Core Values*

- 
1. Enhancing human development throughout the life span;
  2. Honoring diversity and embracing a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts;
  3. Promoting social justice;
  4. Safeguarding the integrity of the counselor–client relationship; and
  5. Practicing in a competent and ethical manner
- 

The ACA Code of Ethics contains nine main sections, each addressing one of these areas as seen in Table 2. It is important to note members of the American Counseling Association are

specifically asked to recognize society’s diversity. In addition, members are encouraged to embrace a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of each individual.

Table 2

*ACA Nine Sections of the Code of Ethics*

- 
- Section A: The counseling relationship;
  - Section B: Confidentiality and privacy;
  - Section C: Professional responsibility;
  - Section D: Relationships with other professionals;
  - Section E: Evaluation, assessment, and interpretation
  - Section F: Supervision, training, and teaching;
  - Section G: Research and publication;
  - Section H: Distance counseling, technology, and social media; and
  - Section I: Resolving ethical issues
- 

As an example, ACA introduces multicultural aspects in its first section, “The counseling relationship.” In Section A, Standard 2, letter c (A.2.c Informed Consent in the Counseling Relationship), the following statement promotes developmental and cultural sensitivity:

“Counselors communicate information in ways that are both developmentally and culturally appropriate. Counselors use clear and understandable language when discussing issues related to informed consent. When clients have difficulty understanding the language that counselors use, counselors provide necessary services (e.g., arranging for a qualified interpreter) to ensure comprehension by clients. In collaboration with

clients, counselors consider cultural implications of informed consent procedures and, where possible, counselors adjust their practices accordingly (ACA, 2014).”

### **Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs**

The ACA and CACREP have made efforts to promote multicultural competences as key components of counseling education and practice. These efforts are done through the accreditation of counselor’s education university programs. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) was established in 1981. CACREP is considered the independent accrediting body of the American Counseling Association (ACA) and most counselor training programs (Fawcett & Evans, 2012; CACREP, 2009; CACREP, 2016).

CACREP’s purpose is to develop, implement, and maintain standards of preparation for the graduate-level degree programs in the counseling professions (CACREP, 2016; Fawcett & Evans, 2012). The council requires graduate counseling programs to offer a research infused curriculum that includes courses in the foundational knowledge in eight areas as outlined in Table 3. In addition, the 2016 standards reflect the importance of multicultural competence in all of the foundational areas. Relevant to current counseling research and practice, CACREP standards ensure accredited counselor education programs offer training appropriate to practice with culturally and ethnically diverse populations. In particular, the 2016 standards identified “Social and Cultural Diversity” as one of eight common core areas in which curricular experiences and demonstrated knowledge is required.

Table 3

*CACREP Eight Foundational Areas*

- 
1. Professional counseling orientation and ethical practice
  2. Social and cultural diversity
  3. Human growth and development
  4. Career development
  5. Counseling and helping relationships
  6. Group counseling and group work
  7. Assessment and testing
  8. Research and program evaluation
- 

Social and Cultural Diversity is regarded as “the understanding of relationships, issues, and trends in a cultural context and through a multicultural lens. This core area refers to factors such as culture, ethnicity, nationality, age, gender, sexual orientation, mental and physical characteristics, education, family values, religious and spiritual values, socioeconomic status and unique characteristics of individuals, couples, families, ethnic groups, and communities” (Belur, 2010). Moreover, social and cultural diversity is increasingly seen in counseling training programs with greater student diversity than before (Sue & Sue, 2016; Haley, Romero Marin, & Gelgand, 2015).

Historically, training counselors in multicultural competencies began with the seminal article of Derald Wing Sue (1981). Subsequent research of Chao, Wei, Good and Flores (2011) indicated multicultural training tended to enhance the multicultural competencies of White

students but was not as effective in training multicultural students in helping Whites. Chao et.al (2011) observed there was a need to focus on training minority students to counsel White clients.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study explored the lived experiences and perceptions of graduate Latino students who have taken a multicultural counseling course as part of their graduate training at a Hispanic serving institution (HSI). The purpose of the study was multidimensional. It sought to understand the students' lived experience of the multicultural counseling course. An additional purpose of this study was to explore how the students' experiences related to their personal and cultural values.

This study also sought to look into the impact of the multicultural counseling course in the development of a multicultural identity and of counseling competencies needed in working with diverse client population. An additional aim of this study was to add to the available body of literature related to the values that graduate counseling Latino students report as relevant and influential to their professional work with similar and different ethnic groups.

Graduate counseling students are the recipients and the users of vital and fundamental information and training. It is important that counseling training programs provide meaningful training experiences. This research study contributed a greater understanding of the experiences of Latino students, and the impact that meaningful, research based, and experiential instruction may have on their professional identity development, as well as the well-being of future clients.

Exploring the ethnic minority students' experiences and perceptions of what it means to be a multicultural counselor and developing a multicultural counseling identity provides insight into the process of multicultural training. Additionally, this research provided implications for further research design, professional practice, and counseling education.



## **Research Questions**

Qualitative methods can be of great value in exploring topics such as perceptions and experiences of certain groups about particular issues, including cultural identity in graduate Latino students in rehabilitation counseling, and other topics. Qualitative research also helps in raising more specific questions and hypotheses to be pursued in subsequent research (Silverman, 2005; Creswell, 2013). Therefore, qualitative procedures are appropriate for this research study. One approach to qualitative research, the phenomenological approach, has been extensively used in fields such as education, psychology, social sciences, and health (Creswell, 2013).

The current research utilizes a qualitative approach, specifically transcendental phenomenology (Creswell, 2013). This type of research analyzes the essences perceived by consciousness with regard to individual experiences. Creswell (1998; 2013) suggested that the use of phenomenology is best recommended when the problem we are researching requires a deep understanding of human experiences common to people in a group (Padilla-Diaz, 2015).

This research inquired and explored the lived experiences of graduate students in a multicultural counseling course, and its effect on the development of their own cultural identity. The principal research questions guiding this study were: “What course experiences and personal values do Latino graduate students identify as relevant to their multicultural counseling preparation?” and “What psychological process do Latino graduate students use to make meaning of their experiences and values in their multicultural counseling preparation to serve the needs of culturally diverse clients?”

## **Significance of the Study**

The world has become gradually globalized. Ease of transportation and communication, easier access to information through navigating the internet, social media and electronic payment

systems have accelerated the rate of globalization in many aspects of society. As this globalization occurs, professionals have found new challenges in working with a flexible approach of acceptance, plurality and inclusion. Human services professionals are not the exception. A multicultural approach to helping people has been cited in literature for decades (Sue & Sue, 2016).

Since the 90's, data from longitudinal studies showed the counseling profession was rapidly expanding to more specialized practice fields. This data reported multicultural counseling as one of the growing trends in the counseling profession (Brue, 2012; Hollis, 1997). Concurrently, the number of racially and ethnically diverse students in graduate counseling education continued to grow (Haley, Romero Marin, & Gelgand, 2015).

Marsella & Pedersen (2004), asserted that in the last decades, the fields of psychology and counseling psychology have seen a meaningful increase in the demand for service professionals and that the counseling field must be responsive to the changing needs of society. The author added that professionals must develop skills that are sensitive to individual and collective differences regarding racial, ethnic or cultural minorities. Every aspect of the counseling profession including counseling, supervision, ethics, and graduate education and training has now a multicultural competences component (Sue & Sue, 2003; Sue & Sue, 2016; Tseng, 2004; Suzuki & Ponteroto, 2008; Bernard, 1994; Sadeghi, Fischer, & House, 2003; Faubert & Locke, 2003). The 2016 CACREP standards at entry and doctoral level also support the ethnic and cultural component of all these areas.

As we know, the way students experience multicultural counseling education supports the development of training programs and course exercises that encourage students' multicultural competences. This study demonstrated relevance for multicultural counseling training programs,

for students and for faculty and supervisors who help students in integrating multicultural principles and competence into their future counseling practice. It is important to note that students are developing awareness of themselves and how they fit within the counseling profession during their training programs (Auxier et al., 2003). Students from ethnic minority background are also developing their professional identity and learning how to relate their cultural values to their clients and how to practice cultural competence.

This study added to the growing body of literature related to the relevance of multicultural counseling training for ethnic minority graduate students in the counseling profession (Breu, 2012). Specifically, this study examined the experiences of Latino counseling students in a multicultural counseling course. The course was designed to prepare graduate students to work with a growing ethnically diverse population, including Latinos at different acculturation and assimilation stages. This study also explored the values Latino graduate students bring into the counseling profession that may prove to be key in working with an increasing number of Latinos and people from other cultural minority groups.

### **Limitations**

The qualitative methodology provided strengths and potential limitations in this study. For example, every effort was made to ensure confidentiality for all of the participants. The course professor removed all identifying information. However, the academic familiarity that the multicultural counseling course professor had with students presented its own challenge. Some of the students' responses could have been potentially identified by the professor, and associated with specific students. However, the researcher for this study did not know the identities of the students in the multicultural counseling course, thus ensuring a high confidentiality level. Most of the participants in this study identified as females. The sample was not equally representative

for males and females. However, this tends to be a common occurrence in counseling programs, as many more women enroll in this profession than males.

The nature of the research study was conducive to reflective written exercises, given the way in which the multicultural counseling course was structured. This could potentially be seen as a limitation, as some students might not include everything they would say verbally if the format were different. However, it also could be difficult for students to provide thoughtful responses on cultural identity in face-to-face interviews. Therefore, there was a possibility that participants may have evaded giving candid responses or reflections because of the written format. Response bias and its impact is an unknown limitation.

Many graduate students identified as female, first-generation Latinos, predominantly from a traditional Mexican-American background. Students from other Latino groups, such as Cuban-Americans, Puerto-Ricans, and others were not represented in this study. A sample with a majority of Latinos from Mexican-American descent could potentially have an effect in the patterns of responses. The level of participants' acculturation and assimilation into mainstream American society can sometimes influence perceptions and attitudes. However, the depth of responses was beneficial in understanding the cultural conceptualization and experiences of these participants.

Last, this study included a purposeful, convenience sample of students in a master's level rehabilitation counseling program in one Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). All participants in the study were enrolled in a multicultural counseling course as part of their course assignments and requirements. The rehabilitation counseling program in this HSI prepares students to become researchers, practitioners and faculty in an increasing number of universities that seek to recruit professionals from Latino and other cultural minority backgrounds.

## **Key Terminology**

**Counselor Development** – Refers to counseling students’ progress through a sequence of hierarchical stages to develop increased knowledge and competence in counseling skills.

Guiffrida (2005) suggested successful counselor development requires for the counselor educator to assist students in finding a theory that reflects their views of human growth. In addition, it requires the using self-reflection to develop a theoretical orientation.

**Counselor Identity** – It refers to a “therapeutic self that consists of a unique personal blend of the developed professional and personal selves, including values and theoretical stance” (Skovholt & Ronnestad, p. 507).

**Cultural Competence** – The ability to work well in a cross-cultural manner, through skills, knowledge, behaviors and attitudes under a set of values and principles. Cultural competence is also the ability to adapt to diversity through self-assessment, management of differences, and displaying cultural knowledge in the cultural contexts of the individuals and communities being served (CRCC, 2016).

**Culturally Diverse** – The presence of various cultural or ethnic groups within society (CRCC, 2016).

**Culture** – Set of shared worldviews and adaptive behaviors, derived from membership in a variety of contexts. Geographical location, religious background, nationality and ethnicity, social class, gender, occupation, political ideas, stages of acculturation, or other values are among the contexts cited by Falicov (1998). Culture is also defined as membership in a socially constructed way of living, which incorporates collective values, beliefs, norms, boundaries, and lifestyles that are co-created with others who share similar worldviews comprising biological, psychosocial, historical, psychological, and other factors (ACA, 2016).

**Discrimination** – The prejudicial treatment of an individual or group based on their actual or perceived membership in a particular group, class, or category (ACA, 2016).

**Diversity** – The similarities and differences that occur within and across cultures, and the intersection of cultural and social identities (ACA, 2016). Diversity includes variables such as age, gender, culture, spirituality, and sexual orientation. These variables are addressed within the context of multicultural counseling.

**Dominant Culture** – The culture that consists of individuals who have the most prominence and influence in a society. For the purposes of this dissertation, the dominant culture, as regarded in the United States, are White Americans who are of European descent.

**Ethnicity** – Belonging to a common group, often linked by race, nationality, and language with a common cultural heritage. Cultural patterns (including values, beliefs, behaviors, roles, affective styles, and attitudes) shared by a group frequently unified by common nationality or geographic origins (Atkinson, Morton, & Sue, 1998)

**Hispanics or Latinos** – According to the US Bureau of the Census (2010), Hispanics or Latinos classified themselves in one of the specific Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino categories listed on the Census 2010 questionnaire -"Mexican," "Puerto Rican," or "Cuban" – as well as those who indicate that they are "another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin" with origins from Spain, the Spanish-speaking countries of Central or South America, or the Dominican Republic. The terms "Hispanic," "Latino," and "Spanish" are used interchangeably.

**Mixed or "In combination"** – A group of people that belong to one or more races. (Colby, & Ortman, 2014).

**Minority** – A group of people who, because of physical or cultural characteristics, are considered different and less in numbers than the majority population. Minority is also defined as any group other than non-Hispanic White.

**Multicultural** – The diversity of racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage; socioeconomic status; age; gender; sexual orientation; and religious and spiritual beliefs, as well as physical, emotional, and mental abilities (CACREP, 2016).

**Multicultural/Diversity Competence** – Counselors’ cultural and diversity awareness and knowledge about self and others, and how these are applied effectively in practice with clients and groups of clients (ACA, 2016).

**Multicultural/Diversity Counseling** – Counseling that recognizes diversity and embraces approaches that support the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of individuals within their historical, cultural, economic, political, and psychosocial contexts (ACA, 2016). Multicultural counseling also refers to counseling preparation and practices that integrate multicultural and culture-specific awareness, knowledge, and skills in the counseling process (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992).

**Pluralistic** – A condition of society in which numerous distinct ethnic, racial, religious, and social groups coexist and cooperatively work toward the interdependence needed for the enhancement of each group. This condition is based on the belief that all members of society benefit when diverse groups participate fully in the dominant society, yet maintain their differences (CACREP, 2016 Standards).

**Professional Identity** – The development of an identity as a professional that integrates personal beliefs and values with the beliefs and values of one’s profession.

**Race** – A concept that has been socially constructed to categorize and distinguish groups based on physical characteristics (Atkinson, Morton, & Sue, 1998).

**Social Justice** – The promotion of equity for all people and groups for the purpose of ending oppression and injustice affecting clients, students, counselors, families, communities, schools, workplaces, governments, and other social and institutional systems (ACA, 2016).

**Student** – An individual engaged in formal graduate-level counselor education (ACA, 2016).

**Supervisee** – A counselor-in-training whose counseling work or clinical skill development is being overseen in a formal supervisory relationship by a qualified trained professional (ACA, 2014).

**Supervision** – A process in which one individual (supervisor), engages in a collaborative relationship with a junior member of a given profession (supervisee), in order to (a) promote the growth and development of the supervisee(s), (b) protect the welfare of the clients seen by the supervisee, and (c) evaluate the performance of the supervisee (ACA, 2016).

**Supervisor** – Counselors who are trained to oversee the professional clinical work of counselors and counselors-in-training (ACA, 2016).

**Teaching** – All activities engaged in, as part of a formal educational program that is designed to lead to a graduate degree in counseling (ACA, 2016).

**Training** – The instruction and practice of skills related to the counseling profession. Training contributes to the ongoing proficiency of students and professional counselors (ACA, 2016).



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The 2014 population report by Colby & Ortman (2014) estimated that by the year 2044 more than half of all Americans will belong to a minority group, defined as any group other than non-Hispanic Whites. The U.S. Census Bureau's 2014 National Projections reported that by 2060, nearly one out of every five people in the U.S. is projected to be foreign born (Colby & Ortman, 2014). The increasingly plural and diverse U.S. population points to Latinos as one of the fastest growing groups. In addition, Latino students make up the fastest growing population in the educational system (Villalba, Akos, Keeter, & Ames, 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Latino, among other diverse students, are also accessing graduate programs at larger numbers than before (Haley, Romero Marin, & Gelgand, 2015). Given these trends, it is necessary to look into the education of Latinos in a multicultural and plural society.

Multiculturalism has emerged as a strong force in counseling. Research literature has shown the relevance of multicultural counseling education in graduate level courses for all students, but especially for ethnic minority students (Sue & Sue, 2016). To understand the salience of students' experiences with multicultural counseling, and its relevance to professional identity, we must understand the history of multicultural counseling training, and the consequential evolution of multicultural counseling courses in graduate programs.

## **Multicultural Counseling and Training**

University faculty are increasingly integrating aspects of multiculturalism in their teaching practices in health and social sciences. However, in the field of graduate counseling education, the requirement of a multicultural counseling course continues to be the primary means to educate future counselors on the counseling process in a multicultural, diverse setting (CACREP, 2016). Research in counseling and psychology programs suggests that the inclusion of faculty and students from minority background greatly contributes to enhancing a multicultural training environment (Rogers, 2006).

Courses in multicultural counseling were originally intended to support students from the dominant culture with professional development in working with ethnically diverse clients (Sue & Sue, 2016). However, the original intention of these multicultural courses did not look into the experience and impact of such for students who were culturally or ethnically different from the dominant culture. In research, the importance and pertinence of multicultural counseling courses for ethnic minority students attending predominantly White institutions has been addressed in a limited way (Brown, 2004), and it continues to grow.

Relevant to counselors' education in multicultural counseling is the regulation and recognition of training programs by accrediting associations. Among the most important associations that regulate graduate programs in counseling and psychology are: 1) The American Psychological Association (APA); 2) The American Counseling Association (ACA); 3) The Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE); 4) The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP); and 5) The Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE).

The largest professional organization for counselors, ACA, makes concrete and intentional efforts to promote multiculturalism as a key component of professional counseling. ACA's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice (2014) reflect this effort in its preamble, stating: "Association members recognize diversity in our society and embrace a cross-cultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of each individual". Moreover, Section A, specifically standard A.2, states: "Counselors will actively attempt to understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of clients with whom they work. This includes learning how the counselor's own cultural/ethnic/racial identity impacts her or his values and beliefs about the counseling process" (ACA, 2014), among other points.

Counselor education programs approved by The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP, 2016), must meet the standard of curricular experiences in social and cultural diversity. CACREP refers to curricular experiences as formal activities, which are planned and structured with the intention of preparing students to learn and apply information, principles, values, and skills as expected outcomes of the academic course. CACREP standards identify "Social and Cultural Diversity" as one of eight common core areas that require curricular experiences and established knowledge. CACREP defines social and cultural diversity as:

Studies that provide an understanding of the cultural context of relationships, issues, and trends in a multicultural and diverse society related to such factors as culture, ethnicity, nationality, age, gender, sexual orientation, mental and physical characteristics, education, family values, religious and spiritual values, socioeconomic status and unique characteristics of individuals, couples, families, ethnic groups, and communities....  
(CACREP, 2016).

Multicultural counseling competencies (MCC) are instrumental for counselors and counselors in training who work with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds (Fawcett, Briggs, Maycock, & Stine, 2010). As previously stated, most counselor education programs require students to enroll in a multicultural counseling course and encourage faculty to integrate multiculturalism throughout their courses. Sue and Sue (2003, 2016) contended that the counseling curriculum must be designed to stimulate multicultural awareness at different levels. It must foster the understanding of issues affecting ethnic minorities. These include: helplessness, powerlessness, low self-esteem, poor self-concept, and how all these factors contribute to low motivation, frustration, hate, ambivalence, and apathy. Sue and Sue propose each course should contain consciousness-raising, affective, knowledge, and skills components.

### **Multicultural Training Experiences of Graduate Counseling Students**

Researchers in multicultural training have introduced various training formats to enhance counselors' and clients' awareness and knowledge, as well as skill development. Research by Kerl (2002), and McCreary and Walker (2001), suggested that students in multicultural training courses have given constructive feedback of the courses. Some students have also illustrated how they experienced personal and professional growth during the training process.

McCreary and Walker (2001) stressed the importance of didactic and experiential learning practices in multicultural counseling courses. Another suggestion has been to utilize a narrative approach so that students become more aware of their identities in relationship to culturally diverse clients (Kerl, 2002). In a qualitative study about reflections from a multicultural counseling course, Kagnici (2014) highlighted the usefulness of one narrative and experiential learning course activity. In the course, the students were required to prepare a

cultural genogram. This course allowed for the graduate students' family members to come together and build family memories by discussing customs and family ties.

Experiential learning may include lectures by the instructor and guest speakers; cultural chats, genograms, written reaction papers and, participation in a skill laboratory for practice and skill development. Coleman (2006) performed a comparison of the multicultural training experiences of ethnic and non-ethnic minority trainees in counseling psychology. Using the Critical Incidents Questionnaire (CIQ), the researcher examined critical incidents in multicultural training in a sample of 59 graduate students. Coleman asked participants to describe their most influential experience in their development of multicultural competencies, and their cognitive and affective reactions to the experience. The importance of their experience and the aspects they would change were also investigated. Different raters reviewed the responses obtained from the CIQ, and important similarities and differences were found in the participants' responses.

Coleman (2006) found statistically significant differences in the perceived helpfulness of the multicultural training between ethnic minority students and White students. While more White students noted the usefulness of interacting with ethnically diverse people, minority students found the didactic and experiential training more useful.

Coleman proposed for training programs to include a combination of didactic and experiential components related to race/ethnicity and less structured activities to facilitate interactions between White and ethnic minority colleagues. One limitation of this study was the ethnic minority sample only included three participants from Asian background and a majority of White participants. Consequently, the study did not cover the experience and perceptions of students from other ethnic groups in graduate training programs.

## **Counseling Identity Development**

The development of a professional identity is an evolving process that can be compared to lifelong learning, because it happens over time (Nelson & Jackson, 2003). CACREP (2009) acknowledged and outlined the importance of professional identity in its standards, delineating the foundational philosophy and beliefs of the counseling profession and commanding the development of professional identity in graduate students. The expectation is that students are given an opportunity to develop their professional identity through facilitating curricular and training experiences. To achieve this, CACREP outlines particular core objectives to be followed by counseling programs.

The professional identity of counselors can be defined both collectively and individually (Breu, 2012). Collectively as a profession, the scope of how counselors define themselves and their distinctive role in mental health forms part of counselor identity. Individually, a professional identity could be described as how counselors view themselves, their roles, and their purpose within the counseling profession (Brue, 2012; Auxier, Hughes, & Kline, 2003).

Nelson and Jackson (2003), also noted there was limited research in diversity issues in professional counselor and identity development, especially for culturally diverse counseling students. They added “the personal transformation of a counseling student into an effective professional helper is an educational journey that has not been researched a great deal from the perspective of Hispanic students.” Ethnic identity is relevant for counselors-in-training and can influence their subsequent cultural competence (Johnson, 2012).

## **Ethnic Minority Counselor Identity Development**

The voices of the newest ethnic minorities entering the profession are emergent, and as a result, the literature in this area is still growing (Belur, 2010; Wieling & Rastogi, 2003). Some of

the earlier research has mainly focused on the positive correlation between White racial identity and multicultural competence (Sabnani, Ponterotto, & Borodovsky, 1991). However, there are plenty of conceptual and empirical research studies that support the idea that current multicultural training may still favor White therapist development (Johnson, 2012).

The number of studies that explore ethnic identity and multicultural competence is growing. However, more research that compares graduate students' ethnic identity as they begin their counseling curriculum and its relation to characteristics of effective counselors is needed (Nelson & Jackson, 2003; Belur, 2010). Previous and recent research suggest a positive relationship exists between multicultural competence and racial and ethnic identity development in counselors (Nelson & Jackson, 2003; Toporek, Ortega-Villalobos, & Pope-Davis, 2004; Phinney, 1989).

For example, in a 1989 study by Phinney, the stages of ethnic identity development were assessed. Phinney conducted in-depth interviews with 91 American born 10th graders from Asian-American, African-American, Hispanic, and White background. Together with ethnic identity development, the measures of ego identity and psychological adjustment were evaluated. Interview data reported that participants felt engaged in one of three identity stages as follows: about one-half of the subjects had not explored their ethnicity (diffusion/foreclosure); about one-quarter were involved in exploration (moratorium); and about one-quarter had explored and were committed to an ethnic identity (ethnic identity achieved).

Phinney noted the participants who scored higher in Ethnic-identity-achieved also obtained the highest scores on the measure of ego identity and on psychological adjustment. Although the process of identity development was similar across Asian-Americans, African-Americans, and Hispanics, Phinney observed that each group faced different issues in the

process of cultural identity development. Although the study by Phinney is not new, its findings seem to be congruent with more current research about the unique needs of different ethnic minority groups.

In a qualitative study, Nelson and Jackson (2003) conducted semi-structured interviews with eight Latino counseling students about their professional counselor identity development. They asked participants questions such as, “How has your graduate school coursework influenced the way you think about your role in the field of counseling?” “What would it take for you to feel you had achieved a sense of identity as a counselor?” Specific to Latino students, the following themes emerged: the importance of relationships (with family, peers, and faculty), the efforts placed in accomplishment (sense of pride), costs (financial, time, investment in counselor identity), and perceptions of the counseling profession (positive feelings).

While Nelson and Jackson’s study highlighted themes that were unique to Latino students, it was noted that the interview questions did not directly inquire about the role of ethnicity and culture in Hispanic students’ counselor identity. The authors documented their initial idea that Hispanic students in counseling programs may face unique challenges and definitely have different experiences in their professional identity development (Nelson & Jackson, 2003).

In another study that utilized a hierarchical regression analysis, Chao (2006) surveyed a group of counseling professionals. The instruments used in the study measured multicultural counseling knowledge and awareness, desirable responding inventories, and racial attitudes inventories. Chao (2006) suggested that ethnic identity had a significant additional variance on multicultural knowledge and awareness. He observed counseling students who scored at higher levels of ethnic identity development also had greater multicultural competence when compared



to students at lower levels of ethnic identity maturity. The study also found the number of multicultural courses and workshops had effects that varied significantly in counseling professionals. Chao (2006) found students with higher scores of ethnic identities were likely to have more knowledge and awareness of multiculturalism.

### **Barriers to Graduate Education for Ethnic Minority Students**

In addition to the struggles faced by many ethnic-minority graduate students, such as tokenism, racism, and isolation, (Gay, 2004; Boston, 2005), ethnic minority students in counseling and psychology may face additional struggles which are specific to their cultural group. The integration of cultural identity with their professional identity is one of the struggles that might affect students from diverse groups (Belur, 2010; Brown, 2004; Nelson & Jackson, 2003; Yin-Lee, 2002).

Other struggles faced by ethnic minority counseling students include cultural marginalization (Wieling & Rastogi, 2003), and developing an ethnic identity (Yin-Le, 2002; Sharma, 2005). Latinos in higher education have documented challenges related to discrimination, financial, academic, personal, and acculturative stress (Morgan Consoli, Llamas, & Consoli, 2016). Yet, these cultural struggles, their manifestation and understanding can assist in meeting the needs of graduate ethnic minority students, and they have not been systematically researched in the last decades.

All professions have shown to have dominant values that underlie and drive them, including counseling psychology (Sue & Sue, 2016). However, some cultural minority researchers have criticized the counseling psychology profession by proposing that its underlying values are mono-culturally biased and based on Eurocentric values. Some scholars have also

claimed the counseling profession does not reflect a truly multicultural agenda. (Comas-Diaz, 2017; Sue & Sue, 2016).

According to prominent multicultural scholars, the Eurocentric cultural value bias is apparent in both graduate/professional training and psychotherapy (Comas-Diaz, 2017; Tseng, 2004; Sue & Sue, 2003; Vasquez & McKinley, 1982). Hutnik (2005) pointed out, for example, what is seen as ethical is usually defined by mono-cultural Euro-American norms. The author also noted that privileged positions of authority and leadership in psychology and counseling are still held predominantly by White middle-class women.

Marsella & Pedersen (2004) support the idea that the counseling profession has endorsed mainly Euro-centric values. The authors suggested the values of the profession must be expanded to go beyond individualism, independence, linear thinking, adjustment, power-distance, and autonomy. Others have referred to Euro-centric professional training values such as rationalism, communication and self-disclosure (Trevino, 1996).

European American education values the exchange of dialogue between students, and the expression of disagreement, emotion and of personal and professional beliefs. Nagata (1995) and Comas-Diaz (2017) have studied how ethnic minorities whose cultural values are cooperative, non-confrontational, respectful, and collective are seen as negative in counseling. Positively, scholars have begun to recognize and discuss in research the cultural value foundations of American counseling psychotherapy with the goal of providing culturally-sensitive counseling, which might go against currently existing Western therapy approaches (Potts & Watts, 2003; Laungani, 2004; Ardila, 1982).

More recently, Tseng (2004) contrasted Eastern with Western psychotherapy values and delineated some of the main differences as follows: hierarchy versus equality, experience versus

cognition/rationality, society versus self, dependence and indulgence versus independence, holistic treatment versus dualism, accepting life versus conquering it. Tseng proposed we must make adaptations to the traditional Euro-centric approach to therapy if we want to become culturally relevant when working with clients who value and live by other cultural norms, in this case, by Asian/Eastern worldviews. Tseng postulated adaptations in three main dimensions: technical, theoretical and reorientation adjustments in the philosophical dimension.

Before Tseng's study, Vasquez & McKinley (1982) stated the problem of adapting to the culture of the profession of psychology as complex for minority students, because the field is currently presented in "predominantly White male terms." For example, Latino students might experience conflicts due to the clash between their Latino cultural value of collectivism, and value of individualism and competitiveness required in a graduate program. However, Belur (2010) contended that values might not be entirely "European," as values are generally not completely restricted to a culture. Rather, the emphasis given to a particular value may be different across cultures. When a high degree of emphasis is given to a specific value in a particular culture, is then said to be a cultural value (Belur, 2010).

The inclusion of cultural minorities in counseling and psychology in recent years has provided the opportunity to expand the profession in multicultural ways (Sue & Sue, 2016; Comas-Diaz, 2017). Ethnic minorities normally bring with them values and beliefs from cultures all over the world. Given the growth in numbers of ethnically diverse professionals in the counseling field, Marsella & Pedersen (2004) indicated that we have a new opportunity to view education, training, therapy, methods, ethics, and all other aspects of the psychology profession here in the United States through a different lens. However, the potential contributions of these

ethnic minority groups are often not capitalized enough, as seen by the limited number of research conducted with ethnic minority trainees in general, and specifically with Latino trainees.

### **Professional Development of Ethnic Minorities**

In the past, researchers have raised questions about the unique training needs of minority graduate students and the limited literature on the topic (McNeill, Horn, & Perez, 1995; Jackson, 1995). McNeill, Horn, & Perez (1995) reported little available evidence on the training needs of ethnic minority trainees 20 years ago. They added that most studies have delineated training criteria to prepare White, middle-class students, to work with racial and ethnic minority clients. Jackson (1995) reported graduate and training programs had not given sufficient attention to assisting the professional development of minority mental health professionals, as demonstrated by the few research articles published to inform and guide such training. Jackson contended that ethnic minority therapists needed as much and more relevant cross-cultural training as White therapists needed.

Chamorro (2004) stated the professional development of Latino students in graduate programs must be different than the traditional White counselor development, given the additional problems and barriers they face. The author discussed the struggle of the professional development of Latino psychologists and called it “The parentified child struggle.” Chamorro added Latinos usually face issues of role reversal, premature responsibility, and isolation. Many times, Latinos are needed in class to teach or illustrate issues of cultural competence during their graduate education, as many faculty members are unfamiliar with Latino culture and other aspects of working with them (Chamorro, 2004).

Additionally, Latina/o counselors who provide bilingual counseling may need to translate their sessions and notes so that their supervisors can understand. Having to translate notes adds

additional pressures for the students. Chamorro's conceptualizations, along with Nelson & Jackson's (2003) study on Hispanic counselor identity, suggested many unique professional developmental issues based on trainees' ethnic or cultural background.

### **Minority Student Struggles in Predominantly White University Counseling Programs**

The additional issues that ethnically diverse graduate students are faced with as a result of having a minority status on a predominantly White campus are worth considering. Scholars have postulated ethnic minority students experience feelings of social isolation, alienation, and marginalization on campuses that are predominantly White (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). Moreover, students have reported feeling invisible and ignored by the majority culture and to have received discriminatory treatment by faculty and staff. Minority students' awareness and experiences with overt and covert racism may influence their perceptions and experiences in a multicultural counseling course (Brown, 2010).

In 2005, Wieling and Rastogi conducted an exploratory survey of 15 marriage and family therapy trainees who were ethnically diverse. Participants were asked if and how their educational development was influenced by the ethnic or cultural make-up of their graduate program. It was noted that thirteen of the fifteen ethnic minority participants believed their programs were inadequate and did not offer culturally appropriate theoretical and practical preparation for them. Some participants reported culture bias in their training, and feeling their graduate training was not representative of their culture and values. The overall comments of minority participants included lack of multicultural models in the training program due to a curriculum geared mainly toward the White graduate student population.

Available studies also seem to indicate that in addition to the struggles faced by a majority of ethnic minority graduate students, such as tokenism, racism, and isolation, (Gay,

2004; Boston, 2005), minority graduate students may face additional cultural struggles. These struggles include integration of their ethnic/cultural identity with their professional identity, cultural marginalization, and developing their own identity (Quinlan, 2002; Yin-Lee, 2002; Nelson & Jackson, 2003; Vasquez & McKinley, 1982; Wieling & Rastogi, 2003; Brown, 2010; Sharma, 2005).

A thorough understanding of the cultural struggles faced by ethnic minority students can assist researchers and practitioners in identifying and meeting the needs of these students during their graduate counseling training. Reid and Dixon (2012) stated that the multicultural and cross-cultural counselor training issues of culturally diverse students has received some attention in the field of counselor education (Gainor & Constantine, 2002; Gardener, 2002; Toporek, Ortega-Villalobos, & Pope-Davis, 2004). However, the research related to the professional development of Latino ethnic minority graduate students is still limited. Additionally, it does not allow for a comprehensive representation of their struggles, specifically those related to cultural values and identity development needs. Seward (2009) emphasized that training programs, counselor educators and supervisors would only be able to meet the cultural learning needs of culturally diverse students they comprehensively understand and represent their struggles with cultural values and identity development needs.

In summary, the experiences of ethnic minority graduate students during their professional development years has been documented for over 10 years (Rastogi & Wieling, 2005). Challenges faced by Latino students that warrant further research include definition of the role of the Latino helper in the family, the importance of family in Latino culture, and the issues faced when consolidating the Latino ethnic identity with their emerging professional identity. Still, the research in this area is still limited in many cases to first-person narrative accounts (Nelson & Jackson, 2003; Sharma, 2005; Belur, 2010).

## **The Proposed Study**

Many studies on Latino perceptions of cultural values and their influence in counseling identity as applied to counseling are theoretical in nature (Nelson & Jackson, 2003; Belur, 2010). This study examined Latino graduate students' experiences with a multicultural counseling course, their learning, and their reflection on the personal and cultural values that influenced the formation of their counseling identity. This study also allowed for a reflection on how Latino counseling students conceptualized the counseling relationship based on their values and experiences and how these might affect the professional work they do with ethnic minority clients. Last, this study gave Latino individuals the opportunity to define the values they hold for themselves and how these values influence their practice. This study significantly contributed to the literature on multicultural education and training.

In summary, this study had several broad goals. First, it attempted to describe graduate students' experiences in a multicultural counseling course at the graduate level. This study also attempted to provide further empirical evidence of the assertion that cultural and ethnic values are at times in conflict with the Euro-American, individualistic approach to counseling, by analyzing the reflections of persons who are most likely to be in direct contact with both sets of values. Furthermore, this study attempted to contribute to the body of literature in counseling Latinos and educating prospective Latino counselors about working with them. Finally, the study aimed to describe the values that contribute to counseling identity development of Latino graduate counseling students, and how these values influence the work they do with ethnically diverse clients.

## **Research Questions**

The study aimed to describe Latino graduate students' experiences from participating in a multicultural counseling course, to understand their perspective on what it means to be a Latino graduate student in a rehabilitation counseling program, to understand how their cultural values influence their identity and practice, and to provide recommendations for research and practice. The overarching research question guiding this study was: "What are the life experiences of Latino students who are developing a professional identity as minority counselors, who contribute to their preparation to become a provider of multicultural counseling services?"



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

Creswell (2013) pointed out five primary qualitative approaches to research: narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, and case study (Creswell, 2007; 2013). The appeal of qualitative research in areas such as psychology, education and social sciences is that it provides detail and depth of analysis that makes its findings relevant to curricular experiences and practices (Levitt, 2015; Wertz, 2005; Creswell, 2013; McLeod, 1999). There is growing recognition of the contribution that qualitative research can make to a variety of disciplines (Chwalisz, Shah & Hand, 2008; Creswell, 2013).

The use of qualitative, specifically phenomenological research is more than justifiable in multicultural counseling and education (Bitar, Kimball, Bermudez & Drew, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Silverman 2007). Qualitative methodology adopts a naturalistic, emergent, flexible, evolving, conservative, and field-based approach and it is appropriate to generate broader and in-depth understandings of the phenomenon under investigation (Zakaria, 2013; Ary, et al., 2008; Denzin & Giardina, 2006; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Punch, 2009; Saldana, 2011; Silverman, 2010).

According to Brown (2004), a naturalistic investigation research method echoes the multicultural education and its ideology. Additionally, Borders and Drury (1992) stress when evaluating students' needs, goals, and resources in counseling programs, it is pertinent to use a descriptive naturalistic research approach. Therefore, naturalistic methods are an appropriate way

to investigate ethnic minority graduate students' perspectives and experiences in multicultural counseling courses.

Multiculturalism and qualitative research seem to highlight issues of identity due to the unique nature of people understanding their experiences in different ways. Identity aspects such as age, socioeconomic status, culture, race, sexuality, national origin, disability, religion, and others, are interrelated (Brown, 2004; Zakaria, 2013). It is important to recognize the complexities of human identity and their socio-cultural context when we conduct research with ethnic minority individuals (Ponterotto & Casas, 1991).

Phenomenology aims at understanding the human experience as it is lived (Lavery, 2003; Creswell, 2013; Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Qualitative researchers who utilize a phenomenology approach have to select a method that is best suited to the research problem and to them as researchers (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

Hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990) and transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) represent the two main approaches to phenomenology. They embody philosophical assumptions about the experience and the ways in which phenomenological data can be analyzed and organized. Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell (2004) stated that these two approaches differ in issues such as methodology, history and proponents. Meaning is the core of transcendental phenomenology, a design for obtaining and collecting data that explains the essences of human experience (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Creswell, 2013).

The present study used a constructivist paradigm, which is consistent with the phenomenology approach (Creswell, 2007 & 2013). It placed specific emphasis on the ethnic minority graduate students' worldviews and lived experiences. The participants were in charge of making meaning of their own experiences (Creswell, 2007). Constructivism assumes there are

multiple, understandable, and equally valid realities. The constructivist worldview utilizes all-encompassing, general questions, so that participants can commit to deep reflection, construct deep meaning of their situation, and bring up to the surface and convey their understanding of phenomenon in their own lives (Creswell, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005). Therefore, this study was in line with the constructivist paradigm.

### **Phenomenology as Qualitative Research**

A significant number of phenomenological research studies have been published in the social, health and human sciences (Creswell, 2013; Wertz, 2005). These types of studies seem to fit in well with the counseling profession, particularly in the field of multicultural counseling (Levitt, 2015). However, a review of the literature also revealed limited qualitative research with Latinos. Ponterotto and Casas (1991) emphasized qualitative research is valued when not much is known about a certain topic. If multicultural courses are to meet the training needs of the counseling profession, educators must have an understanding of what helps or hinders all counselor trainees' development (Heppner & O'Brien, 1994; Brown, 2004; Zakaria, 2013).

Reflective journals as an instructional, experiential activity for counseling students has been used by Howard et al. (2006). In his qualitative, phenomenological study on first-year practicum students, Howard examined how student's self-reflected growth and learning shaped their counselor identity development. Participants' responses were strongly related to professional identity, which led the authors to suggest that the understanding of students' perspectives can improve theory development and allow counselor educators to put together educational opportunities that meet the needs of practicum students (Howard et al., 2006).

Phenomenological studies that explore the relevance of multicultural counseling courses for ethnic minority graduate students, specifically for Latinos in counseling programs, or their

lived experiences, is still developing. Therefore, limited insight and information is known about minority counseling graduate students' experiences or perceptions of multicultural training.

For the purposes of this study, a transcendental phenomenological approach was found to be the most appropriate. Transcendental or psychological phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) is focused on describing the experiences of participants and not on the researcher's interpretation of these experiences (Creswell, 2013). Transcendental phenomenology was founded by Husserl in Germany in the 1930's, and later adopted by Moustakas (1994). Creswell (2007; 2013) indicated a transcendental phenomenology approach requires the researcher "to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated" and to rely on imagination, intuition, and universal structures to obtain a clear picture of the experience.

Moustakas (1994, p.34) added that transcendental phenomenology requires for the researchers to set aside their experiences and to take a fresh perspective of the phenomenon under investigation. For Moustakas, transcendental means "in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time." Analysis of collected data in a phenomenological study must be systematic. Besides bracketing, collecting and analyzing data, the researcher must reduce it to themes and must develop textural and structural descriptions of the participants' experiences before conveying the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013).

### **The Researcher as an Instrument**

According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), and Creswell (2013), in qualitative research, the researcher becomes the instrument, and must become aware of personal values, preconceived notions, and biases being brought to the study. In addition, the relationship between the "knower" and the "known" is considered interactive and inseparable (Ponterotto, 2005). The process of recognizing the researcher's background, experiences, opinions and values is called

bracketing. In a phenomenology, the researcher must be aware and attempt to remove his or her own attitudes towards the phenomenon being studied. Bracketing provides the researcher an opportunity for a fresh, unbiased way of looking at data collected (Moustakas, 1994), and to not influence the results of the study (Creswell, 2007).

### **Bracketing**

By bracketing personal perspectives, the researcher can minimize personal influence on data analysis, and approach the data from a discovery and curiosity standpoint (Creswell, 2007). In this phenomenological study, the bracketing process described in the next paragraphs added to the integrity of the study and the reliability of the results.

I am a Latina (Mexican-American) female doctoral student whose identity aligned closely with many of the participants. Like many of the participants in this study, I am a first-generation immigrant who began higher education in the U.S.A. as an adult and at the Master's level, after a university degree was completed in Mexico. My parents instilled in me the values of education, work ethics, religion, service to others, and the importance of family ties and traditions.

Similar to many participants in this study, I have been holding full time jobs while I attend school. Exploring cultural values and its influence in ethnic professional identity as a counselor is a self-awareness exercise I conduct frequently. The process of exploration is reflected in my practice as a licensed specialist in school psychology, as a clinician, as a doctoral student, as a lecturer, and as a staff member in the university where I study and work.

My own experience with immigration has been one of intense and conflicting feelings and ideas that has lasted for years. Immigrating to the United States, leaving a life of dreams and accomplishments in my home country of Mexico was not easy. Contrary to other immigrants, I

strongly believe I did not immigrate to the United States in search of the so-called “American Dream” as I respectfully think many other people do. Instead, I followed the strongly internalized values of close family ties, deference and respect to my parents, and support for each other in times of need.

Upon immigrating, I was faced with the challenge of starting again in life, personally and professionally. I felt forced to re-evaluate my personal, cultural and professional identities, and to find ways of moving forward in life, in a way, “re-inventing” myself. I can say it has not been an easy journey, but it has been worth the effort and it has helped me become the person and professional I am today. I consider myself blessed and fortunate, and I work diligently to be a good role model for other immigrant women like me, so that they make the best of their opportunities. My job in a higher education teaching and working closely with students with disabilities attests to my efforts.

By society’s standards and for purposes of the US Bureau of the Census, I am considered to be an ethnic minority. I am also an ethnic minority in a doctoral degree program. Additionally, I currently work as an assistant director for a university department that works closely with students with disabilities. Moreover, I am a part-time lecturer in the School of Rehabilitation, where I am also a doctoral student attending the same Hispanic Serving Institution in the State of Texas. My educational experiences include receiving a university level of education in Mexico, earning a license to practice psychology in Mexico. In the U.S.A., where I continued my graduate work, I earned a license as a specialist in school psychology with the state of Texas and I am a current philosophy doctor candidate in Rehabilitation Counseling.

Professionally, I have been employed in K-12 public education, as an instructional assistant, a bilingual teacher, as a licensed specialist in school psychology (LSSP) and in an

administrative position. I have also worked as a psychologist in Mexico and as a mental health clinician for undocumented and unaccompanied children who cross the Mexico-US border in search of asylum in the U.S.A. My experience also includes supervising the internship experience of master's level students in school psychology as a requirement for licensure, consulting with school districts on special education issues, teaching undergraduate level courses in rehabilitation, and working in a leadership position in the fields of higher education and disabilities.

This study reinforced my belief about the usefulness of naturalistic observation and also the relevance of qualitative approaches in counseling education research. This study fits well with my constructivist theoretical orientation related to qualitative designs. I strongly believe the voices and experiences of marginalized individuals are validated and respected through my research. My personal and professional education and experiences, together with my ethical standards all have contributed to my multicultural competence, my ethnic professional identity, and my credibility as a researcher.

To assist in the process of bracketing and in controlling for biases, I incorporated peer debriefing, member checking, and validation of data through triangulation. However, there is always a possibility this qualitative research study is value-laden. Therefore, as a researcher, I am aware my perspective and values might have impacted this study, or that this study might have impacted my perspective for future studies.

### **Institutional Review Board**

The current study has been approved by the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects (IRB). All human research training and certificates were

submitted as part of the IRB approval process. All research procedures were approved by the IRB and were followed throughout the research project.

### **The Sample**

To document the lived experiences and reflections of graduate minority students in a rehabilitation counseling master's program who have taken a multicultural counseling course, this study utilized purposeful, criterion-based sampling. (Creswell, 2013). Convenient or purposeful sampling values each case, because it helps with condensing the "core experiences and central, shared aspects of the experiences" that emerge while adapting to the multicultural counseling course (Patton, 1990, p. 172).

Thirty-four Latino minority graduate students from a HSI, predominantly from Mexican-American background, participated in this study. All participants were selected in accordance with the following criteria:

- The participants identified themselves as Latinos(as) or Hispanics
- The participants were 21 years of age or older
- The participants were enrolled in a Master's program in Rehabilitation Counseling
- The participants had successfully completed a multicultural counseling course within the past 24 months, at a Hispanic Serving Institution

### **Procedures**

This study utilized a convenience, criterion-based sample of students from a graduate course in Multicultural Counseling, who met the inclusion criteria for the study previously stated. Anonymity was used, so no identifying information, such as name, university, or age was revealed. In this study, each participants' reflective written exercise was assigned a number. The



gender of the participants was also noted. The sample included a majority of written reflection exercises from female students and only 4 from male graduate students.

The students in the multicultural counseling course were given a reflection assignment in which they were asked: “Who am I as a counselor?” The students were instructed to use all learning and concepts acquired throughout the semester to answer this question. Students were encouraged to reflect on their cultural identity, their values, their professional identity and any other consideration that would help them integrate their written responses.

The instructor of the multicultural counseling course incorporated various teaching strategies to foster critical thought and reflection throughout the course. Among the strategies and activities were individual participation, class discussion, group work, presentations, critiques, movies and documentaries, and other instructional strategies. The students had various opportunities, verbal and written, to share their experiences and their reflections with classmates and faculty.

### **Data Analysis**

This phenomenological study is intended to collect and analyze data in a way that does not compromise its subjective character. The process of bracketing became instrumental to minimize, if not prevent, the imposition of researcher’s bias in the construction of the data units that were eventually reported (Spooney, 2015). The plan for the analysis of data for this study followed these steps:

- 1) The course instructor, who is a professor for the School of Rehabilitation assigned the graduate students a written reflection exercise with the question: “Who am I as a counselor?”
- 2) The researcher collected all reflective written exercises from the professor

- 3) All of the writing pieces were grouped, creating one document from where all data was retrieved
- 4) The researcher read through all written reflection papers at least twice
- 5) The researcher segmented the pieces of data that were considered relevant and made annotations next to the participant's responses
- 6) The researcher coded all data by themes that reflected the ideas of the participants. A color-coding system was utilized to visually tie themes at a preliminary stage of analysis
- 7) The researcher identified recurring patterns of themes to describe the essence of the participants' responses and ideas
- 8) The researcher clustered all data units by categorizing and grouping them
- 9) Two other peers, or co-researchers, assisted in the reading of responses, segmenting, coding, identifying patterns, and clustering of data units
- 10) Saturation of data was achieved
- 11) Triangulation was achieved with the assistance of the peer-debriefers
- 12) All steps above facilitated the articulation of the written discussion

This study followed the recommendations by Moustakas (1994). He suggested that the researcher must become familiar with the materials provided by one participant at a time, and to become fully immersed in the reading to get a clear understanding of it. The researcher became fully immersed in the participants' responses. All written reflections were read and re-read, and notes were written to help classify the material.

A next step involved listing all segments or themes that stood out as distinct characteristic of the written data, and to reflect on those themes to be able to depict them with fidelity to its

essential components. Following that, the experiences of the participants were illustrated with verbatim examples. Some of the responses accurately highlighted each point to be coded and then clustered, to emphasize the lived experiences of the participants. Last, and following Moustakas (1994) recommendation, the researcher returned to look at the raw data to reflect on the accuracy of the analysis. Coding and organizational strategies included clustering, using patterns to develop themes and synthesizing data from all participants (Brown, 2004; Spooner, 2015).

### **Procedures for Trustworthiness**

The issue regarding trustworthiness in this qualitative study was to ensure the audience or the readers find the study worthy of consideration. This required systematic steps to ensure the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility related to the use of measures or procedures during the research to increase the probability the findings were valid (Brown, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One of the most used strategies utilized in this study was peer debriefing, which is when the written reflections were shared with a peer debriefer who had solid knowledge of qualitative analysis procedures. A peer debriefer independently reviewed the written reflections, coded and analyzed results at different stages of the study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined transferability as the ability to determine the similarities between two or more cases. For this study, two researchers looked into the written data and helped to determine to what extent it matched each other's impressions. Other issues of the trustworthiness of the qualitative data from this study focused on dependability and confirmability. The dependability of the study concentrated on whether or not the existing data consistently supported the contentions made by the researcher. This was achieved through peer

debriefing. Last, confirmability happened when the peer debriefers confirmed the data was congruent with the study's final, articulated results (Brown, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spooner, 2015).

### **Summary**

This study used qualitative methodology. Specifically, it utilized a transcendental phenomenology approach, that analyzed in-depth written reflections of Latino counseling graduate students, predominantly from Mexican-American background. All participants successfully completed a multicultural counseling course as part of their graduate training in rehabilitation counseling. The results, presented in Chapter Four, include a description of the participants' experiences and perceptions. The data analysis followed methodological procedures for the transcendental phenomenology approach recommended by Creswell (2013). It was followed by a cross case analysis, which yielded common themes, as well as differences that were found across participants. A goal of this study was to add to the existing body of research literature related to multicultural counseling identity and values that affect counselor's work with ethnically diverse populations. A broader goal of this study was to positively impact pedagogical strategies to better prepare multicultural counselors and educators to work with ethnically diverse clients.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

Addressing the needs of a population that is growing in racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in the USA is an increasingly necessary task. More specifically, addressing the needs of Latinos has become the focus of researchers and practitioners in healthcare and mental health. Therefore, facilitating appropriate access to human services, medical care and mental health for the Latino population has become the work of many human and health sciences professionals who are also from Latino background. Serving the growing need for culturally competent counseling services made it necessary to look into the graduate preparation of future counseling professionals.

Results from this qualitative study, and the data obtained and analyzed from the participants' responses yielded interesting and solid emerging themes. These themes include: help-seeking behaviors, values and experiences such as family, religion, education and hard work, and personal conflict arising from the clash of the Latino collective cultures and the marked difference with a traditional, individualistic approach. Marked differences of lecturers teaching this course. are critical to the understanding of how students acquire a multicultural counselor identity and competencies. As noted in this study, students achieved their identity through an examination of the values that they hold meaningful in their lives, the influence of their own cultural background, and how these impact their future practice as multicultural counselors.

## **Latinos and Help-Seeking Behaviors in Counseling**

Among other professionals, counselors must take the lead in the provision of culturally sensitive and appropriate mental health services. However, there are numerous studies that report minorities, such as Latinos, do not seek and/or receive mental health services in the same proportion as Whites (Meyer & Zane, 2014; Snowden, 2005; Worthington, Soth-Monett & Moreno, 2007). This disparity has been well documented. Interestingly, the disparity and the limited help-seeking behaviors of Latinos was concretely illustrated by one of the research participant's. This participant described her family's experience with death and the support they obtained by saying:

Student # 33. I remember that my family suffered the loss of my brother when he was 10 years old. He and my sister worked picking cotton to earn money during the summer that they could use for school clothes and/or supplies. The truck hit a big bump in the road and my brother fell off the truck, and according to the witnesses, they did not know this until the dust settled. He was rushed to the emergency room at a nearby hospital where he died within minutes of arrival. My parents and the whole family was devastated at losing him and we all suffered in silence. No one spoke about it, we just went on working and living daily. To this day, I think about my brother. My parents never thought that a child of 4 could be affected by this tragedy, but I was. The only counselors my family knew were caring friends and family. My mother became closer to her religion and God and went to church weekly. She would pray the rosary daily for a very long time, my father got busier at work. I imagine that was how he dealt with the pain and grief of losing his second born child. From this incident, I learned to be compassionate to others who suffer the loss of a loved one. Not all people can handle

this grief on their own, they need a counselor to see them through and to assure them that they can get past this stage and go on to live in a productive and peaceful manner.

This participant pointed out that upon their loss, her parents and the family did not seek out professional support. They rather relied in friends, family, religion and work to feel accompanied and to cope with the loss.

This response exemplified how Latino families do not seek out as much mental health services as other ethnic groups, and they rely on seeking support, help or advice from friends and family (Falicov, 1996; Nelson & Jackson, 2003). For Latino families, a source of guidance and support during times of hardship is *familismo* (German, Gonzalez, & Dumka, 2009). In addition to *familismo*, the traditional Latino value placed on religion, mostly from Catholic faith, has been associated to higher resilience levels in Latinos, when faced with adversity (Morgan Consoli, Llamas, & Consoli, 2016). For Latino families, a source of guidance and support during times of hardship is *familismo* (German, Gonzalez, & Dumka, 2009).

### **Values and Experiences: Family**

There is research that suggest that cultural values like *familismo* [strong family ties] and *respeto* [respect], are considered protective factors for individuals who face adversity or struggles in life (Kasser, 2011; Morgan Consoli, Llamas, & Consoli, 2016; German, Gonzalez, & Dumka, 2009). *Familismo*, as a source of support and guidance during challenging times in the Hispanic population, has been linked to resilience. Participant 1 reflected the following:

Student # 1. Family has always been at the center of my life. I had all four of my grandparents until I was in my mid 20's so I was able to build a relationship with them and learn a lot from them. I watched my parents take care of their parents towards the end of their lives. Many years later, I found myself in the same situation when my mother

died of cancer, and today I find myself caring for my aging father. The values that they themselves taught me, were actually used on them. The situation is far from fun and is downright stressful but I wouldn't change my role in it.

Another participant explained the supportive role that her family played in her brother's recovery after a traumatic accident. Also related to this support, the student gave credit to her family for standing behind her in her achievement of educational goals by saying:

Student # 3. I learned to be encouraged from my family. No matter what we had going on in our lives, someone was always there pushing for the other to achieve what they were trying to achieve. I come from a big family. My mother, father, four sisters and two brothers. When my brother had his motorcycle accident, I was two years old ... He is still going through physical therapy and it is as important now as it was then to give him the encouragement to still push forward and strive for other things. They all encouraged me when I decided I wanted to go back to school in 2010, six years after I graduated from high school. And pushed me through the hard times and stood behind me until I finished my bachelors.

### **Values and Experiences: Education**

Related to the value of education, most research participants in this study reported their parents "had made great sacrifices" to help them obtain an education beyond high school. Due to the different types of hardships experienced in their journey to achieve a university degree, most participants placed a high value on education, and expressed being proud of their educational accomplishments. For example, participant 4 stated:



Student #4. Even though we were poor, and always humble, my parents taught us to be positive. We were a happy family, believing when we grew up we would achieve an education and have a brighter future.

Students who came from Spanish-speaking families and who reported having working parents without formal education, faced an added layer of difficulties that made them value their education from another perspective. Participant 9 mentioned:

Student # 9. My parents have always taught me that dedication is the key to success. It has been implanted in me since I was a little girl and I remembered passing through UTPA and my father telling me “*One day you are going to come here.*” I can say that these words and his support have been everything in my life and made me realized the importance of having an education since a very young age. School is something that I hold close to me it is like one of my most precious treasures. Seeing the struggle my parents had growing up and still have today made me want to expand my knowledge and be here today furthering my education. I am a first generation college graduate and I am happy to show my siblings that everything is possible if you work hard for it. It was not easy for me as the first child in an only Spanish speaking family, where both of my parents many times could not help me in my academic work. However, my parents taught me the importance of an education.

In addition, and related to the value of education, participant 3 stated:

Student #3. You have to set high goals for what you want to achieve, and after you set those goal, you need to work hard and keep working hard in order to achieve and keep them. My mother would tell me, “*La inteligencia sin ambición es como un párajo sin alas.*” In English that means, intelligence without ambition is like a bird without wings.

She always pushed me to set goals for myself and push to achieve those goals, which pushed me to get my bachelors and my masters.

Another participant stated:

Student # 4. My ultimate feeling is what is desired can be achieved if one works hard. Achieving a degree and now working on another degree is very doable hard work, but well worth it in the end. I will encourage my clients to be the best they can be even against all odds.

### **Values and Experiences: Religion**

In this study, religion was also cited frequently by Latino students as one of the values that were instilled by cultural and catholic upbringing and by their family. Research has pointed out religion as a predictor of mental health and the ability to overcome adversities (Morgan Consoli, Llamas, & Consoli, 2015) Kane (2010) found that the catholic religion among Latinos was a key factor in the ability to overcome difficulties. One participant reported:

Student # 19. Religion has been a big part of my life even though I do not necessarily considered myself a religious person. I grew up in a Catholic home and as I Catholic I am strongly faithful to Our Lady of Guadalupe. I think this has made me different from other individuals that are not Catholics because when I need comfort I know I do not only pray to God but I also pray to her with all my faith and that has always made me feel a lot more protected in my life like she is my guardian angel.

In addition, Walker, Gorsuch, & Tan (2004) recognized spirituality and religion as cultural aspects of a client's identity and suggested for counselors not to overlook that aspect. In this study, faith seemed to have taken a special value in terms of student's perceived strength,

their professional identity and their plans of working with their potential clients who also prioritized religion as a value. One student explained:

Student 4. I described the change that took place geographically with my parents and grandparents that migrated from very far away. I also spoke about the change in me in my now Christian Life. My life changed after suffering many deaths in my family. Life will never be the same for me and my family and when those deaths happened another change occurred, we now cherish and live life to the fullest every moment. My clients will also know attending counseling that they have achieved change and a continuous change for the better. I confessed that Jesus is my everything and if you ever see me at a distance I am cool with you saying, "*There goes the Jesus fanatic.*" I was as transparent as possible to describe myself. I pray my clients also will be transparent in their communication and knowing all sessions are confidential.

Clearly, counselors have an ethical obligation to exercise caution not to impose their own religious values on their clients, or to use religious principles and techniques when counseling clients (ACA, 2014). Students in this study seemed to be cognizant of this ethical obligation. Participants #2 and #16 illustrated this by saying:

Student # 2. I also have a great respect for my faith, for believing in God and that through him everything is possible; but I am also aware that in the counseling settings this might not always be the same. Nonetheless, respecting and never imposing my faith and beliefs on my clients remains as my first priority.

Student # 16. I will need to realize that not all clients will have the same values. Respecting their values, and putting mine aside, will make for successful outcomes.

## **Values and Experiences:**

### **Hard-work Leading to Acceptance, Embracing, and to Multicultural Competence**

For the value of hard-work, some participants in the study seemed to compare the value of hard work to the ability to reflect, embrace diversity, and thrive in spite of uncertainty and change. In some cases, students compared hard physical work in the fields as migrant workers, with the sensation of being in tune with the earth, and the ability to self-reflect and make positive changes and life-changing decisions. The participants reported that it took hard work to accomplish goals, and that these accomplishments were achieved through sacrifice and endurance.

One student noted:

Student # 17. Growing up my family and I migrated to northern states to work in different kinds of fields, for example, corn fields and picking asparagus. These experiences taught me to appreciate nature and love the outdoors. I associate the outdoors with having the liberty to take in fresh and a time for self-reflection. The experiences were also a great foundation for my work ethics. To start the day right it is best to start early, be prepared, and reflect on why it is that I am doing what I am doing. They have also taught the necessary skills to be independent.

Other participants felt proud of the hard work that it took them to achieve things in life. They spoke about feeling comfortable with the uncertainty, and with knowing how to navigate differences with other people through good attitude, disposition to help and acceptance. One participant stated:

Student # 2. I do feel that whatever we desire can be achieved if I work hard for it.

There is always a reward for all the hard work, for always trying and for always believing

in ourselves. I also believe that change is possible. Not because someone wants me to change, but if I feel like the change will provide me with a benefit then I put my mind, my soul and my everything into action.

Other participants expressed that the work they have done in the past has led to them being accepting of differences and to be accepted for who they are. They added that their multicultural background made them feel that they would be good multicultural counselors. Two participants stated:

Student # 2. We are all unique and that is what makes us so special. The best way to minimize the interference of my values with other people culturally different will be to never compare their values to mine, to never wanting to impose my values, and what best way to do that by always allowing my client to tell their story and have an open mind. To learn from them, so that the service I give to them can be of use. Always remembering that we are all different and that is what makes us so unique and trying to be empathetic to their situations.

Student # 8. I would make sure that my clients, no matter their race, are comfortable in the environment I have set up. I will make sure that there is something for various ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. When interacting with individuals and their families I will understand that not every culture or ethnicity is the same when it comes to medication or other medical treatment. I will avoid bringing up my values and beliefs so it does not affect or conflict with the different cultures of my clients. I will accept my clients and their family's decisions even though my moral views may be different

## Discussion

The results of this study were consistent with those obtained by Brue (2012) and Nelson & Jackson (2003), who also conducted qualitative studies with Latino graduate counseling students. The authors found that Latino students have unique experiences and challenges when developing their professional identity. This study found similar challenges and barriers experienced by Latinos, in this case Mexican-American graduate counseling students.

Among those experiences with hardship were the ones related to the relationship with family and friends, and the priority given to family needs over the individual needs. These values can hinder or empower the client in search of improvement.

This study's results are congruent with previous literature on personal and professional values for Hispanic or Latino graduate students that reflect their unique cultural background. However, the present study's emerging themes differed from most previous research that highlights traditional euro-centric counseling values. This can sometimes result in conflicting thought for counselor educators who try to meet the needs of all students. For example, one participant described his strong Mexican heritage, values and culture by saying:

Student #18. I descend from ranch lands in Mexico, I carry their customs and traditions in my veins. Although I was born in México, I was not raised there. All my life, I have lived in the United States. Here, most of my customs and traditions stick, but with a twist. I have traditions from here as well. I know things from both places. I identify with both places. I practice traditions from both places. This sounds to me like, diversity. My own version of diversity. I am part of a different population and identifying this was not as easy as it reads. I realize that exposure to different races and cultures enriches the soul. We learn from one another.

Emerging themes from this study were geared in a direction that was more focused on Latino students reconciling differences between traditional Latino values and euro-centric values learned during their training. Vasquez and McKinley's (1982) proposed developing a successful bicultural identity is an ideal goal. However, they added this goal is subject to debate due to the diversity of acculturation levels of students from ethnic minority backgrounds. They also proposed the ability to understand the perceptions and experiences of these bicultural students would be valuable. Vasquez & McKinley's point continues to stand at this time in American society. To illustrate this point, one of the participants responded:

Student # 28. Culture gives vision to an individual by providing a set of guidelines and membership of a larger whole. Our culture maps out values and beliefs that help provide a concept of family, nation, class, and coordination of the human species. Cultural diversity is acknowledging sociocultural differences and empowering individuals to live up to their full potential and bring unity through diversity. Building cultural competency is no simple task. Although I remember the struggles and the hard work that has shaped my own family's progress, I remain encouraged to contribute to such progress. I also hope to remember the hatred and grace poured out onto my family of immigrants, and I will choose grace for the people I serve as I work toward cultural competency.

According to Belur (2010), counseling psychology underlying values that may reflect a Euro-centric bias include: individualism, achievement, universalism, self-disclosure, power-distance-equality, rationality, focus on self, independence, dualism, conquering life, truth-telling, confidentiality, adjustment, autonomy, openness in self-disclosure, and believing in challenge or confrontation (Marsella & Pedersen, 2004; as cited in Marmol, 2003). Belur (2010) argued it is possible that those values may not be exclusively European, because values are not always

reserved for a specific culture. She added it is people from different cultures that ascribe more emphasis to a particular value over another making it then a “cultural value” (Belur, 2010). The participants in this study consistently cited the cultural values in Table 4 as priority values for them, reflecting their Latino cultural background:

Table 4

*Outstanding Latino Cultural Values*

- 
1. Close family ties, including extended and multi-generation family members;
  2. Placing the needs of others above own needs;
  3. Religion, mainly from the Catholic and other Christian faiths;
  4. Hard work from parents and grandparents, leading to the achievement of dreams;
  5. History of immigration and hardships that strengthen character and increase resiliency;
  6. Wisdom and knowledge passed from generation to generation; and
  7. Education at the core of personal and professional growth.
- 

Morgan Consoli, Llamas & Consoli (2016), noted that family support and *familismo* are positively related to thriving. The authors also found that religion significantly predicted thriving among Latinos. Their research is congruent with other research suggesting that belonging to a religious group was related to good mental health and that it served as inspiration to overcome adversities. This study also confirmed their research on the values of *familismo* and religion. In addition, the values emphasized by the participants in this study reflect a collectivistic approach to counseling, which seems to be in conflict with the individualistic Euro-centric approach frequently cited in the literature.



There is a need to find ways of reconciling collective and individual approaches and values to benefit the professional training of Latino and other diverse students in graduate counseling programs. This study suggests that additional research is needed to inform multicultural counseling education and practice. In general, more work is needed in the counseling profession to understand, accept, and embrace the values held by ethnic minority graduate students. The participants in this study perceive their values to be positive factors that may have an influence in the professional work they do when counseling culturally diverse clients. Achieving an understanding of multicultural issues in counseling education can provide make a significant impact for graduate counseling students. Conducting education that uses a multicultural lens, specific to Latinos in the USA, can make the difference in preparing counselors who sensitively respond to the needs of their Latino clients.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### **Summary**

This phenomenological study explored the experiences and perceptions of Latino graduate students who successfully completed a multicultural counseling course as required for their counseling graduate level training. The participants in this study self-identified as Latinos, predominantly from Mexican and Mexican-American background, pursuing a master's level counseling degree at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). This study explored the lived experiences and perceptions of graduate Latino students who have taken a multicultural counseling course as part of their graduate training at a Hispanic serving institution (HSI).

The purpose of the study was multidimensional. In addition to understanding the students' lived experience of the multicultural counseling course, this study explored how the students' experiences related to their personal and cultural values. The impact of the course in students' development of multicultural identity and competencies was another purpose of this study. The last aim of this study was to add to the available body of literature related to the values graduate counseling Latino students report as relevant and influential to their professional work with similar and different ethnic groups.

Two research questions were investigated: 1) What experiences and values do Latino graduate students identify as relevant to their multicultural counseling preparation? 2) What psychological processes do Latino graduate students use to make meaning of their cultural

experiences and values, in their preparation to be multicultural counselors and serve the needs of culturally diverse clients?

A review of the literature indicated that as the world becomes gradually globalized, professionals find new challenges in working with a flexible mindset of acceptance, cultural humility, plurality and inclusion. Training of counselors to provide services to culturally diverse individuals is an increasingly common area of need (Nelson, Bustamante, Sawyer, & Sloan, 2015; CACREP, 2016). There is also an increasing need to address the training needs of ethnic minority graduate students in the counseling profession (Breu, 2012).

Multicultural counseling education, therefore, becomes relevant in graduate level courses for ethnic minority students (Sue & Sue, 2016). In addition, there is regulation and recognition of graduate programs in counseling and in psychology by accrediting associations, such as APA, ACA, and CACREP. These accrediting organizations require universities that offer graduate counseling degrees to address multicultural competencies, awareness and skills in their students through the requirement of a course that is specifically designed for that purpose.

As part of being a multicultural counselor, the development of an ethnic identity is relevant for counselors-in-training and can influence their subsequent perceived cultural competence (Johnson, 2012). Moreover, there is a need to address cultural values that shape student identity. These values also contribute as factors that facilitate or graduate education or place barriers to it, for ethnic minority students from Latino background (Brown, 2010).

Earlier research has mainly focused on multicultural counseling development for White counselors. Some research suggests there is a positive relationship between multicultural competence and racial and ethnic identity development in counselors (Chao, 2006; Nelson &

Jackson, 2003). However, the counseling profession has been shown to have dominant Eurocentric values that underlie and drive it (Sue & Sue, 2016).

Counselor education programs should meaningfully address the training needs of ethnic minority students who also take a multicultural education course as a requirement to become culturally competent. Multicultural counseling education has not substantially validated the values, strengths and contributions that ethnic minority graduate students bring to the counseling profession. At the same time, ethnic minority students need to gain competence in applying counseling to cultures that are different than their own.

Latinos are one of the fastest growing ethnic minority groups in the USA. It is likely that in their professional practice, they will provide counseling services to a group of clients from Latino and other diverse backgrounds. Therefore, it is important to reflect on how students are living the experience of multicultural counseling programs, and how they are developing an understanding of themselves as future multicultural professional counselors.

This research followed a qualitative methodology, specifically the transcendental, phenomenological approach developed by Moustakas (1994), with a sample of Latino counseling students, all from Mexican-American background. Phenomenology aims at understanding the human experience as it is lived (Laverly, 2003; Creswell, 2013). In a naturalistic approach, it is important to recognize the complexities of human identity and socio-cultural context when conducting research with ethnic minority individuals (Ponterotto, 2013).

This study used a constructivist paradigm, which placed specific emphasis on the ethnic minority graduate students' worldviews, lived experiences and values. Following the concepts of constructivism, this study assumed that participants presented multiple, understandable, and equally valid realities (Creswell, 2007 & 2013). The participants were selected based on meeting

a set of criteria including: identifying as Hispanic or Latino, being in a graduate counseling program, over 21 years of age, and having successfully passed a multicultural counseling course as part of their curricular requirements.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained. As part of the procedures, this study utilized a convenience, criterion-based sample of students from a graduate course in Multicultural Counseling. Anonymity was used, so no identifying information, such as name, university, or age was revealed. This study utilized archival data. Data utilized in the study was obtained from a reflection written assignment in which students were asked: “Who am I as a counselor?” The students were encouraged to reflect using all concepts acquired throughout the semester. Students were encouraged to reflect on how their cultural identity, values, professional competencies, and how these influenced their professional work with ethnic minority groups, including Latinos.

All research data for this study was analyzed by collecting all reflective written exercises from the participants, grouping the information and creating one document from where all data was retrieved. Then, the researcher read through all written reflection papers; in addition, segmenting the pieces of data that were considered relevant and making annotations next to the participant’s responses was necessary for a clearer understanding. The next step was coding all data by themes that reflected the perceptions and ideas of the participants. A color-coding system was utilized to visually tie themes at a preliminary stage of analysis. Relevant themes that stood up from this study included the values of *familismo*, *respeto*, religion, achieving an education, and the value of hard work that leads to competences. Additional themes were related to the conflict between cultural values as experienced by graduate students and the embracing of bi-culturalism and professional identity.

Identifying recurring patterns of themes allowed the researcher to describe the essence of the participants' responses and ideas. Last, the researcher clustered data units by categorizing and grouping themes to facilitate the articulation of the written discussion. Two other researchers reviewed the data and independently formulated categories. All researchers reviewed the categories generated and then came to consensus on the major themes that emerged. As suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985), systematic steps such as triangulation, were taken to ensure the study's trustworthiness in the areas of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

### **Limitations**

This study presented some limitations. First, the study utilized a purposeful, convenience sample of graduate students who had taken a multicultural counseling course within a year of the completion of this study. The written reflection was a graded assignment, therefore, there was a possibility that participants reflected and responded in a way that was expected and acceptable for them and for the course instructor. The nature of the written reflective exercise allowed students the time to write, revise and adjust their responses according to their grade expectation for the course.

Another limitation to consider was that the participants' different acculturation and assimilation levels were not accounted for, which might contribute to differences in reported values and experiences. Nonetheless, the analyzed data revealed differences in self-reported levels of acculturation and assimilation. Some participants self-identified as immigrants and first generation college students, other students traced their Mexican-American heritage to three or four generations. This information needs to be viewed in a wider context. All of the students were successful in a graduate counseling course at a major university, which might mean that all

participants have achieved a level of acculturation, including English language acquisition, that facilitated their success in the course.

One last limitation is that there is always the possibility of researcher bias when conducting qualitative studies. This researcher self-identified as a Latino student pursuing a doctoral level of education in rehabilitation counseling. Special attention was placed to the process of bracketing (*epoche*) to assist in reducing researcher biased.

### **Recommendations for Counseling Education**

Qualitative research, specifically this phenomenological study, was helpful in understanding the values and experiences of Latino graduate students in a multicultural counseling course. This exploration was significant in determining what aspects of multicultural counseling courses minority graduate students consider helpful, empowering, and constructive. In addition, counselor education graduate programs need to implement effective teaching strategies to provide students multicultural knowledge, competencies and skills (e.g., Ponterotto, 2013; Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992; Sue & Sue, 2016).

As stated in the review of the literature, experiential learning for students can become particularly valuable in counseling education and training. Multicultural counselor education programs should foster and enhance the experience of their students by having them engage in meaningful hands-on experiential activities. Fawcett and Evans (2013) introduced the concepts of multicultural experiential approaches in counseling education. The authors suggested experiential activities that included students responding to scenarios, journaling, going to public places to observe non-verbal behaviors and social interactions. The focus of the field observations suggested by Fawcett and Evans (2013) was to pay particular attention to interactions among people with visible cultural differences, behavior patterns, and indications of

racial or social privilege. Latino and traditional, non-minority students can benefit from a multicultural experiential approach to learning.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This qualitative study focused on the perceptions and experiences of Latino graduate students enrolled in a multicultural counseling course, and how these experiences can influenced their practice as future counselors providing services to clients from diverse background. The themes that emerged from their written reflections indicated a strong connection with their Mexican-American heritage that was reported as useful in working with similar cultural groups. Many of the participants' reflections revolved around values of family, education, hard work and religion. Additional research could focus on evaluating these values and their relationship with self-reported multicultural competencies.

The practice of multicultural counseling by this group of participants seemed to be strongly in-tune with the concept of cultural humility, which pays particular attention to “taking another person’s stance” when working with them. Research by Hook et al. (2016), suggested that cultural humility is associated with lower frequency of racial micro-aggression in counseling. Counselors with a higher perception of cultural humility appear to be less likely to be racially aggressive to their clients. Cultural humility assumes that the counselor has the ability to maintain an “other-oriented” or interpersonal stance when working with ethnically diverse individuals. This study suggests that more research needs to be conducted related to the practice of cultural humility in ethnic minority graduate level counseling students.

Another area for future research consideration would be to assess the impact of intentional multicultural preparation experiences on the students' identity development and overall integration of multiculturalism in practice. Multicultural counseling training programs



typically outline a mission to develop the integration of competences, self-awareness and skills in a traditional Euro-centric model. Research studies on how these programs evaluate their mission regarding the development of multicultural competencies would be helpful to all programs who train Latino graduate students.

### **Conclusions**

This phenomenological study overall confirmed that the emerging themes represented the overall essence of the participants' experiences and perceptions of a multicultural counseling course. These themes were related to two categories. First, values such as family ties, religion, work ethics and education emerged as playing an important role in professional identity. Second, mainly two psychological processes emerged as characteristic of the students in this study: a) the conflict experienced by students who were raised to respect traditional Latino cultural values versus the value given to individualism as a trait of mainstreamed White American values; and b) the value given to hard-work leading to accepting one's hardships, embracing individual differences, and to pre-disposing graduate students towards multicultural competencies also emerged as important.

The essence of the participants' responses in this study encompassed observations related to their cultural values and their influence on the development of professional identity, considering their cultural and ethnic background. Another major observation was related to the psychological processes that students experience in the course of developing their professional identity development and their work with ethnically diverse clients. Most importantly, the psychological processes experienced by graduate students in this study focused on the cultural clash between their Latino, specifically Mexican-American upbringing, and their White-American mainstream counseling training. For example, students could experience a conflict

between following the wisdom and advice from parents, grandparents and teachers, versus listening to their own sense of self-determination and following their own path towards an individualized professional identity achievement.

It is important to note how the experience of a multicultural counseling course influenced the counseling graduate students who are developing a professional identity. Pedagogically, the experience in the course facilitated students' reflection and understanding on how their upbringing and the values instilled in them through family and culture helped in forming their identity. In addition, this experience appeared to widen their perspective on how this reflection might facilitate the work they do with other ethnically diverse individuals during their counseling practice.

Another implication relates to the influence of euro-centric versus traditional Latino cultural values in the practice of counseling. The field of counseling, the student population, and the service recipients continues to diversify. Therefore, programs that prepare graduate students to be counselors, counselor educators, or service providers should focus their efforts in affording the graduate students authentic opportunities for self-exploration with the goal of enhancing multicultural professional competencies and cultural humility. Multicultural counseling courses provide this opportunity for all students. However, Latino students can specifically benefit from courses that address their specific needs.

The findings of this qualitative study contributed to the literature regarding multicultural counseling education of ethnic minority students. It shared the perceptions and experiences of Latino students who completed a multicultural counseling course in a predominantly Hispanic serving institution. This study offered a deeper understanding of their lived experiences and its influence in the development of their multicultural competencies.

The stories and journeys of these Latino students, their struggles and their successes, provided a glimpse into their identity development process. They also shed light into their assets and strengths when working with clients from their same cultural group, and the relationship between their personal experiences and their perceived multicultural competency. This study also pointed in the direction of the importance of researching and developing cultural humility, and the graduate students expressed willingness and sense of competency to work with ethnically and culturally diverse clients. Addressing graduate counseling students' needs in a way that is culturally sensitive and appropriate should be a priority for counseling education programs in predominantly Hispanic institutions.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Leila Flores-Torres obtained a degree in psychology in 1993 from Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (UANL) in Monterrey, México, before immigrating to the United States of America and continuing her education. She became certified in the state of Texas as a bilingual teacher in 1999, and earned a Master's degree in School Psychology from The University of Texas – Pan American in 2008. She completed her Philosophy Doctor (Ph.D.) degree in Rehabilitation Counseling in May, 2018 from The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Leila has worked in the fields of education and disabilities in various capacities. She has been a teacher, a licensed specialist in school psychology (LSSP) in Texas, a psychologist (in México) a special education administrator and consultant in K-12, a clinician, and a higher education and disability professional.

Leila has also provided mental health counseling to a variety of culturally diverse clients. Leila has conducted outreach, research, and health education with underserved communities. Leila currently works in the field of higher education and disability, and is a part-time lecturer with the School of Rehabilitation in a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). She has co-authored several research publications related to children's psychological needs, culturally sensitive interventions in working with diverse populations, and attitudes towards people with disabilities. She has presented her work nationally and internationally, in the United States, Mexico, India and Japan. Leila has lived and worked in Texas since 1994. Her permanent address is 4316 Martinez Ave., Donna, TX, 78537.