The Power of Experience: Narratives that Promote Critical Transformation and Identity Development

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Multicultural competence is an important component of the counseling profession. All counselors and counselor educators are called upon to find ways of increasing their multicultural competence across all dimensions of their professional identity. This narrative study explores the critical transformative experiences of seven white male counselor educators. Critical transformative experiences are defined as positive or negative experiences that have impacted one's perspective(s) and ways of being in everyday life. Data sources included two semi-structured interviews, photo artifacts, and three-dimensional guided writings. Analysis and results revealed ten themes that explored participants' stories related to early home life, family, racial identity, interpersonal relationships, young adulthood, education, critical transformation, reflection, professional identity, and experience of sharing stories. Implications for counselor education and the counseling profession are provided.

Keywords: *Narrative, Counselor Educator, Multicultural, Transformative*

Multicultural counseling competence is believed to be a cornerstone of contemporary professional counseling. Through the development and operationalization of the multicultural counseling competencies, scholars like Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis, (1992) and organizations such as the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2015) have called on all counselors, and in particular white counselors and educators, to improve their multicultural competencies (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillian, Butler, & Rafferty, 2015). Sue (2004) noted that personal factors such as unexamined beliefs, attitudes, and values may hinder the therapeutic relationship and compel clients to adopt the values and perspectives articulated by their counselor. Thus, a lack of multicultural

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competence can negatively impact the therapeutic relationship (Johnson & Jackson Williams, 2015). While there is abundant multicultural competence research that examines multiple identities and the narratives of women, people of color, and sexual orientation in helping professions, only a few articles examine multicultural transformation in the narratives of white male educators or white male counseling students (D'Andrea, 1999; Kiselica, 1999; VanderGast, 2008). In the context of this article, multicultural transformation refers to significant cognitive, behavioral, and emotional experiences that augment an individual's multicultural competence.

About the same time the concept of multicultural competence emerged in the field of counseling, McIntosh's (1988) work in women's studies emphasized the importance of understanding gender and identity privilege imbalances. McIntosh "noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are over-privileged" (p. 3) despite simultaneously acknowledging their cultural bias against women. McIntosh extended her understanding to matters of race and challenged many to examine and understand men's unearned and unconscious privileges. McIntosh believed by describing and acknowledging white privilege she was "newly accountable" (p. 2) and wondered "what would (she) do to lessen or end it?" (p. 2–3). Counseling professionals, and in particular white male counselors and counselor educators should face the same questions and call to action: "Now that I know about white privilege, what will I do to lessen and dismantle it?"

In addition to privilege and multicultural competence, gender identity plays a significant role in men's ways of being. According to Kleiman, Spanierman, and Grant (2015), some men raised in more traditional gender role environments may experience more psychological distress along racial, sexual orientation, and gender dimensions. McDermott and Schwartz (2013) contend men who overcome negative masculine stereotypes may express higher degrees of well-being. Recently, Ray, Huffman, Christian, and Wilson, (2016) discovered male counselor educators perceive their gender can influence their relationships with students and colleagues. Furthermore, Ray et al., (2016) shared male counselor educators have developed strategies to avoid perceptions of unprofessional behavior when engaging in student-teacher and colleague relationships. Given these findings, there is enough indication that male counselor educators may experience lived events differently than others with different identities.

In order to examine the intersection multicultural competence, privilege, and gender identity a deeper understanding of experience is needed. Educational philosopher Dewey (1929)

asserted experience is an aspect of life that makes us uniquely human. Dewey defined experience as a moment that stands alone and separates itself from everyday life. Dewey added that experience is not something simple but is rather complicated and comprised of: (a) *fluidity* represents the start and finish of an experience one can recount, (b) *integrity* signifies the strength of that experience so that it stands out as salient, (c) *unity* is the wholeness or completeness of the experience that one is able to recall and, (d) *conclusion* solidifies the takeaway meanings that one has from their experiences (Dewey, 1934). In counselor education, exploring how experience can be used as a tool for multicultural development is noted. For example, Cartwright, Avent-Harris, Munsey, and Lloyd-Hazlett (2017) found that counselor education search committees should identify potential bias (e.g. microaggressions) and systemic discrimination policies that impact interviewing and hiring faculty of color. Additionally, Johns (2017) found counselor educators' spiritual and religious beliefs are important aspects of their multicultural competence while conducting supervision. Despite recent research on multicultural competence and experience, it seems reasonable that white male counselor educators' experiences as they relate to their multicultural competence is warranted.

The purpose of this study was to focus on the narratives of white male counselor educators to identify how important experiences influence their multicultural development. Their stories represent a foundation for understanding the experiences of white males as related to their multicultural development and may encourage others to explore the impact of their experiences in relation to their work as counselors in training, clinicians, supervisors, and counselor educators.

Method

For almost three decades, narrative as a methodology has become a major source of understanding one's lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Creswell and Poth, "The narrative study tells the story of individuals unfolding in a chronology of their experiences, set within their personal, social, and historical context, and including the important themes in those lived experiences" (2018, p. 73). Narratives may be songs, poems, autobiographies, interviews, field texts, or other forms of inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This research utilized a narrative approach to uncover the participants' stories of critical transformation in relation to their multicultural development. In the context of this study, critical refers to intense and memorable

events that impact one's development. Three research questions framed this investigation. First, what stories of critical transformation related to participants' multicultural growth in past, present, and future contexts would be retold? Second, what were the critical components of their stories (positive or negative)? Third, what stories would participants retell specifically related to race and gender?

Researcher as the Instrument

In qualitative research, the primary researcher acknowledges the potential for bias that may impact the findings. Narrative research allows researcher(s) to recognize their own stories as well as participants together (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this study, the primary researcher was, at the time, a white male doctoral student intrigued by the impact of his prior racial, social, and gender development experiences in connection to his multicultural competence.

Criteria for Participation

Merriam and Tisdell, (2016) described criterion as an intentional process that selects participants based on certain characteristics. Snowball sampling aids the researcher in securing additional participants through criterion efforts and is a process whereby one participant who meets criteria for inclusion passes along the information of another that also fits the same criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Criteria for inclusion in this study were: white, male, held a doctorate, teach (full- or part-time, tenure or nontenure) in the Counsel for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited programs, have made at least one scholarly contribution to multicultural literature, and reported having a critical transformative experience related to race and gender. Critical transformative experiences were defined as any experience, positive or negative, throughout one's lifespan that created second order change. Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch (1974) defined second order change as a process where an individual has shifted in perspective and orientation from external events (e.g. witnessing race riots) and internal practices (e.g. perceptions of others and themselves) to be more aware and accurately balanced to current systems (e.g. at work, school, and relationships).

Participants were recruited by the researcher through two processes. First, the author of this study sent an email for participation to respondents that were selected based on the aforementioned criteria for inclusion. Second, utilizing snowball sampling, participants who chose to either join or pass on the research opportunity were asked to provide the researcher with another potential participant's email that met the criteria for inclusion.

Participants

Eight white male counselor educators met criteria for inclusion and participated in this study. About half way through the research project, one participant withdrew and all data were removed. Thus seven participants with ages ranged between 30–60 years, who were teaching at institutions across the lower 48 states, represented different areas of professional experience, and expressed a wide variety of professional interests participanted in this study.

Procedure

Institutional review board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to data collection. Prospective participants received a description of the study, purpose, and contact information of the researcher. When respondents agreed to participate, IRB-approved informed consent forms were emailed. Once informed consents were obtained, the researcher and each participant scheduled the first interview.

After the first round of interviews were completed, each participant received instructions for the three-dimensional guided writing and photo artifact assignments. The three-dimensional guided writings served as another data source to help participants connect with their critical transformative experiences. The three-dimensional guided writing emerged from Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) practice of journal writing as field texts. In the three-dimensional guided writings, participants were instructed to write a letter to themselves in the past, present, and future. The purpose of the letters was to identify important messages, thoughts, and feelings that participants might have about their transformative journeys. Photo artifacts represented a third data source. These visual representations served to illuminate participants' critical transformative experiences. After participants received photo artifact and three-dimensional guided writing

instructions, second interviews were scheduled. Second interviews were scheduled approximately 50 days from the date of the first interview. The purpose of the second interview was to follow up with participants and address stories that were incomplete from the first interview, plus discuss the meaning of their photo artifacts and three dimensional guided writings. The time between the first and second interview also allowed the author to transcribe interviews, perform member checks, conduct auditor consultations, and engage in prolonged assessment of the data collected. Before the second interview, participants were instructed to email their three-dimensional guided writings and photo artifacts back to the researcher. These materials were reviewed and discussed during the second interview.

Trustworthiness Procedures

Triangulation is necessary in qualitative research to promote rigor (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A researcher journal, two trained auditors, and two member checks with each participant were utilized to triangulate the data to promote trustworthiness. The researcher journal served as an anchor for the author to continuously monitor his personal bias and interpretations. Two auditors served as additional bias control of the researcher's interpretations. Auditors were qualified based on their prior qualitative research experience, were doctoral students who just completed qualitative research coursework, and identified white and male. Auditors were instructed to read each participants' transcript and corresponding code sheet generated by the primary researcher and note any discrepancies or evidence of bias in the primary researcher's coding. The researcher and two auditors convened after each round of interviews were completed to discuss and reconcile any discrepancies in the coding process. Member checks were conducted after the first and second interviews. Participants were provided a copy of their coded transcript and a master code sheet. Each participant was encouraged to look over their transcript and notify the author of any discrepancies. Only one participant requested changes in his transcripts, but none of these changes affected the codes or themes.

Data Analysis

Data (two semi-structured interview transcripts, three-dimensional guided writings, and photo artifacts) were gathered and analyzed utilizing narrative approaches to retell the grand narrative. Narrative analysis requires the researcher to organize the data into transcribed texts that represent orientation, complication action, and resolution/coda (Riessman, 2008). First, data were transcribed and portions of their stories were coded and sorted based on context and dialogue that portrayed the chronological sequencing of the story portions. This strategy served as an anchor for identifying the beginning, middle, and end of participants' stories. Next, colors were used to denote codes reflective of each participants' central plot or story (Polkinghorne, 1995). Central figures plus ancillary characters were identified and factored into the narratives (Riessman, 2008). Next, cultural implications were considered and noted within each narrative to deepen and contextualize participants' narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995). Penultimately, the resolution or coda step captured the conclusion portion of participants' stories (Riessman, 2008). Finally, data were examined utilizing Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative concepts of inward, outward, backward, and forward to incorporate the researcher's feelings, interpretations, and interactions with the data.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews (*N*=14) were executed over a five-month period. Eight interviews were conducted face-to-face and the remaining eight were conducted over the phone. Demographic questions were introduced at the beginning of each interview followed by semi-structured questions that were designed to explore participants' stories and promote open-ended responses. The first round of interviews were between 70–100 minutes with a median of 88 minutes and elicited participants' stories related to gender, race, and privilege. For example, "What is important for me to know about growing up as a male? white?" and "As you reflect on your experiences, which of these would you consider to be significant to you? Tell me the story about this experience." The second round of interviews were 53–76 minutes in duration and averaged 64 minutes and gathered participants' descriptions of their photo artifacts, three dimensional guided writings, and allowed for follow up from the first interview. Examples of second interview questions were, "Now that you've shared your story, what do you see yourself doing with your experiences today?" and, "If your artifacts could speak, what story would they tell about your transformative experiences?"

Individual Writings and Artifacts

Three-dimensional guided writings (*N*=21) were collected between the first and second interviews. Participants were instructed to write a total of three letters to themselves: one to their past, present, and future selves. Instructions for the letters asked participants to consider what messages, thoughts, and/or feelings about their transformative experiences they would want to know or remember at eachstage. For example, in part three (e.g. the future prompt) participants were instructed to:

> Please take a few moments to consider your transformative experiences one more time. Think about your story(s) and experience(s) as it relates to you today. What messages/words/thoughts/feelings/ do you feel are important for you to remember several years from now? What do you want to make sure you remember at the end of your story?

The goal of the three-dimensional guided writings was to identify the main points of participants' stories that may or may not have been shared during the interviews. This goal aligns with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) concept of temporality which considers elements of place, time (past, present, and future), and setting within narratives.

Photo artifacts (*N*=9) were also collected between the first and second interviews. Seven participants took one photo artifact while one participant provided two. Photo artifacts were images related to participants' stories of critical transformation. Some participants took photos of personal items. For example, Jim spoke at length about the death of Matthew Shepard. His photo artifact was a black and white photo of the fence where Matthew was found tortured. Photo artifacts and three-dimensional guided writings were discussed with participants and the meanings (e.g. thoughts, feelings, behaviors) were coded after the second interviews and incorporated into the summative thematic narrative.

Synthesis of Data

Data were gathered from four collection sources. All interviews (*N*=14) were transcribed by the author to promote prolonged engagement with the data and reconnect the author with participants' voices. Each interview was coded individually and compared collectively.

Participants' three-dimension guided writings (*N*=21) and photo artifacts (*N*=7) were coded and compared with other participants' materials as they were received. Initially, 178 codes were derived from participants' materials. Using a constant and comparative method of data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), 23 expansive categories were constructed through a narrative framework and organized using Reismann (2008) and Polkinghorne's (1995) importance of chronological order, plot and characters, settings, cultural implications, and conclusion. Ten large themes reoccurred throughout the participants' stories. These ten themes were organized into three sections that mirrored participants shared stories. Each section contains themes that retell the participants' grand narrative.

Results

This portion outlines three distinct texts that emerged from the data: (a) the beginning; (b) the middle, and (c) the end. A fourth text also emerged from the author of this study that echoes the experiences and sentiments of the participants. Within each text, key themes shed light on participants' experiences of critical transformation.

The Beginning

All participants (*N*=7) shared stories of early life growing up in relatively homogenous environments, and experiences related to family life and early childhood. These stories illuminated participants' experiences of gender role socialization, emotional availability, and sibling rivalries. Three themes organize these experiences: early home life, racial identity, and a rise in action.

Early home life. Seven participants set their early childhood recollections in familiar and comfortable home life contexts. They noted the impact of growing up in relatively homogenous and safe neighborhoods that were isolated and relatively predictable. For example, Jim said:

> I pretty much grew up thinking that everyone was pretty much equal and I was pretty naïve
> about race and class. My parents never really talked about it. Growing up I had very little
> exposure to difference, no international travel, not really exposed to things.

After they spoke of their neighborhoods, all participants recounted stories of their parents and the impact of family dynamics on gender, masculinity, and racial identity development. Mikel offered, "I would say that my dad is pretty traditional white male, and while I don't think he's aware . . . he's an upper middle class kind of guy . . . so I certainly got a dose of that, his maleness."

In addition to describing experiences of their fathers, participants also shared stories of their mothers. Dave recounted, "I think my mother had a big influence on me . . . my mom was a champion and friend and role model." Participants' depictions of their mothers were more tender and emotional than stories of their fathers that set apart differences in paternal styles, displays of masculinity and femininity, and gender role expectations.

Finally, sibling relationships played a role in each participants' perception of competition and cooperation in early childhood. While siblings were generally regarded as integral, participants' recollections also highlighted differences in gender expectations. Carl mentioned:

> I was the only boy . . . I had my own bedroom and . . . my sisters made me aware that there were different expectations and different chores, and although we all did dishes . . . from my perspective they didn't have to do things like cut the lawn or do manual labor.

In early home life settings, participants note stories of familiarity, privilege, nuclear family, and expectations of gender, socialization, and masculinity. As participants continued on with their stories, moments surfaced that highlighted the importance of interracial friendships and how these relayed deeper explorations of racial issues.

Racial identity. Participants frequently shared experiences of interracial friendships that cast them into different ways of understanding racial identity. Interracial friendships were often set within atypical moments outside of family interactions. Seven participants expressed tense and heartfelt memories of friends that were nonwhite and were treated differently. For example, Hans recounted a time when his white racial identity became more obvious:

> I knew I was white when we were driving into the city . . . I couldn't have been more than five or six maybe. I could see these little brown eyes and it was a little black boy and I was like, "Wow his skin is brown" and going, "Oh, how interesting."

On behalf of most participants (*N*=6), characters in their early stories that prompted an expansion of awareness seemed to be met with intrigue. Later, typically in grade school,

participants fostered a deeper understanding of racial and gender dynamics, sometimes at the adverse hands of other whites. Participants voiced anger, pain, and sadness. Carl shared:

> My neighbor across the street, he was Polish and Japanese and we hung out all the time. We'd get on the bus and we'd hear comments . . . and there was nobody different in the community except for him. I remember maybe in fifth or sixth grade . . . I remember him being called a "Jap," a "yellow Jap*."*

A rise in cultural understanding. Participants (*N*=7) consistently recounted experiences set in larger social contexts that occurred later in middle adolescence and early adulthood. These moments often took place during sociocultural zeitgeists. Examples included protests, demonstrations, and periods of personal and social disruption that furthered awareness and more understanding of identity. Dave captured this sentiment with this recollection:

> I remember going to the city . . . I remember seeing everything burned out from the riots and I was twenty years old. It was shocking, I remember being afraid and feeling like I was in a different country. It forced me to want to learn more about the riots and civil rights struggle and how it happened. I had no clue what was going on.

> For most participants, recounting their stories from early childhood to early adulthood cast many important characters, settings, and plot lines. In these stories, their own narratives continued to strengthen, and they moved away from expected, traditional family roles and influenced who they would become as adults.

The Middle

The middle section illuminates how participants sometimes thrust themselves into new and expansive experiences with others that in turn served as catalysts for second order change. These moments increased critical consciousness and reflection plus created a heightened sense of empathy. Participants were older, more aware, in less restrictive environments and poised for transformation. Two themes organize these experiences: expansion in new ways and those disruptive moments.

Expansion in new ways. In this theme, participants (*N*=7) routinely retold stories of early adulthood set in educational contexts that promoted open, divergent thinking and a rejection of prior family expectations. Personal freedom and independence enabled participants to think critically, and such settings promoted curiosity. Jim related the following experience:

> Classes were fine and then I switched, but switched about as far as I could from recreational therapy, which at the time was heavily female but there were quite a few guys as well and it was a big difference. I was out at the time [childhood house] and I started getting exposed to a wider range of thinking and started working with children with disabilities.

Similar experiences, when reviewed in context, played a pivotal role for all participants, and set up crucial moments in each of their stories. The rising action, characters, and settings were considered to be the most powerful experiences within their full narratives.

Those disruptive moments. Participants intensely expressed stories of atypical, sometimes unexpected and unsettling experiences that facilitated second order change. Most notably, long standing relationships or brief encounters highlighted the power of these life altering moments. Intense emotions (sadness, anger, humiliation) were felt as participants described these experiences as they related to race, gender, and personal beliefs. Mike recalled the heartbreak and shock of visiting the Native American reservations:

> We would see an intoxicated Native American, usually male laying on the side of the road as we drove by. So they walk off the reservation, buy the alcohol and start walking home after they get paid . . . and they start drinking heavily and don't make it back and they pass out . . . it was mind-boggling.

For Mike and the other participants, the power of contrast and exposure of cultures raised their awareness and were highly disruptive moments promoting personal change. Mike realized, to some degree, as a white man, the implications and weight of Native Americans' struggles were too large to go unnoticed.

Most participants (*N*=6) shared stories of critical transformation set within intimate, personal contexts. Carl mentioned a time in his father's specialty store when a customer entered and began conversing with his father. Carl recalled:

> There was this one conversation that just flooded me . . . this black man, probably as old as my dad in his early 60s and we're on one side of the counter and he's on the other side

and my dad's doing his usual thing of being proud of who you are and . . . this guy says,

"No one ever crossed the street on purpose just to make sure you had a bad day."

Carl continued, "That just hit me like a ton of bricks and I realized that it's every day . . . I just got knocked off, it was like an epiphany and I felt totally humbled." After the weight of these moments had settled in, reflection and insight were needed to help participants drive the messages to heart. Usually, these moments occurred sometime later in life and represented a transition to second order change.

The End

Participants engaged in a wide variety of activities, events, and ways of being as a result of their critical transformative experiences. These accounts detailed a life for them that, as a result of their disruptive moments, was forever changed. Evidence of participants' change is found along three personal and professional themes: reflection for meaning, changes in professional and personal identity, and sharing stories bring renewed purpose.

Reflection for meaning. All participants (*N*=7) expressed at length that reflecting on their stories is essential to personal growth. In some cases, participants expressed that critical moments had longevity, and that they derived meaning from them way beyond the actual event itself. Participants implied that continuous reflection was valuable, and that such reflection reminded them about their own white, male identities. For example, James grew up in the South and recalled a transformative experience about seeing Sambo dolls placed on peoples' lawns. James offered, "When I reflect back on it, twenty to twenty-five years later. . . I can see that meaning much more clearly then. Back then, I didn't really understand it."

Some participants took the meaning of their reflections further. Carl described, "I would say that in those moments they affect how I look at things . . . and that I can do something about it." For most participants, the disruption, pain, and anger of these intense moments seemed invaluable. Participants also shared examples of ongoing development in education and advocacy in related areas.

Changes in professional and personal identity. Participants offered examples of how their critical transformative experiences affected their teaching and professional identity. When

participants shared these stories, three areas of importance were noted. First, participants (*N*=7) shared examples that highlighted their perceptions of power, responsibility, and duty as counselor educators and supervisors. Most believed their experiences were valuable teaching and learning tools in the classroom. Dave offered, "I would say to students, to never give up, to show up and speak your truth . . . and acknowledge your limitations."

Second, participants (*N*=7) offered examples that demonstrated greater awareness of others' misuse of multicultural efforts in counseling. For example, Hans recalled, "We have our standards . . . but what are we doing? I just get this cultural arrogance from people a lot that I work with." This sentiment reflects a level of awareness and insight that was absent from participants' younger selves.

Third, participants expressed the consequences of being white and male in contemporary society. All participants (*N*=7) expressed negative outcomes for being white and male, and therefore bearing the outward characteristics of historical oppression were noted. Several spoke about being in the wrong place at the wrong time and experiencing an unexpected attack. Carl shared,

> I was having a conversation with a colleague and out of the blue she looked and pointed her finger at me and said, "you don't understand what you'll always be to me . . . you'll always be the man." I literally just slumped back in my seat because it felt like our interactions will always have a filter.

Sharing stories brings renewed purpose. "The empowering piece is okay because . . . my voice was heard." Mikel offered at the end of our second interview, and it captured the essence of this theme. All participants shared that the opportunity to explore their experiences and retell their stories as part of this study provided a sense of deeper appreciation for their experiences. Participants cried, raised their voices in anger, laughed, and sat quietly in reflection during our interviews. James recalled, "I was surprised how much the first interview stirred up in me . . . so I felt a little guilty at times . . . because it was a lot of self-indulgent reflection."

Most participants shared this research project helped facilitate more growth and awareness. This was noted as an unanticipated outcome that set-in motion a renewed sense of purpose. All seven participants expressed that looking into the past and connecting the dots in a more

meaningful way had helped them reinvigorate their commitment to multicultural efforts. For example, Hans mentioned:

> How I made those connections between . . . experiences as a child and now, how there are threads that drive my thinking in my adult life and how I am to teach, and I didn't make that connection before; plus, this brings back something for me professionally as to why I came back into the field in the first place.

The Author's Story

In the spirit of the findings generated by my participants, plus the narratives of D'Andrea (1999), Kiselica (1999), VanderGast (2008), and honoring Narrative's approach, I briefly offer my story as part of the results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My early home life was in many ways similar to that of the participants in this study. I grew up in Colorado. My parents raised my brother and me to be our best. While my brother and I were taught be nice to people, we were never taught to look within and understand the meaning of our own white culture.

My early recollections of race and gender were often at the expense of others. I remember the Rodney King beating and O. J. Simpson trial as moments that shaped my perceptions of race, gender, diversity, and power. I realized during the data collection phase that my stories of social disruption were similar to participants' recollections of the Washington D.C. riots and civil rights protests, only set in different decades. The participants of this study and I experienced, to varying levels, messages that informed us how to act, think, and be like most other white men. When we found ourselves thinking and acting differently than other traditional white males, our efforts were typically met with skepticism and confusion.

During my undergraduate training, I relished more autonomy and freedom. This is where I expanded my thinking and became more socially aware. Classes changed my perceptions of what I was and how others perceived me. Eventually, after a considerable amount of difficult personal self reflection and willingness to work, I became more aware of my identity and saw the world through a more accurate lens.

Discussion

The present investigation into the critical transformative experiences of white male counselor educators warrants a few points for discussion. First, how can all helping professionals explore the meaning of their experiences related to the identities they represent? This point relates back to research question one which investigated what stories of critical transformation related to multicultural growth in past, present, and future contexts that individuals retell. Although participants described positive experiences they also highlighted a lack of formal, structured opportunity to dive deeply into their past and uncover the meaning of the experiences that shaped them in the present and will continue to inform them in the future. In order for the counseling profession to expand, systematic exploration that promotes understanding and critical understanding may be warranted.

A second point for discussion focuses on the importance of examining the ongoing effects of privilege, oppression, and gender for those in helping professions. This point relates back primarily to research question three which examined the critical stories of transformation specifically related to race and gender. Participants spoke at length about the harmful effects of historically inferred power, privilege, and gender. At some point in participants' lives, they experienced an event that was emotionally and psychologically disruptive. McIntosh (1988) would assert they began to *unpack their knapsacks*. As a result, many experienced a different kind of discomfort as their awareness increased. Later on, participants were able to move past feelings of guilt, anger, and sadness. McIntosh asserted that privilege works to keep itself tacit. If privilege exists beyond one's awareness, then it continues on and reinforces various social inequalities. Once participants shifted their identities and became more multicultural, the unearned, unfair advantages of privilege and gender differences reduced (Kleiman et al., 2015). The findings demonstrate that identity and the intersection of privilege, gender, and oppression are always present and may impact the counseling relationship.

The final discussion point centers on participants' personhood and understanding its relevance in counseling. This point relates back to research question three (noted above) and research question two, which explored the common elements of critical transformative experiences, be they positive or negative. Often the counseling profession asks clients, students, and colleagues to share their experiences that impact the worldview of the counselor. All participants tied together transformative stories that transcended early, middle, and late personhood. While most participants in this study expressed stories that were initially negative, by working to understand their own

stories participants were able to transform those negatives into something positive. In line with research question two, participants' stories were not just positive or negative, but both. This point for discussion seems to align with the professional multicultural competence literature (Mindrup, Spray, & Lamberghini-West, 2011). In particular, helping professionals are called upon to look deep within themselves to uncover how their multiple identities impact the counseling process (ACA, *Code of Ethics*, 2014). After engaging in this reflective work, helping professionals, especially those with more privilege are more informed and able to serve clients.

Implications

Counselor educators plus counselor education programs all benefit from the implications of this research study. Perhaps the most notable takeaway from participants' narratives were the elements and conditions that were helpful for participants to retell their stories.

Counselor education programs. Participants expressed that education, specifically environments that were open, flexible, challenging, supportive, and nonjudgmental freed them to experience transformative events and were crucial to their multicultural growth. Participants also expressed in order to fully understand the impact of those experiences, reflection and the sharing of one's own experiences were necessary. This information indicates that counselor education programs promoting diversity, inclusion, and commitment toward multicultural efforts may want to continuously evaluate and understand how to facilitate, maintain, and promote inclusive environments for all students in all areas of training (Celinska & Swazo, 2016; Ratts, 2011).

Counselor educators and supervisors. A few implications are noteworthy for counselor educators and supervisors. Consistent with the extant literature several participants highlighted the need for white male counseling professionals to understand the meaning of their identities (Cook, Lusk, Miller, Dodie, & Salazar, 2012) and the power inferred in these positions. This theme emerged strongly during participants' stories of teaching, advising, and advocacy as counselor educators. The findings suggest that participants' continuous awareness of their historically inferred privilege, power, white identity, and gender identity remains an imperative for counselor

educators and counselor trainees and ongoing multicultural competence (Bartoli, Bentley-Edwards, Garcia, Michael, & Ervin, 2015).

Limitations

The limitations of this study are noted. Critical transformative experiences are thick, rich, and convoluted in nature and design. Although the present research has begun to uncover the elements of critical transformative experiences, more exploration is needed. Due to the possible social desirability of participants' responses, there was no way to guarantee participants were fully honest when sharing their stories. The lead researcher executed several trustworthiness measures to validate the data findings this study and reduce misrepresentations in the findings.

Areas for Further Research

This investigation is unique in that participants (white males) were able to share their personal stories of transformation set in various contexts related to place, time, and circumstance. Conducting research with other groups may augments the current findings and help counselor educators plus other helping professionals understand the role that critical transformative experiences play in identity development and multicultural competence.

The second area of further research warranted is a deeper understanding of critical transformative experiences. For some participants, three or four intense and pivotal moments in their lives constituted their second order change. For others, moments of transformation were higher in frequency and less intense in severity, therefore more insight into how people experience critical transformation and second order change is needed.

Conclusion

This research represents a first attempt to retell the narratives of white male counselor educators and their critical transformative experiences that relate to gender, race, and multicultural development. The present research reveals the importance of intersectionality combined with a willingness to experience psychological discomfort may aid in multicultural development. This

aligns with Özturgut's (2011) claim that until helping professionals within the multicultural sphere engage in the difficult personal work that is required, little meaningful advancement will be made. This study can serve as inspiration for other counselor educators and others to retell their stories, uncover their meanings and gain a greater sense of awareness with the intention to better serve clients.

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