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Running Head: CULTURAL IMMERSION METASYNTHESIS

Evaluating the Effects of Cultural Immersion on Counselor Trainees'

Multicultural Development and Intercultural Competence:

A Metasynthesis of Qualitative Evidence

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Multicultural Counseling Training; Experiential; Metasynthesis

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Abstract

This metasynthesis critically surveyed and evaluated the learning impacts on counselor and psychology trainees' multicultural development and intercultural competence through participating in cultural immersion (CI), based on published qualitative research evidence. Accordingly, the metasynthesis identified and assessed the characteristics, the methodological strengths and qualities, and the thematic findings of 33 qualitative and mixed-methods CI studies resulting from exhaustive database searches. Using a directed content analysis technique, a six-domain analytical framework was applied to code and analyze the themes reported in these studies. The results point to CI intervention as a multifaceted and versatile instructional apparatus that impacted and contributed to trainees' multicultural development and intercultural learning multidimensionally, across cognitive, perceptual-attitudinal, affective, and skills-behavioral domains. These learning outcomes include trainees' increased cultural awareness and knowledge (cognitive), enhanced reflexivity on their worldview, positionality, and attitude (perceptual-attitudinal), heightened emotion and growth in cultural empathy (affective), adaptation and display of new behaviors and relational skills and increased multicultural competence (skills-behavioral). Therefore, CI embodies many favorable characteristics of experientially-based learning as stipulated in the existing multicultural counseling and intercultural training literature. These findings lend nuanced empirical support for the application of CI to facilitate counselor trainees' multicultural orientation, development, and skills, and offer insights into structural facilitators for enhancing immersion training. However, a lack of structural and methodological consistency and theoretical depth among the existing CI studies were observed as major limitations. Implications and recommendations for advancing future CI and multicultural training practice and research are discussed.

Introduction

A recent comprehensive review has pointed to multicultural counseling training (MCT) and intercultural training literature (ICT) as two culture-focused specialty areas within psychology that share much in common in terms of overlapping objectives, assumptions, and pedagogical approaches (Kuo, 2020). One such overlapping focus between MCT and ICT is the use of ‘immersion’ as a critical, experiential teaching and training tool to promote participants’ multicultural development (Shannonhouse et al., 2018) and intercultural competence (Fowler & Yamaguchi, 2020). As early as nearly three decades ago, proponents of cultural immersion (CI), including MCT scholars and researchers Ridley et al., (1994) and Pope-Davis et al., (1997), had proposed CI as a promising *in vivo* multicultural teaching method to help promote counselor trainees’ development of cultural sensitivity and competence. Following those early conceptualizations, the fields of counseling and professional psychology have witnessed a sustained and expanding interest in the practice and the research of cultural immersion (CI) over the past 15 years, as evidenced by steady growth in published CI studies (see Barden & Cashwell, 2013; Shannonhouse et al., 2018) – a corpus of research literature predominated by qualitative studies.

Broadly speaking, emerging CI research evidence has hinted at participating trainees’ growth and change across a wide spectrum of experiences, including impacts on their cultural knowledge, awareness, racial consciousness, emotions, cultural empathy, skills, and more (Ishii et al., 2009; King et al., 2019). However, despite the enduring popularity of CI and the richness of available empirical knowledge based on this collection of inquiries, to date, no qualitative metasynthesis review has been undertaken to comprehensively compile and examine cumulative qualitative evidence on CI training for mental health counselors and psychologists. Hence, an in-

depth survey and synthesis of immersion-based MCT is much-needed, considering the ongoing calls by CI scholars and researchers: 1) to discern and evaluate the outcomes (Geigle, 2017; Tomlinson-Clark & Clark, 2010) and the efficacy (Vega & Plotts, 2020) of CI; and 2) to more concisely identify the facilitating factors and elements of CI that can effectively contribute to trainees' multicultural development (Canfield et al., 2009; Barden & Cashwell, 2013; King et al., 2021).

To help address these issues above, this present qualitative metasynthesis study aims to systematically review, evaluate, and integrate qualitative evidence found in existing qualitative and mixed-methods CI studies (hereafter referred to as 'qualitative-based' or 'qualitative-supported' CI studies for brevity), designed specifically for multicultural training of counselors and psychologists. We believe such a nuanced and synergetic effort to examine qualitative evidence in the CI literature is critically needed and timely; to help integrate the currently rich but diffused empirical knowledge about CI, to help verify and assess the link between existing MCT concepts and theories and empirical evidence on CI, to extend our current understanding about the effects of immersion intervention as an intercultural training/teaching tool, and to ultimately inform and advance future practice and research of CI for mental health counselors and clinicians.

Definition and Operationalization of Cultural Immersion

Historically speaking, the impetus for incorporating experientially-based MCT into counselor and psychologist education, such as the use of CI, was strongly driven by the principles of multiculturalism and social justice, as endorsed and declared by various professional mental health and psychological disciplines (Kuo, 2020). For instance, training and preparing counselors and therapists to be culturally responsive, humble, and competent has long

been recognized as a professional obligation and an ethical imperative for mental health practitioners by major counseling and psychological governing bodies in the U.S. and Canada, including American Counseling Association (ACA, 2005), American Psychological Association (APA, 2003), Canadian Psychological Association, (CPA, 2001), Council for Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programs, (CACREP, 2016). In their recent analysis of intercultural training methods, Fowler and Yamaguchi (2020) describe the immersion module as an approach in which 'learning takes place in the situation (or similar situation in which the person will be living, studying and working' (p. 241). Furthermore, prominent MCT scholars Ridley et al. (1994) defined CI interventions as experiential MCT exercises that: "provide occasion for trainees to personally experience immersion in a culture different from their own" (p. 263). The common denominator shared by all CI modules is the emphasis on acquiring cultural learning and knowledge through direct human connection and/or interaction, either through developing relationships or dialoguing (Canfield et al., 2009; Platt, 2012). For these reasons, CI has been frequently adopted across many professional and academic disciplines, including education, nursing, and social work (Brock et al., 2019). As King et al. (2019) poignantly described, activities embedded in CI are intended to: "place students in a tailored learning situation, within a real-world context, thus providing meaningful contact that challenges cultural encapsulation" (p. 196). Real-world, intercultural contact can occur with either CI assignment taking place in unfamiliar diverse communities within one's own national borders (i.e., local CI) or in a different national context or country (i.e., international CI). Of note, despite the many potential strengths of CI, Fowler and Yamaguchi (2020) observed that immersion programs can be more time- and cost- intensive, and more emotionally and cognitively overwhelming for the participants, than other intercultural training method.

Conceptual/Theoretical Underpinnings Implicated in the Cultural Immersion Literature

CI, as a cross-cultural training tool, is underpinned by a number of conceptual-theoretical propositions. *Experiential Learning Theory* stems from David Kolb's (1984) theory of learning preference cycle. Kolb described experiential learning as, "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 43). According to Kolb's theorization, experiential development occurs through a recursive cycle involving 4 learning modes: concrete experience, abstract conceptualization, reflective observation, and active experimentation. These elements and the process are said to undergird the design and the learning objectives of CI interventions specifically (Franzen, 2009; Giegle, 2017), and to be central in effective intercultural training in generally (Bhawuk et al., 2006; Fowler & Yamaguchi, 2020). Arthur and Achenbach (2002) contended that trainees' transformation potential can be achieved through experiential learning. Stated, that because of its ability "to raise awareness and multicultural issues, to challenge students' personal frameworks about cultural diversity, and to help them develop cultural empathy" (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002, p. 3). Supported by these conceptual suppositions, Sammons and Speight (2008) pointed to the combination of experiential/interactive and didactic instructional methods in MCT to be optimal in bringing attitudinal and behavioral changes in counselor trainees.

Additionally, Allport's (1954) theory of *Contact Hypothesis* stipulates that effective cross-cultural learning is predicated on direct and meaningful contact, interaction, and experience between culturally diverse individuals and groups. Allan (2003) observed that true intercultural learning necessitates actual cross-cultural interactions with others, which can initially lead to emotional discomfort through cultural dissonance, but eventually result in the development of multicultural identity. *Contact Hypothesis* further dictates that intercultural interactions occurring

under these conditions can help reduce intergroup stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, and promote intercultural sensitivity and understanding (Allport, 1954).

Service-Learning Theory represents yet another pertinent conceptual foundation for CI programs designed to foster student learning of multicultural and social justice principles and interventions. Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010) described culturally-focused service-learning as “a direct cross-cultural contact occurring through work with a community in which individuals are involved in the social, political, cultural, and environmental aspects of that community” (p. 167). CI researchers and educators have further submitted that a service-based CI curriculum – which involves working with underprivileged communities and populations – is particularly apt for fostering and promoting students’ social justice actions and social advocacy skills (Giegle, 2017; Koch et al., 2014).

In sum, these conceptual-theoretical propositions reviewed above converge on the basic assumptions that effective and impactful learning is optimally achieved through experiential modalities and through direct, hands-on, interactional, and interpersonal processes. In parallel, within the MCT literature counselor trainees’ cultural learning through CI has been hypothesized to prompt growth in diverse personal spheres (Ridley et al., 1994; Toporek & Reza, 2001), including trainees’ changes in their cognitions, affects, and behaviors, as highlighted in more recent works (e.g., Brock et al., 2019; Smith, 2018). Granted that, to the authors’ knowledge, no attempt has been undertaken so far to directly and empirically examine cumulative qualitative findings of CI research, based on an analysis of individual CI studies at the content level. Therefore, this present CI metasynthesis was conducted to fill this gap.

Applying Metasynthesis as a Qualitative Research Translational Method

To provide a rigorous and thorough evaluation of cumulative qualitative-driven CI studies in this present research, we, the research team, employed metasynthesis (Thorne et al., 2017; Timluka, 2009) as the methodological framework and the direct content analysis (DCA) (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) as the analytical technique to organize and examine the qualitative data (DCA will be elaborated in the Method Section). Metasynthesis represents a family of rigorous methodological approaches designed to develop new knowledge based on progressive, prescribed steps of analyzing qualitative research findings (Thorne et al., 2004). To strive for transparency and fidelity in implementing this metasynthesis we appealed to the expert recommendations of metasynthesis theoreticians and practitioners (Levitt et al., 2018; Timluka, 2007, 2009; Tong et al., 2012), while giving full respect to the fluidity and the dynamic nature of this qualitative metamethod and of qualitative data in general (Lachal et al., 2017; Thorne et al., 2017). The methodological and analytical steps undertaken in the present review are carefully described and illustrated in the ensuing sections.

Method

Identification of Research Questions

This metasynthesis aimed to address three specific research questions. Research Question #1 asks: *“What do we currently know about the state of qualitative-based cultural immersion research and the characteristics of the corresponding cultural immersion interventions being implemented in counseling and psychology graduate training programs for multicultural training?”*. Relatedly, cumulative MCT research and conceptualization have long described multicultural learning outcomes and processes from a multidimensional perspective, suggesting meaningful cultural development in trainees to be manifested through critical changes in their cognition, affect, and behavior (Ridley et al., 1994; Toporek & Reza, 2001). Concurrently, prior

experientially-based MCT literature has observed trainees experienced growth in awareness, knowledge, cultural empathy, and multicultural skills through participating in immersion projects (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Sammons & Speight, 2008; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). Despite these observations, current empirical evidence and knowledge pertaining to CI exercise are markedly diffused and sporadic. Caste within the MCT literature above, Research Question #2 of this metasynthesis asks: “*What are the cultural learning outcomes of counseling and psychology trainees who participated in cultural immersion?*”. This then leads into the final Research Question #3, which submits: “*To what extent do the thematic learning outcomes reported in the CI primary studies reflect CI trainees’ changes in their cognition, affect, and behavior, as broadly defined and hypothesized by the prevailing, experiential-based MCT theories and research?*”. In this review, these latter two research questions were critically examined with the application of an empirically-guided, domain-supported coding framework to analyze the qualitative themes of the primary CI studies identified.

Selection of Primary Studies

Systematic Database Search of the Literature. A comprehensive database search was launched by the present research team between April and May of 2022 to identify full and partially qualitative primary CI studies. The research team comprised of four senior undergraduate researchers in psychology and a supervising faculty researcher. All of the student researchers are members of the faculty’s research lab and received specific training for this project. Importantly, the researchers of this project are diverse, yet all have cross-cultural lived experiences, with cultural heritages rooted in Egypt, Lebanon, India, Canada, and Taiwan, respectively, and a combination of first-generation, second-generation immigrant, and Canadian-born non-immigrant backgrounds.

Based on prior recommendations of experts in qualitative synthesis (Levitte, 2018; Timluka, 2009; Tong et al., 2012), several procedural steps were undertaken to seek out and screen CI studies for this synthesis. First, the research team focused on searching for primary CI studies with reported thematic findings based on either qualitative or mixed-method research design, published in peer-reviewed journals or as dissertation studies in the English language. Second, comprehensive database searches were conducted on the most relevant bibliographic databases on CI pedagogy, which included *PsycInfo*, *ERIC*, *Web of Science*, and *ProQuest*. Keywords, including ‘cultural immersion’, ‘multicultural immersion’, ‘international immersion’, ‘service learning’, ‘counseling’, ‘counselor’, the wildcard term ‘counsel*’, and the various permutations of the combined terms among these keywords were submitted to run the bibliographic searches by the team. In our searches, it became clear that ‘service learning’ research constitutes a large and distinct body of literature from CI research. Therefore, only service-learning studies for counselors with an identifiable cultural and cross-cultural focus were included in this synthesis (e.g., a service-learning immersion program implemented to serve ESL students). Third, meticulous screening was conducted to filter the resultant article hits from the databases, based on reading the articles’ abstracts, and retrieving and reviewing the articles. Fourth, the research team members manually scanned the reference sections of the identified primary studies to seek out additional CI publications. A visual summary of the article search and screening processes is illustrated in the Flowchart in Figure 1.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for the Primary Studies. To ensure the comparability of the qualitative themes being reported in the CI studies for the purpose of analysis in this metasynthesis, the following inclusion criteria were put forth for inclusion and exclusion. The CI research: 1) must be published in English; 2) must be empirically-based research with

identifiable data collection and analysis procedures; 3) must contain qualitative results/evidence, grounded in either a qualitative or mixed-methods design; and 4) must involve trainees and/or practitioners in counseling, mental health therapy, or professional psychology (i.e., counseling/school/clinical psychology). Operating under these stated criteria, CI articles were excluded if they were: 1) conceptual and theoretical papers; 2) narrative or descriptive literature review papers; 3) personal reflections and/or accounts of immersion experiences; 4) exclusively quantitative studies; and 5) CI studies conducted with nursing, education, and social work participants (i.e., non-counseling and non-psychology students and professionals).

Appraisal of Primary Studies

Quality assessment of individual primary studies supplies an additional layer of depth, rigor, and understanding for a qualitative synthesis (Lachel et al., 2017; Tong, et al., 2012). In this metasynthesis, we employed the 10-question Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Checklist (2018) to evaluate the methodological strength of each CI study included in this review. A CASP scoring system adopted in Babb et al. (2021) was used for this study: the response to each of the CASP questions was scored with *Yes* = 1, *Cannot Tell* = 0.5, and *No* = 0, with the maximum possible score of 10. A member of the research team, who was not involved in the process of coding and analyzing the CI studies' themes but had prior course training in qualitative research, was tasked with independently reviewing and rating each of the primary studies. The resulting CASP scores were subsequently reviewed and cross-checked by the entire research team to arrive at a consensus-based, agreed-upon evaluation. The quality assessment scores are displayed in Table 1 which correspond to each primary study.

Preparation and Analysis of Data: A Directed Content Analysis Approach

In this metasynthesis, we employed a data analytic strategy based on the adaptation of the ‘Directed Content Analysis’ (DCA) method (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2000, 2014), to code and analyze the qualitative themes in the CI primary studies. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) defined qualitative content analysis broadly as: “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (p. 1278). The deductive application of the DCA is characterized by a distinctive feature of utilizing a literature-informed, pre-defined ‘categorization matrix’ to help code and analyze the target qualitative data – a process guided by researchers’ prior conceptual and empirical knowledge about the phenomenon under study (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Mayring, 2000, 2014). Specifically, Mayring (2000) explained that “deductive category application works with prior formulated, theoretically derived aspects of analysis, bringing them in connection with the text” (Point 4.2). Therefore, the DCA is said to be highly suited to interrogate a field of study, for which cumulative conceptual, theoretical, and/or empirical evidence and knowledge exist, but are incomplete (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005); as is the case for the current state of CI research (Shannonhouse et al., 2018). Therefore, the use of the DCA approach can help to organize, validate, and extend present knowledge about CI (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2014). In the ensuing sections, we detail the analytic phases and tasks undertaken in this metasynthesis to content analyze the primary CI studies, based on expert recommended steps (Assarroudi et al., 2018; Kibiswa, 2019).

The Preparation Phase: Data Immersion and Familiarization. To fully immerse ourselves in the data, we first reviewed the identified journal and dissertation studies comprehensively and discussed our observations and questions across several rounds of research meetings. Notes were taken during the meetings to record our thoughts and the decision-making

process. Second, three randomly selected sets of primary CI articles from the shortlisted pool of primary studies were assigned by the faculty researcher to three members of the research team for a more in-depth read and evaluation. Lastly, after acquiring a holistic sense of the identified studies, the research team met to debate and consider what optimal empirical-based strategies were to be employed to manage this body of qualitative data and to extract findings. The differing levels of experience with academic research and familiarity with MCT and CI literature among the project members provided an instructive context for the members to contest each other's perspectives and blind spots. These critical reflections and dialogues subsequently led up to the eventual development of the 'analytical coding framework' to assess the CI data, described in the next section.

The Organization Phase: Formulation of the Domain-Supported Coding Framework.

The next step of DCA is to develop an empirically-derived data coding framework (or a 'categorization matrix') that is grounded in existing theories or previous research literature (Assarroundi et al., 2019). For this purpose, we brought the existing perspectives and research evidence from the MCT literature on multicultural counseling development to bear on the formulation of the coding framework in this study. Conceptually, the MCT literature has long conceived and hypothesized the process of multicultural learning and development as a 'multidimensional phenomenon', that involves trainees' cognition/conceptualization, perception, affect, belief/values, behavioral skills, cultural empathy, identity, and knowledge (Ridley et al., 1994; Sue et al., 2013; Toporek & Reza, 2001). Recent multicultural orientation (MCO) literature further underscores the multidimensional nature of counselors' cultural development in terms of cultural humility (awareness and attitude), cultural comfort (affect and emotion), and cultural opportunity (behavior, action, & skills) (Hook et al., 2017). Empirically, these

multilayered views of cultural development and their related ‘markers’ in counselor trainees find supporting evidence in later qualitative studies (e.g., Geigle, 2017; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011; Ishii et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2014; Sammons & Speight, 2008). Furthermore, the broad cognitive-affective-behavioral framework of conceptualizing and evaluating cultural learning also finds support from non-counseling/non-clinical intercultural research literature (Bhawuk et al., 2006).

As follows, we built on this prior knowledge and developed a domain-supported, analytical coding framework anchored in the following six key ‘pillars’: 1) cognitive domain; 2) perceptual-attitudinal domain; 3) affective domain; 4) skills-behavioral domain; 5) cultural dissonance; and 6) supplementary findings (see Table 2). Heuristically speaking, the deductive use of this pre-defined, empirically-derived coding matrix has the added benefit of rendering the findings of this metasynthesis more readily for comparison, linkage, and integration with the existing MCT literature on multicultural development and experiential-based training – the target issue being addressed in Research Question #3 of this study. In the next step and the section below, we outline and operationalize the six-domain coding framework for the content analysis of this synthesis.

The Implementation Phase: Operationalization of the Coding Domains/Categories.

Grounded in prevailing MCT and CI literature, the developmental and learning pillars represented in the six-domain coping matrix were defined as follows: 1) *Cognition Domain*: intellectually-based changes in and/or reflected through thinking, reasoning, and/or knowledge acquisition; 2) *Perceptual-Attitudinal Domain*: shifts in awareness, beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives about self, other, and circumstance; 3) *Affective Domain*: learning as a result of and/or reflected through impactful feelings and emotions; 4) *Skill-Behavioral Domain*: learning gains as manifested in and/or through one’s ability to practice or adopt different behaviours or

actions in cross-cultural contexts, including interpersonal and relational skills; 5) *Cultural Dissonance*: response and learning as a product of being confronted with a new experience inconsistent with or contradicting one's prior experience, position, or viewpoint; and 6) *Supplementary Findings*: distinctive and/or miscellaneous thematic outcomes that do not fit with the aforementioned domains (See Table 2). Of note, the domain of 'cultural dissonance' was included in the current coding matrix because previous intercultural learning research has found it to be a core element of cultural exposure and immersion experience for students in international schools (Allan, 2002, 2003) and counselor trainees (Ishii, et al., 2009; Mehta, 2011). Cultural dissonance has been described as a sense of discord, disharmony, and conflict often experienced by individuals facing changes in their cultural environment and context (Allan, 2002; Mehta, 2011), such as trainees undergoing CI. In addition, the inclusion of the 'Supplementary Findings' category is relevant and consistent with the approach of the DCA to maintain an open and flexible coding process (Assarroundi et al., 2018; Myring, 2014). In the current analysis, this domain category served to capture any novel or uncommon themes that might emerge from the thematic extraction. Common 'keywords' associated with each of the domain categories were further provided in the coding protocol to aid analysts in identifying the domain-corresponding themes. For example, for the 'Behavioural Skill' domain, referenced keywords or phrases, '*Increased Cultural Competence*'; '*Efficacy*'; '*Confidence*'; '*Adjustment (of Behavior/Action/Practice)*'; '*Rapport*'; '*Relation*'; '*Relationship Building (with the Host Group)*'; '*Connection*'; '*Clinical Work with Client*'; '*Counseling*', were noted.

The Data Analysis Phase: Coding Process and Consensual-based Triangulation of the Results. Utilizing the aforementioned coding framework along with the analytical protocol/instruction, three research analysts on the team read in detail and coded the thematic

narratives of the original CI studies being assigned to them. To ensure the trustworthiness and integrity of this coding and analysis process, (Assarroudi, 2018), a pairwise, peer-review process was implemented to establish some objectivity in coders' reading and understanding of themes in the target primary studies. First, each analyst independently determined which primary domain each of the qualitative themes correspond to in the coding framework. Then each research coder was further paired up with one other analyst, who met to scrutinize and cross-check the coding results by the original analyst; they discussed, worked on, and adjusted the theme-domain coding results until a consensus was reached between the two analysts. This process was repeated for all themes across all of the CI primary studies. All the coding results were subsequently screened and examined by the first author. The research team then met and discussed in research meetings to finalize the results.

The Reporting Phase: Presentation and Interpretation of the Findings. This final step of the DCA is characterized by: 1) outlining the analysis of the research and providing a 'thick description' of the research findings (Kibiswa, 2019); and 2) systematically illustrating the association between the raw data and the categorization of the research results (Assarroudi et al., 2018). To these ends, in the Results section below we report and outline the findings of this metasynthesis by adhering to the perspective of the DCA technique (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2004, 2014), while considering them within the broader context of qualitative metasynthesis method (Levitt et al., 2018; Timluka, 2009).

Results

The initial literature search from the four databases process yielded a total of 1195 potential articles (See Figure 1). Fifty-eight relevant articles were retrieved from this pool of publications for more detailed examination in accordance with this metasynthesis' inclusion and

exclusion criteria. In the end, a shortlist of 33 qualitative-based primary CI studies with a total of 339 participants, consisting of 29 peer-reviewed journal articles and four dissertation studies, were identified and included in the final analysis. The specific information about the article screening process and the exclusion explanations are outlined in Figure 1.

Characteristics of CI Studies

Sample Size and Demographics. The published CI studies in this review spanned from 2005 to 2021, with 66% (22/33) of the studies published within the last eight years, between 2014 and 2021, suggesting a sustained interest in the practice and the research of the CI interventions within this body of literature. All but two studies (i.e., involving Canadian participants) were conducted with graduate trainees in the U.S. The sample size of the studies ranged widely from $N=2$ to $N=67$, with a mean of $N=13$ (See Table 1). Four studies, however, did not provide complete information about their sample size or demographic information. The samples were represented overwhelmingly by White female trainees, with an overall mean age between mid-20s and early 30s across most studies, likely reflective of the typical characteristics of student bodies in most counseling and professional psychology programs in the U.S. and Canada. Fifteen CI studies involved only master's trainees (46%), 11 with both master's and doctorate trainees (33%), 3 with only doctorate trainees (9%), and 4 described simply 'graduate students' without any specification (12%). The vast majority of these CI studies were affiliated with master's programs in counselor education, followed by counseling and counseling psychology; a handful of studies were linked to graduate programs in school and clinical psychology, and marriage and family therapy. Lastly, the *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* and *the International Journal for the Advancement of Counseling*, represent

the two top journals in which a significant number of CI studies were published, with 6 published articles in each of these journals.

Structural Characteristics and Design of the Cultural Immersion Interventions. There are clear structural variabilities in the contents, the formats, the locales, and the target populations of the CI modules among the reviewed articles, as shown in columns 3 and 4 of the Integrated Summary Table 1. The duration and length of the reported CI programs ranged from 10 hours (i.e., Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011) to 18 weeks (i.e., Kuo et al., 2020), with 1 to 3 weeks being the most typical time frame. Two major types of immersion experiences were observed: 1) ‘international CI’ and 2) ‘domestic/local CI’. International CI was reported in 20 studies (60%), which carried out immersion overseas across many different countries around the globe (e.g., in Mexico, Honduras, South Africa, Ireland, and Taiwan). Domestic CI was reported in 13 studies (40%), which conducted CI assignments in either the city or the community in which participants attended graduate training, or in other cities or locations within the same country (mostly U.S.). For example, Vega and Plotts (2020) conducted a study in which bilingual Latinx school psychology students in Arizona were immersed in a neighboring state, Texas. Additionally, four studies described their CI to be service-learning-based projects (e.g., Smith et al., 2014).

A survey of the primary studies also pointed to wide-ranging activities and tasks associated with different CI projects. For international CI, the most common immersion activities included visiting local institutions and organizations, touring historical and cultural sites, receiving cultural information and lectures, interacting with hosts, locals (students and families) and homestays, and engaging in brief outreach. Conversely, in the case of domestic CI, direct services involving the target populations were often indicated. These included counseling,

mentorship, consultation, outreach, lecture and program delivery. Notably, two of the domestic CI studies involved trainees or counselors being immersed in Native communities in North Dakota in the U.S. (Smith, 2018) and Nunavut in Canada (Wihak & Merrill, 2007). In terms of preparation for the immersion experience, the presence of some didactic training or instructional support was observed in the majority of the CI studies reviewed. In some cases, the CI module represented stand-alone training coursework or projects that were supported by in-class or in-group instructions (e.g., Heppner & Wang, 2014; Domínguez et al., 2020). In other cases, the CI assignment was implemented as a built-in, experiential supplement to a didactic multicultural or international course (e.g., Koch et al., 2014; McDowell et al., 2012). Pre-departure orientations (or pre-training) were repeatedly noted as a necessary didactic preparation for CI trainees. In most studies, these preparatory instructions typically involved information sessions, seminars, lectures, and assigned readings about the target culture or country. There was also significant variability among CI studies regarding the approaches taken to track and monitor trainees' learning and experiences before, during, and after the CI assignment. This ranged from the use of daily reflective journals, regular debriefing sessions, regular supervision meetings, and pre- and post- training interviews.

Methodological Characteristics and Designs of the Cultural Immersion Primary Studies.

Columns 5 and 6 of Table 1 delineate the methodological attributes of 33 CI studies. Among the 29 strictly qualitative articles and four mixed-methods articles in this pool of research, the most common data source and the data collection methods of the qualitative themes were: 1) participant trainees' daily/periodical journals or notes completed and collected over the course of their immersion projects (reported in 13 studies; 39%); and 2) semi-structured interview data conducted with trainees post immersion (reported in 12 studies; 36%). Other less frequent

methods included trainees' post-trip surveys in four studies, and post-trip final papers identified in three studies. The data collection timepoints are also quite variable among these primary studies. For instance, post-trip interviews were conducted one month after the completion of CI in Domínguez et al. (2020), after five weeks in Vega and Plotts (2020), and after five years in Kelly (2015). Information reported on the qualitative methods and analytical approaches in these studies are also very diverse, but incomplete in some studies (see column 5 of Table 1). A broad range of qualitative methods was reported, including thematic analysis ($N=5$), phenomenology ($N=5$), grounded theory ($N=4$), consensual qualitative analysis ($N=4$), case study ($N=4$), constant comparison method ($N=3$), narrative inquiry ($N=2$), and content analysis ($N=1$). Five of the articles stated 'qualitative analysis' without any specifications, and four of the articles simply did not include any information in this regard.

Quality Assessment of the Primary Studies. As mentioned in the Method section, the quality profile of the reviewed CI studies is indexed with the scores of the 10-item CASP Checklist, with a maximum of 10 points. The scores for individual studies are displayed in the last column of Table 1. The average CASP score for the studies is 9.5. Among them, 31 of the 33 primary studies scored between 9 and 10 points. Where apparent gaps reside in some studies, they were mostly found to be related to questions #4 (*the participant recruitment strategy*) and #6 (*the relationship between researcher and participants*) of the checklist. For example, there was some vagueness and/or a lack of clarity on how research participants were solicited to take part in the studies. This was likely complicated and compounded by the fact that in many CI studies, the researcher/the author of the study was also the instructor of the CI course or project, creating multiple layers of relationships between the researcher and the study's participants. It is, however, important to note the CASP checklist items focus on broad structural, methodological

and ethical issues pertaining to qualitative research; thus, the items do not tap into specific details about a given study (e.g., lack of participant demographic information and information on methods of analysis, etc. as noted in the previous section). While these indices suggest an overall favorable methodological quality across the identified qualitative-based CI studies, caution is needed in interpreting their implications.

Thematic Findings/Outcomes across the Learning Domains

To answer Research Question #2 and #3 of this synthesis, the results of our analysis in extracting and coding CI studies' qualitative themes are presented sequentially according to the six key developmental domains in the following sections. In addition to the descriptive themes for each CI primary study being depicted in Table 1, Table 2 further illustrates the specific learning domains for which the themes of each study are represented, and the overall profile of each domain's representation (i.e., the frequencies of the reported themes correspond to each domain) across all studies.

Cognitive Domain. The results of the coding analysis showed trainees' cognitive learning and change to be among the most salient impacts resulting from the CI experience as reported across the studies. Table 2 shows that 85% ($N=28$) of the CI studies contain themes corresponding to the cognitive domain. In particular, the emergent cognitive-based outcomes characterize the changes experienced by trainees from being exposed to, and/or learning from new information and knowledge they were presented during the CI. Often, they were manifested in trainees' improved or transformed thinking and reasoning skills within the cross-cultural context. Appropriately, these themes correspond directly to the 'cultural awareness' and the 'cultural knowledge' components of the Tripartite Model of Multicultural Competence proposed by Sue et al. (2013; 2019). In fact, the word 'awareness' was recurring in the themes of many CI

studies. These emerging insights have included trainees' increased awareness of their social positions and their impacts (McDowell et al., 2012; Wihak & Merili, 2007), previously unprocessed reactions (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011), clinical and therapeutic blind spots working with refugees (Kuo et al., 2020), and the lived experiences of racial minorities and/or the immersed populations they interacted with (Prosek & Michel, 2016; Vega & Plotts, 2020).

Additionally, themes involving the keywords 'knowledge', 'know', and 'knowing' were also prevalent among the reported learning outcomes. This notion concerns cognitive-based changes and transformations through actual information or knowledge gains, or expansion resulting from CI experiences. For example, as a key theme, trainees in Barden and Cashwell's (2014) study reported 'cultural knowledge' of the host cultures' traditions, values, rituals, language, and food to be an integral element of cross-cultural learning through CI. The authors attributed this gain to the distinctive opportunity afforded by their CI projects to allow them to actively observe and interact with the immersion communities.

Furthermore, CI experience was also found to foster greater cognitive flexibility and adaptability on the part of trainees. This is illustrated in the themes of 'flexible thinking' and 'establishing alternative images' (King, 2020), 'shifting to a more balanced view' and 'moving towards more nuanced perspectives' (Peterson et al., 2019), 'shift in thinking' (Lee et al., 2014), and the development of 'cognitive empathy' (Barden & Cashwell, 2014). In particular, such a shift in cognition has been found to prompt trainees in developing alternative, nuanced, and positive images of the cultural group they were exposed (King, 2020). These emergent cognitive transformations in CI trainees were reflective of trainees' experiential learning through observing, doing, and interacting with the target cultural community first-hand. These elements of learning fittingly correspond to the learning cycle prescribed by the Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb,

1984) discussed in the previous section. The following quote from a trainee who participated in a 31-Day Service-learning CI program in Singapore reported in Smith et al. (2014) effectively captures cognitive insights trainees acquired from immersion: *“The experiences I had in Singapore made something I had always wanted to know so badly become more than just word and intellectual knowledge. They became the sights, smells, tastes, and sound of living them.”* (p. 1202).

Perceptual-Attitudinal Domain. Based on the present analysis, themes associated with the perceptual-attitudinal domain represent the most common outcomes found in the CI studies. A total of 31 of the 33 CI primary studies reported themes that correspond to this particular domain, representing 94% of the reviewed research. While there are some conceptual overlaps between the previous cognitive domain and this perceptual-attitudinal domain, the latter concerns more directly with trainees’ internal reflection and introspection about their beliefs, consciousness, attitudes, and perspectives as illustrated below.

‘Increased awareness’ was a recurrent theme found across multiple CI studies, encompassing heightened awareness concerning one’s privileges and the effects of such privileges on others (Shannonhouse et al., 2015; Smith, 2018), cultural relativism (Smith, et al., 2014), biases and stereotypes (Geigle, 2017; Nilsson et al., 2011), and social justice stance (Dominguez et al., 2020; Dietz & Baker, 2019). In Franzen’s (2009) CI dissertation study, the author reported a poignant subtheme of ‘complexity awareness’, which characterizes a transformative perceptual change: “where the participants may have moved from a simple static view of culture and competence to a process view, or where the participant may have moved from prejudiced view of others to an expanded understanding” (p. 141, Franzen, 2009).

Additionally, counselor trainees across several CI studies reported narrative outcomes related to a sense of personal and professional growth as they gained and adopted new cultural insights and perspectives. Specifically, these attitude and perspective changes were found to be related to self-acceptance of the trainees' racial identity (Smith-Augustine et al., 2014), affirmation of their cultural identity (e.g., Domínguez et al., 2020; Kock et al., 2014), and elevation of their racial consciousness (e.g., Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2009; Wihak & Merili, 2007). As a case in point, Choi et al. (2015) identified a salient theme of "the Meaning of being American" based on interviews with master's counselor trainees who were immersed in a South African cultural context for 14 days. Under this theme, the participants reported a movement from holding primarily American-centered cultural perspectives and biases to becoming conscious of their need to monitor their behaviors and how they can be perceived by others, as Americans, in different cultural contexts. Incidentally, these emergent themes aligned with the emphasis of the Service-Learning Theory on promoting student learning by allowing them to experience and reflect upon a 'self-in-relation to others' perspective (Burnett et al., 2004). These observations also draw attention to the concept and development of 'cultural humility,' as an attitude and a virtue that acknowledges one's limitations and blind spots, while being open to adapting and change (Davis et al., 2018). These perceptual-attitudinal-related thematic outcomes highlight CI's capacity to profoundly challenge and deconstruct trainees' previous or pre-existing beliefs, attitudes, and self-identity.

Affective Domain. A total of 21 of the 33 CI studies contain themes captured by the affective domain, characterizing 64% of the surveyed research. Among the 21 CI articles with affective themes, both distressing and growth-promoting emotions related to the CI experience were reported. For challenging emotions, Vega and Plotts (2020) identified 'Pushed out of

comfort zone’ as a major theme in their study, highlighting feelings of both apprehension and hopefulness from trainees participating in an immersion assignment. Similarly, in a domestic CI study involving two participants, a bisexual Latina trainee who was immersed in a conservative Christian group and an African American male trainee immersed with older White adults, both reported intense anxiety and fear before and during their immersion assignments (King, 2020).

On the other hand, immersion projects were reported to instill positive, ‘affective empathy’ and ‘cultural empathy’ in trainees in several studies. This effect was observed both with international CI (e.g., Barden & Cashwell, 2014) and domestic CI assignments (e.g., Ishii et al., 2009; Roysircar et al., 2005). Platt (2012) explained that trainees’ experience of being ‘displaced’ and being a ‘cultural other’ (a foreigner) in an unfamiliar cultural context in the CI assignment actually allowed participants to develop greater empathy for marginalized and culturally-diverse individuals and populations living in trainees’ home communities. McDowell et al. (2012) further submitted that first-hand, in-person contact and exposure to culturally diverse communities directly through immersion is a vital contributor to deepening trainees’ emotional and cultural empathy. As well, affective-based experiences concerned with the feelings of gratitude, optimism, and hopefulness stemming from immersion underline yet another main theme in this domain. For instance, Choi et al. (2015) reported that outreach to underprivileged populations in South Africa resulted in American trainees gaining a new ‘appreciation for life,’ as they became more ‘grateful and open to diversity and life itself’ (p. 255). Other CI studies have effectively linked trainees’ emotional growth and impact to the relational aspect of CI. They included improved emotional bonding and rapport-building with culturally-diverse clients (Kuo et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2014) and peers (Vega & Plotts, 2020).

The following quote from Smith’s (2018) dissertation study of a female African American

CI trainee reveals the emotional awakening process participants experienced in cross-cultural immersion. Reflecting on the emotional impacts of living on a Native America Reservation in North Dakota, this trainee recounted: *"as a minority, I am very aware of historical trauma, the effects of it, the social inequities that we (African Americans) experience. However, what I felt emotionally, and I think it was psychologically actually, was that for Native Americans it's a silent scream, nobody is listening. There's no voice and that's how I felt about it. It was a shift in terms of just truly understanding how difficult that must be."* (pp. 59-60, Smith, 2018). These findings highlight the evocative and visceral nature of CI, which can bring about and heighten both negative and positive emotions in trainees and can serve both as a contributor as well as an outcome in their cultural development.

Skills-Behavioral Domain. Skill-Behavioral-related themes were found in 28 CI articles, which accounts for 85% of the CI studies in this synthesis (See Table 2). Our analysis points to three general clusters of learning outcomes pertaining to this specific pillar. First, 'adaptation of new behavior' represents a prominent narrative under this thematic domain. It was found in trainees' efforts to adjust, modify, and recalibrate their behaviors or habitual conduct or approaches, as a result of having to operate in a new and unfamiliar cultural environment. For example, Lee et al. (2014) reported that the acquisition of a new behavioral repertoire was demonstrated by CI trainees' ability to adjust their counseling and mentoring practices with students after being immersed in a local middle school in the U.S. In Smith-Augustine et al.'s (2014) study, it was shown that American trainees immersed in Belize learned to modify their behaviors to correct their previously held prejudicial views. Note that this only occurred after trainees became aware of their discriminatory attitudes (i.e., change in the perceptual-attitudinal domain discussed above) in a new cross-cultural context.

Second, ‘enhanced relational skills’ was reported as another salient and vital cluster of outcomes. It pertains to CI trainees’ interpersonally-based behavioral gains from cross-cultural immersions. Interpersonal relationship themes, such as ‘promoting growth-fostering relationships,’ ‘enhanced rapport building,’ and ‘increased collaboration skills’ pervaded several CI studies. Furthermore, it was observed that ‘relational’ terms, such as the words ‘connection’ and ‘disconnection’, were used by several authors to characterize trainees’ impacts through immersion in their studies (e.g., Kelly, 2015; Prosek & Michel, 2016; Smith, 2018; Roysircar et al., 2005). As a concrete example, counselor trainees in West-Olatunji et al.’s (2011) study reported that not only did they gain the opportunity to refine their counseling skills being immersed in South Africa, but also they attributed their ability to acquire practical knowledge to function in a multidisciplinary school team to the direct result of having built collaborative relationships and worked first-hand with South African teachers, community workers, and school personnel.

Third, ‘increased multicultural competence’ represents yet another critical behavior-based transformation resulting from exposure to CI in some studies. These themes encompass trainees increased multicultural self-efficacy and skills, cultural humility, and social justice skills in a number of studies. After undertaking an eight-day outreach program in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, counselor trainees reported enhanced confidence and competence in integrating their personal identity with their professional identity, and in practicing culturally-informed disaster response counseling in support of survivors (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2009). Distinctively, in the study by Kuo et al. (2020), clinical trainees reported a greater level of multicultural efficacy after participating in a supervised multicultural practicum working with culturally-diverse refugee clients. Particularly the trainees became more flexible and confident in their intervention

skills with refugee clients. As a mixed-methods study, these findings of growth in trainees' cultural competence were corroborated by both trainees' qualitative narratives as well as quantitative scores of multicultural self-efficacy. Similar evidence of CI enhanced multicultural skills and competence (e.g., Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011; Shannonhouse, et al., 2015; Wester-Olatunji et al., 2015), and social advocacy and activism (Dietz & Baker, 2019; Dominguez et al., 2020; Smith, 2018) were reported in other studies. Conceptually, the skill/behavior-facilitating aspect of CI gives further credence to the propositions of the Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954) and Service-Learning Theory (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010), which underline the central role of meaningful social interaction (or contact) and service-focused collaboration with the target cultural communities in fostering genuine cultural humility in counselors (Smith, 2018).

Cultural Dissonance Domain. In this study, cultural dissonance was defined as trainees' reactions and learning through being confronted with a new experience that is inconsistent with or contradictory to their prior experience, position, or viewpoint (Allan, 2002, 2003; Mehta, 2011; Brock et al., 2019). Based on this definition, themes relevant to this domain were found in 13 articles, constituting 39% of the CI studies surveyed. These themes center around CI trainees' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions or responses to the discomfort or tension brought about by the new cultural exposure from CI. These examples included some trainees' tendencies to: 1) minimize the importance of race and ethnicity due to feeling overwhelmed and overburdened by the immersion experience (Lee et al., 2014); 2) overgeneralize self-other cultural similarities and stereotypes due to the anxiety associated with having to manage their relationships across cultures (Roysircar et al., 2005); and 3) engage in 'self-monitoring behaviors' due to the concerns of being perceived negatively by others for being culturally inappropriate (Shannonhouse et al., 2015). However, cultural dissonance due to the CI

experience was also found upon trainees' return to their home country or community. For instance, Platt (2012) reported that several CI trainees experienced significant cultural dissonance resulting from having to reconcile their 'privileges' as U.S. citizens, and the hardship and misery they witnessed in immersion communities abroad. This process led to trainees' unexpected 'cultural shock' upon returning home to the U.S. after the immersion project. Such a cultural dissonance can be effectively illustrated by this reaction expressed by an American female trainee after returning to the U.S. from a five-week HIV/AIDS study CI program in Botswana, Africa (Giegle, 2017). The trainee expressed: *"I remember thinking; I'm going to lose it, like these people [fellow Americans] have no idea what it is really about. Like, they have no idea how other people live. What we [as Americans] spend our time and energy on and it felt like a lot of things to use were really superficial."* (p. 152; Geigle, 2017). In sum, these aggregated findings capture Ishii et al.'s (2009) observation that cultural dissonance resulting from CI can lead some participants to react and respond by engaging in "judging, stereotyping, downplaying, and avoiding" (p. 22) within a cross-cultural context. Despite that, prior cross-cultural literature has heeded that individuals' struggle with cultural dissonance during initial intercultural contact can potentially lead up to greater cultural learning and openness at a later point (Allan, 2002, 2003).

Supplementary Finding Domain. This final domain was incorporated into the coding framework as an 'open' category to capture any themes that were not accounted for by the preceding five pre-defined domains. This is an important element inherent to the DCA method to ensure that the data coding and analysis process is relatively flexible (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Themes found to be subsumed under this auxiliary domain were reported in six CI studies, which represent 18% of the overall primary studies. These themes include challenges and negative

reactions trainees experienced related to the structural and trainee responses to the operational/structural aspects of immersion assignments. For example, these experiences are reflected in trainees' discontent about the lack of clear expectations and practical information about CI assignments (Vega and Plotts, 2020), and feelings of being underprepared to work with ESL student mentees and the time constraints due to immersion programs (Burnham et al., 2009). Moreover, a handful of negative cases were also identified in the analysis, highlighting individual differences among trainees and the lack of fit for some trainees who undertook CI. As a case in point, in Nilsson et al.'s (2011) CI service-learning study, one trainee reported a profound sense of inadequacy and frustration due to language and communication difficulties with her refugee client. This frustration resulted in the trainee concluding that she would not want to work with culturally diverse clients after the CI experience. Contrary to the researchers' expectation, Lee et al. (2014) found that after having been immersed in an environment working with low SES school children, some of the trainees revealed a negative impact on their multicultural competency. Some of these participants reported either no new gains from the CI or resorted to minimizing the significance of cultural diversity following the CI assignment. Importantly, these negative cases underscore the fact that the immersion training pedagogy is not suited for every trainee, given individual differences among trainees (Lee et al., 2014)

Discussion

Synthesis and Interpretation of Findings

Integrating, synthesizing, and interpreting observed qualitative evidence marks the final step of a qualitative metasynthesis (Timluka, 2009). Accordingly, in the following discussion section, we draw together and detail the major findings and takeaways from the evidence and insights generated from the current CI metasynthesis.

General Attributes and Quality of the CI Studies. In addressing Research Question #1 of this metasynthesis, the current study indicates that CI research is a relevant, vibrant, and growing area of academic inquiry within the disciplines of counseling and professional psychology. The sustained interest in CI as a supplementary instructional intervention to MCT is evident in the fact that 72% of the 33 primary studies were published within the last 10 years. Therefore, the first important lesson to be drawn from the present review is that the CI-based training modality will continue to play a unique and critical role in the MCT literature and in the training practice of counseling education and counseling psychology graduate programs for the years to come.

Concerning the overall profile of the existing qualitative-based CI studies, the present metasynthesis identifies a high degree of heterogeneity and variability among these primary studies. The CI studies varied extensively, with respect to their sample size, the structural/programmatic content and design, the course/project objectives, the targeted populations and the locales of the immersion, the qualitative epistemologies and methodologies used in analyzing and presenting studies' thematic findings, and more. While the diversity among the CI studies was not entirely unexpected due to the idiographic nature of each study (e.g., varying resources and contacts available to the instructor, the program developer, and the researcher), this lack of consistency and standardization of CI programs/projects renders the comparison and integration of studies and their findings much more difficult. This observation should serve as a cautionary note for future CI researchers and practitioners. A more consistent and successive (e.g., programmatic) approach that is grounded in or built on previous CI research and/or established theories is sorely needed to help advance future immersion programs.

Despite the highly heterogeneous nature of this collection of CI studies, an overall reasonable level of methodological strength among the primary studies was indicated by the

CASP quality assessment of this metasynthesis, with an overall average score of 9.5 out of 10 CASP across all studies. However, these CASP scores need to be carefully considered given their lack of sensitivity to certain, nuanced aspects of qualitative studies as discussed in the previous section. Still, this added information is vital for readers and consumers of this body of CI research to help gauge the relative strengths and limitations of the existing immersion studies and to interpret their findings.

Multidimensional Thematic Outcomes in the CI Studies. A major contribution of the present qualitative metasynthesis is identifying and pointing to the multidimensional nature of training outcomes through experientially-based CI interventions for counselor trainees. Specifically, Research Questions #2 and #3 of this study set out to respectively address *what* thematic outcomes were represented in the CI primary studies, and *how* these themes reflected changes and impacts in CI trainees' cognitive, affective, and behavioral experiences, as broadly predicted and observed in the experiential MCT (e.g., Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Sammons & Speight, 2008) and the intercultural training literature (e.g., Bhawuk et al., 2006; Fowler & Yamaguchi, 2020). As revealed in this analysis, the thematic outcomes from the 33 studies were well-represented across the four principal learning pillars, from 94% of the articles for the Perceptual-Attitudinal Domain, to 85% for both the Cognitive and the Skills-Behavioral Domains, to 64% for the Affective Domain (See Table 2).

Taken together, these findings highlight the potential, versatile nature of immersion-based training. From a pedagogical and programmatic standpoint, the results of this synthesis lend support to early proponents of CI for MCT in counseling and professional psychology (e.g., Ridley et al., 1994; Pope-Davis et al., 1997), who envisaged CI to 'fill a void' in multicultural training (Pope-Davis et al., 1997). On the conceptual-theoretical front, the multi-pronged CI

learning outcomes analyzed in this synthesis concur with the multidimensional developmental model of cultural competence previously posited by MCT experts (Sue et al., 2013; Toporek & Reza, 2001). Furthermore, we observed that the wide spectrum of the reported qualitative themes in CI studies – span from self-directed cultural awareness and conscious raising (i.e., individual) to ‘self-in-relation’ connections with cultural others (i.e., group) through immersion (e.g., Franzen, 2009) – also map appropriately unto the intrapersonal and the interpersonal dimensions of cultural humility as stipulated by advocates of multicultural orientation more recently (Davis et al., 2018; Hook et al., 2017). In short, these empirical findings are valuable, as they offer an evidence-based, multidimensional framework for conceptualizing the process and the outcome of trainees’ CI intercultural learning and multicultural development. These results also point to CI as a viable and adaptable teaching apparatus that has the potential to stimulate and inspire trainees’ growth and development in a holistic manner across thoughts, attitudes, feelings, and actions, when implemented under the rights conditions.

Findings on the Facilitative Conditions of CI Intervention. The findings of this CI metasynthesis also bear direct implications on the operational aspect of immersion exercises. In fact, previous CI literature reviews have stressed the importance of identifying and examining structural and process factors of CI (see Barden and Cashwell, 2013; Shannonhouse et al., 2018). The first structural-procedural issue revealed in our current analysis is the duration or length of the immersion experience. Based on the current analysis, the modal time length of the CI modules reviewed is between 1 and 3 weeks across the 33 studies. Prior CI literature has posited that a sustained period of cultural exposure to the target culture and communities is imperative to achieve an impactful immersion experience for trainees (see Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010; West-Olatunji et al., 2011). Speaking pedagogically, Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010)

contend that sustained cross-cultural exposure is needed in a CI exercise not only to give trainees sufficient time to engage with the target population and culture, but also to allow trainees adequate time to react, reflect, and process their experiences cognitively and/or affectively. Inferring from the present finding, it can be concluded that an ideal CI training should involve a multi-week immersion experience, with no less than a week in duration.

The second facilitative condition stemming from the present synthesis pertains to intercultural contact and relationship-building with the host cultural communities during CI assignments. The significance of having interaction and connection with the target populations was reported through multiple relationally- and interpersonally- oriented themes found in both domestic CI (Roysircar et al., 2005; Smith, 2018) and international CI (Barden & Cashwell, 2014; Shannonhouse, et al., 2015). Most of these relationship-connection qualitative themes were found in the affective and the skills-behavioral domains based on our analysis. The importance of the social and the interpersonal aspect of CI is well-supported by Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954), and Service-Learning Theory (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010) discussed previously. The key takeaway of this finding is that when devising a CI intervention, the opportunity for trainees and the host national/community members to participate in direct cross-cultural contact and interaction is paramount and should be given priority. For instance, this can be achieved through involving CI trainees in direct service for or collaboration with local partners/communities/agencies (e.g., via a CI service-learning), and/or in direct dialoguing, exchange, and fostering friendships and relationships with the host members, either formally or informally.

Gaps and Limitations of the Current CI Studies. The present study identifies a number of critical gaps within this aggregate of qualitative-based CI studies. First, the CI studies were

overwhelmingly represented by research conducted with counselor and psychology trainees in the U.S. (i.e., 31 of the 33 articles; only 2 were conducted in Canada) and with predominately white female participants. Therefore, the existing qualitative evidence associated with the CI interventions and the CI literature broadly speaking need to be carefully viewed and interpreted from this North American, particularly the U.S., perspective. Relatedly, given the substantial expense associated with undertaking CI (e.g., travel and accommodation costs) and the fact that the majority of the participants in the reviewed CI studies were white females, issues of privileges, powers, and inequity between visiting trainees and the host members need to be considered in future CI exercises. While selected recent CI studies seem to have involved more diverse American trainees (e.g., Domínguez, et al., 2020; Verga & Plotts, 2020) and non-American trainees (e.g., a Canadian sample in Kuo et al., 2020) in these research, future CI training and research investigations should continue to build on this body of work with more diverse national, racial, and ethnic samples.

Second, in coding and analyzing the themes of the primary studies, we found that the way in which qualitative themes were termed and labeled by the researchers varied dramatically from study to study, which rendered comparison and synthesis between studies much more challenging. For example, a theme with similar and overlapping content and meaning is broadly referred to as ‘Personal Characteristics’ in one study (e.g., Shannonhouse et al., 2015) and is more specifically described as ‘Knowledge of Personal Biases, Presumptions and False Ideas’ in another study (e.g., Giegle, 2017). On this point, future qualitative CI research would greatly benefit from streamlining the vernacular and language used in reporting qualitative themes. Such an effort would enhance the comprehensibility and interpretability of the themes between and among CI studies. Finally, there is currently very limited data and understanding of the long-term

effects of CI on trainees' multicultural development based on the current CI studies (Barden & Cashwell, 2013, 2014). However, preliminary evidence by Kelly (2015) has suggested that CI participants continued to experience growth five or more years after their international CI trips. To ascertain the temporal impacts of CI on trainees, future CI research will profit from collecting qualitative data at various time points during and after immersion to study the process.

Implications for Practice

Deriving from the overall results of this CI metasynthesis, we offer three explicit recommendations for future MCT and intercultural training and practice. First, with the growing evidence and knowledge about the use of CI with counselor trainees, as revealed in this present synthesis, it is recommended that counseling and professional psychology graduate programs give greater attention and consideration to immersion-based and service-learning pedagogies to support and enhance their culture, diversity, and social justice training curriculum. Notably, in a recent survey study of 142 practicing American psychologists, Benuto et al. (2019) found that while only 38% of the sample reported having CI-related instruction during their graduate training, 75% of the participants reported retrospectively that having CI training would have been helpful for their MCT as graduate students. These findings speak voluminously to the value and need of CI, even from the perspectives of experienced, practicing psychologists. Therefore, counseling and professional psychology graduate program training directors, administrators, faculties, and researchers may wish to consult the findings of this synthesis and the various CI studies and intervention models reviewed in this study. They may take cues from the synthesized evidence and recommendations from this review in designing, formulating, and implementing CI courses/projects that are tailored to their unique multicultural and social justice training needs and their available resources.

Secondly, the qualitative evidence and the cumulative literature have pointed to the benefits of the ‘didactic-experiential’ model of immersion. Functionally, this didactic-immersion combined curriculum would offer CI trainees a more coherent and integrated multicultural educational experience, expose them to cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning opportunities, and engage them through the cycle of learning modes predicated by Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Theory. In fact, a few examples of this type of CI curriculum are found in the published research. For instance, the Cross-Cultural Immersion Program reported by Heppner et al. (2014) was comprised of an initial 15-week preparatory seminar followed by 10 to 14 days of immersion in a different culture. In a domestic immersion program described by Kuo et al. (2020), trainees first completed a semester-long in-class multicultural course. After which, they undertook an immersion through an eight-month-long refugee-serving multicultural therapy practicum, providing therapy and advocacy for community-based refugees. Consequently, it is recommended that this sequential, didactic-experiential model be adopted to help maximize the effectiveness of a CI intervention. In fact, such an instructional sequence, involving a didactic component first followed by a practical and experiential component, has been touted as the optimal design not only for MCT (Abreu et al., 2001), but also for intercultural training (Fowler & Yamaguchi, 2020).

Thirdly, future instructors and designers of CI training should consider building on or extending existing CI models/modules that have been empirically examined, through replications or modifications. For instance, Prosek and Michel (2016) designed their CI project by incorporating the conceptual/structural framework of the Multicultural Immersion Experience (MIE) proposed by Pope-Davis et al. (1997) nearly two decades earlier. Similarly, the Multicultural Action Project (MPA) originally adopted and investigated in Hipolito-Delgado et

al.'s (2011) CI study was subsequently examined by King and her colleagues in King et al. (2020) and King et al. (2021). Similarly, in formulating a CI assignment, instructors should consult the findings and observations of this present metasynthesis and other relevant CI reviews (e.g., Brock et al., 2019; Shannonhouse et al., 2018) to help inform and construct their program.

Lastly, the principal markers of the six-domain coding framework, being applied to analyze the CI study themes in this synthesis, can potentially be used as a 'benchmark' to guide and inform the design, delivery, and evaluation of future CI curricula. While the major learning pillars (or categories) of this coding matrix (i.e., from cognitive domain to cultural dissonance) may not have fully accounted for all possible learning outcomes through immersion for trainees, the application of this analytical framework in this metasynthesis was shown to be empirically relevant and heuristically helpful. For instance, CI instructors may consider using the primary pillars adopted in this review to help establish and articulate targeted learning objectives that correspond to a given cultural developmental domain/marker when developing a CI project. Taken a step further, these domain-specific markers may be utilized as a heuristic guide to help CI creators and instructors to devise targeted teaching tools or experiential activities/tasks to facilitate learning in CI and MCT.

Specifically, grounded in the findings of this metasynthesis, we recommend the following strategies/ideas to help CI instructors optimize the effectiveness of their immersion interventions. These concrete recommendations include: 1) using article readings and didactic lectures about the target culture of the immersion to fulfill the cognitive and information learning need of the trainees; 2) incorporating case study and critical incident analysis into the immersion to challenge and help trainees process their cultural perceptions and attitudes, including stereotypes and biases; 3) implementing introspective journaling and group processing opportunities to allow

trainees to reflect and process emotions that may arise from the CI experience; and 4) enhancing students' direct service-based learning and practicing actual multicultural and social advocacy skills, through collaborating with local communities in the form of outreach, consultation, and counseling and/or informal relationship-building and social interactions with local populations.

Implications for Research

First, to the authors' knowledge, the current study represents among the first empirical attempts to systematically summarize and analyze qualitative evidence related to MCT research employing a metasynthesis approach. The adapted use of the direct content analysis as the analytical technique in this metasynthesis – to manage and assess a significant amount of narrative, thematic data in the CI studies – has been shown to be highly invaluable, rigorous, and practicable for this research. With the rapid growth of qualitative research in multicultural psychology (Ponterotto, 2002), we anticipate that the need for comprehensive qualitative syntheses will increase and be needed in the coming year, to integrate and translate the cumulative qualitative evidence coming from multicultural and diversity research. To this point, this present metasynthesis can serve as an example to inspire other researchers and scholars to undertake qualitative metasynthesis studies on various multicultural and intercultural research topics.

Second, future CI research will greatly benefit from strengthening its theoretical and conceptual depth. Our review indicates that as a whole the theoretical groundings and contributions of the prevailing CI primary studies are somewhat patchy and inconsequential. Specifically, the theoretical positions and underpinnings of most of the reviewed studies are either insufficiently elaborated or completely absent. While several conceptual theories were sporadically alluded to in some of the CI studies, such as the Experiential Learning Theory, the

Contact Hypothesis, the Critical Conscious Theory, Liberation Psychology, and the Relational-Cultural Theory, more often than not they were referenced in a cursory manner with limited interpretation and linkage to the actual data and findings of the CI studies. On this issue, Prosek and Michel (2016) strongly urged counselor educators to optimize trainees' learning by resorting to 'an intentional theory' or 'evidence-based structure' in designing and devising immersion training. A meta-analysis of multicultural education conducted by Smith et al. (2006) showed that multicultural training interventions designed based on extant theory and research were twice as effective as those that were not. Therefore, the implication here is clear: to advance the current understanding and evidence on CI research, dedicated and deliberate efforts are required to ground immersion interventions in empirically-validated theories, and to explicitly tight theoretical anchors or assumptions of CI interventions to anticipated outcomes.

Lastly, it is apparent from our present review that the emerging topic of cultural humility and MCO (Hook et al., 2013, 2017) is currently underrepresented and underexplored within the existing qualitative-supported CI studies. We observed that the majority of the prevailing CI studies examined in this synthesis operated under the perspective, assumption, and language of the traditional multicultural counseling competence framework (Sue et al., 1992; Sue et al., 2019). We could only identify three CI studies with the mention of 'cultural humility' in their texts (i.e., King et al., 2021; Kuo et al., 2020; Smith, 2018). This is partially due to the fact many of the CI studies predated the advent of the MCO and cultural humility literature, which has gained eminence only in recent years (Hook et al., 2013). MCO's emphasis on both the intrapersonal and the interpersonal dimensions of a counselor's cultural learning, and its view of multicultural development as 'a way of being' within an intercultural context (Davis et al., 2018; Hook et al., 2017), closely parallel the transformative process and outcome reported by CI

trainees who underwent immersion experience. The implication here is that future CI research should seek to explore *if* and *how* CI experience might impact trainees' development of MCO. In particular, it would be conceptually and empirically important and informative to examine the potential intersection between the three key pillars of MCO (i.e., cultural humility, cultural comfort, and cultural opportunity) (Davis et al., 2018), and the domain-supported CI learning outcomes identified in this metasynthesis.

Conclusion

By critically compiling, coding, and analyzing the available qualitative evidence of the 33 CI studies, this present metasynthesis contributes to the current literature on CI by providing evidence-based insights into the 'multidimensional' qualities and effects of immersion exercise on counselor trainees. As follows, the results of this qualitative synthesis marshal evidence supporting CI as a viable, versatile, and emotionally evocative MCT teaching tool. Clearly, continuous research efforts are needed to expand and refine current empirical and conceptual understanding of CI and its implications for multicultural counseling and social justice training. For instance, research is needed for a comparable synthesis to integrate and assess cumulative quantitative evidence about CI interventions for counselor and psychology trainees (i.e., a quantitative metaanalysis or systematic review), to help verify and corroborate the qualitative findings identified in the current metasynthesis. It is hoped that this synthesis and its findings can serve as a critical and timely catalyst in propelling the field of CI practice and research forward, and, in turn, contribute to the advancement of the broader, experiential-based MCT and the intercultural training research literature.

Figure 1. Flowchart of the Database Literature Search for Cultural Immersion Studies

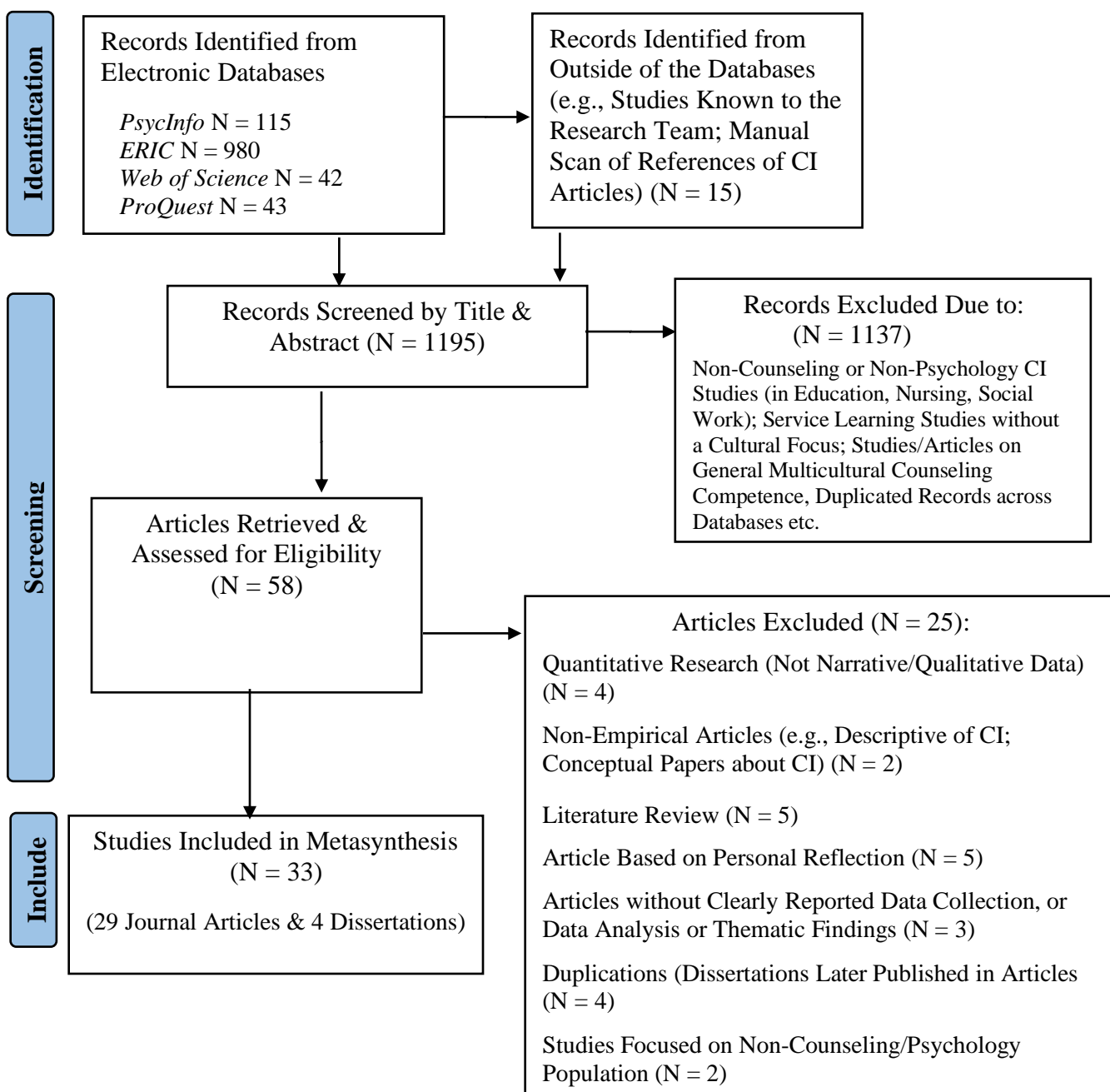


Table 1. Integrated Summary Table across All Cultural Immersion Studies

Authors & Location of the Study	Sample Size & Background	Immersion Program/ Location	Activity, Setting & Population Served	Method of Data Collection*	Method & Approach of Analysis	Thematic Outcomes/Findings	Quality A. CASP Score
King et al. (2021) (USA)	-N=31 -28F:3M -20 White, 7 African A., 1 Latinx, 3 Multiracial -Age: M=24.94 -Master's in Counselor Ed.	Individualized CI at Various Local Sites with Diverse Religious, Ethnic, Immigrant, SES, Ability, Older Age, HIV-Affected Groups. Adopted the 3-Level of the Multicultural Action Project.	Participated in Discussions/ Information Sessions, Attended Religious Activities, Volunteered for Events, Patronized Restaurants/Grocers	Journals	Consensual Qualitative Research	Themes (For Learning Outcomes): 1) New Knowledge; 2) Personal Growth; 3) New Perspectives on Others; 4) Implications for Counseling; 5) Intentions for Future/Personal goals.	10
Domínguez et al. (2020) (USA)	-N=15 -14F:1M -11 Latinx, 1 Black, 1 PhilipinX, 2 White -Age: 23-35 -Master's in Counseling Psy.	1-Week CI in Huejotal Huaquechula, Mexico A Cross-Bordering Curriculum (Cruzando Fronteras)	Worked with Mexican School Children by Sharing Family & Migration Stories	Post-Trip Written Tesimonios (1 Month After)	Thematic Analysis + Liberation Psychology	Themes: 1) Reclaiming Identity; 2) Journeying with Our Ancestors & Families; 3) The Children as Teachers; 4) Cultural Wealth; 5) Community as Family; 6) Crossing Borders as a Call to Social Action	10
King (2020) (USA)	-N=2 -1F:1M -1 Latina; 1 African A. -Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling	CI in a Local Culturally Diverse Group Adopted the 3-Level of the Multicultural Action Project	Latina Immersed in a Local Church Group Black Male Immersed in a Group of Older White Men	Journals + Final Course Papers	Thematic Narrative Analysis	Themes: 1) Flexible Thinking; 2) Layered Emotions; 3) Reflecting on Purpose; 4) Evaluating Safety/Risk; 5) Interpreting Meaning; 6) Establishing Alternative Images; 7) Affirming Rights	9.5
Kuo et al. (2020) (CANADA)	-N=14 -13F:1M -11 White; 3 E. Asian A. -Age: 25 to 31 -Ph.D. in Clinical Psy.	18-week CI Through a Therapy Training Practicum Involving Exposure & Interaction with Refugees	Provided Counseling to Refugees & Collaborated with a Local Settlement Agency	Mixed-Methods Design + Critical Incident Journals	Thematic Coding + Multi-Level Model Analysis	Themes: 1) Increased MC Competence; 2) Increased Self-Efficacy; 3) Cognitive, Behavioural, & Affective Impact	10
Vega & Plotts (2020) (USA)	-N=7 -6F:1M -English-Spanish Bilingual Latinx -Age:23-61 (M=28.8) -Graduate Students in School Psy.	2-Week CI in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas	Visited Local School, Non-Profit Agency, & Historical sites	Post-Trip Semi-Structured Interviews (5 Weeks After)	Phenomenology	Themes: 1) Being Pushed Out of Comfort Zone; 2) Bonding with Peers; 3) Language, Culture, & Identity; 4) Awareness of Unique Challenges; 5) Changes Needed in the Immersion Program	9.5

Dietz & Baker (2019) (USA)	-N=8 -6F:2M -3 White; 5 African A. -Age: 23-46 (M=30) -Master's & Doctorate in Counseling/Counseling Psy.	13-Day CI in Tegucigalpa, Honduras	Visited Host University, Schools, & Participated in Conference	Journals + A Follow-Up Survey + Course-Related Documentation	Case Study Method	Themes: 1) Promoting Awareness of Self & Other; 2) Acquiring Knowledge about Honduras; 3) Reflecting about Counseling Field; 4) Promoting Self-Fostering Relationships; 5) Reflecting about Social Justice & Advocacy	10
Peterson et al. (2019) (USA)	-N=5 -All White Females -Age: M=29.83 -Doctorate in Counseling Psy.	2-Week CI in the Netherlands	Live-in Homestay with Host Families & Visited Schools & Agencies	1 Journal Paper (1 Month After)	Phenomenology + Constant Comparative Method	Themes: 1) Moving Toward Nuanced Perspectives; 2) Applying New Cultural Awareness to School Contexts; 3) Shifting to a Balanced View	10
Smith (2018)* (USA)	-N= 5 -5F -4 White; 1 African A. -Age: 25 to 31 -Master's & Doctorate in Counseling Ed.	8-Day CI in a Native America Reservation (The White Earth Nation) in North Dakota	Participated in Organized Cultural Teaching & Experiential Activities about	Structured Interview (2 Years After)	Phenomenology	Themes: 'Cultural Humility' as the Overarching Theme with 6 Subthemes: 1) Difficult Conversations; 2) Appreciation & Application of Native American Spirituality; 3) Hearing the Silent Scream; 4) Desire to Share Leads to Activism; 5) Learner's Mindset; 6) Connection	10
Geigle (2017)* (USA)	-N=7 -6F:1M -6 White, 1 Native A. -Age: 29-42 (M=34.57) -Master's & Doctorate in Counseling Ed.	-5-Week CI in Botswana & South Africa Under a HIV/AIDS Study- Abroad Program	Attended Lectures at a Local University, Volunteered at HIV/AIDS Public/Community/Health Agencies, & Cultural Excursions	Semi-Structured Interviews	Case study	Themes: 1) Knowledge of Personal Biases, Presumptions & False Ideas; 2) Knowledge of Self; 3) Awareness of Economic Privilege; 4) Changed View of American Culture; 5) Knowledge of HIV/AIDS in Africa; 6) Knowledge People of Africa; 7) Knowledge of Poverty in Africa; 8) Knowledge of Mental Health Counseling in Africa; 9) Open-Mindedness, Understanding, Compassion & Empathy; 10) Increased Comfort in Interacting with Individuals of Other Races & Ethnicities; 11) Acknowledgement for Need of Continuing Education	10

Prosek & Michel (2016) USA	-N=13 -12F:1M -Age:20 to 37 (M=26.6) -10 White, 1 African A., 1 Hispanic, & 1 Multiracial -Master's in Counseling	10-Day CI in Dublin, Ireland	Interacted with Counseling Professionals & Visited Agency	Semi-Structured Interviews	Thematic Analysis	Themes: a) Culture Self-Awareness; b) Witnessing Peer Growth; c) Global Connection	10
Choi et al. (2015) (USA)	-N=5 -4F:1M -All White -Age: 26 to 38 -Master's in Counseling	14-day CI in South Africa	Outreached to Underprivileged Children & Communities & Participated in Community Services	Semi-Structured Interviews (6 Months After)	Thematic Analysis + Analysis via NVivo	Themes: 1) The Meaning of Being American; 2) Sociopolitical Awareness; 3) Engagement with South Africans & Their Communities; 4) Appreciation of Life; 5) Commitment to Change	10
Davies et al. (2015) (USA)	-N=16 -Gender & Ethnicity Not Reported -Age: 22-30 -Graduate Students in School Psych.	2-Week Study CI in Buenos Aires, Argentina	Visited Schools, Participated in Group Excursions, Interacted with Locals & Attended Classes	Mixed Methods Design + Open-Ended Questions + Quantitative Measures	Content Analysis of Open-Ended Responses + Pre & Post Comparison + Comparison between the Immersion & a Non-Immersion Control Groups	Themes: 1) Knowing ourselves as Cultural; 2) Communication Across Cultural Differences *However, No Difference in the Growth of Intercultural Competence between Immersed and No-Immersed Groups Using Quantitative Measures.	9
Kelly (2015)* (USA)	-N=10 -7F:3M -8 White, 2 African A. -Age: 34-56 (M=45.3) -Graduates of Master's in Marriage & Family Therapy/Practicing Therapists	2-Week CI in Athens, Greece	Attended Lectures by Local Speakers, Journalled & Processed Experiences, Interacted with Locals, & Traveled.	Semi-Structured Interviews (5 or More Years After)	Phenomenology	Themes: 1) Connecting (vs. Disconnecting); 2) Risk Taking; 3) Challenging Assumptions; 4) Application; 5) Time	10
Shannonhouse et al. (2015) (USA)	-N=10 -9F:1M -9 White;1 Asian A. -Age: 23 to 32 -Master's in Counseling	3-Week CI in Costa Rica	Lived with Costa Rican Host Families, Practiced Spanish, & Engaged in Family Activities	Daily Journals	Consensual Qualitative Research + Cross Analysis of Data to Identify Categories	Themes: 1) Personal characteristics; 2) Past Experiences; 3) Coping; 4) Emotional Reactions; 5) Communication; 6) Relational Connections; 7) Encouragers/Barriers; 8) Personal & Professional Changes; 9) Awareness	10

West-Olatunji et al. (2015) (USA)	-N=6 -5F:1M -5 White; 1 Asian A. -Age: 24-31 (M=26.5) -Master's & Doctorate in Counselor Ed.	28-Day CI in South Africa under the International Disaster Outreach Project	Shadowed Professional Counselors, Engaged in Outreach in Community Agencies, Schools, Offered Case Consultation	Journals	Grounded Theory + Instrumental Case Study	Themes: 2 Major Themes with 5 Subthemes Major Theme A Struggle & Discomfort: 1) Conflict & Tension & 2) Disconnection Major Theme B Growth: 3) Group Cohesion; 4) Self-Awareness; & 5) Excitement	9.5
Barden & Cashwell (2014) (USA)	-N=10 -9F:1M -All White -Age: 23 to 34 (M=27.9) -Master's in Counselor Ed	3 Participant Groups 1) 21-Day in South Africa and Botswana (N=4); 2) 12-Day in Bolivia (N=3); 3) 12-Day in Guatemala (N=3)	Varied Activities (Details Not Reported)	Semi-Structured Interviews	Consensual Qualitative Research	Themes: 1) Cultural Knowledge; 2) Empathy; 3) Personal & Professional Impact; 4) Process/Reflection; 5) Relationships; 6) Personal Characteristics; 7) Structure	10
Heppner & Wang (2014) (USA)	-N=12 -11F:1M -5 White; 3 Asian A.; 1 African A.; 2 Latinx -Age: Not Reported -Graduate Students in Counseling Psy. & a Professional Staff	12-Day CI in Taiwan	Engaged in Cultural Activities & Tours, Interacted with Local Students, Participated in Lectures & Group Processing	Journals	Participants' Quotes Used to Illustrate the Cross-National Cultural Competence Model	Themes: 1) Increased Experiential Awareness; 2) Expanded Understanding of the Host Culture; 3) Increased Cross-Cultural Confidence & Efficacy	9
Koch et al. (2014) (USA)	-N=9 -7F:2M -5 White; 4 African A -Age: 23-42 -Master's & Doctorate in Counseling/Counseling Psy.	10-Day Service- Learning CI in Belize	Provided Psychoeducation to Elementary School Children, Revised Curriculum, & Offered Professional Development Workshops	Semi-Structured Interviews (1 Month After)	Consensual Qualitative Research	Themes: 1) Change in Diversity Attitudes; 2) Professional Development & Skills; 3) Knowledge; 4) Immersion; 5) Personal Development; 6) Post-Travel Impact; 7) Group/ Interpersonal Relations; 8) Cultural Identity; 9) Emotional Impact; 10) Comfort Level; 11) Relationships	10
Lee et al. (2014) (USA)	-N=32 -30F:2M -22 White, 1 African A., 4 Latinx, 2 Native A., 1 Asian A. -Age: 22-53 (M=32) -Master's & Doctorate in Counseling/Counseling Psy.	8-Week Service- Learning CI in Local Middle Schools	Delivered Anger Management & Learned Optimism Programs to Diverse Middle School Students	Mixed Methods with Open-Ended Questions + Quantitative Measures	Q-Sort Method + Pre & Post Regression Analyses	Themes: 1) Shift in Thinking; 2) Enhanced Rapport Building; 3) Adjustment of Practice	10

Smith, Jennings, & Lakhan (2014) (USA)	-N=20 -17F:3M -13 White, 3 Asian A., 3 Multiracial, 1 Arab A. -Master's & Doctorate in Counseling Psych.	4-Week Service-Learning Course in Singapore	Shared Class with Local Students, Visited Mental health Settings, Visited Cultural & Religious Sites, & Delivered Psychoeducation to Adolescent Female Survivors of Abuse in a Residential Program	Online Post Trip Survey (with 3-5 Questions Collected 4 Months After)	Content Analysis	Themes: 1) Movement Towards cultural competence; 2) Social Justice; 3) Service Learning; 4) International Education	9.5
Smith, McAuliffe, & Rippard (2014) (USA)	-N=17 -Age, Gender, & Ethnicity Not Reported -Master's & Doctorate in Counseling & Counselor Ed. from Across the U.S.	2-Week CI in Ireland	Participated in Seminar at the Host University & Visited Historical/Cultural Sites & Local Counseling Agency & Program	Final Reflection Papers + A Follow-Up Survey (2 Weeks & 4-6 Months After)	Grounded Theory + Constant Comparison Method	Themes: 1) Engaging with Others Through Transformative Learning; 2) Becoming More Self-Aware; 3) Increasing Autonomy; 4) Discovering American Culture; 5) Increasing Cultural Relativism; 6) Learning about & Comparing Social Conflict; 7) Inspiring Engagement in Counseling Work; 8) Situating the Counselling Professional within an International Context.	10
Smith-Augustine et al. (2014) (USA)	-N=5 -5F -All African A. -Age: 20-25 -Master's in Clinical Mental Health & School Counseling	3-Week CI in Belize	Interacted with Local Mental Health Providers & Community/Religious Leaders, & Co-Facilitated Training for Service Providers	Journals for 5 Weeks	Phenomenology	Themes: 1) Discrimination & Prejudice; 2) Cultural Pride & Appreciation; 3) Cultural Sensitivity; 4) Self-Awareness.	9
McDowell et al. (2012) (USA)	-N=8 -6F:2M -5 White; 3 Participants of Color -Age: Mid-20s to Mid-30s -Master's in Counseling Psy.	12-Day to 17-Day CI in either Middle East or Asia	Received Lectures from the Host University, Visited Counseling Professionals & Agencies, Interacted with Local Students & Families	Semi-Structured Interviews (2-6 Months After)	'Generic Qualitative Research Design' + Critical Theory Analysis	Themes: 1) Increased Social Awareness; 2) Personal Transformation; 3) Professional Development; 4) Affective/Experiential Learning; 5) Learning from Cultural Differences	9
Platt (2012) (USA)	-Sample Size & Demographics of the Participants Not Reported -Graduate Students in Marriage & Family Therapy & Clinical Psy.	5-Week CI & Spanish Language Program in Mexico City, Mexico	Attended 2-day Retreat in Mexico & Participated in Spanish Language Program	Post Trip Survey	Not Reported	Themes: 1) Increased Awareness of Own Culture; 2) Challenges from Immersion Education; 3) Increased Complexity on Perception of Latino Culture; 4) Implications of Clinical Work with Latino Clients	5.5

Hipolito-Delgado et al. (2011) (USA)	-N=3 -All Females -All White -Age: 29 to 30 -Masters in Counselor Edu.	10-Hour Individualized CI (over 2 Months) with a Targeted Population Chose by the Trainees: Incarcerated Women Homeless Individuals, & Older Adults	Researched the Target Population, Developed an Action Plan, & Participated in Community Service	Final Narrative Papers (2 Weeks After)	Narrative Inquiry + Constant Comparison Method	Themes: 1) Increased Awareness of Previously Unprocessed Emotions; 2) Increased Knowledge of Discrimination Experienced by the Target Community; 3) Increased Skills & Ability to Work with Diverse Clients	10
Nilsson et al. (2011) (USA)	-N=12 -All Females -9 White; 3 African A.; 1 Caribbean -Age: No Reported -Master's & Doctorate in Counseling/Counseling Psy.	3 Months to 6 Years Service-Learning CI in a Refugee/Immigrant Women-Serving Mental Health Program	Delivered Workshops, Conducted Home Visits (N=6), Provided Individual Counseling to Refugee/Immigrant Women	Structured Interview (with 3 Questions)	A 6-Stage Qualitative Analysis	Themes: 1) Development of Cultural Knowledge; 2) Counselling-Related Skills; 3) Personal Growth & Reactions	10
West-Olatunji et al. (2011) (USA)	-N=6 -5F:1M -5 White; 1 Asian A. -Age: 24 to 31 (M=26.5) -Doctorate in Counselor Ed.	4-Week CI in Johannesburg & Cape Town, South Africa	Visited Cultural & Clinical Sites, Provided Case Consultation & Peer Supervision in Community Center, Shadowed Counselors, Offered Counseling	Journals	Qualitative Analysis + Critical Consciousness Theory	Themes: 1) Process that Facilitates Critical Consciousness; 2) Processes that Block Critical Consciousness; 3) Critical Consciousness Development	9.5
Burnham et al. (2009) (USA)	-N=9 -8F:1M -All White -Age: 22 to 30 (M=28) -Master's in School Counseling	A Semester-Long CI with ESL Students in a University-Based Summer Program	Participated in Pretraining, Worked with ESL Teachers, & Delivered Lessons to ESL Students	Semi-Structured Group Interviews	Qualitative Analysis	Themes: 1) The need to Reach All Students; 2) General & Unique Skill-Building when Working with Ethnically Diverse Students; 3) Culturally Related Challenges with ESL Students; 4) Limitations in the ESL Experience of Counselor-in-Training	9
Franzen (2009)* (USA)	-N=6 -Demographics Not Reported -1st-Year Master's in Marriage & Family Therapy	Individualized CI in 4 Local Settings with Diverse Populations	Participated & Observed Programs in: a) An Alcohol & Drug Treatment Center; 2) An ESL High School Class; 3) A Rural Hair Salon; 4) A Camp for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities	Ethnographic Field Note Journals & Focus Groups	Case study + Grounded Theory Approach + Constant Comparative Method	Themes: 1) Connection Subthemes: Authenticity, Empathy, Power & Empowerment; 2) Disconnection Subthemes: Relational Paradox & Sense-Of-Self Clarification	10

Goodman & West-Olatunji (2009) (USA)	-N=6 -All Females -4 White; 1 Haitian A.; 1 Indian A. -Age: 23-53 (M=31) -Master's & Doctorate in Counselor Ed. & School Psy.	8-Day Outreach CI in New Orleans, Post Hurricane Katrina	Provided Counseling & Consultation to the Community, & Participated in Night Program at Local School	Journals	Qualitative Analysis + Critical Consciousness Theory	Themes: 1) Critical Consciousness; 2) Group Cohesion; 3) Mentoring; 4) Transformation; 5) Self-Care; 6) Cultural Competence	10
Ishii et al. (2009) (USA)	-N=15 (from a Group of 24) -All Females -11 White, 3 African A., 1 Bi-Ethnic -Age: 24-56 -Master's in Counseling	1-Week CI in New Mexico	Visited Cultural & Historical Sites, & Local Enterprises (i.e., Traditional Businesses & Healers)	Journals	Open Coding Procedure + Grounded Theory	Themes: 1) Cognitive Reactions; 2) Affective Reactions; 3) Perceptual Reactions; 4) Empathy; 5) Cultural Dissonance	9.5
Wihak & Merili (2007) (CANADA)	-N=8 -All Females -Age: Not Reported -Non-Aboriginals -Master's-Level Practicing Counselors	2 to 19 Years of CI Working Experiences in Nunavut, Canada	Employed & Worked in Various Settings with Inuit Clients (e.g., Agencies, Schools & Colleges, Native Bands)	Individual Interviews + Arts-based Data (i.e., Drawings)	A 2-Step Narrative Approach	Themes: 1) Increased White Racial Consciousness; 2) Feeling Unity with Nature; 3) Cultural Shifts in Worldview; 4) Recognizing Universal Human Connections	8.5
Roysircar et al. (2005) (USA)	-N=67 -42F:25M -60 White, 7 Racial/Ethnic -Age: 22-45 -Master's & Doctorate in Counseling Psy.	10-Session CI Working with ESL Students in a Local Public School	Participated in Mentoring & Tutoring with an Assigned ESL Student in School	Mixed-Methods Design + Weekly Progress Note + Quantitative Measures	Consensual Qualitative Research + Between-Session Analysis + ANOVA & Correlation Analyses	Themes: 2 Main Themes with 10 Subthemes <i>-Main Theme A - Connection/Closeness:</i> 1) Differences Integrated; 2) Cultural Empathy-Cognitive; 3) Empathy-Affective; 4) Counselor Self-Disclosure; 5) Counselor Self Reflection <i>-Main Theme B – Disconnection/ Distance:</i> 1) Environmental Barriers; 2) Frustration with Environmental Barriers; 3) Unintegrated Differences; 4) Overgeneralization of Similarity; 5) Stereotypes	9.5

Note: * Represents dissertation study. When it is not specifically mentioned, the study in this column represents a fully qualitative research grounded in a qualitative method of data collection. F:M = Female: Male; CI = Cultural Immersion; Psy. = Psychology; Ed. = Education; Quality A = Quality Assessment; CASP = Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

Table 2. Thematic Outcome-Domain Frequency Table

Cultural Immersion Study	Cognitive Domain	Perceptual-Attitudinal Domain	Affective Domain	Skills-Behavioral Domain	Cultural Dissonance Domain	Supplement Findings
King et al. (2021)	√	√		√		
Domínguez, et al. (2020)		√	√	√		
King (2020)	√	√	√	√		
Kuo et al. (2020)	√		√	√	√	
Vega & Plotts (2020)	√	√	√	√		√
Dietz & Baker (2019)	√	√	√	√		
Peterson et al. (2019)	√	√		√		
Smith (2018)*	√	√	√	√		
Geigle (2017)*	√	√	√	√		
Prosek & Michel (2016)	√	√	√		√	
Choi et al. (2015)		√	√	√		
Davies et al. (2015)	√	√		√		
Kelly (2015)*	√	√	√	√	√	
Shannonhouse et al. (2015)	√	√		√	√	
West-Olatunji et al. (2015)	√	√		√	√	
Barden & Cashwell (2014)	√	√	√	√		
Heppler & Wang (2014)		√		√		
Koch et al. (2014)	√	√	√	√	√	
Lee et al. (2014)	√		√	√		
Smith, Jennings, & Lakhan (2014)	√	√		√		
Smith, McAuliffe, & Rippard (2014)	√	√				
Smith-Augustine et al. (2014)	√	√	√	√		
McDowell et al. (2012)	√	√	√	√		
Platt (2012)	√	√		√	√	√
Hipolito-Delgado et al. (2011)	√	√		√		
Nilsson et al. (2011)	√	√	√	√	√	√
West-Olatunji et al. (2011)	√	√	√	√	√	
Burnham et al. (2009)	√	√		√	√	√
Franzen (2009)*		√	√	√	√	
Goodman & West-Olatunji (2009)		√		√		√
Ishii et al. (2009)	√	√	√		√	
Wihak & Merili (2007)	√	√	√			
Roysircar et al. (2005)	√	√	√		√	√
Total Count	28	31	21	28	13	6
% Out of 33 Studies	(85%)	(94%)	(64%)	(85%)	(40%)	(18%)

Note: *Represents Dissertation Study.

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