Voices of Resilience: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of BIPOC Counseling Student Researchers' Journey

Alfonso L. Ferguson
Department of Counseling, Saybrook University

LaShawn M. Adams
Department of Counseling, Montclair State University

Olivia A. Fadul
Department of Individual, Family and Community Education, University of New Mexico

Estefanie Ceballo
Department of Counseling, Montclair State University

Shanta Pamphile
Department of Counseling, Montclair State University

Daylan Moore
Department of Counseling and Psychological Studies, Regent University

Sunanda M. Sharma
Department of Counseling, Montclair State University

Abstract

Research identity is a critical component of counselor education, yet little is known about the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) graduate counseling students engaged in academic research. This interpretive phenomenological analysis study explored how BIPOC counseling students navigate research training, and examined systemic barriers, motivations, and factors that influenced their development as researchers. Using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and semi-structured interviews, data were collected from 11 participants in CACREP-accredited programs. The analysis revealed four central themes and stages of researcher identity development: (a) Roots of inspiration, (b) Pathway to readiness, (c) Research in motion and (d) Grounded in growth. The results also suggested the need for more inclusive, equity centered research training in counselor education and offered recommendations for supporting novice counseling student researchers.

Keywords: research identity, BIPOC graduate students, counselor education, interpretive phenomenological analysis

Journal for Social Action in Counseling & Psychology, 17(1), 82-99. First Published: 8/6/2025
doi: 10.33043/47x3rc9z.

Voices of Resilience: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of BIPOC Counseling Student Researchers' Journey

Prominent counseling scholars have called for more multicultural and social justice-oriented scholarship and noted the importance of all counseling scholars, regardless of their racial and cultural identities, being more intentional about engaging in multicultural research (Hays, 2020; O'Hara et al., 2021; White et al., 2024). However, due to systemic barriers in academic research, scholars of color have faced enduring challenges with engaging in and publishing their research (Bellin et al., 2022; Buchanan et al., 2021). Presently, there is a dearth of literature that centralizes the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) counseling scholars' research training experiences. BIPOC counseling students have had disparate experiences in their programs, as compared to their White counterparts, due to their encounters with racism, microaggressions, and tokenism (Basma et al., 2019; Cisneros et al., 2021; Ferguson et al., 2023). In related fields, such inequitable experiences have included BIPOC students' challenges to access and engage in research (Park & Bahia, 2022). BIPOC counseling scholars are vital stakeholders who can advance the profession through their research; thus, it is imperative for their experiences engaging in research to be understood and documented in the counseling literature.

Literature Review

As part of the 20/20 initiative, all divisions that were linked with the American Counseling Association (ACA) agreed to a shared vision for the future of the profession and a notable focus was, "expanding and promoting the research base of professional counseling" (Kaplan et al., 2014, p. 371). Research was central to advancing the counseling profession and supporting community stakeholders to understand how counselors were distinct from related fields such as psychology, social work, and psychiatry. Therefore, it was essential that counselors developed evidence-based research and best practices to serve their diverse clients and communities (Kaplan et al., 2014). Furthermore, research was a vital tenet of professional identity for counselors at both the master's and doctoral levels (Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015a; Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015b; Limberg et al., 2020; Stevens & Bhat, 2024). Thus, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) included training standards to encourage both master's and doctoral counseling students to apply, conduct, and disseminate research (CACREP, 2023, 3.H).

BIPOC graduate students and faculty continue to face underrepresentation, discrimination, and exclusion in the counseling field (Basma, et al., 2021; Hannon et al., 2024), making their navigation of counselor education programs challenging. The counseling profession is historically rooted in White Eurocentric values, practices, and theories (Counselors for Social Justice [CSJ], 2020), and a history of ambivalence with respect to addressing racial injustice within the field (Hannon et al., 2024). For example, Eurocentric counseling models such as person-centered or cognitive behavioral therapy have historically emphasized individualism and neutrality, which may conflict with the collectivist or communal values held by many BIPOC students and clients (Haskins & Singh, 2015). Additionally, counselor training texts and case studies often default to White cultural norms, limiting BIPOC students' ability to see their identities reflected or affirmed in the curriculum (Pieterse et al., 2023a). In addition to the experiences of a cultural mismatch, researchers found that BIPOC counseling students often encountered disparities in their support during training. These included less access to mentorship, fewer opportunities for research involvement, and the reduced availability of practicum placements compared to their White peers (Ferguson et al., 2023; Haskins & Singh, 2015). Such inequities significantly influenced the evolution of both their clinical and research identity (RI) development. Thus, counseling scholars must seek to understand the experiences of BIPOC students and professionals to ensure their inclusivity and equity in counselor training, with special attention to their experiences as budding researchers.

BIPOC Counseling Students

Over the last 15 years, there has been a marked increase of BIPOC graduate students enrolling in CACREP-accredited programs (CACREP, 2023, 2024). While there is a growing amount of research emerging in counseling and psychology on BIPOC graduate counseling students (Basma et al., 2021; Brunsma et al., 2017; Hannon et al., 2024; Haskins & Singh, 2015; Kim et al., 2025; Pieterse et al., 2023 a, b) there continues to be a limited understanding of their experiences as researchers. Current research has emphasized the unique challenges BIPOC counseling students faced in the classroom due to a notable lack of efforts to increase diversity in counseling programs (Clark et al., 2025; Lopez-Perry et al., 2021). These challenges included navigating racial microaggressions from peers or faculty, being the only student of color in classroom spaces, and receiving lower-quality mentorship due to implicit biases (Basma et al., 2021; Brunsma et al., 2017). Such experiences often led to feelings of isolation and reduced academic confidence. While it is important to stress the challenges and resiliency of this population, to date, researchers in counselor education have not sufficiently explored the contributing factors related to the RI development of BIPOC counseling students.

Counselor educators and practitioners find direction from an array of scholarship in the academy as it informs academic training, clinical care, and community care in counseling (Gerig, 2018; Shure et al., 2020). However, research in the counseling field has traditionally lacked parity between Eurocentric frameworks and those from racially marginalized students, scholars, and clients (Gerig, 2018; Lopez-Perry et al., 2021). Racially marginalized counseling students and scholars have often encountered discrimination and limited faculty and institutional support, which directly undermined their counselor self-efficacy throughout their academic journey (Wade-Ball et al., 2024). In counselor education, BIPOC students have described being excluded from research teams or receiving fewer opportunities to publish compared to their White peers (Cisneros et al., 2021). Similarly, in a study of racialized and Indigenous graduate students in sociology, Park and Bahia (2022) found that participants were discouraged from pursuing culturally relevant research topics, with some faculty labeling their work as "too niche" or unsuitable for academic inquiry. Although their study was not situated in counselor education, the results reflected broader patterns of exclusion that BIPOC students face across disciplines. Accordingly, supporting BIPOC counseling students can bring more racial representation to scholarship and practice within the field (Hannon et al., 2024; Lopez-Perry et al., 2021).

There have long been challenges for students in adopting a RI in counselor education, as it differs significantly from the developmental focus of cultivating a clinical identity during master's level training (Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015a; Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015b; Stevens & Bhat, 2024). RI is guided by one's sociocultural identities, where one comes from, and how these factors impact one's research interests (Pontretto & Grieger, 1999) yet, there is a dearth of research that examines the lived experiences, the research interests, and the RI development of BIPOC counseling student researchers.

RI research scholars have noted the importance of attending to RI development when counseling students were in their master's programs, particularly given the negative perceptions students reported regarding research (Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015a; Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015b; Limberg et al., 2020; Stevens & Bhat, 2024). Jorgensen and Duncan (2015b) proposed a developmental model for master's students' RI which included three stages: (a) stagnation, (b) negotiation, and (c) stabilization. Students move through the stages (a) rejecting the idea of engaging in research to (b) transitioning to learning to appreciate and integrate research into their clinical roles, and finally (c) feeling more dedicated and recognizing the broader conceptualization of research (Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015b). These stages demonstrate that RI development occurs on a continuum and the goal is to integrate RI into professional counselor identity. However, this model was based primarily on White student samples, with little attention to how training disparities affect BIPOC students' RI development.

Additional studies (Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015a; Stevens & Bhat, 2024) supported the observation that achieving a stable RI remained a challenge for counseling students at both master's and doctoral levels. In their quantitative study, Stevens and Bhat (2024) surveyed 189 master's level counseling students and published results

that confirmed Jorgensen and Duncan (2015a, b) findings, which showed lower rates of counseling student preparedness and perceived competency to conduct research. Similarly, in several studies about counseling doctoral students' RI, scholars found that doctoral students identified more strongly as practitioners than researchers, and they struggled to find their researcher voice and develop research self-efficacy (Borders et al., 2020; Lamar & Helm, 2017; Lamar et al., 2019; Limberg et al., 2020). While these studies show the importance of cultivating RI and the authors recommended strategies like research mentorship and tailoring counseling curriculum to infuse more research (Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015a; Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015b; Lamar & Helm, 2017; Limberg et al, 2020; Stevens & Bhat, 2024), they did not reveal how this process of RI development may look for BIPOC counseling students.

Counseling RI studies have been predominantly conducted with samples of White, female doctoral and master's students (Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015a; Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015b; Limberg et al., 2020; Stevens & Bhat, 2024). These samples are not representative of the experiences of BIPOC students who may hold other layered minoritized and intersecting identities and who navigate the counseling profession differently than their White counterparts. Similar to counselor education, the research enterprise operates in a system shaped by complex power dynamics. These dynamics influence the composition of research teams, the types of questions pursued, the content deemed worthy of publication, and the journals that determine what gets disseminated (O'Hara et al., 2021). To foster meaningful transformation and greater inclusivity for diverse scholars, counselor educators and scholars must approach research training as a systemic process, that is, one that requires critical reflection, intentional restructuring, and equity-centered practices. Therefore, this study aimed to address a gap in counselor education and supervision by investigating and better understanding the experiences of BIPOC students who engage in research. Our central research question was, *what are the lived experiences of BIPOC counseling students involved in academic research?*

Methodology

We interpreted the lived experiences of BIPOC counseling student researchers by utilizing Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis (IPA). By integrating CRT and IPA, we examined the nuanced realities of BIPOC counseling student researchers and the broader socio-political contexts that impacted their experiences. CRT provided a lens through which to examine and challenge the systemic structures of power, privilege, and racism that shape the academic and professional landscapes for these students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hiraldo, 2010). Meanwhile, IPA allowed for an in-depth exploration of their subjective experiences, highlighting the essence of participants lived experiences as they reconcile their racial and ethnic identity while they cultivated their counseling RI. Together, this dual methodological approach provided a robust framework for understanding the intersectionality of race, identity, and systemic barriers ultimately centering and amplifying the voices of BIPOC counseling student researchers.

Critical Race Theory

CRT centralizes the perspectives and experiences of BIPOC individuals through counter-storytelling (Delgado, 1995). CRT originated in the mid-1970s and expanded as an intellectual theoretical framework that examines how race and racism intersect with politics, law and culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The key tenets of CRT include acknowledging intersectionality, elevating counter-narratives of marginalized communities, showcasing race as a social construct and recognizing intersectionality as a layer of oppression. The application of CRT contextualizes the research experience of BIPOC graduate students within the larger historical, cultural, and social frameworks of higher education institutions in the United States. Moreover, integrating CRT into this study helped to illuminate systemic barriers that limited BIPOC graduate students' access to opportunities to conduct research and resources in CACREP-accredited counseling programs.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

We employed IPA as the methodologic approach in this study, which is grounded in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Moustakas, 1994). IPA emphasizes a deep examination of personal lived experiences (Smith et al., 2022). The core aim for IPA is to explore how individuals make sense of their experience. Moreover, IPA engages both the researcher and participant in an active process of meaning-making (Smith et al., 2022). Finally, the idiographic nature of IPA is to thoroughly analyze each participant's experience individually before considering broader patterns across cases (Smith et al., 2022).

Researcher Positionality

All authors of this article were members of the Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ) Research Committee. The research team was composed of an interethnic and multiracial group of doctoral students and counseling professionals, all of whom identified as BIPOC counselor educators and practitioners. Each author brought unique research interests centered on serving marginalized communities and challenging systems of oppression. The shared cultural and professional identities between the researchers and participants contributed to the process of double hermeneutics, a foundational element of IPA, wherein the researchers interpret how participants make meaning of their experiences (Smith et al., 2022).

The first author is an Afro-Caribbean Black male immigrant and full-time counselor educator who leads several research teams focused on BIPOC counseling issues. The second author is an African American female and counselor educator whose work amplifies the voices of marginalized populations across the counseling profession. The third author is a second-generation Asian American female and doctoral student with a strong commitment to research that supports communities affected by ableism and other forms of marginalization. The fourth author is a Latinx female and doctoral candidate whose research centers the experiences of gender and sexual orientation minorities. The fifth author is an Afro-Caribbean female, counselor educator, and practicing counselor whose scholarship spans spirituality, gender and sexual orientation, and the well-being of historically marginalized communities. The sixth author is a Black male counselor, doctoral candidate, and adjunct professor serving in various counseling programs. The final author is an Asian American female and doctoral candidate with research interests that include adoption-related microaggressions, clinical supervision, and the advancement of BIPOC counselor education.

Recruitment and Data Collection

We conducted recruitment through the distribution of an Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved flyer shared across counseling networks, including the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC), CSJ, and the Counselor Education and Supervision Network Listserv (CESNET-L). The authors also disseminated recruitment materials through their professional networks, social media platforms, and in their respective communities. Individuals who expressed interest in the study received an IRB-approved informed consent form outlining the study's purpose, objectives, and procedures. Respondents were informed that the study aimed to explore the lived experiences of BIPOC graduate researchers enrolled in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. They also were made aware of potential risks, including possible breaches of confidentiality and emotional or psychological discomfort when responding to questions. Participants were provided with mental health resources to support them in the event they experienced emotional distress during or after the interview process. They were informed that, although no monetary incentives would be provided, the benefits of participation included contributing to the existing literature, sharing about their lived experiences, and gaining insight into the research process from a participant perspective. Criterion and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

Prospective respondents completed a demographic questionnaire through SurveyMonkey to confirm their eligibility for the study. Eligible participants who agreed to take part in the study completed a signed informed consent form prior to participating in a semi-structured 60-to-90-minute recorded interview focused on their

experiences as counseling student researchers of color. All interviews were conducted virtually on a secure passcode protected and HIPAA-compliant video conferencing platform. After each interview was completed, the recording was transcribed by Temi, a HIPAA-compliant third-party transcription service. The transcripts were then reviewed for accuracy and uploaded to Dedoose, a secure, password-protected online database.

Researcher Interview Training. All the researchers completed a 1-hour interview training led by the first author. The training covered the interview protocol developed by the first three authors, techniques for facilitating semi-structured interviews, how to ask open ended questions, and how to foster a safe environment. The training also included guidance on safety assessment, ensuring confidentiality, and crisis intervention if participants became emotionally distressed. All interviews were reviewed and confirmed by the first author to determine that they were conducted as intended. Following the initial analysis and review of the transcripts, each participant was invited to engage in member checking via email (McKim, 2023).

Participants

We interviewed and collected data from a total of 11 participants. This number of respondents closely aligns with the recommended sample sizes of traditional IPA studies (Smith et al., 2022) before saturation was reached (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The inclusion criteria for this study were master's and/or doctoral students enrolled in CACREP-accredited programs, with a research experience of a minimum of six months. Participants had to be proficient in the English language and identify as adults (18 years or older). The respondents also needed to self-identify as a BIPOC. Confidentiality was prioritized throughout the study. Participants selected pseudonyms, and all transcripts and associated materials were de-identified and securely stored. Respondents represented a range of educational levels, with 81.8% identifying as doctoral students and 18.2% as master's students. The sample was racially and ethnically diverse: 45.5% identified as African American, 18.2% as Asian Indian, and the remaining participants identified as African-Nigerian (9.1%), Middle Eastern–Arab (9.1%), Asian (9.1%), and Biracial (9.1%). In addition, participants' gender expression included 27.3% males and 72.7% females. Participants also reported varying levels of research experience, ranging from six months to six years. See Table 1 for additional participant details.

Data Analysis

As stated earlier, we employed IPA guided by CRT to explore the lived experience of BIPOC graduate counseling student researchers. The use of IPA allowed for an in-depth exploration of individuals' experiences, while CRT provided a framework to critically examine how systems of race, power, and oppression shaped participants' experiences. To start, the first author who was trained and had extensive experience in qualitative research, facilitated a research team orientation and training on IPA and data analysis software. The qualitative data analysis software Dedoose was used to manage, organize, and analyze the data. All team members engaged in a 1-hour training led by the first author and was provided additional dedoose instructional videos to ensure consistency and alignment when engaged in the data analysis. The first, second, and third author reviewed all coded interviews to ensure consistency.

Following the completion of data collection, the research team adhered to the IPA data analysis protocol (Smith et al., 2022). Before engaging in the analysis process selected research team members were assigned to dyadic teams and specific interviews. Each dyad was responsible for reviewing and coding at least 2 interviews. Team members began by independently reviewing initial interviews and compiling exploratory notes. The exploratory notes focused on three key domains, that is descriptive (what the participant said), linguistic (how it was said), and conceptual observations, that is, the underlying meaning and assumptions (Smith et al., 2022). This inductive process allowed the team to remain grounded in participants' narrative while identifying nuanced expressions of their experience.

Following the exploratory notes phases, research team members collectively worked to identify emergent themes which were then clustered to capture the essence of participants lived experience (Smith et al., 2022).

These themes were interpreted with a critical attention to the sociopolitical context and racialized realities of graduate counseling student researchers.

After creating exploratory notes and establishing initial codes, the dyad partners met to compare their coding decisions and refine emergent themes. This process supported reflexivity and fostered collaboration. Throughout the data analysis process the full research team met regularly to synthesize results, identify superordinate or experiential themes across all participants (Smith et al., 2022). To ensure rigor, bracketing was practiced individually and collectively (Moustakas, 1994). Team members engaged in reflective journaling, dyadic processing, and full-group discussions to identify and manage personal biases, fostering openness to participants' perspectives. When disagreements emerged, they were brought to the full team for discussion, allowing for collective processing and the development of shared understanding. The final phase of analysis involved merging themes across all the interviews to construct a comprehensive and critically informed understanding of the phenomenon. Through sustained dialogue, iterative coding, and the application of a CRT framework, the team produced a rich, layered interpretation of the research experiences of BIPOC graduate counseling students.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, the team engaged in bracketing throughout the process (Moustakas, 1994), intentionally setting aside preconceived assumptions to enhance openness and minimize bias. The researchers practiced both individual and group bracketing, which included journaling and processing thoughts and feelings during dyadic meetings as well as in larger team discussions. The team's diversity provided varied perspectives, strengthening the validity of the study's results. Therein, throughout each phase of the research process, the team openly discussed potential biases. As a research team, we consistently shared our feelings, thoughts, and concerns related to the data. This ongoing dialogue fostered a collective learning experience and a transformative process, as we continuously prioritized the safety and well-being of participants while remaining focused on addressing the guiding research question. Triangulation through multiple researchers and sources ensured transparency and accuracy in analyzing and reporting the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

We also incorporated member checking with the participants as a strategy to enhance trustworthiness (McKim, 2023). This process took place through virtual interactions, during which participants received executive summaries via email. These summaries included a description of the data analysis process and the preliminary emerging key themes. Participants were invited to offer critiques, feedback, note any incongruences, or provide additional insights via email or by scheduling a follow-up interview. Several participants responded acknowledging their gratitude for seeing the preliminary findings, while others did not respond to our outreach. No respondent elected to participate in a second interview.

Results

Our results illuminate the themes that participants identified as central to their development as emerging researchers. Through comprehensive analysis of the lived experiences of the BIPOC counseling students, four core themes emerged in response to the research question: (a) Roots of inspiration, (b) Pathway to readiness, (c) Research in motion and (d) Grounded in growth. Together, these results offer a nuanced understanding of how BIPOC students navigate the complexities of academic research engagement.

Roots of Inspiration

The first theme was roots of inspiration. This theme is described as the lived experiences, individuals, places or things that served as motivating factors for participants' engagement in research. The roots of this theme are central to participants cultivating their RI as BIPOC counseling students. Participants drew attention to early academic experiences as foundational to their research aspirations. Interviewees discussed their interest in research emerged from a blend of curiosity, personal development, and a commitment to enacting meaningful change. For many participants, their research inspiration was deeply rooted in their identities as BIPOC counseling

students. Many respondents expressed a strong interest to address gaps and limitations of representation in the counseling research, contribute to their communities, and challenge systemic inequities that exist. For instance, Kayla (African American, Master's Student), reflected on representation in the counseling research field served as a source of inspiration. Kayla stated:

> Being able to connect with Black professionals and seeing others who look like me succeed helps me believe that I can get there too...When I interviewed people who were minorities or looked like me, I felt an even deeper motivation—'Oh my gosh, yes, I want to do it!

Kayla's reflections were one of many that underscored how roots inspiration can be both personal and socially driven, motivating participants to explore research as a means of shaping the future. Similarly, Shawn, (Nigerian, Doctoral Student) shared, "I wasn't planning to be a researcher... I always wanted to be a counselor. I think I realized that studying research was in my path. It helped me build my spoken English skills, written skills... I discovered myself." Similarly, Jasmine, (African American, Doctoral Student), echoed this sentiment in her statement "Trying to find the unknown answers to questions... If I can help one person at a time, that will help with the community in the larger population." Similarly, Dakota (African American, Doctoral Student) also reflected on how her research was motivated by a commitment to increase representation and safety in the mental health field:

> I mean, Black women make up what, definitely less than 10% of education. So when we're talking about counseling in the mental health field, it's not many Black people anyway. So understanding how that's important for our community, and what am I gonna do to give back... [I am] just making sure we are creating more people that look like us in the field so we can have better, safer mental health experiences.

Participants' reflections illustrated that roots of inspiration can be connected to intellectual curiosity, self-discovery, identity affirmation, and the pursuit of knowledge as a form of advocacy. For these BIPOC counseling students, research becomes a pathway for personal empowerment and social change, strengthening their commitment to academic scholarship.

Pathways to Readiness

All participants reflected on their transition from inspiration to preparing to engage in research. They described pathways to readiness as acquiring knowledge, developing practical skills, and cultivating the mindset necessary for scholarly engagement. For many of them, pathways to readiness included both intellectual and psychological preparations, which supported them in approaching research with confidence and resilience. Heer, (Asian Indian, Master's Student) for example, discussed how her readiness involved not only developing research knowledge and skills, but also learning how to care for herself in the process:

> Definitely academically comes up as doing review of literature on the topic and knowing what kind of research or design I want to use. If I don't know it well, first trying to fill that gap. And then I would say physically, I started to understand that initially I was so inspired to do research, and I was like, this is something I have to do. That it became this process where I was doing too much without noticing my health. And then through the help of a therapist, an expressive therapist, who told me how to come back to my body and notice the signs of exhaustion. I used to work on these remote research projects two to three at a time. Sitting on my laptop, just like she told me how to notice the dryness of my eyes or how there is a pain in my shoulder. I feel like I had to then prepare how to set boundaries and how to take care of myself. So I think physically and mentally, that was the whole process.

Heer's reflection, like those of many participants, illustrated how pathways to readiness often required attending simultaneously to academic preparedness and to one's mental and physical well-being, pointing out the dual demands of research socialization.

Intellectual Preparation

The next sub-theme, intellectual preparation, was viewed as the process of recognizing gaps in the literature and identifying the areas participants would like to contribute to academic research. While many students embraced intellectual preparation with enthusiasm, others experienced tension between the expectations of research and their personal academic trajectories. This dissonance shed light on the varied ways participants navigated intellectual growth. Shawn described how the process of intellectual preparation sometimes created tension, as engaging deeply with research changed the way he interpreted information. Shawn shared,

> One thing that always helped me is to read... It informs you about challenges, about people's experiences in the articles or posts, and what is really going on. I've always studied widely. Not just counseling. I studied science and other fields to understand everything that is going on before embarking on any research. Before I identify a problem, I'm able to defend that problem.

While this broad knowledge base strengthened his research confidence, it also created moments of tension when navigating interdisciplinary perspectives and defending research positions.

Conversely, some participants found that intellectual preparation created a sense of pressure, as they sought to balance research expectations with other academic and professional responsibilities. Giselle (African American, Doctoral Student), however, emphasized how intellectual preparation extended beyond general research skills, allowing her to engage meaningfully with issues relevant to African American mental health: "I'm always reading... Anything dealing with how our mental health is impacted by racism, I'm glued to it." For Giselle, reading served as both an academic tool and a deeply personal bridge to broader issues of systemic oppression and resilience in research. Her experience shows that intellectual preparation extends beyond mastering techniques and into intentionally anchoring one's scholarship in lived experiences and the realities of systemic injustice.

Another student, Vedmak (African American, Doctoral Student), highlighted his excitement drove his intellectual preparation, he stated,

> I think it's the enthusiasm for it.. I always tease— you know a researcher when they see an article and immediately start highlighting things on the reference page because they go, 'Oh, I wanna follow up on that, that's a good point.'"

This proactive approach to intellectual engagement solidified participants' identities as emerging scholars, equipping them with the tools to contribute meaningfully to academic discourse.

Psychological Preparation

Another sub-theme of pathway to readiness was psychological preparation. Psychological preparation was seen as the incorporation of mental and emotional practices to help initiate the research experience. Participants experienced psychological preparation differently, while some struggled with motivation and belonging, others saw it as an opportunity to build endurance in academia. Research, particularly for BIPOC students, often involved navigating uncertainty, systemic barriers, and the mental and emotional demands of academic inquiry.

For instance, Mariam (Arab, Doctoral Student) described the necessity of setting realistic expectations. She reported: "I know research isn't my absolute top, but I value it. Setting realistic expectations helps, this is a marathon, not a sprint." This participant's experience brought to the forefront that research preparation involves acquiring technical skills, managing expectations, and maintaining long-term engagement in academia, especially for students navigating intersecting academic and cultural pressures. For some, psychological preparation was empowering, providing the mental fortitude to persist. Others, however, described moments of uncertainty, where

the demands of research made them question their place in academia. For example, Dallas (Biracial, Doctoral Student) stated:

> "When it comes to research, it was really intimidating for me and awkward. And so, I did reach out to the people that I trusted first… then was like, okay, this is, this is good… I'm validated. I am good enough, I can do this. moving through my minor stuff about myself, first helped me to seek mentorship"

Dallas' reflection showcased the emotional labor of navigating underrepresented identities in research spaces. This process of adaptation is crucial in developing a sense of belonging in research spaces. For participants in this study, developing mental fortitude allowed them to persist despite challenges, reinforcing their commitment to research.

The combination of intellectual and psychological preparation, rooted in the initial stages of research inspiration laid the groundwork for participants' ability to fully engage in research. This process solidified their understanding of research and empowered them to transition into the next phase of the researcher identity development.

Research in Motion

All participants described the uniqueness of being a BIPOC person actively engaging in research. In this stage, they advanced their initial inspiration to practical application, confronting the challenges of conducting research in real-world settings and deepening their rooted identities as researchers. This stage moves beyond theoretical learning and skill acquisition, requiring students to actively design, conduct, and analyze research in structured academic settings. The shift from inspiration to practice marked a defining moment in their researcher identity and reinforced the significance of initiative, adaptability, and perseverance in the research process.

For example, Jessica (Asian, Doctoral Student) reflected on this transition, stating, "I take charge of my own learning by researching existing literature and seeking guidance from my advisor, even when I feel limited in knowledge or tools." Her experience affirmed the necessity of self-advocacy in gaining research opportunities and securing mentorship. Similarly, Mariam (Middle Eastern, Doctoral Student) emphasized intentionality in selecting research projects, noting, "Some people take any opportunity just to gain experience, even if the topic doesn't interest them, but I wanted to be intentional. I sought research projects that aligned with my interests and allowed me to learn from mentors I admired."

Respondents also encountered challenges in asserting themselves in research spaces. Navigating power dynamics, particularly when taking on leadership roles, required both confidence and persistence. Sam (Asian Indian, Doctoral Student), who served as a principal investigator, described these complexities: "As the only person of color on my research team, I had to assert my leadership while navigating power struggles with my supervisor, whose dominant approach led to difficult but constructive discussions." This experience illustrated how research in motion often demanded more than intellectual readiness, it required participants to advocate for their contributions and establish their legitimacy in academic settings.

However, the transition into active research had its challenges. Respondents engaged in an ongoing process of refining their technical skills, revisiting their research approaches, and contributing to scholarly knowledge. Shawn reflected on the process of refining research skills and contributing to the field, stating,

> I want to revalidate it, present it, and publish it. Right now, I'm analyzing data to improve the study's relevance. Engaging with peers helps identify skill gaps, refine work, and contribute to knowledge. Publishing allows others to build on it, research is bittersweet because there's always room for improvement, but that's how growth happens.

His reflection demonstrated how the research process is iterative, requiring ongoing reassessment, skill development, and an awareness of one's contribution to the academic community.

Participants also emphasized the importance of adaptability and persistence when confronting the unpredictable nature of research. Mariam explained, "Research isn't always neat; it's messy. You have to be flexible, learn how to adapt when things don't go as planned, and keep pushing forward. That's when you really grow as a researcher." This insight exemplified that research in motion is all encompassing, that is, executing a study, setbacks, refining approaches, and learning through experience.

Ultimately, engaging in research deepened participants' sense of their researcher identity, reinforcing their confidence and commitment to scholarly inquiry. This phase marked the moment when research ceased to be an abstract concept and became a lived reality, requiring both intellectual and psychological resilience. As students progressed, the lessons learned in this phase enhanced their growth as budding researchers, signaling a shift toward increased confidence and independence in their scholarly work.

Grounded in Growth

Many of the respondents described reaching a level of research self-efficacy in their development. This final theme of grounded in growth reflected participants' growth mindset in the research experience, highlighting their belief in their abilities as scholars, and their abilities to navigate obstacles and overcome both personal and systemic challenges. As students advanced in their research journey, many began to see themselves as active agents in their research capable of asserting their knowledge within the academic community. Shawn's reflection, "At first, I wasn't sure if I belonged in research. But with each study, my confidence grew," encapsulated the trajectory of moving from self-doubt to a growing sense of competence and research identity. Similarly, Kayla's perspective further emphasized this evolving growth:

> "I think with research, I love being able to kind of dive right in and being able to see those numbers come to life… I think that's something that I'm really passionate about. I love being able to connect with other people or like being able to see it from each perspective of this is how research was in the past and how we are presently and what are the things that we can change? What are the things that we can influence?"

Kayla's reflection showcased the enthusiasm and passion that informed her research journey. Feelings of empowerment supported respondents to continue to assert their belonging in research spaces, overcome obstacles, and solidify their identities as researchers. Their experiences growing in their RI was a dynamic, fluctuating process that intertwined with their earlier stages of roots of inspiration and research in motion. The non-linear experience of RI development reveals the complexity of their identities as BIPOC counseling student researchers was shaped by ongoing learning, mentorship, and personal reflection.

Discussion

This study explored how the racial and ethnic identities of counseling student researchers influenced their RI development, expanding on existing literature and calling attention to the disparities in counselor education for students of color (Basma et al., 2021; Park & Bahia, 2022; Pieterse et al., 2023b). Results revealed the importance of BIPOC graduate researchers' lived experiences and emphasized that counselor education honor the pluralistic and diverse perspectives these researchers bring to counseling education and supervision. Moreover, this study highlighted a transformative process that affirms identity, cultivates voices, and fosters a sense of purpose.

Cultivating BIPOC Counseling Student Researcher Identity

Like prior research, our participants described a non-linear journey, where their progression as researchers oscillated between stages of inspiration, preparation, and application (Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015a; Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015b; Stevens & Bhat, 2024). This process reflected the dynamic nature of developing RI, shaped by both personal and academic experiences (Pontretto & Grieger, 1999). Participants shared that their research aspirations were often ignited by a desire to address gaps in representation and contribute to their communities.

This motivation underscored the powerful intersection of racial identity and scholarly engagement, and aligned with Pontretto and Grieger (1999) assertion that RI is deeply shaped by sociocultural backgrounds. Our results suggested that RI development was not just a professional shift but also a personal evolution, deeply intertwined with a sense of purpose and commitment to social justice.

Pathway to readiness emerged as a central theme in participants' narratives, illuminating the psychological and intellectual preparation necessary for BIPOC counseling students to meaningfully engage in research. Participants frequently spoke to the mental and emotional toll of navigating the research process, noting that the challenges they encountered extended beyond individual effort. For instance, a few participants described psychological and emotional distress as a barrier to them engaging in academic research and choosing to distance themselves despite the consequential impact on their career development. These difficulties were often rooted in broader systemic inequities in academia that have historically marginalized BIPOC voices and contributions (Buchanan et al., 2021). While earlier research noted the growing population of racial and ethnic minority counseling students (Basma et al., 2021; Brunsma et al., 2017; Hannon et al., 2024; Haskins & Singh, 2015; Kim et al., 2025; Pieterse et al., 2023 a, b) and the unique challenges BIPOC students may experience in the classroom (Clark et al., 2025; Lopez-Perry et al., 2021), many researchers have yet to explore the emotional toll experienced by BIPOC counseling student researchers as they engage in the research process. Respondents described the emotional burden of navigating layered inequities in academia and emphasized strategies like boundary-setting, pacing, and self-care to protect their well-being. These practices were crucial for managing pressures in a system not designed to support them. Consistent with Wade-Ball et al's., (2024) findings, over time, many participants gradually developed greater stability and self-efficacy as they became more comfortable and engaged in their roles as researchers.

Similar to Shure et al., 2020, our results reinforced the importance of addressing the systemic barriers that disproportionately impact BIPOC students in academia. To advance structural change in the counseling profession, Bayne et al. (2024) emphasized the critical role of White counselor educators in demonstrating allyship towards BIPOC students and faculty. One way that White allies can display their solidarity is to leverage their racial privilege and collaborate and empower budding BIPOC scholars to lead research inquiries, as opposed to taking the lead themselves (Bayne et al., 2024). Allyship is particularly important given the scarcity of scholarship examining racially minoritized communities across academic disciplines, and this lack of representation in the literature affects the pipeline of BIPOC scholars who produce and publish research (Buchanan et al., 2021). Thus, it is imperative that counselor educators and research supervisors ensure they are using equitable practices in their research training (O'Hara et al., 2021) to bolster the RI for BIPOC students.

Participants reflections about their emotional and systemic challenges reflected the compounding effects of multiple marginalized identities, not just racial identity alone. Although our study did not explicitly examine intersectionality during data collection and analysis, respondents' descriptions of their emotional burden, systemic exclusion, and self-preservation revealed the broader impact of layered marginalization. While Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality functions as a standalone framework, it also aligns closely with a broader emphasis on the interconnectedness of social identities and systems of oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Future research should actively explore how gendered and class-based dynamics further complicate BIPOC students' access to and engagement with research opportunities in counselor education.

Implications For Counselor Education and Research

Several key implications emerged from this study to guide counselor educators in their efforts to empower and uplift novice researchers during the early stages of their academic journey. It is imperative for counselor educators to develop a research culture that recognizes and addresses the specific needs of BIPOC researchers as they cultivate a RI. This includes curating intentional spaces for BIPOC counseling students' access to research opportunities, tending to the multifaceted need of students with intersectional marginalized identities,

encouraging emotional expression, and fostering a sense of community. In alignment with existing research, many participants in this study emphasized the critical role of mentorship in their development (Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015a; Jorgensen & Duncan, 2015b; Limberg et al., 2020; Stevens & Bhat, 2024).

Counselor education programs should consider implementing an interphase peer mentorship program, pairing advanced student researchers with novices to support both skill development and community building. Such programs can offer BIPOC counseling student researchers' meaningful opportunities for fostering fellowship and connection. Additionally, cultivating an environment that encourages self-directed learning is essential. By actively seeking out resources and growth opportunities, novice researchers can strengthen their researcher identities and confidence.

In addition to program-level efforts, professional organizations such as ACA, ACES, and CSJ can deepen their support for BIPOC student researchers through intentional pipeline investments, including early-stage research funding, travel scholarships, and professional development grants tailored. Our results revealed the need for identity-affirming communities and structural support. Sustaining and expanding these efforts, alongside a commitment to institutional accountability, may help reduce BIPOC students' inequities in research access, visibility, and authorship. This aligns with broader critiques in counselor education that challenge the profession's complicity in upholding systemic barriers such as Whiteness in research mentorship, gatekeeping in publishing, and a lack of structural responses to racialized exclusion (Counselors for Social Justice, 2020; Wilcox et al., 2022). Addressing these barriers requires moving beyond individual-level interventions toward systemic transformation in research training, authorship practices, and leadership structures across the profession.

Future research examining how systemic challenges shape RI development for BIPOC counseling students could benefit the profession, by ensuring a more diverse array of research topics that are multicultural in nature (O'Hara et al., 2021) and that focus on BIPOC researchers themselves. It is vital that future studies explore strategies of counselor educators to support, mentor, and enhance the RI development of BIPOC counseling student researchers. Future research also should examine how intersecting systems of oppression, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism, shape this developmental process. Understanding how these layered identities influence access, mentorship, and belonging can further inform equitable practices in counselor education. Additionally, there is limited research focused on BIPOC international student researchers in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. Expanding this area of research could illuminate their distinct needs and assist counseling programs to identify more effective ways to support these students.

Limitations

As is common in qualitative research, the use of a small, purposefully selected participant pool and despite the rigor applied throughout the research process, may limit the generalizability of our results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Furthermore, participants represented specific racial and ethnic identities, which may not encompass the full spectrum of experiences among BIPOC counseling student researchers. In addition, the majority of participants were located in the South, Southwest, and Midwest regions of the United States, potentially limiting the applicability of the findings to those in other geographic areas.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our study amplifies the voices and experience of BIPOC counseling student researchers, contributing to the ongoing discourse on social action-oriented scholarship in counselor education. Our study also affirmed the need for more intentional, equity-focused approaches to research training that validate and uplift the contributions of BIPOC scholars. Addressing these disparities is necessary for supporting the success of BIPOC counseling students and advancing the counseling profession to truly reflect the diverse society we serve.

Author Note

This research was partially funded by the CSJ Research Grant fund. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Alfonso L. Ferguson, Department of Counseling, Saybrook University, 55 W Eureka Street. Pasadena, CA. 91103 Email: Aferguson2@saybrook.edu

Author ORCID iDs

Alfonso L. Ferguson: Aferguson2@saybrook.edu; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4363-8656
LaShawn M. Adams: Adamsl8@montclair.edu; https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7578-7652
Olivia A. Fadul: Ofadul@unm.edu; https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1819-5037
Estefanie Ceballo: Ceballoe1@montclair.edu; https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3657-5299
Shanta Pamphile: Pamphiles@montclair.edu; https://orcid.org/0009-0004-4001-5626
Daylan Moore: daylmoo@mail.regent.edu; https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2377-7330
Sunanda M. Sharma: Sharmas1@montclair.edu; https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2005-9327

Declaration of Interest Statement

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose at this time.

References

Basma, D., DeDiego, A. C., & Dafoe, E. (2021). Examining wellness, burnout, and discrimination among BIPOC counseling students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, *49*(2), 74 - 86. https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12207

Bayne, H., Page, N., Harrichand, J., & Neuer Colburn, A. (2024). Pathways to allyship in counselor education and counseling psychology: A model for white ally development. *Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology*, *16*(2), 22–42. https://doi.org/10.33043/8ycba9236c

Bellin, Z., Sappio, E., Castillo, Y., Flinn, R., Srisuppak, D., Miller, K., & Ross, A. (2023). Counseling research as caring: Lessons from Group Contemplative Practice. *Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology*, *14*(2), 64 -80. https://doi.org/10.33043/JSACP.14.2.64-80

Borders, L.D., Wester, K.L., & Driscoll, K.H. (2020). Research development of doctoral students: Supports and barriers across time. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, *59*(4), 297-315. https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12190

Brunsma, D. L., Embrick, D. G., & Shin, J. H. (2017). Graduate students of color: Race, racism, and mentoring in the white waters of academia. *Sociology of Race and* Ethnicity, *3*(1), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649216681565

Buchanan, N.T, Perez, M., Prinstein, M.J., &Thurston, I.B. (2021). Upending racism in psychological science: Strategies to change how science is conducted, reported, reviewed and disseminated. *American Psychologist, 76* (7), 1097-1112. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000905

Cisneros, D., Anandavalli, S., Brown, E.M., Whitman, J.S., & Chaney, M.P. (2021). Anti-racist mentorship: A multicultural and social justice approach to mentoring students identifying as Black, Indigenous, and persons of color in counselor education. *Journal of Counselor Leadership and Advocacy*, *10*(1), 63-75. https://doi.org/10.1080/2326716X.2022.216246 2

Clark, M., Kempf, J., Paul, D., Sheikh, S., Gleason, B., & Odrunia, K. (2025). Recruitment and retention of minoritized students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, *64*(2), 196-207. https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12331

Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2023). *2024 CACREP Standards.* https://www.cacrep.org/for-programs/2024-cacrep-standards/

Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2024). *CACREP Annual Report FY 2023*. https://www.cacrep.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/CACREP-2023-Annual-Report.pdf

Counselors for Social Justice. (2020). A call for social justice in the American counseling association. *Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology*, *12*(1), 2-12. https://doi.org/10.33043/JSACP.12.1.2-12

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design* (5th ed.). Sage.

Delgado, R. (Ed.). (1995). *Critical race theory: The cutting edge.* Temple University Press.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (*3rd ed*). New York University Press.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2017). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (*5th ed.*). Sage.

Ferguson, A. L., White, E.E., Walo-Roberts, S., Martinez, T., Crawford, C., & Nadrich, T. (2023). Black AF: A heuristic inquiry study of how six ethnically diverse counselor educators used community as a tool of decolonizing academy. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, 62*(2), 97-111. http://doi.org/10.1002/johc.12206

Gerig, M. (2018). *Foundations for clinical mental health counseling: An introduction to the profession* (*3rd ed.*). Pearson.

Hannon, M. D., Adams, L. M., Nieves, N., Ceballo, E., Ford Jr, D. J., & Vereen, L. G. (2024). Black peoples' reasons for becoming professional counselors: A grounded theory. *The Professional Counselor*, *14*(2), 164–180. https://doi.org/10.15241/mdh.14.2.164

Haskins, N. H., & Singh, A. (2015). Critical race theory and counselor education pedagogy: Creating equitable training. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, *54*(4), 288–301. https://doi-org.libproxy.unm.edu/10.1002/ceas.12027

Hays, D.G. (2020). Multicultural and social justice counseling competency research: Opportunities for innovation. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *98*(3), 331-344. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12327

Hiraldo, P. (2010). The role of critical race theory in higher education. *The Vermont Connection, 31*(1), 53-59. https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/tvc/vol31/iss1/7

Jorgensen, M. F., & Duncan, K. (2015a). A grounded theory of master's-level counselor research identity. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, *54*(1), 17-31. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6978.2015.00067.x

Jorgensen, M. F., & Duncan, K. (2015b). A phenomenological investigation of master's-level counselor research identity development stages. *The Professional Counselor*, *5*(3), 327-340. https://doi.org/10.15241/mfj.5.3.327

Kaplan, D. M., Tarvydas, V. M., & Gladding, S. T. (2014). 20/20: A vision for the future of counseling: The new consensus definition of counseling. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *92*(3), 366-372. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00164.x

Kim, N., Kim, I., Mumbauer-Pisano, J., Kim, T., & Zeligman, M. (2025). Discrimination, social support, and wellness among BIPOC counseling students. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, *64*(2), 208-219. https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12332

Lamar, M.R., Clemens, E., & Shipp Dunbar, A. (2019). Promoting doctoral student researcher development through positive research training environments using self-concept theory. *The Professional Counselor*, *9*(4), 298-309. https://doi.org/10.15241/mrl.9.4.298

Lamar, M.R., & Helm, H.M. (2017). Understanding the research identity development of counselor education and supervision doctoral students. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, *56*(1), 2-18. https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12056

Limberg, D., Newton, T., Nelson, K., Barrio Minton, C.A., Super, J.T., & Ohrt, J. (2020). Research identity development of counselor education doctoral students: A grounded theory. *The Professional Counselor*, *10*(4), 488-500. https://doi.org/10.15241/dl.10.4.488

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage.

Lopez-Perry, C., Tuttle, M., Hyun, J. H., & Robinson, S. (2021). A social justice recruitment and retention model for diversifying school counselor education. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, *14*(4), 1-22. https://research.library.kutztown.edu/jcps/vol14/iss4/8/

McKim, C. (2023). Meaningful member-checking: A structured approach to member-checking. *American Journal of Qualitative Research, 7*(2), 41-52. https://doi.org/10.29333/ajqr/12973

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage.

O'Hara, C., Chang, C.Y., Giordano, A.L. (2021). Multicultural competence in counseling research: The cornerstone of scholarship. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *99*(2), 200-209. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12367

Park, A.S.J., & Bahia, J. (2022). Examining the experiences of racialized and indigenous graduate students as emerging researchers. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, *8*(3), 403-417. https://doi.org/10.1177/23326492221098953

Pieterse, A. L., Lewis, J. A., & Miller, M. J. (2023a). Dismantling and eradicating anti-Blackness and systemic racism. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 70*(3), 235–243. https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000660

Pieterse, A. L., Roberson-Miranda, K. L., Paiko, L., & Kirkinis, K. (2023b). Exploring the Experiences of Students of Color in United States Counseling Psychology Doctoral Programs: A Qualitative Investigation. *The European Journal of Counselling Psychology,*1–11. https://doi.org/10.46853/001c.91442

Ponterotto, J. G., & Grieger, I. (1999). Merging qualitative and quantitative perspectives in a research identity. In M. Kopala & L. A. Suzuki (Eds.), *Using qualitative methods in psychology* (pp. 49–62). Sage.

Shure, L., White, E., Green, D., Goodman, R., Dollarhide, C., Smith, S., & Neal, F. (2023). Towards a Decolonization of Counseling: CSJ Responds to Racial Violence & Injustice. *Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology*, *15*(1), 2–13. https://doi.org/10.33043/JSACP.15.1.2-1

Smith, J. A., & Nizza, I. E. (2022). Essentials of interpretative phenomenological analysis. *American Psychological Association*. https://doi.org/10.1037/0000259-000

Stevens, M.M., & Bhat, C.S. (2024). Research identity among counselor education master's students. *Journal of Counselor Leadership and Advocacy*, *11*(2), 93-104. https://doi.org/10.1080/2326716X.2024.2335954

Wade-Ball, E. D., Isawi, D. T., & Fisher, T. A. (2024). Racial identity development and imposter phenomenon as predictors of counselor self-efficacy. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision, 18*(2), 1-15. https://research.library.kutztown.edu/jcps/vol18/iss2/6/

White, E.E., Nadrich, T., Walo-Roberts, S., Martinez, T., Crawford, C.R., & Ferguson, A.L. (2024). Searching for social justice: Examining counselor educators' training and implementation. *Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology*, *16*(1), 44-58. https://doi.org/10.33043/y98zc67324

Wilcox, M. M., Shaffer, K. S., Marks, L. R., Hutchison, A., & Hargons, C. N. (2020). Answering the call for systems change: Facilitating the development of a social justice theoretical orientation and skills in counselor trainees. *Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology, 12*(2), 2–24. https://doi.org/10.33043/JSACP.14.2.2-24

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Alias	Cultural Identity	Gender Identity	Student	Carnegie Classification	Research Methodology	Years of Experience
Heer	Asian - Indian	Female	Master's	R2	Qual, Quant	6 years
Giselle	African- American	Female	Doctoral	R2	Qual	3 years
Shawn	African - Nigerian	Male	Doctoral	R2	Qual, Quant	6 years
Jessica	Asian	Female	Doctoral	R2	Qual, Mixed Methods	7 months
Vedmak	African- American	Male	Doctoral	R1	Qual	6 months
Mariam	Middle Eastern	Female	Doctoral	R1	Qual, Quant	14 years
Dakota	African- American	Female	Doctoral	Unclassified	Qual, Quant, Mixed Methods	4 years
Kayla	African- American	Female	Master's	Unclassified	Mixed Methods	4 years
Sam	Asian-Indian	Male	Doctoral	R1	Qual, Quant, & Mixed Methods	4 years
Dallas	Biracial	Female	Doctoral	R1	Not Reported	2 years
Jasmine	African- American	Female	Doctoral	Unclassified	Qual, Quant	6 years

Note. Qual = Qualitative; Quant = Quantitative