Latino Doctoral Students in Counseling Programs: Navigating Professional Identity within a Predominantly White American Profession

Anna Flores Locke
Montclair State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/etd

Part of the Counseling Commons

Recommended Citation
Locke, Anna Flores, "Latino Doctoral Students in Counseling Programs: Navigating Professional Identity within a Predominantly White American Profession" (2017). Theses, Dissertations and Culminating Projects. 98.
https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/etd/98

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Montclair State University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses, Dissertations and Culminating Projects by an authorized administrator of Montclair State University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@montclair.edu.
LATINO DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN COUNSELING PROGRAMS: NAVIGATING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY WITHIN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE AMERICAN PROFESSION

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of
Montclair State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

ANNA FLORES LOCKE

Montclair State University

Upper Montclair, NJ

2017

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Dana Heller Levitt
MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation

LATINO DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN COUNSELING PROGRAMS: NAVIGATING
PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY WITHIN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE AMERICAN
PROFESSION

of

Anna Flores Locke

Candidate for the Degree:

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Counseling & Educational Leadership

Certified by:

Dr. Joan C. Ficke
Dean of The Graduate School

Date

8/1/??

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Dana Heller Levitt
Dissertation Chair

Dr. Jeremy Atlee

Dr. Kathy Camor

Dr. Angela Sheely-Moore
ABSTRACT

LATINO DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN COUNSELING PROGRAMS: NAVIGATING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY WITHIN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE AMERICAN PROFESSION

by Anna Flores Locke

Using a basic qualitative research design, this author interviewed eight Latino doctoral students in counseling programs about their professional identity development experiences. The author analyzed the data from a Latino Critical Race theoretical perspective to explore the ways in which power and privilege played a role in the participants’ professional identity development as Latino doctoral students in a predominantly White American profession. The results supported that ethnicity played a central role in the participants’ experiences navigating professional identity within a predominantly White American profession. The three themes that emerged were: (1) being one of the few, (2) navigating professional identity development, and (3) becoming a Latino counselor educator. Further, the participants’ professional identity development was like a rollercoaster and proceeded in a less linear fashion than the current models explained. The implications for the counseling profession, counselor education, counseling doctoral programs, and Latino doctoral students included: promoting inclusion, creating community, and providing support.

Keywords: Latino doctoral students, professional identity development, LatCrit, counselor education, counseling
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I’d like to thank all those in my life who have made this dissertation a success. I truly could not have succeeded without your support. In particular, I would like to thank all the childcare providers who watched my kids so I could complete this study. I also thank Nancy and John Locke for producing their son, John, to be a kind and generous man. Thank you John Locke III for your financial and emotional support throughout this process, and for your patience. I thank my parents, Roberto and Sonia Flores for always believing in me and for pushing me to always do more. To all my family and friends who have served as inspirations and as my support systems, I thank you. I also thank my Latino professional community who have validated me and reassured me that I would succeed. Lastly, I am grateful and forever indebted to my dissertation participants who had the courage to share their stories with me, and forever changed my life.
DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my husband and father who have always been a source of inspiration and support when I needed it most. I also dedicate this dissertation to my children, Alejandra and Charles, who are my constant motivators and lights of hope. To all marginalized doctoral students in counseling programs, I dedicate this work to you and to your continued resistance and perseverance.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One .................................................................................................................. 1

Introduction ................................................................................................................... 1

Background .................................................................................................................... 2

Increasing Diversity in the U.S.: The Rising Tide of Latinos ....................... 5

Professional Identity Development in Counseling Programs ................. 7

Statement of the Problem ......................................................................................... 11

Research Questions ................................................................................................. 14

Significance of the Study ......................................................................................... 15

Conceptual Framework ......................................................................................... 17

My Positionality .......................................................................................................... 17

Critical Race Theory (CRT) ..................................................................................... 19

Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) ................................................................. 19

Chapter Summary .................................................................................................... 21

Definition of Terms .................................................................................................. 22

Chapter Two ............................................................................................................. 25

Conceptual Framework ............................................................................................ 27

Critical Race Theory (CRT) ..................................................................................... 27

Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) ................................................................. 33

Being Latino in the U.S. .......................................................................................... 36

Latinos as an Ethnic Group .................................................................................... 37

The Role of Ethnicity (and/or Race) ................................................................. 40
Data Analysis..................................................................................................................101

Trustworthiness.............................................................................................................103

Researcher Role and Positionality..............................................................................104

Strategies to Ensure Trustworthiness.........................................................................108

Chapter Summary.......................................................................................................112

Chapter Four................................................................................................................114

Theoretical Framework: LatCrit..................................................................................115

A Collective Story of Resistance..................................................................................116

Figure 1: Identity Development Process.................................................................118

Being “One of the Few”..............................................................................................120

Navigating Professional Identity Development: “Making Space”.........................158

Figure 2: Facing White Spaces Subthemes..............................................................166

Figure 3: Complicated Engagement Subthemes......................................................196

Becoming a Latino Counselor Educator: Towards a Re-Definition.......................209

Figure 4: Becoming a Latino Counselor Educator Subthemes..............................209

Chapter Summary.......................................................................................................245

Being One of the Few..................................................................................................246

Navigating Professional Identity Development......................................................246

Becoming a Latino Counselor Educator.................................................................251

Chapter Five................................................................................................................253

The Rollercoaster Experience.....................................................................................253

Figure 5: The Rollercoaster.......................................................................................254
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Ethnicity</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6: Being In-Between</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Themes</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7: Identity Development Process Revisited</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being One of the Few</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating Professional Identity Development</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming a Latino Counselor Educator: Towards a Re-definition</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for the Counseling Profession</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Counselor Education Doctoral Programs</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Counselor Educators</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Latino Doctoral Students</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Tables

Table 1: Demographics .............................................................................................................. 93
LIST OF FIGURES

Figures

Figure 1: Identity Development Process ......................................................... 118
Figure 2: Facing White Spaces Subthemes ..................................................... 166
Figure 3: Complicated Engagement Subthemes ............................................. 196
Figure 4: Becoming a Latino Counselor Educator Subthemes ......................... 209
Figure 5: The Rollercoaster Experience ......................................................... 254
Figure 6: Being In-Between ......................................................................... 258
Figure 7: Identity Development Process Revisited ........................................ 268
LATINO DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN COUNSELING PROGRAMS: NAVIGATING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY WITHIN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE AMERICAN PROFESSION

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Often times, professional counselors are asked, “Are you like a social worker or psychologist?” No, not quite. Professional counselors are similar to social workers and psychologists in some ways, and are uniquely different in other ways (Gerig, 2014; Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990). For example, while social workers focus on treating individual psychopathology systemically or within the environment, and some psychologists, not including counseling psychologists, focus on remediating psychopathology within the individual, counselors emphasize prevention and positive human development along with remediation of those challenges that disrupt normal development (i.e., psychopathology; Mellin, Hunt, & Nichols, 2011; Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990).

As a fairly young profession, the field of counseling has been grappling with a professional identity that is unique from social work, psychology, and other related fields because of confusion around the uniqueness and distinction of the profession (Gerig, 2014; Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990). Many theorists and researchers in the field have attempted to explore and explain the professional identity of counseling, yet it remains somewhat elusive and debatable contributing to an “identity confusion” (Gerig, 2014, p. 5). As a result, the definition and development of a professional identity as a counselor
has been the hallmark of the counseling profession as the field struggles with this “identity crisis” (Gale & Austin, 2003, p. 3).

Hence, professional identity development is a highly regarded and valuable component of the counseling profession (Burkholder, 2012) and has been researched and explored within the last 30 years. During this time, a unified professional identity amongst all members of the counseling field has been an imperative goal and regarded as a means by which the profession can solidify its place as a viable and respected helping profession (American Counseling Association, 2009; Sweeney, 1995; Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990).

**Background**

One way that researchers sought to consolidate and create cohesion amongst professionals in the field was by exploring the developmental process of becoming a master’s level counselor or doctoral level counselor educator (Auxier, Hughes, & Kline, 2003; Dollarhide, Gibson, & Moss, 2013; Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss, 2010; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). One purpose of such studies was to understand how counselors-in-training at the master’s level develop a sense of professional identity and how this process unfolds over time (Gibson et al., 2010; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Additionally, the ways in which master’s level counselors-in-training integrated into the professional culture of counseling was also explored (Gibson et al., 2010).

Professional identity at the master’s and doctoral level is defined as the incorporation of the professional and personal activities inherent in the roles and obligations of that discipline and develops through education and experiences (Dollarhide
et al., 2013). The professional aspects include expectations as a counselor, duties in the field, mentorship, educational experiences, and working with clients (Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014). The personal aspects consider how the student became more confident as a counselor over time, and moved from an idealistic view of counseling to a more realistic one (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). As a result of this process, most students begin to integrate their personal and professional selves into one cohesive identity and become integrated into the profession (Moss et al., 2014; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992).

Professional identity helps to integrate the student with the professional culture of counseling (Carlson, Portman, & Barlett, 2006; Dollarhide et al., 2013; Limberg, Jacobson, Christmas, Bell, Fox, Young, Super, DePue, & Lambie, 2013). Thus, this process of integration and professional identity development has been considered to be a sociological phenomenon (Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990). One in which the student is immersed and socialized or acculturated into the profession (Reiner, Dobmeier, & Hernandez, 2013) through education, mentorship, and active participation in the professional community (Carlson et al., 2006). Through this acculturative process, the student “learns what is expected and what they can expect; and learns to behave as ‘native speakers’ in the new culture through observation, supervision, consultation, and practice” (Gibson et al., 2010, p. 22). Ultimately, the student becomes a new professional who has been socialized in the “language of therapy” (Gibson et al., 2010, p. 22), and has learned the attitudes, values, modes of thinking, and strategies for problem solving (Dollarhide & Miller, 2006) that encompass this culture.
Given that the professional culture of counseling operates within a predominantly White American context, since more than 75% of counselor educators are White American and 60% of all graduate students are White American (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs [CACREP], 2015), the attitudes, values, mode of thinking, and other aspects most often reflect White American cultural values such as individualism, competition, and the belief in meritocracy (Gerig, 2014; Katz, 1985). For students who belong to ethnic and/or racial groups who share similar White American cultural values, the acculturative process of integrating into the counseling profession may proceed in a less challenging manner than for students upholding differing values (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). For example, some students from ethnic groups who believe in collectivism, interpersonal harmony, and collaboration may experience the integration process differently and possibly find it more challenging (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Lineros & Hinojosa, 2013; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2002). For instance, many Latino doctoral students in most fields reported feeling a sense of guilt about engaging in the professional identity developmental changes that often come in conflict with familial obligations and cultural values (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006; Gonzalez et al., 2001; Lineros & Hinojosa, 2013; Protivnak & Foss, 2009; Rosales, 2006). In addition, research on the factors impacting the retention of students of color at the graduate level indicates that many felt disenfranchised and isolated from peers and faculty in the classroom and in the academy (Gasman, Hirschfeld, & Vultaggio, 2008; Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; Gonzalez, 2006; Henfield, Woo, & Washington, 2013; Herzig, 2004; Nettles, 1990; Vaquera, 2007).
Thus, upholding cultural beliefs and values that are defined by one’s ethnicity can possibly influence the acculturative professional identity developmental process in various ways, as may the experience of operating in a predominantly White American context that can make students of color feel disenfranchised and isolated.

However, most of the published research studies on professional identity development in counseling programs did not explore the role of ethnic differences in the process, nor did they explore the experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling developing a professional identity (Auxier et al., 2003; Dollarhide et al., 2013; Gibson et al., 2010; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Yet, research on the experiences of students of color, including Latinos, indicates that negotiating a predominantly White American setting can make the professional identity developmental process unique and different from other students (Gasman et al., 2008; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Gonzalez, 2006; Henfield et al., 2013; Herzig, 2004; Nettles, 1990; Vaquera, 2007). Therefore, a more diverse understanding of the experiences of developing a professional identity, for students belonging to ethnic or racial groups other than White American, is warranted if the field of counseling is to be a validating and supportive environment for all students, especially Latinos.

**Increasing Diversity in the U.S.: The Rising Tide of Latinos**

Given the vital importance of professional identity in the field of counseling, and the rising racial and ethnic diversity of the United States population and the profession, a more thorough and diverse understanding of the professional identity development experiences of students belonging to racial and/or ethnic groups other than White
American is needed. It is projected that by the year 2050, more than half of the United States (U.S.) population will be comprised of individuals from racial and/or ethnic groups that are not White American (Colby & Ortman, 2015). Latinos, in particular, are one such ethnic group that is the fastest growing and will make up about 30% of the U.S. population in the next 40 years (U.S. Census, 2011).

In the United States, Latinos or individuals with origins in the countries of Latin America, including Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, South or Central America, or the Iberian Peninsula, regardless of race, account for more than 14% of the U.S. population, and continue to increase at higher rates than any other ethnic group (U.S. Census, 2011). The mean age of most Latinos in the U.S. is approximately 27 years (U.S. Census, 2011), making them one of the youngest ethnic groups in the country (Crouch, Zakariya, & Jiandani, 2012). They are the fastest growing group enrolling in college, as compared to Black and White American students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Within the last 15 years, the number of Latinos enrolling in college increased by 119%, from 1.4 million to 3 million, while the enrollment rate for Black students increased by 57% and the increase for White American students was 7% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Due to this enrollment increase and average age of many Latinos, students from this ethnic group will be entering the educational pipeline and may possibly enroll in doctoral programs. In fact, “more Latinos are earning doctoral degrees than before, but overall the numbers are still small” (Santiago & Brown, 2004, p. 5). For instance, in the year 1976, only 1% of doctoral degrees were earned by Latinos, while in 2012, Latinos
were awarded 6% of all doctorates conferred in all fields (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). In the last 15 years, the number of Latino graduate students in all fields has increased by 50% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Following the current precedent of most Latino doctoral students who earn degrees in education or psychology (Santiago & Brown, 2004), many Latino students may enter social services programs, such as counseling programs.

Given the rising demographics of Latinos in the U.S., the number of Latinos in counseling programs may also rise. Currently, more than 10% of professional counselors are Latino (Robinson, Lewis, Henderson, & Flowers, 2009). Within the professional organization of the American Counseling Association (ACA), there are about 550 Latino members, which is 4% of the 14,000 members who identified their racial or ethnic identity. Out of the 550 Latino members, 150 belong to the Latino Concerns Interest Network of ACA (American Counseling Association, 2016). As of 2014, almost 8% of master’s level counseling students and about 6% of doctoral level students identified ethnically Latino (CACREP, 2016). As the counseling profession is becoming more ethnically diverse, it will benefit from a multicultural understanding of professional identity development of Latinos, who may soon comprise about one third of the graduate student body in the next forty years.

**Professional Identity Development in Counseling Programs**

As a sociological and acculturative process, professional identity development involves an interaction between the student and the environment (Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990). Professional identity development is an acculturative process in which two
cultures meet and learning occurs. Acculturation is defined as a process of socialization that happens when two different cultures interact (Ortiz & Santos, 2009). This concept refers to how one group adapts, culturally and psychologically, and relates to the dominant or host society (Ortiz & Santos, 2009; Quintana & Scull, 2009). In this case, doctoral students in counseling programs comprise the group that adapts to the counseling profession, which is the dominant or host group.

In other words, as the doctoral student is immersed in the professional counseling community and is taught the cultural values, norms, beliefs, and behaviors of the field, they are actively constructing an identity as a counselor by adapting to the dominant group. This active construction of identity is influenced by several factors: 1) the person-environment fit between the student and the counseling profession, 2) the student’s personal attributes and developmental history (Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990), and 3) the counselor educators’ values, beliefs, and perceptions about counselor identity (Reiner et al., 2013). In other words, the person-environment fit between a Latino doctoral student (who may racially identify as white or as a student of color) and the predominantly White American counseling profession is influenced both by the student’s and the counselor educator’s personal attributes, values, beliefs, and perceptions about counselor identity.

Counselor identity. Currently, the profession of counseling is predominantly White American, in terms of racial and ethnic demographics (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1991; Sue & Sue, 2013). More than 75% of full-time doctoral-level counselor educators are White American (CACREP, 2016; Robinson et al., 2009) and about 60% of all doctoral students in counseling programs accredited by CACREP are White American (CACREP,
By contrast, 12% of counselor educators are African American and 4% are Latino. Approximately 23% of doctoral students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs are African American, and Latinos account for about 5% (CACREP, 2016).

As such, the counseling profession, as a predominantly White American field, tends to uphold cultural values, norms, beliefs, and behaviors that align more closely with those from the White American culture: individualism, competition, and a linear way of thinking (Ali & Sichel, 2014; Katz, 1985). In addition, counseling theories and curriculum tend to promote an individualistic perspective on well-being and healing (Gerig, 2014; Usher, 1989). Educational standards are mostly individually focused and often promote competition and personal advancement through hard work and merit (Carlson et al., 2006; Katz, 1985).

By becoming professional counselors, students adopt and share the professional values of the field (Moss et al., 2014; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990). The professional identity of counseling upholds certain values. For instance, many counselors believe in equality, client advocacy, the importance of career, personal growth, and the influence of health, human development, and biology (Granello & Young, 2012). Most counselors also believe in the benefits of science to inform practice in the form of evidence-based treatment approaches, assessments, and testing (Granello & Young, 2012). A counselor can be someone who has pride in the profession and focuses on wellness, development, prevention, and empowerment of individuals (Mellin et al., 2011; Remley & Herlihy, 201; Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990).
Latino students who may uphold cultural values, such as collectivism, collaboration, and a circular way of thinking, may find it hard to adapt to a perception of a counselor identity that promotes individualistic and competitive values (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Kamimura, 2006; Ortiz & Santos, 2009). Experiencing such a culture clash can lead to stress and tension between loyalty to one’s ethnic group and awareness of the dominant culture and the pressure to conform (Ancis et al., 2000; Lineros & Hinojosa, 2013; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2002). Such cultural clashes can cause acculturative stress that can influence the professional identity experience in unknown ways, and thus must be more fully understood by counselor educators (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999).

Acculturative stress has been defined as the “stress response to challenges in negotiating and adjusting to perceived cultural incompatibilities and cultural self-consciousness because of differences in language, practices, and values between and within the host and heritage cultures” (Rodriguez, Flores, Flores, Myers, & Calderon Vriesema, 2015, p. 1438). Stress is perceived when the environmental demands exceed the person’s coping resources, leading to negative affect and possibly affecting the person’s ability to adapt successfully to their setting (Gil, Vega, & Dimas, 1994; Rodriguez et al., 2015).

As a result of this potential acculturative stress, Latino doctoral students may experience professional identity development differently than other students, possibly making the integration process more challenging. Integration occurs when a student feels a sense of connection to, shares values with, and participates in the cultural practices of
the professional community (Herzig, 2004). This integration strengthens the students’ goals and commitments and membership within the professional environment, thus helping students feel supported, validated, and experience their role as “full participants” (Herzig, 2004, p. 176). If new counselors are not fully integrated into the profession and do not develop a well-defined sense of identity, role confusion can occur, which may impair their ability to function ethically as professionals (Gibson et al., 2010). For example, a counselor with role confusion may not be able to maintain appropriate boundaries with clients which can affect clinical effectiveness and can possibly lead to unethical behavior (e.g., acting as a friend instead of as a counselor). Thus, it is imperative that all students, including Latino doctoral students, develop a well-defined sense of professional identity and feel integrated into the culture of counseling. It is also important that counselor educators continue to assist in the process by more fully understanding the unique intricacies of professional identity development of Latino doctoral students.

**Statement of the Problem**

Despite the aspirational statement that counseling programs “make systematic efforts to attract, enroll, and retain a diverse group of students and to create and support an inclusive learning community” (CACREP, 2016, Standard 1Q), the profession of counseling is predominantly White American (D’Andrea & Daniels, 1991; Sue & Sue, 2013). Given the predominance of White American counselor educators and counselors in the field of counseling, the profession is a microcosm of the larger U.S. society, and is therefore not immune to the ethnocentrism and racism that can pervade it (D’Andrea &
Daniels, 1991; Valdes, 2005). Ethnocentrism and racism create an environment where White American culture and values are perceived as central and superior to all other cultures (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012). As a result, individuals from these other cultures are deemed inferior and are placed at the margins of society (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Latinos are one such group being marginalized and made to be invisible (Quintana & Scull, 2009).

Latinos have been made invisible in our understanding of professional identity development because few of the models explored how their experience may be different from their White American counterparts. Despite the fact that counselor professional identity development is defined as the “successful integration of personal attributes and professional training in the context of a professional community” (Gibson et al., 2010, p. 23-24), little is known about how Latino doctoral students’ personal attributes related to ethnicity contribute to their professional identity development. Yet, as Nelson and Jackson (2003) stated in their exploratory study of eight Hispanic counseling master’s level interns, “counselor educators need more information on how Hispanic students internalize experiences and conceptualize a professional identity” (p. 12).

The lack of diversity in our current understanding of professional identity development can contribute to an invalidating environment that tends to ignore or minimize the importance of ethnicity. By continuing this colorblind approach, that tends to minimize cultural differences, the counseling profession risks invalidating the development of Latino doctoral students and perpetrating non-inclusive environments (Remley & Herlihy, 2010). In other words, if our understanding of professional identity
development does not speak to the role of ethnicity in the experiences of Latino doctoral students who are seeking validating examples that reflect their lived experiences as members of an ethnic group that is not White American, then they may feel neglected, confused, disappointed, and misunderstood (Contreras & Gandara, 2006; Millett & Nettles, 2006). These experiences can lead some Latino students to drop out of doctoral studies.

Despite comprising more than 13% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census, 2011), Latinos continue to be highly underrepresented in most doctoral programs (Gloria, Castellanos, & Kamimura, 2006). Latinos comprise about 5% of the total graduate student enrollment, and about 6% of all doctoral degrees were earned by Latinos (Santiago & Brown, 2004). In contrast, White Americans earned 61% of the doctorates and African Americans earned 5%. Thus, Latinos have one of the lowest levels of doctoral degree attainment amongst the major ethnic and racial groups (including African Americans and Asians) in the U.S. (Contreras & Gandara, 2006; Millett & Nettles, 2006). In addition, ethnic and racial minorities complete doctoral degrees at lower rates than the average rate of 50% amongst White American doctoral students (Council of Graduate Schools, 2011; DiPierro, 2012; Gardner, 2009). Research on the challenges related to retaining Latino graduate students at both the master’s and doctoral levels indicates that students who may uphold different collectivistic cultural values, such as interdependence with the family unit, may experience psychological distress and dissonance, which can lead to high attrition rates (Gonzalez et al., 2001; Watford, Rivas, Burciaga, & Solorzano, 2006; Wiedman, Twale, & Stein, 2003).
Therefore, as a profession that follows the multicultural and social justice
capacities that urge us to develop awareness, knowledge, skills, and action about
power, privilege, and oppression that influences the counseling relationship (Ratts, Singh,
Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & Rafferty McCullough, 2015), we must begin to explore the
professional identity development experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling
programs. By having more knowledge about the experiences of Latino doctoral students
developing a professional identity in the field of counseling, counselor educators can help
students develop a well-defined sense of professional identity and feel integrated into the
culture of counseling. In so doing, counselor educators may possibly retain and graduate
Latino doctoral students at higher rates than currently.

**Research Questions**

Currently, there is little research on the experiences of Latino doctoral students in
counseling, and how being part of an ethnically marginalized group influences
professional identity development. Most of the research on the experiences of
individuals in the counseling profession has focused on faculty of color or master’s level
White American students (Auxier et al., 2003; Butner, Burley, & Marbley, 2000;
Cartwright, Washington, & McConnell, 2009; Dollarhide et al., 2013; Henfield et al.,
few have explored the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students
engaged in the education and professionalization process.

Due to this gap in knowledge about the professional identity development of
Latino doctoral students in counseling, I have conducted this qualitative research study. I
focused on Latinos as an ethnic group because they are most often perceived and self-identify as an ethnic group (Gloria et al., 2006); however the role of race is not minimized. Given that the line between race and ethnicity is blurred (Leonardo, 2004), the role of race did not emerge as a salient factor in the experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs. Therefore, I primarily focused on ethnicity and remained cognizant of the role of race, and the intersection of these two personal identities in the experiences of the participants.

The research question that guided this qualitative study was: What are the experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs regarding their professional identity development? The purposes of this study included: (a) understanding the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs, and (b) amplifying the counterstories of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs since our current understanding tends to reflect the experiences of White American students in counseling programs.

**Significance of the Study**

This study was significant because it may inform the counseling field about the professional identity development of Latino doctoral level counseling students, who are the fastest growing ethnic group in the U.S. (U.S. Census, 2010). We can anticipate that by the year 2050 more than half of the population will identify with ethnic groups other than White American, given the rising diversity of the U.S. (U.S. Census, 2011). Therefore, Latinos may account for a larger portion of graduate students in counseling than currently. Thus, it behooves us to explore the professional identity development of
Latino doctoral students in counseling programs if we are to create validating academic and professional environments for Latino doctoral students. Creating a validating setting where ethnicity is acknowledged and integrated into the acculturation process may allow more Latino doctoral students to find the educational and professional experience less challenging and may graduate at higher rates than currently. As a result, the ethnic diversity of faculty in counselor education may increase and possibly contribute to a more ethnically diverse student body.

Most importantly, by understanding more about the professional identity development, the counseling profession will evolve to include “culture-bound values” (Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990, p. 525) and “unique developmental orientation” (Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990, p. 525) in the education of doctoral students from various ethnic groups. The profession will also “reflect current knowledge and projected needs concerning counseling practice in a multicultural and pluralistic society” (CACREP, 2016, Standard 2B). By creating “developmentally focused counselor education programs” (Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990, p. 527) that include cultural diversity and social justice practices (Ratts et al., 2015) that foster “systemic change” (Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990, p. 524), the profession will continue to evolve towards an inclusive and validating environment for all students. Especially in the case of Latino doctoral students who belong to a marginalized and often invalidated ethnic group in the U.S., an inclusive environment that validates cultural differences is crucial to the development of Latino counselor educators who have a clear sense of their professional identity vis-a-vis their ethnicity. This process of integrating ethnicity within professional identity may have a
ripple effect wherein future counselors who are trained by Latino counselor educators may be more equipped to broach the topic of cultural and ethnic differences with ethnically diverse clientele (Estrada, Frame, & Williams, 2004).

As a future Latina counselor educator, I conducted this qualitative research study to explore the experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs developing a professional identity. My hope was to return to Van Hesteren and Ivey’s (1990) and Hansen’s (2010) desire for the profession to focus on the person-environment interaction and broad sociocultural context by emphasizing a multicultural and diverse awareness to understanding professional identity development. This exploration of the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students contributes to a conversation about how White American cultural values and current individualistic orientation of the counseling field may not address or account for the unique experiences of ethnically diverse students. The results of this study can help create validating educational and professional environments for Latino doctoral students in counseling programs by recognizing the sociocultural context that possibly influences the person-environment interaction between Latino doctoral students and professional identity development.

**Conceptual Framework**

**My Positionality**

As a Latina doctoral student in counselor education, I am an “insider” (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Mattis, & Quizon, 2005; Villenas, 1996), or participant of the population being studied. I am also an “outsider” in many ways due to my social location as a fair-skinned Latina doctoral student from a privileged racial, educational, and economic class.
From this positionality, I interacted with the participants and interpreted the data in a way that promoted egalitarian research practices. For example, I disclosed my racial and ethnic identity to all the participants before the first interview was conducted. During the last interview, I asked the participants to give me feedback on the ways that this identity influenced the research process. I was also mindful about the ways in which my identity manifested in the interview process. I also journaled or debriefed with my advisor about moments when my privilege arose in response to the interviewees’ stories. I checked in throughout the interviews to ask the participant if I at all invalidated their experiences. None of the participants reported that I was invalidating, instead they commented that I was respectful and trustworthy.

Because of my positionality, I have first-hand knowledge and experience with the context within which Latino doctoral counselor education students are immersed. This first-hand experience of racialized academic socialization practices contributes to my understanding of the experiences of Latino counselor education doctoral students. My experience also aligns with the following assumptions:

1. Racism and ethnocentrism are pervasive and endemic to the U.S. society.
2. Racism and ethnocentrism create oppressive educational and professional environments, in which Latino doctoral students operate.
3. As a result, Latino doctoral students experience professional identity development differently than their White American peers, and ethnicity plays a role in this process.
These assumptions closely align with the main tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit).

**Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

According to CRT, all educational experiences are racialized, meaning that due to the predominance of White Americans in the educational system, there is an inherent and implicit belief that White American culture is superior to others (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Valdes, 2005). The five basic tenets of CRT include: (a) acknowledgement of racism as being ordinary and pervasiveness, (b) a socially constructed definition of race that is used to differentiate groups of people in different ways at different times in response to shifting needs, (c) a commitment to social justice and to challenge dominant ideology, (d) the use of storytelling and counter-storytelling of the “missing voices” (Valdes, 2005, p. 149) in the dominant discourse, and (e) taking an interdisciplinary approach to promoting social justice and CRT ideologies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

Ethnicity, as a social construct in the U.S., can only be understood in relation to race (Leistyna, 1999). Race is an embedded factor in the social construction of our society and defines the lived experiences of all individuals. As such, ethnicity needs to be understood as being shaped by the lived experiences of people interacting, participating, and operating within a racialized society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Leistyna, 1999).

**Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)**

Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) emerged in response to this enduring invisibility of Latinos in the U.S. due to the historical colonization and persistent oppression of Latino individuals and communities (Valdes, 2005). For example, LatCrit
researchers explored the ways in which the multiple and varied personal identities of Latinos intersect to make the experiences of Latinos different from African Americans (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Perez Huber, 2010; Valdes, 2005). In particular, ethnic and other cultural identities (e.g., race, language, immigration status, socioeconomic status) of Latinos make their educational experience different from African-Americans, yet similar in that Latinos also experience oppression and marginalization within the U.S. higher education system (Perez Huber, 2010). As a sub-specialty of CRT, LatCrit scholars explore the role of ethnicity in the lived experiences of individuals belonging to ethnic groups other than the White American racial group, as it is manifested within the racialized societal structure of the U.S. (Valdes, 2005).

**How LatCrit was used in this study.** LatCrit, which will be explained in greater detail in chapter 2, was used in this study to explore the experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs developing a professional identity and how the intersection of race and ethnicity may influence this process. In particular, I deconstructed the education and professionalization of Latino doctoral students to explore the professional identity developmental process within a predominantly White American professional context. LatCrit allowed me to recognize, label, and problematize academic and professional experiences as being influenced by racism, ethnocentrism, the intersectionality of multiple identities, and systems of power and privilege (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).
Chapter Summary

By understanding the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students, the profession of counseling may demonstrate multicultural competence by embracing ethnic differences. This exploration of ethnic differences in the experiences of doctoral students can help create a more validating and inclusive professional environment that more fully understands the complexities of developing a professional identity within a predominantly White American context. As indicated, Latino doctoral students experience predominantly White American settings differently than their White American counterparts, and thus may experience the professional identity developmental process in various ways (Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Wasburn-Moses, 2007). The ways in which these experiences are different have not yet been addressed in the counselor education research on the topic of professional identity development. For this reason, I proposed this research study.

In the following chapter, I provide a detailed literature review on the following: (a) Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Race Theory as conceptual models, (b) Latinos in the U.S., (c) Latino cultural values, as mediated by racial and ethnic identity development and acculturation, (d) the counseling profession, (e) counselor education, and (f) professional identity development in counseling programs and for Latinos. In chapter three, I explain the epistemological assumptions and methodology that I used to answer the research question. In chapter four, I describe the findings of the study, and in chapter five, I explain my interpretation of the results, limitations, and implications.
Definition of Terms

**Counselor Education**: A program that prepares students to apply counseling theories and principles to support the personal, social, educational, and vocational development of individuals. Students receive instruction in legal and professional requirements, therapeutic intervention, vocational counseling, and sociological and psychological foundations (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013).

**Counselor Education Professional Identity**: A set of qualities and beliefs about clinical practice, instruction, supervision, and research and scholarship, and leadership and advocacy that individuals with a doctoral degree in counselor education acquire through education and professional experiences (Adkinson-Bradley, 2013; CACREP, 2016; Goodrich, Shin, & Smith, 2011; Limberg, et al., 2013).

**LatCrit**: LatCrit is a critical conceptual model that allows scholars to understand the oppression of Latinos in higher education by deconstructing the Black-White racial binary, to include multiple and varied personal identities (e.g., ethnicity) and other cultural identities such as race, language, immigration status, and/or socioeconomic status of Latinos (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

**Latinos in the U.S.**: Latino, as an ethnic group, is a socially constructed classification system created by the U.S. Census Bureau and is currently defined as any person with origins in the countries of Latin America, including Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, South or Central America, or the Iberian Peninsula, regardless of race. Hispanic origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s parents or ancestors before their arrival to the U.S. (U.S. Census, 2011).
Acculturation: Acculturation is defined as a process of socialization that happens when two different cultures interact (Ortiz & Santos, 2009). This concept refers to how one group adapts, culturally and psychologically, and relates to the dominant or host society (Ortiz & Santos, 2009; Quintana & Scull, 2009).

Race: Race is a socially constructed category used to differentiate, separate, and classify individuals based on physical characteristics, such as skin color, facial features, and hair type that are common amongst geographically isolated populations (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993; Utsey, Ponterotto, & Porter, 2008). However, research has found that there are more within-group differences than between-group differences in these characteristics indicating that racial groups are more alike than they are different in terms of physical and genetic characteristics (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). Therefore, a definition is race is elusive given that it is socially constructed and determined and maintained by the societal systems in power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Racism: Racism is a “system of advantage based on race” (Tatum, 1997, p. 7). Racism has been defined as the systematic use of power to subjugate an out-group (or other racial groups different than one’s own), who are defined as inferior based on intellect, psychological make up, and/or physical attributes. In the United States, the dominant culture is White American and deemed superior, while all other racial and ethnic groups are deemed inferior (Pack-Brown, 1999; Utsey, Ponterotto, & Porter, 2008).

Ethnocentrism: Ethnocentrism is different from racism in that it does not imply hostility towards other races based on the beliefs that biological racial traits, such as intelligence or morality, exists (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012). According to Bizumic and Duckitt
(2012), ethnocentrism refers to a sense of ethnic group self-importance and self-centeredness, where one’s ethnic group is central and all other ethnic groups are compared from this vantage point. Ethnocentrism leads to the devaluing and disadvantaging of other ethnic groups (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012).

**Ethnicity:** Ethnicity is a distinct concept from race and is a socialized, learned construct that defines an individual’s perceived group membership based on nationality, ancestry, or both. Cultural values, norms, and behaviors are transmitted with ethnic groups (Murray, Smith, & Hill, 2001).
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the fact that counselor professional identity development is defined as the “successful integration of personal attributes and professional training in the context of a professional community” (Gibson et al., 2010, p. 23-24), little is known about how Latino doctoral students’ personal attributes (e.g., race, ethnicity) contribute to their professional identity development. Little is also known about how these personal attributes may interact with the predominantly White American field of counseling, and how this interaction may make the professional identity developmental process of Latino doctoral students different than other students. Yet, as Nelson and Jackson (2003) stated in their exploratory study of eight Hispanic counseling master’s level interns, “counselor educators need more information on how Hispanic students internalize experiences and conceptualize a professional identity” (p. 12).

For this research project, the focus was on Latinos in the U.S. who comprise almost 14% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census, 2011), and account for the largest percentage of population growth at 38% (U.S. Census, 2011). As a result, Latinos will soon be the youngest, in terms of age, and largest ethnic group in the U.S. by the year 2050 (Gloria, Castellanos, & Kamimura, 2006). Due to this demographic increase, more Latino students will be entering the educational pipeline and possibly higher education, such as doctoral programs; therefore it is imperative that the counseling profession continue to explore and understand the unique experiences of Latino doctoral students. This understanding will help create an inclusive and supportive experience for Latino
doctoral students so they can develop an integrated and authentic sense of professional identity as a counselor educator.

The research question guiding this study was: What are the experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs regarding their professional identity development? The purposes of this study included: (a) understanding the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs, and (b) amplifying the counterstories of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs, in order to document their experiences that may be different from the narratives of White American students. Counterstorytelling is a method for telling the stories of individuals whose experiences are not often told, such as Latinos (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

In order to understand the complex educational and professional experiences of Latino doctoral students negotiating professional identity within the predominantly White American counseling profession, I provide a comprehensive literature review on key aspects relevant to this study: (a) Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Race Theory as conceptual models, (b) Latinos in the U.S., (c) Latino cultural values, as mediated by racial and ethnic identity development and acculturation, (d) the counseling profession, (e) counselor education, and (f) professional identity development in counseling programs and for Latinos. By providing this literature review, I present the relevant research that informed this study and provided the starting point from which to further expand our understanding of the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs.
Conceptual Framework

CRT and LatCrit were used as the conceptual framework from which I analyzed and interpreted the data because counseling programs are most often housed in predominantly White American academic settings. As such, these settings are often microcosms of the larger U.S. society, and therefore may manifest educational and professionalization practices that tend to be White American focused (D’Andrea & Daniels, 1991; Sue & Sue, 2013). CRT and LatCrit as conceptual models provided the framework from which to explore the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs from the perspective of power and oppression. Since Latinos are considered a marginalized ethnic group in the U.S., the social justice tenets of CRT and LatCrit were used as guiding principles from which to explore the experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs who are developing a professional identity.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

The predominance of White American professionals in higher education, including counseling programs, contributes to an academic and professional context in which individuals belonging to other racial and ethnic groups other than White American, such as Latinos, may feel disenfranchised, isolated, and invisible by peers and faculty in the classroom and in the academy (Gasman et al., 2008; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Gonzalez, 2006; Henfield et al., 2013; Herzig, 2004; Nettles, 1990; Vaquera, 2007). As a result, Latino doctoral students may experience the classroom, faculty relationships, peer relationships, and the academy in racialized and oppressive ways (Gasman et al., 2008;
Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Gonzalez, 2006; Henfield et al., 2013; Herzig, 2004; Nettles, 1990; Vaquera, 2007). In such a setting, Latino doctoral students in counseling programs may experience the professional identity developmental process differently than White American students.

CRT as a conceptual model is the critical lens through which to understand the unique challenges that Latino doctoral students may experience when navigating the predominantly White American profession of counseling. As will be shown, the research on the experiences of students of color, including Latinos, navigating predominantly White American contexts can be different based on cultural differences between the student and the academic environment (Gonzalez, 2006; Ortiz & Santos, 2009). CRT helps to examine these differences by applying five main tenets of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

The first CRT tenet is that racism is ordinary, commonplace, and affects the everyday life of most people of color in this country (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). The next tenet is that race is socially constructed and used to differentiate groups of people in different ways at different times in response to shifting needs. The third tenet is the commitment of CRT scholars to social justice and to challenging the dominant ideology that promotes colorblindness, equality, and meritocracy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). Colorblindness implies that race and other physical markers of ethnicity (e.g., shape of nose, hair type) are not relevant (Pack-Brown, 1999). Being colorblind also minimizes cultural differences. The myth of equality and meritocracy promotes the belief that everyone is equal and that individual worthiness and merit is paramount to social status
and advancement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The fourth CRT tenet pays homage and respect to storytelling and counter-storytelling by amplifying the “voice of color” (Valdes, 2005, p. 139) to analyze and challenge these dominant ideologies. The last tenet is the CRT scholars’ interdisciplinary approach (e.g., sociology, law, Marxism) when promoting social justice and CRT ideologies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

According to CRT, all educational experiences are racialized, influenced by power and privilege that maintains White American power over other cultural groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Levin, Jaeger, & Haley, 2013; Truong & Museus, 2012), and designed to maintain the current power structure dominated by White Americans (Valdes, 2005). Collins (1990) referred to this power structure as a “matrix of domination” (p. 230).

The matrix of domination refers to the socially constructed hierarchies that favor some racial groups, while disadvantaging and excluding others (Anderson & Collins, 2010; Valdes, 2005). In other words, some lives are valued more than others depending on an individual’s social location and the manifestation of race within this system. In the U.S., race is positioned within the Black-White binary which deems the White race superior over the Black one (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In the U.S., race is reserved for people of color (e.g., African Americans, Latins) and is used to distinguish White Americans from all others (Leonardo, 2004).

Also, according to CRT, racism is a tool to subordinate people of color, including Latinos, and serves an ideological function of White American supremacy (Perez Huber, 2010). White American supremacy “can be understood as a system of racial domination
and exploitation where power and resources are unequally distributed to privilege White Americans and oppress People of Color” (Perez Huber, 2010, p. 79). In the U.S., the dominant culture is White American and deemed superior, while all other racial and ethnic groups are deemed inferior (Pack-Brown, 1999; Utsey, Ponterotto, & Porter, 2008).

Racism is a “system of advantage based on race” (Tatum, 1997, p. 7). It has been defined as the systematic use of power to subjugate an out-group who are defined as inferior based on intellect, psychological makeup, and/or physical attributes (Utsey et al., 2008). The beliefs and behaviors that accept race as a biological entity, instead of a socially constructed category, are intentionally or unintentionally supported by the dominant culture (Utsey et al., 2008).

Racism is maintained by the notion of White American supremacy and privilege, in which White Americans are granted power over other racial and ethnic groups (Valdes, 2005). White supremacy and privilege refer to the “invisible knapsack” of societal rewards granted on the basis of white skin color and other socially determined racial indicators (McIntosh, 1992, p.180). Larger societal systems, such as the educational and justice systems, confer and maintain this dominance, as evidenced by the White American-based curriculum in higher education and disproportionate representation of incarcerated African American persons (Utsey et al., 2008). Similarly, in the field of counselor education, the curriculum tends to reinforce White American worldviews and values, such as individualism and a linear way of thinking (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1991; Granello & Young, 2012), thus possibly creating a professionally racialized environment.
that unintentionally can imply that the White American viewpoint is primary. Such an implication of White American primacy can represent ethnocentrism and be an example of a racial microaggression.

According to Bizumic and Duckitt (2012), ethnocentrism refers to a sense of ethnic group self-importance and self-centeredness, where one’s ethnic group is central and all other ethnic groups are compared from this vantage point. There are six facets to ethnocentrism: (a) preference, or an inclination to like and prefer one’s own ethnic group over others; (b) superiority, belief that one’s own ethnic group is better than others; (c) purity through association with members of one’s own ethnic group only; (d) justification to exploit others as long as the interests of one’s own ethnic group is pursued; (e) group cohesion as shown by high levels of integration, unity, and cooperation amongst members of one’s own ethnic group; and (f) devotion, or strong and unconditional loyalty, attachment, and dedication to one’s own ethnic group and its interests (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012).

Bizumic and Duckitt (2012) suggested that a racial group, such as White Americans, can be viewed as an ethnic group that demonstrates aspects of ethnocentrism, such as hypervaluing one’s own racial group while devaluing, dominating, and disadvantaging other groups. Due to the self-importance and self-centeredness placed on one’s own ethnic group, members from other ethnic groups tend to be perceived as inferior (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012), and are compared to White American standards and evaluated accordingly (Highlen, 1994). Thus, in the evaluation of Latino doctoral students developing a professional identity in the field of counseling, Latino students are
compared to White American educational and professional standards, thus ignoring cultural differences in the process.

Racial microaggressions are defined as “brief, commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). There are three forms of racial microaggressions: (1) microassaults, which are explicit verbal or physical attacks to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or discriminatory actions; (2) microinsults or communications that are rude and convey insensitivity to a person’s racial heritage or identity; and (3) microinvalidations that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological reality of a person of color (Sue & Sue, 2013; Sue et al., 2007). Reinforcing White American worldviews and values within the counselor education curriculum can be viewed as a microinvalidation in that Latino worldviews are excluded, negated, and nullified.

It is important to be aware of these CRT tenets and beliefs when researching the experiences of Latino doctoral students developing a professional identity within the predominantly White American profession of counseling. This perspective is important because the professional identity development experiences of Latino doctoral students may be influenced by the social status of Latinos as an ethnic group. According to this theory, Latinos are considered inferior to White Americans based on racial beliefs that White Americans are superior to other groups. As a result of this social location in the U.S., Latino doctoral students in counseling programs may experience the professional
Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)

Following CRT, LatCrit emerged to further expand the discussion of how race and the intersection of multiple identities may impact the academic experiences of Latinos, who can be considered both a racial and an ethnic group (Leonardo, 2004). LatCrit scholars wanted to explore the enduring invisibility of Latinos in the U.S. due to the historical colonization and persistent oppression of Latino individuals and communities (Valdes, 2005). They also sought to understand the oppression of Latinos in higher education by exploring the role of ethnicity and other cultural identities, such as race, language, immigration status, and/or socioeconomic status (Perez Huber, 2010).

LatCrit scholars recognize the coexistence and intersectionality of these multiple identities that make Latinos invisible in White American dominated educational systems (Perez Huber, 2010). Intersectionality refers to the interplay and coexistence of multiple identities in the lives of human beings (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Valdes, 2005). Multiple identities can include socioeconomic, political, religious, sexual orientation, national origin, immigration status, language, and ethnic background, to name a few (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Intersectionality pays attention and confirms the complexity of the human experience, and provides a framework from which to understand how oppression can manifest itself in a person’s life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).
For Latinos, who phenotypically exist on a spectrum from White to Black and can include individuals who are “mestizo” or are racially and ethnically mixed (Arredondo, Gallardo-Cooper, Delgado-Romero, & Zapata, 2014; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001, p. 39), the interdependence of race and ethnicity is evident. Ramirez (2013) concurred “…that although race, class, gender are analytically distinct structures of inequality, they intersect and are all equally important for understanding [experiences]…” (p. 26). Intersectionality is “…a theory illustrating the interconnectedness of groups within a complex system of social stratification…” (Ramirez, 2013, p.26). Further, this concept can be applied to study how an array of social identities and power dynamics shape individual experience (Nunez, 2014).

Racenicity also captures the complexity of the intersection of race and ethnicity in the lived experiences of Latinos (Leistyna, 1999). This construct refers to the “unequal distribution of power throughout society along racial lines” (Leistyna, 1999, p.138). Because of the powerful ideology of “whiteness” (Leistyna, 1999, p.138) in our society, ethnicity is shaped by the racial hierachy that designates “ethnics” (Leistyna, 1999, p.138) as a devalued social identity (Leistyna, 1999). “This racialized ideology of Whiteness – a pure race and culture, which has fanned flames of White supremacy in the United States – set the internal standards of ethnicity” (Leistyna, 1999, p. 141). As a result, ethnicity became associated with racial “otherness,” “difference,” and “deviance” (Leistyna, 1999, p. 145). In other words, ethnic identity is formed within society and is shaped by social interactions that are defined within a societal structure that deems Whiteness as superior. Therefore, ethnicity and race are interwoven social constructs that
are not mutually exclusive, rather they are interdependent. Racenicity, as a point of analysis, helps examine how race is a social and historical construction that shapes ethnicity (Leistyna, 1999). LatCrit, as a theory that follows CRT, takes into account the varied ways in which race and ethnicity can shape the professional identity developmental experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs, and can make their experiences counterstories.

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) further explained counterstorytelling as a method for telling the stories of individuals whose experiences are not often told, such as Latinos. It is a “tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). The types of counterstories include: (a) personal stories or narratives, (b) other people’s stories or narratives, and (c) composite stories or narratives, which draw on various stories to create composite characters. Another purpose of counterstorytelling is to illustrate the social, historical, and political situations in which the individuals are in and to discuss racism and other forms of subordination (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Counterstories serve to raise critical consciousness about social and racial injustice, and document the persistence of racism from the perspectives of those “injured and victimized by its legacy” (Yosso, 2006, p. 10). For Latino doctoral students in counseling programs, their professional identity development experience is influenced by social, historical, and political situations that have made Latinos an oppressed ethnic group in the U.S., therefore their experiences served as counterstories to our current understanding of professional identity development.
Because Latino doctoral students may experience professional identity development differently and belong to a marginalized ethnic group, their stories served as counterstories to the current dominant narrative of counseling doctoral students developing a professional identity. For example, a Latino student who has a strong sense of connection with the cultural spaces of family and community may feel guilty, confused, and vulnerable when leaving these spaces to join the academy (Gonzalez et al., 2001; Rosales, 2006). As a result, this student’s academic experience will be complicated by the need to negotiate a new and different world of the academy that can ignore the interdependence of family and community in favor of individualistic pursuits (Flores Niemann, 1999; Gonzalez et al., 2001). However, this experience tends to be out of the ordinary for most doctoral students, who tend to be White American, and therefore served as a counterstory and may demonstrate how racism plays a role in the professional identity experiences of Latino doctoral students.

**Being Latino in the U.S.**

In order to understand the importance of exploring how Latino doctoral students in counseling programs experience the professional identity development process, a thorough description of Latinos as an ethnic group is provided. Following this description, I explain the Latino cultural values that Latino doctoral students may contribute to their professional identity development process. As previously mentioned, professional identity development is an active socialization process between the student and the counseling program. As a result of this process, students begin to integrate their personal and professional selves into one cohesive identity and become integrated into
the profession (Moss et al., 2014; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). This active construction of identity is influenced by several factors: 1) the person-environment fit between the student and the counseling profession, 2) the student’s personal attributes and developmental history (Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990), and 3) the counselor educators’ values, beliefs, and perceptions about counselor identity (Reiner et al., 2013). The focus for this study was on how the participants actively constructed their professional identity as marginalized doctoral students in the predominantly White American counseling profession. This process was complicated by their experiences of microaggressions and invalidations; resulting in an acculturative process of resistance and disruption to the norm of the current perception of who a counseling doctoral student is. The participants’ cultural values and ethnic identity played a role in their professional identity development, as did the manifestations of power and privilege in the counseling program.

**Latinos as an Ethnic Group**

The ethnic category of Latino is a socially constructed and complex concept that is impacted by the dominant society in which it is imbedded (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Gloria et al., 2006). The U.S. Census Bureau currently defines Hispanic as any person with origins (i.e., heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth) in the countries of Latin America, including Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, South or Central America, or the Iberian Peninsula regardless of race (U.S. Census, 2011). The term Latino is used in this study to signify those individuals who self-identify with the U.S. Census definition of Hispanic, and to respect the self-determination and empowerment of the Latino
community to identify with other people of color and not with the White-identified and invented label of Hispanic (Valdes, 2005).

The term Latino can encompass a diverse array of ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, languages, and racial identities (Arredondo et al., 2014; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Gloria et al., 2006; Quintana & Scull, 2009). For example, about 64% of Latinos in the U.S. identify as Mexican, about 15% identify as Central or South American, about 8% identify as Puerto Rican, about 4% identify as Cuban, and about 8% identify as other Hispanic origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Most Mexican Americans live in California, Texas, Arizona, as well as in Illinois and Colorado (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2015). Central and South Americans live mostly in California, Florida, and New York. Puerto Ricans are concentrated in New York, Florida, New Jersey, and New England. Most Cuban Americans are in Florida, California, and New Jersey (Ennis et al., 2015).

Amongst these Latino ethnic subgroups, various racial identities also exist (Ortiz & Santos, 2009). Fifty-three percent of Latinos identified their racial classification as “White” and 37% chose “some other race” (U.S. Census, 2011). Phenotypically, Latinos can have light, dark, or caramel skin color, various facial features and hair texture that demonstrate that Latinos exists on a spectrum from White to Black and can include individuals who are “mestizo” or are racially mixed and have multiple ethnic and racial heritages (Arredondo et al., 2014; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001, p. 39).

Latinos can also represent various political identifications (e.g., Chicano or Boricua), immigration statuses (i.e., first-generation individuals, U.S. citizens; Gloria et
al., 2006), and socioeconomic statuses (SES; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). According to the U.S. Census (2011), 74% of Latinos are American citizens. Forty percent of Latinos are first generation citizens meaning that they were the first in their family to be born in the U.S. (Sierra, Carrillo, DeSipio, & Jones-Correa, 2000). The reasons for and context of immigration to the United States can also vary and range from political asylum to financial motivations and can impact cultural interactions within the dominant culture (Quintana & Scull, 2009; Sierra et al., 2000).

Given the diversity of heritages and immigration stories, the languages spoken amongst Latinos varies. For instance, 65% of U.S. Latinos speak only English or speak it very well (Motel & Patten, 2012, as cited in Arredondo et al., 2014). Foreign-born Latinos speak primarily Spanish (Arredondo et al., 2014) and other subgroups may speak indigenous languages as well (Carter, 2015). Despite the fact that Spanish was one of the native languages of the U.S., it has become a marker of Latino ethnicity, negative assumptions and stereotypes associated with this ethnic group (Carter, 2015).

The majority of Latinos belong to low income households, have little inherited wealth, and have no financial assets (Ramirez, 2011). Because of these characteristics, Latinos belong to a lower socioeconomic class with little rank, status, capital, and resources (Anderson & Collins, 2010). Ramirez (2011) described low-income Latino students having lower resources, guidance, and knowledge about college admissions; lower expectations for college attendance, lower test scores, and lower probabilities of attending graduate school than their middle-class counterparts. Low-income Latino students are also less likely to attend selective institutions compared to White, male, and
middle-class students and apply to fewer colleges (McDonough, 1997, as cited in Ramirez, 2011). This unequal access to college maintains class inequalities embedded in the matrix of domination that can exist in predominantly White American academic settings (Jensen, 2013) and denies upward mobility. By denying access to this social and cultural capital, Latinos remain oppressed and constrained into a lower class with little opportunity for advancement (Contreras & Gandara, 2006).

As a diverse ethnic group, Latinos encompass a wide range of racial and ethnic identities, as well as political, immigration, and socioeconomic statuses. These identities can intersect in unique ways, possibly making the professional identity development experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs unique and varied. Specifically, these personal attributes of the student interact with the environmental ones and possibly shape the socialization process of developing a professional identity for Latino doctoral students in unknown ways. Thus, this study took into consideration the diversity of experiences and the role of race and/or ethnicity for Latino doctoral students in counseling programs.

The Role of Ethnicity (and/or Race)

Latinos may be identified by their race and/or ethnicity within the professional context of counseling. Ethnicity refers to a “system of shared meanings” (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012, p. 897) where cultural values, such as collectivism, spirituality and religiosity, communication patterns and language, affective styles, and family roles are transmitted and shared within the ethnic group (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993; Murray et al., 2001). Given that, according to Kluckhohn and Stotbeck, identifying as Latino shapes
students’ worldviews, or how they view relationships, time, nature, activity, and people (as cited in Arredondo et al., 2014), it is necessary to understand how ethnicity interacts in a professional context that values a different worldview, such as those values based on White American values.

As many scholars have described, interacting within predominantly White American professions can lead to a cultural clash that can lead to either a successful integration of personal and professional identities, or a sacrifice of personal identities for the sake of conformity with the professional identity that often conflicts with ethnicity (Ancis et al., 2000; Gloria & Castellanos, 2006; Gonzalez et al., 2001; Lineros & Hinojosa, 2013; Niles & Harris-Bowlsby, 2002; Protivnak & Foss, 2009; Rosales, 2006). For example, some students of color stopped identifying with their community concerns in order to shift loyalties to faculty and peers in the profession, may become blind to personal experiences of inequality, and begin to develop a detached stance from racism (Daniel, 2007). As a result, Latino students may feel pressured to leave behind their previous ethnic identity and take on scholarly characteristics of the chosen field, which in this case is the counseling profession (Torres, 2006).

For many Latino doctoral students adapting to academia, it may be hard to stay true to culture while succeeding in academia (Rosales, 2006; Torres, 2006). As Rosales (2006) stated, “family is difficult to separate from the individual, and without family, my journey would not be complete” (p. 202). Some Latino students may feel a sense of guilt about engaging in the developmental changes that occur as a result of an academic program that are in opposition to their familial ties, because their studies can keep them
away from their family (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006; Gonzalez et al., 2001; Lineros & Hinojosa, 2013). For instance, Latino students who participated in research studies about the experiences in graduate school described feeling fragile, lonely, and unsure about whether or not the doctoral degree is worth the pain and effort required to navigate predominantly White American settings that may ignore or devalue the importance of their ethnicity (Gonzalez et al., 2001).

Levin et al. (2013) interviewed 26 graduate students of color, 5 of whom were black and 9 were Latino, about their experiences. The students discussed how the academic culture set expectations that one must prioritize work over family and that the independent nature of academic work contrasts with cultural values, such as giving back to the community (Levin et al., 2013). As a result, although the participants engaged in academic dialogue and research with peers and faculty, they often felt angry or unable to reconcile the cultural differences between their academic and ethnic identities (Gonzalez et al., 2001; Rosales, 2006).

**Latino cultural values.** In order to explore fully the ways in which Latino doctoral students in counseling programs may experience the professional identity developmental process differently than their White American counterparts, a thorough understanding of the Latino cultural values of education, gender norms, spirituality, *familismo, compradrazco, and personalismo* is warranted. Based on level of acculturation and racial and/or ethnic identity development, the experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs may be colored by these cultural values in various ways.
In the Latino culture, education is highly valued as a means of upward social mobility for the family (Ortiz & Santos, 2009). The definition of \textit{educacion} in the Latino culture emphasizes having respect for family, for tradition, and pride in one’s community (Gonzalez, 2012). Valuing community and success is grounded in cooperation, interdependence, and selflessness (Gonzalez, 2012), which are hallmark features of collectivism. Gender roles, spirituality, familismo, and personalismo are common shared values that reinforce collectivism, community, and interdependence.

\textbf{Gender roles.} Gender roles are learned in the family and can affect how Latino males and females relate and act in academic settings. Females are taught to follow the concept of \textit{marianismo}. This concept suggests that girls must grow up to be pure, long-suffering, nurturing, pious, virtuous, and humble, like the Virgin Mary (Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002). Following this concept, some mothers are seen as selfless, self-sacrificing, and nurturing individuals who provide the spiritual strength for the family. Sons are taught to follow the concept of \textit{machismo}. Machismo refers to a man’s responsibility to care for, protect, and defend his family, rather than engage in arrogant and sexist behavior towards women (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008). Additionally, men are considered the head of the household (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002).

\textbf{Spirituality.} Spirituality and religious beliefs are fundamental aspects of a Latino person’s way of life and search for identity and meaning (Arredondo et al., 2014). For example, Latinos make meaning of their world by invoking their belief of a higher power, by stating, \textit{si Dios quiere} (if it is God’s will). This belief demonstrates how Latinos
believe that change is possible through prayer and that destiny is linked to spirituality (Arredondo et al., 2014). Religion can be a source of strength when coping with challenges (Ortiz & Santos, 2009). However, this external locus of control may be viewed by others outside of the culture as passivity or dependence (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). In university settings, for example, faculty can perceive this behavior as non-assertive and perceive it as a detriment to academic progress and success, since assertiveness is valued in that setting.

**Familismo.** Familismo refers to a preference to maintain a close connection to family, and emphasizes interdependence, cohesiveness, and cooperation amongst family members (Kuperminc, Wilkins, Roche, & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2009; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). Familismo is a defining concept of the Latino culture, and has three components: (a) family obligations, (b) perceived support, and (c) family members serving as role models (Miranda, Bilot, Peluso, Berman, & Van Meek, 2006). There is a deep sense of family obligation that overshadows individual needs and maintains the family’s harmony, which stems from a collectivist worldview (Guarnero & Flascherud, 2008; Sager, Schlimmer, & Hellman, 2001; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). Family members may feel that they represent more than just themselves and desire to stay close to the family (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006; Lineros & Hinojosa, 2013; Ortiz & Santos, 2009).

This collectivist worldview is manifested in a shared sense of responsibility for childcare, providing financial and emotional support, and participating in decision-making efforts that involve more than one family member (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). The family is the source of emotional and economic support, and is grounded with a
sense of *orgullo* (pride), *dignidad* (dignity), *confianza* (trust and intimacy), and *respeto* (respect; Falicov, 2010; Guarnero, 2007). A person’s self-confidence, decision-making process, security, worth, and identity are largely created within family relationships. For instance, compradazco or valuing godparents as role models promotes a sense of community (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). Godparents are often respected individuals of authority in the community who are invited to all traditional celebrations of a child’s life. Such individuals play an important role in the Latino family; the practice dates back to colonial times (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002).

Therefore, the educational experience is a shared one, yet many Latino students have felt isolated during this time in their lives. Many Latino doctoral students came from a family that had very little experience with higher education and over half of them were first-generation college students, meaning that they were the first in their family to attend college (Gonzalez et al., 2001). As a result of coming from a family that had sparse experience with higher education, the participants in the above referenced research study felt that they were unable to solicit advice from their parents. Latino students, who are often family oriented (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002) and thus seek advice from parents, may feel a sense of isolation when they cannot seek advice from loved ones during one of the most challenging times of their lives (Gonzalez, et al., 2001).

Many Latino doctoral students also reported having felt torn between school and family obligations (Gonzalez, 2006). For example, some master’s level counseling students expressed that they had to make cultural adjustments from a collectivist orientation to an individualistic one by learning to self-advocate and dealing with being a
minority (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Some students reported struggles with navigating the academic program and meeting academic standards. Other students felt it difficult to maintain a school-life balance that did not sacrifice time with family and partners (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Maintaining energy, transitioning into a new role of doctoral student, managing time, living on reduced finances, and coping with health-related problems were aspects of the theme of personal issues. Feelings of guilt and regret were felt for prioritizing doctoral work over other life obligations (Protivnak & Foss, 2009).

**Personalismo.** Personalismo or valuing and building interpersonal relationships where there is a great deal of emotional investment is part of the collectivistic worldview of Latinos. Since lifelong relationships of mutual dependency and closeness are valued, positive interpersonal and social skills are valued (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). This value of warm, friendly, and personal relationships impacts how a person perceives and responds to an impersonal and formal environment, such as a university setting. In such a setting, Latina/o doctoral students may find it hard to relate and socially thrive with others (Rosales, 2006). These emotional experiences can influence the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students in unique ways that have not been captured in our current understanding of this process.

**The Role of Acculturation and Racial and Ethnic Identity**

Acculturation and racial and/or ethnic identity play a role in the professional identity development experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs because these aspects of the students’ personal identity shape cultural values, beliefs, and worldviews that they bring into the counseling program (Chavez & Guido-DíBrito,
1999). From this cultural place, Latino doctoral students may interact with the counseling profession in unique ways, and therefore make their professional identity development experiences varied and different from other students.

**Acculturation.** Acculturation occurs when two or more culturally distinct groups come in contact and cultural learning and adaptation takes place (Quintana & Scull, 2009). This concept refers to how one ethnic group adapts, culturally and psychologically, and relates to the dominant or host society (Ortiz & Santos, 2009; Quintana & Scull, 2009). Some changes that can easily be seen are changes in clothing, language, and customs or practices that adapt to align with the dominant society. In the case of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs, the dominant society is the U.S. and the counseling profession, which are both predominantly White American.

A person’s level of acculturation can fall on a continuum from low to high (Guarnero & Flaskerud, 2008; Kohatsu, Concepcion, & Perez, 2010; Sager et al., 2001). For example, a Latino born in the United States, who speaks English fluently, and has little difficulty communicating with the American dominant culture, would be considered highly acculturated. On the other hand, a Latino who recently immigrated to the United States, speaks Spanish fluently, and is immersed in his ethnic culture would be considered less acculturated (Sager et al., 2001). Also, at a basic acculturation level, individuals may forget important historical events or traditions of their country of origin. At an intermediate level, Latinos may lose proficiency of the Spanish language, and at a profound level, persons may change core values, beliefs, and norms that guide behavior. For example, the behavior of *simpatía*, being charming and sociable, may become less
important when interacting with people from other cultures and more salient when interacting with other Latinos (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002).

Thus depending on level of acculturation, Latino doctoral students will have diverse experiences regarding professional identity development. This diversity is shaped by cultural values Latino doctoral students incorporate into their learning environments. Due to acculturation levels, they may have learned to negotiate multiple cultural environments (i.e., the White American academy and their respective ethnic community) and have been immersed in “White-normed” education; thereby, having helpful knowledge about White American education expectations and skills to navigate it (Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999, p. 45). Both racial and/or ethnic identity and acculturation can affect the relationship that Latino doctoral students in counseling may have in their learning environments, which is the counselor education doctoral program (Chavez & Guido-Dibrito, 1999).

**Racial identity development.** Atkinson, Morten, and Sue developed a five-stage Minority Identity Development model (MID) to describe the racial identity development for ethnic groups that are not White American, such as Asians and Latinos (as cited in Sue & Sue, 2013). This model integrated the similar patterns of adjustment to cultural oppression that many ethnic groups experience in the U.S. Sue and Sue (2013) further elaborated on this model to encompass a broader population and renamed it Racial/Cultural Identity Development (R/CID; Sue & Sue, 2013). The five stages are: (a) conformity, (b) dissonance, (c) resistance and immersion, (d) introspection, and (e) integrative awareness (Sue & Sue, 2013). These stages account for how individuals
struggle to understand themselves in terms of their own culture, the dominant culture, and the oppressive relationship between the two cultures (i.e., the U.S. culture and the ethnic culture). There are four corresponding beliefs and attitudes at each stage that are integral to the person’s views of self, of others of the same minority, of others of another minority, and majority individuals (Sue & Sue, 2013).

Individuals in the conformity stage prefer dominant cultural values over their own. Lifestyles, value systems, and cultural or physical characteristics that most resemble White American society are highly valued (Sue & Sue, 2013). A consequence of the pressure to assimilate and acculturate to the White American culture can create culture conflicts and feeling negative about oneself and one's culture. Individuals in the conformity stage may become ashamed of who they are, reject their own group identification, and attempt to identify with the White American group (Sue & Sue, 2013). Yet over time, this person’s denial of racial/cultural heritage will dissipate, leading to a questioning and challenging of beliefs of the conformity stage. Movement into the dissonance stage is a gradual process; however, a traumatic event can propel a person to move into this stage at a much more rapid pace. A person in this stage begins to develop a sense of awareness that racism exists and begins to have a sense of pride in self. These feelings of pride are mixed with feelings of shame resulting in a sense of conflict. Most of the person’s psychic energy is expended towards resolving this conflict. With this growing awareness of racism and rejection of stereotypes, the person may develop suspicion and some distrust of certain members of the dominant group (Sue & Sue, 2013).
When a person enters the resistance and immersion stage they tend to reject the dominant values of White American society (Sue & Sue, 2013). This person is invested in self discovery of one's own history and culture. This person begins to feel connected with other members of their racial and cultural group. Feelings of guilt, shame, and anger can develop at this time as the person struggles to resolve the conflicts and confusions of the previous stage (Sue & Sue, 2013). Because these feelings are reactions against the dominant culture, the individual may begin to develop a need for a more proactive, positive self-definition. A person in this introspection stage may experience feelings of discontent and discomfort with their ethnic group views that may be rigid. The challenge now becomes a conflict between responsibility and allegiance to one's own ethnic group versus notions of personal independence and autonomy. There is a lowering of intense feelings of anger and distrust toward the White American group. When the person enters the last stage, integrative awareness, the individual develops a positive self-image and experiences strong self-worth and confidence. They realize that all cultures have acceptable and unacceptable aspects. This person has a greater sense of racial and cultural pride, individual control and flexibility, and a strong commitment and desire to eliminate oppression (Sue & Sue, 2013).

Depending on a Latino doctoral student’s level of racial identity development, the professional identity developmental process will proceed in varied ways that may be different from their White American counterparts. Level of racial identity development may influence the experiences of Latino doctoral students negotiating a predominantly White American profession and academic setting. For example, a student at the
beginning stages of racial identity development may not perceive race to be a factor in their professional and academic experiences, while a student at later stages may be more aware of the role of race (Lerma, 2010).

**Ethnic identity development.** Ethnic identity development serves as a multidimensional construct that describes and explains a person’s ethnic group identification and affiliation (Saylor & Aries, 1999). Ethnic identity development is a complex and fluid process that occurs throughout the life span, and can be defined as someone having a sense of belonging, positive attitudes, commitment and involvement through cultural practices and activities with one’s ethnic group (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Saylor & Aries, 1999). The construct of ethnic identity development is a way of understanding, in a stage model, the internal (e.g. feelings and thoughts) and external (e.g. behaviors) factors that individuals develop through group membership and self-identification with a particular ethnicity (Ortiz & Santos, 2009).

This process is also impacted by context (Quintana & Scull, 2009). In other words, the context (i.e., academic and professional setting) within which a Latino student is immersed can influence ethnic identity development and identification by creating or denying opportunities for self-reflection of ethnic identity (Saylor & Aries, 1999). For example, research has shown cultural organizations within the academic institution that provide an ethnic community can facilitate students’ adjustment and involvement with the academic community by making Latino cultural aspects assets instead of sources of stigmatization (Saylor & Aries, 1999). Research has also shown that when ethnicity becomes salient in a predominantly White American educational context, the strength and
level of one’s ethnic identity can increase over time (Lerma, 2010; Saylor & Aries, 1999).

In other words, if a particular identity, such as ethnicity, is central to a student’s self-concept and necessary to maintain a sense of self-consistency, the undergraduate college student will search for a way to support that identity (Ortiz & Santos, 2009), even if it is devalued by others in the new academic context (Saylor & Aries, 1999). For example, a Latino undergraduate college student with a strong ethnic identity may look for other Latino students and get involved in Latino activities to strengthen ethnic identification, while a Latino student with a weak ethnic identity may not get involved (Saylor & Aries, 1999). A politically active Latina student may identify as Chicana (an ethnic identity that denotes political activism) at school, but identify as Mexican American at home (Ortiz & Santos, 2009).

One research study showed that a strong ethnic identity does not imply a low involvement with the dominant White American culture, and that undergraduate college students belonging to ethnic groups other than the White American one did not adapt their behaviors and attitudes to resemble those of their White American peers (Saylor & Aries, 1999). These students, with strong ethnic identities, also did not withdraw from the dominant culture and were more likely to join with White American groups than students with weaker ethnic identities (Saylor & Aries, 1999). It should be noted that 50% of the participants in this study attended predominantly White American high schools, grew up in predominantly White neighborhoods, and came from families that were middle or upper middle class; out of the 110 students, only 24 were Latino (Saylor
& Aries, 1999). Given that most of the participants in this study showed how students did not adapt their behaviors and attitudes to resemble their White American peers came from predominately White American communities, they may have acculturated to the White American culture in such a way that promoted White American behaviors and attitudes; thus little adaptation may have been required.

Ortiz and Santos (2009) also found that many Latino undergraduate college students associated a strong ethnic identity with having a sense of confidence to tackle challenges and struggles in the academic world. Many Latino students also reported developing greater political consciousness and a collectivistic awareness regarding their actions and future plans as scholars (Ortiz & Santos, 2009). They viewed education as the primary vehicle towards improving the status and power of their ethnic group and of themselves. The students spoke of “becoming Americanized and forging a new hybrid culture they found to be personally and collectively beneficial, one that did not entail sacrificing valued and treasured elements of their Latino culture and heritage” (Ortiz & Santos, 2009, p. 314).

Although this research explored the experiences of undergraduate college Latino students, the findings are relevant to the experiences of doctoral students because ethnic identity development occurs throughout the lifespan. Entering a doctoral program within predominantly White American settings can evoke similar experiences for Latino doctoral students since this context, along with the students’ ethnic identity, may serve as transformative events for ethnic identity development.
**Latino ethnic identity development model.** There are a variety of ethnic identity development models focusing on Latinos (Sue & Sue, 2013). For this study, I have chosen Ruiz’s (1990) five stage model of Latino ethnic identity development because it follows a similar framework of other racial identity models (e.g., Helms’ White racial identity model, Cross’ Black identity model; Sue & Sue, 2013). I also extended it by including Ferdman and Gallegos’ (2001) Latino ethnic orientations because being Latino is important to one’s experience of education and professional identity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Perez Huber, 2010).

Ruiz (1990) posited five stages of Latina/o ethnic identity development that only exist in relation to the dominant White American culture in the United States (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). The first stage, causal stage, involves being humiliated by dominant environmental messages that ignore, negate, or denigrate Latina/o heritage. A person in this stage may experience traumatic relationships related to being Latina/o and may not identify as Latina/o. In stage two, the cognitive stage, erroneous belief systems related to being Latina/o are incorporated. Before entering the consequence stage of development, a transformative event or encounter that triggers movement to the next stage usually occurs (Ruiz, 1990; Wehrly, 1995). In the consequence stage, the fragmentation of ethnic identity intensifies and this person may reject his/her Latina/o heritage. During stage four, the working through phase, a person begins integrating a healthier Latina/o identity. This stage is characterized by an increase in ethnic consciousness, reclaiming, and reconnecting with a Latina/o identity and community. The last stage, successful resolution, occurs when a person has a greater acceptance of self, culture, and ethnicity.
The individual has improved self-esteem and believes that ethnic identity is positive and promotes success (Ruiz, 1990).

This process does not always happen in these discrete stages; instead, individuals may simultaneously hold values and beliefs across various stages and may go back and forth between stages (Saylor & Aries, 1999). Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) further defined this process as evolving orientations towards Latino identity that are defined by the person’s “lens” toward identity (or how they view their ethnicity), how the person prefers to self-identify, how White Americans are seen, and how race fits into the equation. These orientations include: (a) Latino-integrated, (b) Latino-identified, (c) Subgroup-identified, (d) Latinos as Other, (e) undifferentiated/denial, and (f) White-identified.

Someone who is Latino-integrated is aware of one’s own subgroup background and culture, and is able to handle the complexities of Latino identity (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). Additionally, this person is fully integrated with other social identities (e.g., gender) and is capable of advocating from an integrated sense of self. This person is inclusive of other Latinos and is able to challenge dominant viewpoints of race (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). A Latino-identified person views race beyond the Black-White paradigm and places ethnicity at the center of one’s self-concept and relationships with others (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). This person identifies with the Latino ethnic group as a whole and other racial and ethnic groups as barriers or allies. One is able to recognize institutional racism and to advocate against discrimination (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). Members of these two orientations hold the highest level of advocacy
capabilities and awareness of racial complexity. Individuals in the other orientations have less developed advocacy desires and awareness of racial identity.

Persons who value their ethnic subgroups at the expense of other Latino subgroups are in the subgroup identified orientation (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). This person may view White Americans as barriers to inclusion, yet view ethnicity and not race as primary. Individuals with the orientation of Latino as “other” may identify broadly as a person of color or minority, but are unaware of their specific Latino background. This person may not adhere to Latino culture values or to White American cultural values and norms. A person with an undifferentiated orientation promotes a colorblind view of individuals, and attributes discrimination and racism to individual behavior (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). Lastly, a Latino who is White-identified views oneself as racially White and prefers White culture over Latino culture (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). This person may also view Latinos as inferior to Whites and can become highly acculturated into the White culture (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001).

According to LatCrit, depending on a Latino doctoral student’s level of racial and/or ethnic identity and acculturation, the student’s commitment and integration of certain Latino cultural values will vary. For example, a Latino student who is highly acculturated to the U.S. culture and was born here may espouse more individualistic worldviews than a student who recently immigrated to this country and may hold more collectivistic viewpoints (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). These variations may influence the experiences of Latino doctoral students developing a professional identity within a predominantly White American profession, such as counseling. An understanding of
racial and/or ethnic identity and acculturation is necessary to further understand the unique ways that Latino doctoral students in counseling programs may experience the professional identity developmental process. According to LatCrit, race and/or ethnicity play a role in the professional experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs since all educational experiences are racialized and embedded in our White American U.S. society that tends to reinforce racist and ethnocentric practices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Perez Huber, 2010; Valdes, 2005). Thus, race and/or ethnicity cannot be denied.

**The Counseling Profession**

The counseling profession evolved within the last century and is considered a helping profession, similar to psychology and social work (Gerig, 2014; Granello & Young, 2012). Our foundation emerged from theories of psychiatry and psychology in the United States in the 1800s. Some of these theories included psychoanalysis, cognitive behavioral, and person-centered (Gerig, 2014). These theories emphasized White American values such as (a) a focus on the individual, (b) emphasis on competition, (c) active and future orientation, (d) hierarchical decision-making model, (e) Protestant work ethic, and (f) an emphasis on a scientific and linear way of thinking (Gerig, 2014; Katz, 1985; Usher, 1989). Pederson (1987) further explained 10 cultural biases that the counseling profession may uphold: (a) normal behavior is universal, (b) development of the individual is paramount, (c) academic disciplines operate independently from one another to understand human behavior, (d) independence is overemphasized, (e) dependency on linear thinking, (f) change agent is focused on the
individual, not the system, (g) neglect of history, and (h) that counselors are not culturally encapsulated.

Given the White American foundation of the counseling field, the current professional culture most often follows and reinforces White American values, beliefs, and worldviews (Gerig, 2014; Granello & Young, 2012). This foundational history, that valued White American cultural values of independence and competition over other values, created a counseling profession that espoused a culturally encapsulated viewpoint of clients that was individualistic and impacted clients’ treatment and outcome (Gerig, 2014; Katz, 1985; Richardson & Molinaro, 1996). In particular, clients were viewed from the White American cultural point of view and as culturally deficient (Pederson, 1987), instead of culturally different and equal. From this ethnocentric perspective, counselors struggled with being multiculturally competent (Sue & Sue, 2013) and instead, may have unwittingly perpetuated racialized White American dominant viewpoints that viewed clients from ethnic groups as inferior (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1991; Sue & Sue, 2014).

The education of counselors at the master’s and doctoral level also follows a monocultural White American perspective by focusing on the development of the counselor-in-training as an individual and promoting a curriculum that mostly emphasized White American cultural values and counseling tenets (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Sue & Sue, 2013). For example, in order to secure a counseling internship, students have to compete with one another for limited positions. Also, most textbooks and journal articles used in counselor education are written by White American men and
focus more on skill development than racial self-awareness (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Granello & Young, 2012). Cultural aspects are often the last topic to be discussed in the curriculum and treatment approaches for ethnic groups are presented in a “cookbook” fashion, wherein each treatment approach for each ethnic group is considered homogeneous (Thomas & Schwarzbaum, 2010).

Likewise, in the field of counselor education, the professional identity
development of master’s and doctoral students has been viewed as homogeneous. For instance, our current understanding of professional identity development of doctoral students in counseling programs involved mostly White American students and did not explore the experiences of students who did not belong to the White American racial group (Granello & Young, 2012). Therefore, our current knowledge is more relevant to other White American students than to students belonging to other ethnic groups, thereby contributing to an ethnocentric academic environment that upholds specific values, behaviors, and perspectives that must be internalized in order for any student to succeed (Boyle & Boice, 1998), including Latinos. However, due to cultural factors as mediated by racial and/or ethnic identity and acculturation level, the internalization process may look different for Latino doctoral students compared to their White American counterparts.

**Counselor Education**

Counselor education has become the means through which counselors-in-training are taught the counseling theories, skills, and values required to be professional counselors and counselor educators. The CACREP accreditation, state licensure
requirements, and historical precedents have delineated educational and professional standards that a student must meet in order to be considered a professional counselor (Adkinson-Bradley, 2013). Thus, counselor education is one of the primary vehicles through which the professional identity of counseling is disseminated and reinforced at both the master’s and doctoral level (Granello & Young, 2012).

**Doctoral level studies in counselor education.** By completing a doctoral counseling program, a person can become a counselor educator. Students entering a doctoral program in counselor education often have achieved competencies of an entry-level counselor and have met educational requirements of a master’s program (Goodrich et al., 2011), and may have been socialized in the White American counseling profession.

The additional education requirements to become a counselor educator include completion of a minimum 66 semester credit hours beyond the master’s degree. These credits meet curricular requirements in didactic work, instructional theory, supervision experiences, individual and group counseling, consultation, research, social change theory, advocacy action planning, and crisis, disaster, and trauma-causing events (Adkinson-Bradley, 2013). Doctoral students are expected to complete one 600 hour internship, a minimum of 100 hours in counseling and 40 hours of direct service with clients (Adkinson-Bradley, 2013).

Additionally, CACREP (2016) has outlined five curricular areas required for obtaining a doctoral degree in counseling: (a) teaching, (b) supervision, (c) research and scholarship, (d) counseling, and (e) leadership and advocacy (CACREP, 2016). These standards clarify requirements to promote a unified counseling profession and to
delineate education and professional requirements for doctoral-level graduate preparation within the areas of counselor education, supervision, and practice (CACREP, 2016). Therefore, most doctoral programs in counseling require students to engage in teaching and supervision, leadership, and scholarship (Adkinson-Bradley, 2013; Carlson et al., 2006; Goodrich et al., 2011).

Teaching is a core component of a doctoral counseling program (CACREP, 2016) and is defined as didactic instruction of master’s level students, in the form of teaching classes, facilitating psycho-educational groups, and clinical instruction (Limberg et al., 2013). The teaching experience provides doctoral students an opportunity to practice and apply teaching and learning theory, and to build confidence as a teacher (Limberg et al., 2013). Limberg et al. (2013) found in their qualitative study of 19 first, second, and third year, mostly Caucasian doctoral counselor education students (including three African-Americans and two Asians) that teaching was a large factor in creating and strengthening their role as counselor educator. Specifically, using teaching skills and evaluating students’ knowledge were key contributing factors to identifying as a counselor educator (Limberg et al., 2013).

Supervision is a second major component of a doctoral counseling program (CACREP, 2016) and includes applying theories of supervision to students’ development and ensuring sound clinical practice (Limberg et al., 2013). Supervision teaches future counselor educators about counselor development and affects the professional identity transition from counselor to doctoral-level counselor (Limberg et al., 2013). Many
participants in the Limberg et al. (2013) study reported that supervision was one of the most significant experiences that solidified their counselor educator identity.

Conducting research is another important factor in doctoral studies and is vital to identity formation as a doctoral-level counselor (Carlson et al., 2006; Limberg et al., 2013). Creating and disseminating new knowledge becomes doctoral students’ responsibility (Limberg et al., 2013). Doctoral students perceive research as a responsibility to the profession and a new way of thinking about professional knowledge. Research involves writing a manuscript, submitting an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application, and identifying and developing research interests (Limberg et al., 2013).

Research interfaces with White-dominated academic systems, such as IRB and administration that values prestige and status over racially-based research (Gonzalez et al., 2002). Often times, racially-based and community action-oriented research is not supported or deemed scholarly. For example, many students of color at the doctoral level in predominantly White American settings experienced conservative viewpoints that excluded research topics related to race (Gildersleeve et al., 2011), and made these topics “tokens” (or examples that the program is being diverse) and “marginally important” (Gonzalez et al., 2002, p. 547). For example, students of color reported that the predominantly White American academic culture stifles “culturally-based” scholarly endeavors and restricts personal interests that involve race (Gasman et al., 2008, p. 129; Gonzalez et al., 2002). For Latino doctoral students, topics related to culture or race are often pursued given the sense of obligation to contribute to the ethnic community through research (Gonzalez et al., 2002).
Counselors at the doctoral level can be practitioners and/or educators in the profession of counseling. CACREP delineated six required aspects for developing foundational knowledge in counseling. The first aspect is learning to examine counseling theories from a scholarly perspective. The second is integrating counseling theories. The third is conceptualizing clients from multiple theoretical perspectives. The fourth is understanding evidence-based counseling practices. The fifth is developing methods for evaluating counseling effectiveness, and the last is exploring ethical and culturally relevant counseling in multiple settings (CACREP, 2016). Based on this knowledge, doctoral level counselors develop advanced knowledge and expertise in counseling. Currently, this knowledge tends to promote White-American worldviews and values, therefore developing advanced knowledge and expertise in counseling means incorporating this knowledge into one’s identity as a counselor. Latino doctoral students incorporating this knowledge may experience development differently, due to ethnic differences.

Leadership entails developing knowledge on theories of leadership and applying leadership skills in various roles (CACREP, 2016). According to Northouse (2013), servant leadership entails being both a leader and a servant. A servant leader pays attention to the concerns of followers, empathizes with them, and nurtures them. This type of leader serves the greater good of the organization, community, and society at large (Northouse, 2013). As Northouse (2013) described, a servant leader is one who wants to serve and aspires to lead so that persons grow and benefit from their leadership.
Part of being a servant leader is engaging in advocacy. Advocacy is a derivative of social justice counseling (Ratts, Toporek, & Lewis, 2010). Advocacy entails addressing oppressive social structures to improve conditions for individuals who have been and continue to be disenfranchised in society. Through individual, group, institutional, and societal level interventions, counselors, as change agents, examine possible barriers and obstacles inhibiting client development. One goal is to create equity in access and success in education (Ratts et al., 2010).

Students may become counselor educators by engaging in a doctoral program that meets these educational and professional requirements. They may begin to feel and act like a counselor educator by developing a professional identity aligned with the profession’s image of a doctoral level counselor. A function of the educational and counseling professional standards and expectations is to create common factors and normality that all doctoral students can adopt and integrate into their sense of professional identity (Carlson et al., 2006; Hall & Burns, 2009). In other words, doctoral education is a process that “…teaches people how to behave, what to hope for, and what it means to succeed and fail. [Where] Some individuals become competent, and others do not” (Tierney, 1997, p. 4). Namely, students who do not fit the mold that is characteristic of White American males and reinforces White American values, such as individuality and competition, may suffer and find it hard to integrate their personal and professional identities (Gonzalez, 2006; Hall & Burns, 2009). Given that Latino doctoral students do not fit the mold of a White American, because of racial and cultural differences, Latino students may experience a professional identity developmental process that may be
different than their White American counterparts, yet we do not understand in what ways. For this reason, I proposed this research study to explore the experiences of Latino counseling doctoral students who are developing a professional identity within a predominantly White American profession.

**Professional Identity Development**

Over the past 40 years, the counseling profession has researched and explored the topic of professional identity development. Most of the qualitative and quantitative research on this process involved White American counselors-in-training at the master’s and doctoral level (Granello & Young, 2012). What these researchers found was that counselors, in general, develop a professional identity over time and learn to become independent, autonomous professionals who embody the professional norms, beliefs, and values of the field (Moss et al., 2014; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990). In this way, students become acculturated into the field and become professional counselors.

By becoming professional counselors, students adopt and share the professional values of the field (Moss et al., 2014; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990). The professional identity of counseling upholds certain values. For instance, counselors believe in equality; client advocacy; the importance of career and personal growth; and the influence of health, human development, and biology (Granello & Young, 2012). Counselors also believe in the benefits of science to inform practice via evidence-based treatment approaches, in addition to assessments and testing (Granello & Young, 2012). A counselor is someone who has pride in the profession and focuses on
wellness, development, prevention, and empowerment of individuals (Mellin et al., 2011; Remley & Herlihy, 2010; Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990).

Professional identity is defined as the incorporation of the activities inherent in the professional roles and obligations of that discipline with one’s personal identity (Dollarhide et al., 2013). Through interpersonal and intrapersonal means, students learn and adopt skills, values, roles, attitudes, ethics, and modes of thinking and problem-solving that define that professional identity (Auxier et al., 2003; Nugent & Jones, 2009). The desired outcome is to develop an authentic professional identity that incorporates personal and professional aspects into one “therapeutic self” (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992).

**Professional Identity Development at the Master’s Level**

Professional identity development in counseling has been understood as a process wherein a counselor-in-training develops a “therapeutic self that consists of a unique personal blend of the developed professional and personal selves” (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992, p. 507). This therapeutic self creates “frames of reference for counseling roles and decisions, attitudes concerning responsibility and ethics, modes of thinking, and patterns of problem solving” (Gibson et al., 2010, p. 21). This process of individuation involves a movement from dependence on external validation and dependency on authority figures to an internal validating sense of autonomy as a confident counselor (Gibson et al., 2010; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Definitions of professional identity include self-labeling as a professional, integrating skills and attitudes as a professional, and a connection to a professional community. The professional
community assists the new professional to maintain contact with standards, expectations, and rules of the profession (Gibson et al., 2010).

Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) explored the themes in counselor development by analyzing 120 pages of narrative data from 100 White American participants over a five year period. Divided into five groups of 20 individuals each, the first group of participants was first-year graduate students, the second group consisted of advanced doctoral students, the third, fourth, and fifth groups were doctoral level practitioners with 5-25 years of postdoctoral experience (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992).

From this qualitative research study, 20 themes were delineated and categorized into 4 constructs: (a) primary characteristic themes, (b) process descriptor themes, (c) source of influence themes, and (d) secondary characteristic themes (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). The first category explored the process of developing an authentic professional self through an integration of professional and personal aspects. The researchers found that participants expressed a strong consistency between these two aspects and moved from rigidity to increased authenticity, and external approval seeking to internal wisdom (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). The next category, process descriptors, described the long, slow, and erratic process of professional identity development. Through this process, elders, peers, clients, personal life, social and cultural environments influence the students’ experiences in unique ways. This category also captured the sense of anxiety many students feel during the process. The next category outlined the source of influences that also influence the process, such as external support and modeling mentors. Personal life aspects are emphasized here (e.g., balancing
life roles, culture shock to academia), as are the influences of clients and elders, and being in the “powerless student role” (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992, p. 513). The secondary characteristics included self-regulation, negotiating boundaries between personal and professional selves, protection of self, and development from an ideal to a realistic view of being a counselor.

In a qualitative study of eight master’s level White American students, Auxier et al. (2003) reported participants engaging in a recycling identity formation process which involved conceptual learning, experiential learning, and external evaluation. All of these processes interacted with each other in a cyclical manner. Conceptual learning referred to traditional academic experiences, such as listening to lectures, reading, and writing papers (Auxier et al., 2003). Experiential learning occurs when students apply conceptual learning to the practice of counseling. Students practice in counseling techniques classes, practicum, internships, and small group experiences. An essential part of experiential learning are the changes that happen in emotional and behavioral awareness, interpersonal behaviors, and skill development (Auxier et al., 2003). These transformations are linked to external evaluation or feedback from peers, supervisors, professors, and clients. Experiencing such feedback created anxiety and reactions from students (Auxier et al., 2003). When such feedback was validating, it invoked positive reactions within students. When the feedback disconfirmed the students’ perceptions of their counselor identity it led to a complex process of questioning and self re-examination (Auxier et al., 2003). Through this complex process, students decided to accept or
disregard the evaluations. They also struggled to define and clarify their interpersonal and counseling identity (Auxier et al., 2003).

Over time, students form a clearer personal counselor identity (Auxier et al., 2003). Students also experienced an evolution in their feelings about learning. At the beginning of their counseling program, they feel excited and optimistic. In the middle, they may feel disoriented at the complex learning process and external evaluations. Towards the end, students reported more confidence in their counselor identity (Auxier et al., 2003).

Gibson et al. (2010) expanded on these findings by describing transformational tasks that are required for professional identity development of master’s level students, and to move from a reliance on external validation to self-validation. The transformational tasks included: (a) defining counseling, (b) being responsible for professional growth, and (c) becoming integrated into the profession (Gibson et al., 2010). The definition of counseling for the participants represented a more internalized view of counseling and contributed to students taking responsibility for professional growth (Gibson et al., 2010). Taking responsibility demonstrated motivation and self-reliance as a professional. The last transformational task occurs when the student feels integrated into the field of counseling as a contributing professional. This developmental process occurs over time and leads to the student feeling a sense of fit within the profession and the professional community (Gibson et al., 2010).
**Professional Identity Development at the Doctoral Level**

In addition to these aspects, developing a professional identity as a doctoral level counselor involves an evolution and integration of the multiple identities as a counselor, doctoral student, and counselor educator within one’s professional identity. This process was found to be cumulative and integrated all three aspects into one cohesive professional identity. In other words, being a counselor integrated into the role as a doctoral student, which integrated with the role of a counselor educator (Dollarhide et al., 2013). The ultimate outcome is to develop an integrated sense of personal and professional selves, creating an authentic professional identity as a doctoral level counselor and counselor educator.

Carlson et al. (2006) described a conceptual model for professional identity development for counselor education doctoral students within seven key professional areas: (a) program expectations, (b) teaching and supervision, (c) research, (d) publications, (e) grants and funding, (f) service, and (g) conferences, networking, and professional development. The purpose of this model is to provide guidelines to help students navigate through doctoral programs and develop professional identities as counselor educators (Carlson et al., 2006).

Upon entry into the doctoral program, the student must learn and understand the program’s expectations and become oriented to the campus and the community (Carlson et al., 2006). These expectations include meeting academic demands determined by written policies and/or by personal preferences of a faculty advisor, which includes completing a dissertation. At this time, the student is expected to attend formal
orientations, to meet with a faculty advisor, and to meet changing academic demands (Carlson et al., 2006).

Throughout the program, the student is expected to teach, to improve teaching skills, and to supervise master’s level counseling students. By teaching and supervising, the student begins to assume the responsibility and identity of a counselor educator (Carlson et al., 2006). Conducting research is another integral component of counselor educator professional identity. Through active participation with a research mentor, attending symposia or workshops on research skills, and being intentional in developing research expertise, the student develops this aspect of identity (Carlson et al., 2006).

Submitting manuscripts for publication in the professional counseling literature is mandatory and begins during doctoral training. This experience develops students’ writing skills and exposes them to the process of submission, revision, and publication of manuscripts (Carlson et al., 2006). Grant writing and obtaining funding for professional activities are also valuable aspects of professional identity development. Providing service to the profession by volunteering on university or professional organization committees can help the doctoral student learn to manage academic time related to service, teaching, and research (Carlson et al., 2006). The final area of attending conferences, networking, and professional development speak to the need to be involved and connected to the field (Carlson et al., 2006).

Carlson et al. (2006) also described that “counseling students are responsible for their own educational experience, and by actively monitoring and shaping their own journey, they will engage in self-management opportunities that will ultimately increase
possibilities for success in the academy” (p. 126-127). Due to self-efficacy in the form of self-reflection, self-regulation, goal articulation, and plan development, doctoral students actively engage in the educational experience. Through intentional experiences in seven key areas, students develop a professional identity as counselor educators and begin an effective transition to academia (Carlson et al., 2006).

Through active participation and intentionality in these seven areas, Carlson et al. (2006) believed doctoral students in counseling programs will “ultimately lead to a stronger sense of professional identity, greater knowledge and skill acquisition, and enhanced professional efficacy” (Carlson et al., 2006, p. 134). They also believed that it is the students’ responsibility to engage in appropriate professional opportunities and for faculty and the program to provide such opportunities (Carlson et al., 2006). Presenting at professional conferences and participating on research studies are examples of professional activities. Usually, these opportunities arise from professional relationships with peers and faculty; therefore, social and mentoring connections are vital to gaining access to these opportunities. For Latino doctoral students who often experience challenges connecting with peers and faculty in predominantly White American settings (Gonzales, 2006), engaging in these professional opportunities may prove more difficult, which can hinder professional identity development.

Dollarhide et al. (2013) developed a model that described the counselor professional identity developmental process of doctoral students. They interviewed 23 counselor education doctoral students (14 White, 8 African American/Black, 1 Latina/o and White) about their experience of professional identity during their doctoral program
(Dollarhide et al., 2013). This qualitative study revealed that doctoral students in counseling experience a three-stage growth process evident in each of three specific tasks: a) integration of multiple identities, b) evolving legitimacy, and c) acceptance of responsibility. The three-stage growth process began when the student entered the program as a student, continued throughout the doctoral student period, and ended when the student identified as a new counselor educator (Dollarhide et al., 2013).

Internal and external validation serves as a means of building legitimacy as a counselor educator. Doctoral students rely on external validation from professors as the primary source of feedback about performance in teaching and in supervision, since they lack confidence or internal validation. Internal validation evolves through time as doctoral students succeed at counselor education tasks and complete the dissertation. Towards the end of doctoral study, students feel a sense of internal legitimacy and begin to take responsibility for their role as leaders in the profession (Dollarhide et al., 2013).

Developing a professional identity as a counselor educator entails “the paradigm shift from thinking like a counselor to thinking like an educator, supervisor, researcher, and leader” (Limberg et al., 2013, p. 41). The goal is to invest oneself in the qualities of counselor education and to be student-centered, a research contributor to the field, and someone who gives back to the counseling community (Adkinson-Bradley, 2013; Limberg et al., 2013). The professional expectations of teaching, research, counseling, leadership, and advocacy that doctoral students in counseling acquire gives them advanced skills in these areas, and makes them future leaders in the profession of counselor education (Carlson et al., 2006; Goodrich et al., 2011). By engaging in these
professional expectations, doctoral students develop professional identities as counselor educators and are acculturated into the culture of the field (Adkinson-Bradley, 2013; Reiner et al., 2013). Doctoral students are acculturated into the field through interpersonal and intrapersonal means that encourages students to adopt the professional values, worldviews, norms, and beliefs of the field (Moss et al., 2014; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990).

The role of mentoring. Through social and cultural activity with faculty, mentors, and advisors, students learn the customs, traditions, and values of their particular field or discipline and begin to feel integrated into the profession (Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Herzig, 2004). Students can begin to develop a strong professional identity when they feel this integration. A strong professional identity is crucial to future effectiveness and success as a counselor educator (Dollarhide et al., 2013).

Mentoring and faculty-student relationships are mechanisms through which students develop a professional identity (Carlson et al., 2006; Creighton, Creighton, & Parks, 2010). Mentoring is an integral component of this socialization process and involves modeling, teaching, and assisting with the development of research interests (Limberg et al., 2013). This faculty-student mentorship relationship validates students’ identity development, assists in retaining students, influences the student outside of the classroom setting, and is often perceived as the most helpful experience in doctoral studies (Limberg et al., 2013; Protivnak & Foss, 2009).

Mentoring is a key feature of professional socialization (Hall & Burns, 2009; Millett & Nettles, 2006) as it helps the student learn the knowledge, skills, and
dispositions that make them more or less effective members of the profession (Brim, 1966 as cited in Felder, Stevenson, & Gasman, 2014). Mentors can be faculty members who help doctoral students navigate graduate programs by forming intimate relationships with students and contributing to their socialization through teaching, advising, guiding, and validating. Students often emulate their mentors and seek to work with and learn from them (Creighton et al., 2010). The role of mentoring speaks to the influence of the counselor educator’s values and perceptions of counselor identity within the Latino doctoral students’ active process of developing a professional identity within a predominantly White American profession.

Mentors are critical to the students’ development as professionals and can be a source of great support (Williams, 2000) or a place of marginalization, in that mentors may impose their conception of a professional identity on the student, while discounting the student’s conceptions of this identity (Hall & Burns, 2009). In a qualitative study of 13 Latina doctoral students attending various public research institutions in the U.S., Gonzalez (2006) found that some students lacked mentorship and felt discriminated against by faculty.

Given the vital importance of professional and academic connections in the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students, not having such connections, or feeling discriminated in such relationships can possibly influence development in unknown and various ways. For instance, since engaging in professional activities, teaching and supervising, and conducting research are crucial elements to
developing a secure sense of a counselor educator professional identity, mentoring and peer relationships are often required to meet these professional obligations.

**Where do Latino Doctoral Students in Counseling Programs Fit In?**

Research on the experiences of Latino students in higher education speaks to the importance of investigating unique ways that Latino students experience predominantly White American academic settings. Generally, graduate programs emphasize research, individuality, independence, perspective challenging, and the pursuit of power, while Latino culture encourages familismo, compradazco or reverence and support of elders, and personalismo or interdependence and collaboration with others (Kamimura, 2006). These contrasting cultural values, behaviors, and perspectives can lead to acculturative stress and tension between loyalty to one’s ethnic group and awareness of the dominant culture and the pressure to conform (Ancis et al., 2000; Lineros & Hinojosa, 2013; Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2002).

Henfield et al. (2013) reported that African American students felt pressured to assimilate into the academic culture and to get along well with peers in their graduate program. Similarly, Protivnak and Foss (2009) surveyed 141 counselor education doctoral students about their experiences as students. Six out of the 141, or 4%, were Latino; the majority (70%) were White American. Some of the participants whose ethnic group was not specified reported compromising their own values to fit within the departmental culture and difficulty adjusting to the academic culture (Protivnak & Foss, 2009).
Many qualitative and quantitative studies exploring the experiences of Latino and students of color in graduate school have revealed the psychological, relational, and identity challenges of pursuing higher education within predominantly White American academic settings (Gonzalez, 2006). Specifically, research indicated Latino students’ experiences of guilt, confusion, and isolation within graduate programs. Many students feel the imposter syndrome and return to a novice position from which they must re-cycle through the developmental stages specific to identity development in counseling. Individuals experiencing imposter syndrome fear that they will be exposed as a fraud, have self-doubt and anxiety about taking credit for success. Experiencing such stress can lead to depression, psychological distress, and low self-confidence (Hutchins, 2015).

Additionally, Latino and students of color often reported experiencing a lack of academic, professional, and social support from faculty and peers (Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2002; Gonzalez, 2006; Watford et al., 2006) leading many of them to feel disrespected, stifled, and tokenized as students of color (Flores Niemann, 1999; Gonzalez , 2006). As a result, many students felt as if they were “losing of oneself” (Carlson et al., 2006, p. 28) and struggled with reconciling “who they were and who they were becoming” (Gonzalez et al., 2002, p. 27). For instance, many participants felt that they would no longer be accepted as equals in their cultural communities due to their increasing level of education that tended to separate them from their families (Gonzalez et al., 2001). Study participants realized they were changing and felt the pain and sadness associated with such change and the deep state of confusion related to who they were and who they were becoming (Gonzalez et al., 2001).
Gonzalez et al. (2001) conducted a qualitative research study in which they interviewed six Latino doctoral students in a predominantly White American academic program in various large research universities. They provided rich descriptions of what being a Latino doctoral student feels like. One of the participants in the Gonzalez et al. (2001) study likened the experience of leaving one’s home community to join the academy as walking a tightrope over the Grand Canyon. The canyon symbolizes the massive divide between the familiar (i.e., home community) and the unfamiliar (i.e., the academy). The only path between the two worlds is a thin line of wire that must be traversed alone without the advice and input from loved ones, who also may not have experience with higher education (Gonzalez, et al., 2001). Leaving one world for another made some of the students feel guilty and confused. Coupled with their inability to make sense of their new world, the academy, students endured and coped with dissonance that distracted from other academic pursuits (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006), making their academic experience a fragile and vulnerable one (Gonzalez et al., 2001).

For instance, despite being accepted as an academic in the program, many students simultaneously felt like outsiders due to being Latino (Gonzalez et al., 2001). This sense of marginalization led to contradictory experiences within the academy. For example, ethnicity, which is the first personal identity by which Latinos are often judged (Torres, Yznaga, & Moore, 2011), is also the first aspect that is denied, ignored, and invalidated (Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Rapp, 2010). As one Latino student stated in a qualitative study on the experiences of Latino doctoral students, “I am halfway. I am an
academic. I am Latina. They are comfortable with one half and that lets them ignore the other” (Gonzalez et al., 2004, p. 572).

Even though ethnicity can be ignored, it may also become hypervisible, in that a Latino student may be labeled the Latino student and nothing more (Flores Niemann, 1999). In other words, the students’ ethnicity becomes an identifier and marker that are imbued with stereotypical perceptions of academic and professional functioning (Daniel, 2007; Gasman et al., 2008). Not only does ethnicity become a marker, it also becomes “evidence” of ethnic diversity in academia because the graduate program has a Latino student (Flores Niemann, 1999).

Thus, being a Latino student in a predominantly White American context can make the student a token minority (Flores Niemann, 1999). As token minorities, students stand out, feel isolated, are watched more closely, are stereotyped, and suffer performance and assimilation pressures to fit in with the dominant White American group (Mpofu & Harley, 2000). Latino doctoral students in counseling, who comprise only 6% of all doctoral students in counseling programs (CACREP, 2015), may feel this pressure to fit in as they are often one of the token minorities in their graduate programs.

The effects of tokenism can be viewed as a double-edged sword as one is “simultaneously, a perverse visibility, and a convenient invisibility” in that you are visible as the “ethnic student” yet invisible as a person and devalued (Flores Niemann, 1999, p.119). Instead of “being more accepting to differences” (Lerma, 2010, p. 90), the counseling profession promotes a colorblind approach in the education and professional identity development of Latino doctoral students (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001). A
colorblind approach denies the existence of differing outward physical appearances and implies that race and other physical markers of ethnicity (e.g. shape of nose, hair type) are not relevant (Pack-Brown, 1999) and tends to minimize cultural differences. As a result according to currently relevant research, Latino doctoral students in counseling may be subjected to a racialized professional context that simultaneously invalidates ethnicity while making it hypervisible (Cartwright et al., 2009; Flores Niemann, 1999; Mpofu & Harley, 2000). Despite the fact that the previously cited literature is more than 10 years old, what they describe remains constant today.

Being forced to live in these inherent contradictions, as the invisible minority who is also the token one, can cause psychological distress and dissonance for many Latino doctoral students who are developing a professional identity within the field of counseling and can lead to drop out or unnecessary sacrifices of core personal identities, such as ethnicity (Hall & Burns, 2009; Mpofu & Harley, 2000). By denying the importance of ethnicity, the academy risks creating an invalidating environment that can adversely affect the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs.

By continuing this colorblind approach of minimizing cultural differences to understanding the development of Latino doctoral students, the counseling profession risks invalidating them and perpetrating non-inclusive environments (Remley & Herlihy, 2010). In other words, if our understanding of professional identity development does not speak to the role of ethnicity in the experiences of Latino doctoral students, who are seeking validating examples that reflect their lived experiences as members of an ethnic
group that is not White American, they may feel neglected, confused, disappointed, and misunderstood (Contreras & Gandara, 2006; Millett & Nettles, 2006).

Since our current understanding of professional identity focuses on the experience of White American students, Latino doctoral students may feel that their ethnicity is at the periphery of their educational and professional experiences (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Living in such margins of the profession can influence the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs in unknown and complex ways as the following research study alludes.

From the stories of the professional identity of eight Hispanic counseling student interns, Nelson and Jackson (2003) found that being Hispanic may have influenced the degree to which the students experienced the following themes: (a) knowledge, (b) personal growth, (c) experience, (d) relationships, (e) accomplishments, (f) costs, and (g) perceptions of the counseling profession. Particularly, the theme of costs was highly focused upon by the participants and was more intense for them including reported personal, financial, and emotional sacrifices to pursue a doctorate. Some found it hard to juggle child care and other family responsibilities that put extra demands on their time and energy (Nelson & Jackson, 2003).

Furthermore, the researchers noticed that the emphasis on the importance of the relationship to others in the academic program, by frequently using the words teamwork and support, seemed crucial to the Hispanic student (Nelson & Jackson, 2003). Respectful and accepting teaching and supervisory styles were important factors in development, as was camaraderie with peers and support from family members. Family
pride in the students’ achievements was mentioned several times, and formal academic ceremonies were well attended by family and extended family members (Nelson & Jackson 2003). Nelson and Jackson (2003) explored cultural factors that may contribute to these findings, but noted that the study was exploratory and that further investigation of the phenomenon was warranted in order to more fully understand how Latino students experience the professional identity development process.

Professional identity development involves the successful integration of internal and external factors into one cohesive identity. Moreover, the student-environment interaction is paramount to this socialization process. Current literature on the topic of professional identity development in counseling programs sheds light on the internal and external factors contributing to the formation of an integrated sense of a professional self for master’s and doctoral level students. Throughout this process, emotional reactions, such as anxiety and confusion, are likely to occur for the counselor-in-training (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). For Latino students engaged in this process, the psychological, relational, and identity effects of navigating a predominantly White American context can intensify these emotional reactions of anxiety and confusion. The combination of the emotional challenges of navigating a predominantly White American setting as Latino students and developing a professional identity can make the experience unique.

**Chapter Summary**

As has been outlined, research on the experiences of Latino graduate students living in the margins in academia show that ethnicity, ethnocentrism, and racism play a significant role in how these students integrate, develop, and function in predominantly
White American settings (Estrada et al., 2004; Saylor & Aries, 1999). Since Latino doctoral students may espouse collectivistic values (e.g., valuing community, family, interpersonal harmony) before individualistic goals and pursuits (Miranda et al., 2006; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002), they may experience the professional identity developmental process differently than White American students. For instance, Latino cultural values can come into conflict with individualistic ones of the counseling profession, thus making the professional identity development experience different, which can contribute to high attrition rates and psychological dissonance between ethnic and professional identities (Gonzalez et al., 2002; Rosales, 2006; Wiedman, et al., 2000).

According to CRT and LatCrit, Latino doctoral students operating and functioning within counseling programs that tend to promote a colorblind and ethnocentric approach to the education and professionalization of all students may struggle with developing a professional identity that is in harmony with who they are as Latinos. Students have to expend lots of emotional and mental energy to succeed, and to adjust their behaviors and natural forms of expression to conform to the dominant professional culture of counseling, thus possibly creating acculturative stress (Gasman et al., 2008; Gildersleeve et al., 2011), resulting in various academic and professional experiences that have psychological, relational, and identity consequences. These experiences can make the development of a professional identity more challenging and complex for Latino doctoral students.

Thus, considering the experiences of Latino doctoral students developing a professional identity in the counseling profession is crucial. However, their experiences
have not been fully understood. Because of our lack of a diverse understanding of the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs, I proposed this qualitative research study to better understand their experiences. The next chapter explains the methodology that was used to explore the research question of what are the experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs regarding their professional identity development.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

As a future Latina counselor educator who upholds a multicultural, social justice theoretical orientation, I am intrigued with understanding how Latino doctoral students in counseling programs make meaning of their professional identity development. As a neophyte critical race scholar and researcher, I am also intrigued by the interplay of personal identities, such as race and/or ethnicity, and professional identity as it manifests itself in the predominantly White American context of the counseling profession. For these reasons I conducted this qualitative research study that attempted to answer this research question: What are the experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs regarding their professional identity development?

In the following pages, I provide an overview of qualitative research, describe the context of the study, the participant selection criteria, and the design of the study. I also describe my role and positionality in this study, and conclude with a discussion on trustworthiness.

Overview of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a genre that seeks to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experiences and the interrelatedness and interdependence of person and environment (Merriam, 2015). Qualitative research emphasizes the experience of multiple individuals in the present situation (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Qualitative research is inductive and exploratory in nature, and begins with
specific observations (from the interviews) and then allows the categories of analysis to emerge from the data as the study progresses (Mertens, 2005).

There are various qualitative research traditions, including basic qualitative study, phenomenology, and a case study, to name a few (Hays & Wood, 2011; Merriam, 2015). A basic, interpretive qualitative study seeks to understand the meaning a phenomenon has for the participants. Phenomenology focuses on philosophically understanding the essence of the experience for the participants, and a case study is used to provide an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system (Hays & Wood, 2011; Merriam, 2015).

Basic qualitative studies are the most common form of qualitative research found in education (Merriam, 2015). In the field of counseling, qualitative studies are increasing (Hays, Wood, Dahl, & Kirk-Jenkins, 2016; Hunt, 2011). For instance, in the mid-1990s about 6% of articles were qualitative, while currently 38% are qualitative (Hays et al., 2016). In addition, based on a 15-year review of 68 articles in the Journal of Counseling and Development, 82% did not specify a particular research paradigm (such as positivism or critical theory) and only 66% indicated a research tradition, such as phenomenology (Hays et al., 2016).

For this study, the experiences of professional identity development of a Latino doctoral student in a counseling program were studied. More specifically, the purposes of this study included: a) understanding the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs and b) amplifying the counterstories of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs, in order to document their experiences that
may be different from the narratives of White American students. Counterstorytelling is a method for telling the stories of individuals whose experiences are not often told, such as Latinos (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Based on my purpose for this qualitative research study aimed at exploring the experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs regarding professional identity development, I used a basic qualitative research methodology. I chose this methodology because I wanted to gather rich and in-depth descriptions of the lived experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs to understand how they understand and make meaning of their professional identity development in a predominantly White American profession (Creswell, 2012; Hunt, 2011; Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013). My overall purpose was to understand how Latino doctoral students make sense of their educational and professional experiences in counseling programs (Mertens, 2005).

**Design**

To answer the research question, I employed a basic, interpretive qualitative research design, guided by CRT and LatCrit principles. I wanted to understand the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs, in terms of the meanings that the participants, “as holders and creators of knowledge” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 105) bring to it (Mertens, 2005). Since there is little research on this topic, an in-depth descriptive, qualitative approach that studies personal experience, introspection, and interviews was necessary to understand Latino doctoral students’ experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I was able to understand and describe
the experiences of professional identity development from the viewpoint of the participants. In other words, the participants’ subjective experience of their professional identity development, and how they interpret this experience (Mertens, 2005) were ascertained. In addition, the guiding principles of CRT and LatCrit provided the framework from which I deconstructed their counterstories to expose the ways in which race, ethnicity, racism, ethnocentrism, oppression, and marginalization may have been a part of and influenced the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

**CRT and LatCrit as Guiding Principles**

As a critical researcher who follows CRT and LatCrit principles, I am interested in understanding the experiences of Latino doctoral students developing a professional identity within the predominantly White American counseling profession. From this perspective, I considered the role of power, privilege, race, ethnicity, racism, ethnocentrism, oppression, and marginalization in the professional identity experiences of Latino doctoral students in a predominantly White American profession. Due to these potential influential factors, Latino doctoral students in counseling programs may experience their professional identity development differently than their White American counterparts. Thus, their experiences served as counterstories to the current understanding of professional identity development in counseling programs.

Yosso (2006) described critical race counterstorytelling as “a method of recounting the experiences and perspectives of racially and socially marginalized people” (p. 10). By using counterstories that challenge the dominant narratives that tend to omit
or distort the histories and realities of oppressed communities, the lived experiences of people of color are honored and valued. As a result, counterstories serve to raise critical consciousness about social and racial injustice, and document the persistence of racism from the perspectives of those “injured and victimized by its legacy” (Yosso, 2006, p. 10). Counterstories also function to build community among those at the margins of society; to challenge the perceived wisdom of those at the center (i.e., White Americans), to nurture community cultural wealth, memory, and resistance; and can facilitate transformation in education (Yosso, 2006). In other words, counterstories can teach others that they are not alone in their experiences (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). For the purpose of this study, I wanted to amplify the counterstories of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs in order to understand their experiences as students who are often relegated to the margins of education.

**Research Process**

**Study Context**

Given the social status of Latinos in the U.S. as a marginalized ethnic group, it is important to review the social context within which this study is embedded. Individuals construct their understanding of the world within their communal and cultural context (Mertens, 2005). Therefore, reality is not absolute, but is defined by community and culture (Mertens, 2005).

This study was situated within the White American context of the United States. Currently, White Americans as a racial group comprise the majority of citizens in the U.S. (U.S. Census, 2011). Due to racism and ethnocentrism, White American
worldviews tend to be considered superior to others and define the societal structure in which most graduate students operate (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012; Valdes, 2005). In particular, Latino doctoral students operate within the national context of the U.S., within the academy, and within the counseling program that is housed in the academy. All of these contexts are White American dominated, in terms of demographics, curriculum, educational and professional standards, and practices (D’Andrea & Daniels, 1991; Sue & Sue, 2014; Utsey et al., 2008), therefore the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs may be influenced by the manifestation of racism, ethnocentrism, and oppression in these contexts.

Since there are various counseling doctoral programs in the U.S., the name of the degree and the geographic location of the program were expansive to allow for variation. The doctoral degree programs represented were: counseling and counselor education (n=1), counseling psychology (n=1), counselor education and supervision (n=6), and clinical/counseling/school counseling (n=1). All the programs were consistent with graduating students who met the CACREP definition of a doctoral level professional in counseling, which was preparing graduates for counselor education, supervision, and practice (CACREP, 2016). Specifically, graduates are prepared to work as counselor educators, supervisors, researchers, and practitioners in academic and clinical settings (CACREP, 2016).

In terms of the geographic location of the programs, I used the American Counseling Association’s (ACA) demarcations of regions to determine the regional location of the program, Midwest, North Atlantic, Western, and Southern. These regions
correspond with our general understanding of geographic regions of the U.S. by including states within each region.

Four of the programs were in the North Atlantic region, one was in the Southern region, two were in the Midwest, and one was in the Western region. Puerto Rico was not included because, as a societal context, Puerto Rico differs from the U.S. in many cultural and political ways that can influence the doctoral experiences of Latino students in ways that this study cannot address.

**Data Sources**

After obtaining approval from the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this research study, I began recruiting participants. Participants for this study were recruited using a purposive and snowball sampling technique. The snowballing technique identifies participants from others who know which participants are “information-rich,” share similar experiences, and meet the selection criteria (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28). I recruited participants through personal connection of people I have met at professional conferences (e.g., NLPA, ACA), word of mouth, and emails. After meeting someone at a conference who seemed to meet criteria, I contacted them via email to invite them to participate. I provided them with the invitation letter and the consent form to review before agreeing to participate (Appendix C & D).

**Selection Criteria**

This study focused on Latino doctoral students in counseling, counselor education and supervision, or counseling related field. Systematically choosing a small sample that was representative of the typical individual and situation of the context being studied
provided more confidence that the sample adequately represented the average members of the population, and allowed me to obtain rich and in-depth descriptions of their lived experiences (Kuzel, 1999; Maxwell, 1996). Therefore, a purposeful sampling selection procedure was used to recruit eight participants who had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied. Eight participants were sought because the depth of data collected is more important than recruiting large samples in qualitative research (Noble & Smith, 2014).

The sampling criteria to participate were: (1) self-identify as Latino or Hispanic (can belong to any gender), (2) currently enrolled or recent graduate (within 6 months) in a doctoral program in counseling, counselor education and supervision, or counseling related field, and (3) the doctoral program is located in a predominantly White institution in the U.S. (meaning that more than 50% of student body is White American) and meets the CACREP definition of counselor education identity. I purposely excluded Latino doctoral students from the program that I attend to protect their privacy and confidentiality. Given that there were only three other Latino doctoral students in my counseling program at the time of the study, the risk that their identity can be ascertained from the interviews is too high to warrant their inclusion in the study.

The demographics of the eight participants are represented in Table 1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years in the US</th>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>Languages Spoken in addition to English</th>
<th>First Language</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>First Generation to Attend College</th>
<th>Semesters Completed in Doctoral Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>South American</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>Native Caribbean/Black</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>Long Term</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Part</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raquel</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Part</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marisol</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Mexican/Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Long Term</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>South American</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aryanna</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Mexican/Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Mexican/Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Long Term</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Bi</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This table represents that of the 8 participants, 2 identified as male, 6 identified as heterosexual, 1 identified as bisexual, and 1 identified as queer. Six were either married or in long-term relationships, 1 was divorced, and 1 was single. Only 2 had one child. Seven belonged to the middle class and 1 to the lower class. Five identified as racially Hispanic or Latino, 1 as White, 1 as Native Caribbean/Black and 1 as indigenous/mixed. Ethnically, 2 identified as Puerto Rican, 1 of Caribbean island descent, 3 as Mexican and Puerto Rican, 2 as South American. The mean age of the participants was 32.5 years and the range was 25-43 years old.

This table also shows that 3 of the participants were employed full-time, the other 5 were part-time. All of them spoke Spanish as another language, 3 reported that Spanish was their first language learned. Three were not first generation students, the rest were first generation students. Most of the participants had been living in the U.S. for most of their lives, only one participant was not born in the U.S. Most of the participants, except one, were in the last semesters of their doctoral program. One participant had graduated 6 months prior to the first interview.

Each participant was given a pseudonym that will be used throughout the document when referencing their experience. The brief descriptions and the demographic table provided include the self-identification words and phrases that each participant wrote in the demographic survey to describe themselves. I included their own words to respect and honor their self-determination and empowerment to self-label their own cultural experiences, therefore I did not categorize the participants into pre-determined categories, such as Hispanic or Latino.
Most of the participants self-identified racially as Latino, and not White or Black. Their identifications support the tenets of LatCrit that expand on the Black-White binary of CRT to include Latino as an additional social category of meaning (Valdes, 2005). They also did not view me as racially White, even though I stated before the first interview that I identified as White Puerto Rican. For the participants, our connection as Latinos superseded racial identifications, and reinforced that Latino was considered a racial category by the participants. Since then, my ethnic identity has shifted to being Puerto Rican American and not White Puerto Rican. I address this shift later in the document.

**Participant Descriptions**

The first participant will be named Alicia. Alicia is a 33 year old, heterosexual, single, Mexican-American female who was born in the U.S. and identifies racially as Latina. Her primary language is English, and she is proficient in conversational Spanish. She is a first generation student in the beginning stages of her doctoral dissertation. Regarding her racial and ethnic background, Alicia commented that her parents were a mixed race couple, her mom is White, and her father is Latino. Since she lived in a predominantly White American area and was mostly raised with her mother and her White family, Alicia reported that she “grew up with a lot of White privilege and a lot of internalized racism.” In college, she started to identify as a “racial other” and felt like she “stuck out more as a person of color” during the doctoral program in counseling. She also spoke about her rural identity and coming from a “very low SES background and we
lived below the poverty line for most of my life.” Now as a doctoral student she identifies as middle/working class and belonging to “the world of kind of the elite.”

Aryanna is a 33 year-old, Mexican-American female, who was born in the U.S. Her parents were also born in the U.S. Aryanna speaks English and Spanish, belongs to the middle/working class, and is employed part-time as a graduate assistant and a counselor. She attends a doctoral program in counselor education full-time at a Midwestern state university, and is a first generation student. Aryanna is heterosexual, divorced with no children, and not in a romantic relationship. Aryanna speaks about her family upbringing as a positive place where she spoke Spanish and listened to Spanish music. She commented how her parents “would always say be proud of being Mexican.”

Jose is a 32 year old, Hispanic male, who was born in the U.S. Jose speaks English primarily and Spanish proficiently. Because many of his family members have graduate education, Jose is not a first generation student. He is heterosexual, married to a White woman, expecting a child, belongs to the middle class, and works full-time as a counselor educator. Jose graduated 6 months prior to the interview, however, since his experiences as a Latino doctoral student were still fresh in memory, he was included in the study.

Raquel is a 32 year-old, White Puerto Rican female. She was born in Puerto Rico and moved to the U.S. as an infant. Both her parents were born in Puerto Rico and she is a first generation graduate student. She speaks English primarily and Spanish secondary. She is heterosexual, not married, has no children, works full-time, and belongs to the middle class.
Mary is a 34 year old, heterosexual, Latina female who immigrated to the U.S. from a South American country about 6 years ago. She considers herself mixed race and primarily of indigenous descent. Her primary language is Spanish and she speaks English, as well. She is a U.S. citizen, has no children, is married, belongs to the lower middle-class, and is a first generation doctoral student in counselor education. Mary is in the data collection stage of her dissertation.

Miguel is in his late twenties, queer, identifies as male, and is in a romantic relationship with no children. He moved to the U.S. from a Caribbean island when he was a teenager. He grew up in a lower socioeconomic status and is currently employed. Miguel is a first generation doctoral student in counselor education and is in the data collection stage of his dissertation. He identifies as “racially, native, Caribbean Indian and Black.” For Miguel the concept of colorism is a prevalent feature in his experience, meaning that he racially identifies as a person of color, yet because some of his family members are light skinned, he also has experienced being able to watch them “pass” as White American.

Carina is a 43 year old, heterosexual, married with one child, Puerto Rican female. She identifies her racial group as Latina. She was born in Puerto Rico and has lived in the U.S. for 26 years. Her primary language is Spanish and she speaks English as well. She is a first generation doctoral student in counselor education and is in the last stage of her dissertation.

The final participant is Marisol. Marisol is a 33 year old, heterosexual, Puerto Rican-Mexican female who was born in the U.S. Her primary language is English, and
she speaks conversational Spanish proficiently. She works full-time and belongs to the middle class. She is in a romantic relationship and has no children. She is a first generation student in counseling and, at the time of the interviews, was two classes away from beginning her dissertation.

**Consent and Confidentiality**

Participants, who I met at professional conferences, were contacted via email or phone that they provided me to schedule the first interview during a mutually agreed upon time slot. Before the first interview, the participant was emailed the consent form to review, sign, and return as a scanned document via email. The informed consent (Appendix D) ensured that participants knew the benefits and risks of the study and were freely volunteering to participate. The informed consent form included information on the following topics: (1) focus of the study, (2) data collection procedures, (3) explanation of protecting participants’ confidentiality and anonymity, (4) participants’ role, (5) anticipated time commitments, (6) benefits and risks of participating, (7) how data will be used, and (8) a statement of consent.

Informed consent helps participants feel more comfortable and safe to engage in the interview and member check process, and to feel invested in the research study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During the first interview, this consent form was reviewed so the participant has the opportunity to ask questions. The participant was told that the interview will be audio recorded (using a digital recorder that will be kept in a locked box) and stored digitally on a password protected computer. Once the participant provided consent to proceed, the interview and the recording began.
Instruments

I developed a semi-structured interview with demographic questions and open-ended questions that allow for the emergence of various aspects of the interviewee’s experiences regarding the professional identity development experience (Appendix A). A demographic form with the informed consent was sent to the participants via Survey Monkey to be completed and submitted before the first interview (Appendix B). Three main topics were addressed in the interviews. The first topic was how the person defines and makes meaning of professional identity. The second involved the integration and/or navigation of professional identity with personal identities, such as race and/or ethnicity, and finally anything else the interviewees felt was relevant to the research question. I conducted 3, 45-60 minute interviews, per interviewee to allow for rich data collection. The rationale for this decision is explained in the following section.

Data Collection

Based on qualitative research practices, I conducted three rounds of interviews. This method of conducting more than one round of interviews per participant allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences by asking more questions about specific components or aspects that were brought up in the interviews of the same and/or other participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2015). Raquel commented that there was “consistency across all the interviews.” It also gave the participants time to, as Alicia said, “self-reflect” on the discussion. Before the first interview, I reviewed the consent form, disclosed my racial and ethnic identity (White Puerto Rican), and invited the participants to speak in English and/or Spanish. I invited them to speak in their native
language (Spanish) because emotions are encoded in one’s first language, and I wanted the participants to have access to the full range of their experiences (Santiago-Rivera & Altarriba, 2002). Two participants spoke in Spanish to describe their emotions related to an experience. During the second interview, I sought more clarification on previous answers and/or insight into aspects of the experience that other participants brought up during their first interview. In the third interview, I performed the member checks (Blythe, Wilkes, Jackson, & Halcomb, 2013) and asked questions related to the possible role of belonging to a marginalized ethnic group on their professional identity development experience. For Alicia, as with many of the participants, having a member check process, “was really nice too to be able to go back and …make sure that I was explaining myself how I wanted to be understood and that you were understanding me that way.” I also asked for feedback on my role as researcher and on the interview process.

The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Interviews were conducted via Skype, an online video conference program. I conducted these interviews from my home or professional office to ensure confidentiality and privacy. I kept notes and a reflective journal entry during and after each interview. Each interview was digitally stored on a password protected personal computer that belonged to me.

All data were kept on a password protected laptop and only one master list with participants’ full names, identification number (first and last name initials with a number) and pseudonyms existed. This list was kept in a locked file cabinet, in a locked room. Each transcript included the date, time, and pseudonym for the participant. The
electronic copy was saved on a password protected laptop, flash drive, and Dropbox (a password protected internet based storage system), and the paper copy was kept in a locked filed cabinet, in a locked room. After the data analysis was completed, the transcripts were erased from the flash drive and the Dropbox folder.

**Data Analysis**

Each interview was transcribed by a hired bilingual (English/Spanish) transcriptionist. I chose a bilingual transcriptionist because the participants were invited to speak in Spanish, when needed, during the interviews. In order to capture the participants’ stories in their entirety, the transcriber needed to speak and write in Spanish. This person had access to the digital recording of the interview via a password protected internet based storage system, such as Dropbox. Once transcribed, I read and coded each interview using the methods described by Saldana (2009) and Merriam (2009).

Coding is a process of assigning words that symbolically represent the meaning of a piece of data (Saldana, 2009), which could be a transcribed quote or an aspect of a document. Each printed transcript was coded and interpreted for meaning. Through this process of horizontalization, the data was reviewed for unique aspects that occurred across the data (Hays & Wood, 2011), noting, in written form or electronically, reflections in the margins (Chenail, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

A code book was created wherein each coded quote retained an identifier (the participant identification number) and line number to allow for cross-referencing and to ensure that the data is not taken out of context (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). This code book was kept on an excel sheet. Following the process of an initial
descriptive coding of each line of data (at times the descriptive coding included the participant’s words, making them in vivo codes), I then created categories of codes with sub categories to further elaborate the category (Miles et al., 2014). As the first round of coding transpired, the code book became more detailed, yet concise. In other words, as I learned more from the data, the categories condensed from 8 to 3 main categories. I arrived at this condensation of categories after reviewing the codes within each of the 8 categories and finding similarities between them. From these similarities, I captured the meaning of the codes in more condensed and broader categories. For example, the categories of: ethnic identity process, intrapersonal aspects, and manifestations of ethnicity within professional identity were condensed under one main theme, which was becoming a Latino counselor educator, and in particular under the subtheme of finding voice.

I then examined the data as a whole for recurring and significant themes by reviewing the excel sheet (Noble & Smith, 2014). By sorting and sifting through this material to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between participants, common sequences, and categories of codes I arrived at a textural description of the phenomenon being studied (Hays & Wood, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994). These categories or generalizations were taken back to the participants and into the third interview to be either substantiated, expanded, or omitted (Noble & Smith, 2014). None of the themes were omitted, however my conceptualization of this process changed from a collective story of experiences to a collective story of resistance based on the participants’ feedback on them.
A process of constant comparison or a cycling back and forth between the codes of each transcript was conducted to ensure that novel interpretations were being substantiated (Hays & Wood, 2011; Noble & Smith, 2014). In this way, the data analysis was supported and comprehensive. I re-read all the printed transcripts to make sure that I included all coded phrases in the data analysis and to get a holistic picture of the participants’ experiences. With the second and third round transcripts, I coded them in the same manner as the first interviews and incorporated the coded phrases into the themes and subthemes that were already established from the first interview. The three themes were represented in a visual diagram that is presented in chapter 4 (Hays & Wood, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to the viability of the interpretations made from the data provided (Merriam, 2002). For qualitative research that seeks to develop an intuitive and deeply rich description of lived experiences, trustworthiness is paramount to the acceptance of a research study. As an insider of the community being studied, I run the risk of becoming too involved and attached to the participants, and may possibly bias the research findings in such a way that the trustworthiness or validity of the results become suspect, and participants can be inadvertently harmed or oppressed (Donalek, 2004).

Since my research question involved Latino counselor education doctoral students, my social position as a member of the population served as a strength and as a limitation. This positionality served as an advantage by allowing me to more clearly and intimately understand the experiences of Latino counselor education doctoral students in
greater depth (Blythe et al., 2013). It also gave me easier access to the study population, minimized the power differential between myself and the participants, and enhanced the development of rapport and reciprocity (Blythe et al., 2013). At the same time, the challenge was maintaining enough distance and objectivity from the data in order to make meaningful and least biased interpretations, instead of making presumptions (Blythe et al., 2013). To do this, I took numerous breaks while coding, debriefed with my dissertation chair, performed member checks, peer review, and kept a reflective journal.

Since my positionality was an inherent part of the research process (Blythe et al., 2013), I made it transparent to the participants during the first interview. As Allen (2000) pointed out, our private experiences, identities, feelings, thoughts, ideologies, and political affiliations affect our interpretations of the world, and of our epistemological assumptions related to the research question (Suzuki et al., 2005). Further, in qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument who defines the research question, sample parameters, data collection and analysis procedures, and reports the findings and interpretations (Merriam, 2002). As the primary instrument, the researcher’s biases, worldviews, and values will influence and shape the research design and thus must be made explicit and transparent (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, I provide a description of my positionality, and describe the ways in which this positionality affected the research process, and how I attended to it throughout the research process.

**Researcher Role and Positionality**

I was both an “insider” and “outsider” as the researcher in this study. I was an insider because I am engaged in the process of developing a professional identity as a
counselor educator. I was an outsider based on various personal identities that I did not share with the participants. My experience as a doctoral student in counselor education is colored by this social location. I have the privilege of passing as White American due to my light skin color and high level of acculturation to the U.S. culture, as someone who was born and raised in an urban environment in this country. I also have educational and economic privilege.

As a Latina doctoral student in counselor education, I am an “insider” (Suzuki et al., 2005; Villenas, 1996) or participant of the population being studied. Villenas (1996) explained that being an insider refers to a person who has been accepted as a member of a particular community because he/she shares common experiences and a collective space with that community. As a consequence, I have first-hand knowledge and experience of developing a professional identity in the context within which some Latino doctoral counseling students are immersed (i.e. academic programs and professional organizations, such as the American Counseling Association or the National Latino Psychological Association). As a result, I was engaged in the process of developing a professional identity as a White Puerto Rican future counselor educator.

Being an outsider refers to not being part of the community and instead being considered an “other” or a member of “them” (Villenas, 1996, p. 723). For instance, to the participants I may be considered an “outsider” due to varying aspects of my social location. For example, a dark skinned Latino or a first generation student may view me as an outsider since I do not share those personal identities. When asked, during the third interview, none of the participants related that my fair skin tone made me an “outsider.”
Instead, they expressed how my ethnic identity was a way of connecting. One participant commented that my lack of having an accent when I spoke English was an area of disconnection for her. However, overall she and all the other participants felt that they could trust me and were validated throughout the interview process. As a result, they felt safe to be vulnerable and to share rich stories of their professional identity development experiences.

**The interview experience.** The following section will describe the participants’ experience of the interview process. Because I implemented strategies to ensure trustworthiness, the participants’ experiences reflected an openness that led to an emergence of rich and in-depth data. Additionally, my research practice to be egalitarian and respectful was also noticed by the participants. In these ways, I ensured that the data that emerged accurately reflected the participants’ professional identity development experiences and that they were empowered through the process.

Related to feeling comfortable and able to engage in open dialogue, the following comments were provided. Jose said, “I felt like a valued participant” and Aryanna stated, “there’s already a level of safety and comfort because you do identify as Latina and… we probably had a lot of lived experiences therefore I feel very validated.” Alicia further related:

“[I was] able to create that personal connection [and that] helped a lot and [I] identify with you on a couple different levels and I don’t know how comfortable I would have been or would have been so real in the interviews … without that personal piece.”
In regards to the participants feeling respected and valued in the process, the following excerpts were stated. Marisol expressed, “I think definitely respectful, inquisitive when you needed to be asking questions and following up.” Mary said, “I found it to be very engaging and I liked how you recognized things that were so important to me.”

Aryanna and Miguel shared how my Latina identity played a role in their experience. Aryanna stated, “I’m able to see your passion in the work that you’re doing and that goes a really long way for me.” Miguel said, “it made it much easier for me and as a Latina it made it easier.” He further elaborated:

“It made me comfortable I think if it had been a white person researching it I know you identify as white Latina but as a white person, as a white American, like a white blonde blue eyed woman or man I would have been more like well can I really trust you.”

Because the participants felt that they could trust me, they were able to be vulnerable and share in-depth responses about their professional identity development. Most importantly, as Miguel and Carina shared, they did not feel influenced towards a specific construct. As Miguel said, “I don’t feel like I was led to any answers.” Carina concurred, “[you] just remaining neutral, you know I never felt that you were influencing my responses but I also felt safe to tell how I felt.”

From these excerpts, it can be seen that the participants felt valued, respected, and understood throughout the interview process.
Strategies to Ensure Trustworthiness

Delgado Bernal (1998) described a useful way to harness this bicural positionality, as a White Puerto Rican American doctoral student who is both an insider and outsider to inform this research project. This framework uses Chicana feminist epistemology to validate the “cultural intuition” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 563) that I bring to the research project based on my researcher’s stance. My cultural intuition, or my sense of knowing, informed by my positionality as a student living in the “borderlands” (Andzaldua, 1987) or in-between the two cultures (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013), was a primary factor in this study exploring the professional identity experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs.

In order to explore how this bicural positionality played out in the research process, and to minimize the potential effects of my positionality on the research study, I performed member checks, peer reviews, debriefings with my dissertation advisor, and kept a reflective journal to integrate my positionality with the research (Blythe et al., 2013). Recent research on common strategies of trustworthiness for 81 qualitative articles across three American Counseling Association journals identified that researcher reflexivity, member checks, and peer reviews were the most common techniques utilized (Woo & Heo, 2013). Specifically, these strategies allowed me to self-examine and ensure accurate interpretations that are less biased and help increase the trustworthiness or validity of qualitative research findings (Blythe et al., 2013; Merriam, 2002).

After the first interview and coding cycle, I sent one participant, via email, codes with supporting quotes in order to get a member check of the codes. I asked her to
review the findings and inform me of any discrepancies between what they meant by the quote and what was coded. I asked her if the code matches the essence of their quote, and if the code does not capture an important aspect that they want conveyed. She indicated that I did capture her meaning in the codes provided. In this way, I performed the necessary member checks to ensure trustworthiness of my data analysis and to further guide my second interviews and subsequent analysis. I discovered that this initial member check was helpful, however too preliminary. I found it more helpful to wait until the second round of coding was completed to perform the member checks of the less preliminary and more substantiated findings. This process is aligned with Colaizzi’s strategy of qualitative data analysis (Shosha, 2010).

After the second interview, all the participants received a document via email of the preliminary codes and their quotes that represented those codes. This document was used during the third interview to facilitate discussion of my interpretation of their meaning of the quotes provided. These member check documents were also used to compile the collective story of the participants’ experiences related to their professional identity development in counseling programs.

After all three rounds of interviews, I also asked one peer, who is familiar with qualitative research and the basic tenets of CRT (i.e. racism, power, and oppression), to review my findings and give her input related to the analysis. These reviews ensured that my interpretations were feasible and aligned with the meanings of the participants (Merriam, 2015). I also debriefed about my emotional reactions to the interviews with
my dissertation advisor on a regular basis to minimize any detrimental effects to my well-being and to the interview process (Blythe et al., 2013).

Throughout the coding process, I maintained consistent contact with my methodologist in order to ask questions and discuss my research method. In particular, we discussed the importance of exploring the deeper meanings of the participants’ experiences during the second and third interviews. These discussions helped me focus the second and third interviews on key elements that needed further elaboration and understanding. In this way, I came to a deeper understanding of the participants’ meaning of their professional identity development experiences as Latino doctoral students in counseling.

Reflective journaling is an effective qualitative research strategy to consistently examine and explore the ways in which I, as the researcher, am possibly influencing the research process. As reality is “coconstructed by the research participants and the researcher” (Noble & Smith, 2014, p. 2), it is important to be aware of the ways that I am influencing the stories told by the participant (Blythe et al., 2013). This practice discouraged presumption and encouraged me to seek clarification directly from participants on topics that arose during the data collection process (O’Connor, 2004). Additionally, journaling helped minimize the distortion of knowledge and enhance the credibility of the research findings (Rice, 2009). Throughout the process of journaling, I used my new awareness to reflect on my experiences and biases (Blythe et al., 2013). In so doing, I was more aware of what aspects of the data needed clarification from the
participants (which I asked them during the second and third interviews), and I became more cognizant of any biases that arose during the interpretation of the data.

For example, I noticed my White American identity becoming salient during many of the interviews with the participants. I felt feelings of guilt and sadness at hearing their counterstories of oppressive academic and professional experiences. As a result, I asked the participants to comment on my role as researcher and how my identity may have played a role. I gained awareness and a stronger connection with the participants. Our relationship as two cultural beings became a salient piece of the research process.

From the interview experience, I further developed my ethnic identity. At the beginning of this research project, I identified as White Puerto Rican. Now, I identify as Puerto Rican American. I made this change because the participants’ selection of Latino as their racial category empowered me to re-think my racial identity. Before, I thought that I had to choose from the U.S. Census classifications that did not include Latino as a racial category. After hearing the participants’ answers describing their racial identity as Latino, I, too, claim my racial classification as Latino and not White.

Another aspect that became salient in the research process was the outcome of the 2016 presidential elections, which took place during the time of the interviews. With the election of Donald Trump, a White male, to office, many of the participants brought up the impact of this election for their professional experience. For example, Mary expressed how she felt further isolated and “othered” as an immigrant to this country post-election. She also shared how her decision to stay in the North Atlantic region
versus the southern region for future employment as a counselor educator was directly influenced by the election of Donald Trump. She felt unsafe to work and live in a part of this country that supports the racist and sexist beliefs of Mr. Trump. She made this decision because of the perceived safety of living in this region, as opposed to others that may uphold some of the racist and sexist beliefs of the current president. For me, the post-election response, after feeling fear and dismay, was motivation to finish this dissertation and to share the counterstories of Latino doctoral students experiencing the effects of racism and oppression on a daily basis.

**Chapter Summary**

I believe in a social constructivist view of the world, meaning that multiple realities or truths exist, and that are time and context dependent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Individuals construct their understanding of the world within their communal and cultural context (Mertens, 2005). Therefore, reality is not absolute, but is defined by community and culture (Mertens, 2005). As a result, I considered the social and historical factors, and personal identities of race and/or ethnicity, that shaped the professional identity development experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs.

Specifically, I conducted a qualitative research study that was informed by phenomenology and guided by CRT and LatCrit principles to explore the experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs regarding their professional identity development. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, I explored this research question from the perspective of 8 participants. I performed three strategies to ensure trustworthiness and credibility: member checks, peer reviews, and debriefing (Sheperis,
Young, & Daniels, 2010). Credibility is the confidence in the “truth” of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure confirmability, I kept a reflective journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sheperis et al., 2010). Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings were shaped by the respondents and not the researcher’s bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All of these methods were engaged to maintain the trustworthiness of this study (Merriam, 2015).

Since this research study examined data from a highly specific and selected population, the generalizability of the findings to different populations is limited. However, the strength of these types of research strategies comes from the ability it gave me to discover rich and in-depth descriptions of lived experiences (Merriam, 2015; Sheperis et al., 2010). From these descriptions, I applied the findings to theory, practice guidelines, and directions for future research studies (Hays & Wood, 2011).
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

Theoretical Framework: LatCrit

From a LatCrit perspective, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which power, privilege, and oppressive practices may have shaped the experiences of the participants in this study. It is also important to recognize the influence of culture on these experiences. For these reasons, I describe the academic, professional, and cultural context that the participants were exposed to throughout their doctoral journey. I then provide the collective story that emerged from my analysis of the data.

The academic context in which all the participants found themselves was one in which they were one of the few, if not only, Latinos in the doctoral program. Being one of the few meant that they were surrounded by mostly White American peers and faculty, creating a predominantly White American academic setting situated within a White counseling profession.

Because counseling programs are housed in predominantly White American academic institutions, there is the potential for oppression in the form of racism and ethnocentrism to occur. As Mary said, “… there is a racialized environment as in any other school pertaining to higher education there are people who have different views about you know Hispanic communities.” In this excerpt, Mary is saying that she experienced a climate in her doctoral program that promoted ideas about Latino communities based on White power and privilege. In other words, Mary encountered individuals who believed erroneous ideas about Latinos, such as that Latinos are not
smart and are inferior. For Mary, this climate created a racialized environment in which she had to operate and navigate in order to succeed. All of the participants shared in this experience of operating within a predominantly White American profession.

During the year that the interviews were conducted, a presidential election took place. The nominees for this election were White Americans, one male and one female. The male candidate had a political platform that tended to be conservative, viewed immigrants as “a burden” or “problem” (Mary), and promoted sexist and racist beliefs. As a result of this political context, the participants felt a heightened sense of marginalization based on immigration status, gender, and/or race that the current ideology promotes.

The collective story of the participants’ experiences and process takes into account these systemic academic and political forces that contribute to an oppressive academic and professional environment in which the participants operated. As Raquel stated, “all of that [the systemic forces] has an implication on my role in the larger [academic and professional] system [as a doctoral student].” Given that all counseling programs and their students are within this country, it would seem that academic and professional experiences are also embedded in this societal system that values ethnic group classifications. According to CRT, ethnic classifications are used to maintain the hierarchal power structure wherein White Americans are deemed superior and all other races and ethnicities are inferior (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). Hence, the understanding of the participants’ professional identity development experiences was constructed within a societal framework that tends to “other” these individuals based on race and ethnicity.
The experiences of the participants in this study served as counterstories to the experiences of White American doctoral students developing a professional identity in counseling programs because being Latino was significant in how the participants were viewed, treated, and understood by others in the program. Being Latino in a predominantly White American profession meant that the participants were one of the few and marginalized because of their ethnic identity. As Latino doctoral students having such marginalizing experiences, the participants’ professional identity developmental process was complex and may have been different than their White American counterparts. The various ways that this process differed from White American students was captured in this collective story of resistance.

**A Collective Story of Resistance**

Through an in-depth, recursive data analysis of the three interviews conducted with all eight participants, I was able to develop a comprehensive picture of the experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs. In telling their counterstories about their marginalizing experiences, I intended to amplify the ways in which racialized power and oppression played a significant role in the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students in counseling. Along with being counterstories, their experiences highlight resistance and disruption to the norm because despite feeling as if, “you don’t belong here” (Miguel), all the participants persisted in the doctoral program and created a space for themselves.

The experiences of the study’s participants spoke to the importance of relationship, connection, and giving back to community. In other words, the participants
emphasized connecting to community and using their educational privilege, as doctoral level professionals, to provide service and Latino focused research for their communities. The participants focused on giving back as a way of empowering other Latinos and contributing meaningful service and research that would counter the effects of being marginalized. For the participants, the pursuit of a doctorate in counseling signified dedication to family, the Latino community, and to other marginalized students in higher education. Although they experienced oppression that led to anger and frustration, they also had times of deep connection and internal growth resulting in a sense of empowerment. The following collective story, that reflects the participants’ experiences, has the potential to serve as an inspiring message to all Latino doctoral students facing similar experiences.

In this chapter, I detail the counterstories of the participants and amplify the ways in which the participants of this study developed a professional identity grounded in a spirit of resistance and disruption of the norm of who a doctoral student is and becomes. The three themes that emerged from this study are depicted in figure 1: (1) being “one of the few,” (2) navigating professional identity development, and (3) becoming a Latino counselor educator.
Enter Doctoral Program

Being One Of The Few

- Experiencing Microaggressions
- Biopsychosocial Outcomes

Navigating Professional Identity Development

- Facing White Spaces
- Complicated Engagement

Becoming A Latino Counselor Educator

- Finding Voice
- Reclaiming Power
- Disrupting The Norm

To The Profession

Figure 1: Identity Development Process
Being “one of the few” captured the participants’ experiences of isolation and marginalization within their doctoral program and within the counseling profession. The two subthemes of this category were experiencing microaggressions and biopsychosocial outcomes. These subthemes detail the experiences of microaggressions and the physical, psychological, and social ramifications of such events.

The next theme, navigating professional identity development, describes the ways in which the participants figured out ways of coping and persisting despite experiences of isolation and marginalization. This category includes two subthemes: (1) facing “White spaces” and (2) complicated engagement. Facing White spaces (i.e. predominantly White American settings) elucidates the aspects of utilizing support systems, harnessing cultural capital, and persisting in academia. Complicated engagement refers to the participants’ experience of cautiously proceeding through the professional identity development process. This process included taking risks, making sacrifices, and playing it safe.

Becoming a Latino counselor educator explains a process of defining a professional identity that is congruent with one’s sense of self as a Latino. For the participants, this experience of finding congruency involved integrating multiple identities, including ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status; and was informed by their connection to the Latino community. The three subthemes of becoming a Latino counselor educator were: (1) finding voice, (2) reclaiming power, and (3) disrupting the norm.
Being “One of the Few”

All of the participants shared that they were one of the few Latinos in their doctoral programs. According to the literature on the topic of diversity in higher education, it is not uncommon for Latino doctoral students to be “one of the few” in their graduate program (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). In fact, less than 6% of the student body in doctoral counseling programs across the nation is comprised of Latino students (CACREP, 2016). This statistic is reflected in Marisol’s observation that “the further you go up [in higher education] the less diversity that you see.” For the participants in this study, being one of the few manifested itself in the counseling program and in their family of origin.

Besides being one of the few Latino students in a counseling doctoral program, the participants were simultaneously one of the few individuals in their family to pursue higher education, further marginalizing them within their family. Some of them described that pursuing higher education was “going against the grain” (Aryanna), especially pursuing a doctoral degree in counseling because of the stigma of mental health held by many Latino families. Due to familismo and the internalization of traditional gender roles, some of the female participants felt “selfish” (Alicia) for leaving family to study at a university far from home.

Aryanna also shared how her feminist identity conflicted with the cultural value of machismo that tends to emphasize men as heads of the household who protect the family (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). Some of the participants were first generation higher education students making it
more isolating and challenging for them, because they felt disconnected from their families and unable to reconcile the divide created by surpassing the educational level of most of their family members, which resulted in a feeling of guilt. As Aryanna stated, “[there is a] huge disconnect where I recognize my privilege in higher education and I wish that I could bring my family along with me.” For Aryanna and others, the experience of guilt arose from not being able to include family in their educational and professional pursuits, and feeling as if they were surpassing their family’s educational and financial statuses. In a way, the participants’ guilt was about feeling superior to their family members and identifying, in some ways, with the oppressor (i.e., White Americans). Often, when a member from an oppressed ethnic group gains social capital in the form of education and wealth, they could be perceived as aligning with the oppressor (Villenas, 1996). This perception could make the person feel that they are betraying their sense of connection to their family and Latino community, which can make them feel guilty.

Being one of the few Latinos in the counseling program meant that ethnicity played a significant role in the participants’ experiences because they were classified based on it and had racialized encounters. As Aryanna said, “[my ethnicity is] always at the forefront” of my experience and “in my face all the time.” For Aryanna, her ethnicity was a prominent feature in her professional identity development experiences because she is the only Latina in her cohort, and, as such is categorized and viewed accordingly. In other words, being Latino in a predominantly White American setting meant that she was often viewed as the Latino student and marginalized as a result. Carina further said,
“there’s few of us but that’s not an advantage for me” (because of lack of mentoring and guidance). For Carina, being Latina meant less access to mentors who looked like her and/or shared similar educational experiences related to belonging to a marginalized ethnic group.

Interestingly, Jose viewed gender and not ethnicity as a prominent feature in his doctoral experiences. Since Jose belonged to the female-dominated profession of counseling, he found himself “in a place where my identity as a male is seen [by other students and faculty] first before a Hispanic male” because “people [faculty and students] are assuming that I identify as white.” Embedded in this experience of being viewed as a White male was a stereotype about how Latinos should look and act. As Jose stated, “I get labeled as one thing because of how I physically appear and because of that and because I don’t naturally come off as they assume all Hispanic or Latino people do then a lot of those assumptions and biases and stereotypes come out.” In other words, others viewed his gender and racial identity as a prominent feature because Jose has fair skin tone and does not speak with an accent. In Jose’s experience language, race, ethnicity, and gender all played a role in his doctoral student experience. Similar to how Aryanna and Carina felt, being marginalized and perceived as the token minority contributed to a sense of invalidation and not being accepted as a whole person. In other words, the participants’ experiences speak to how their ethnicity or other identity was amplified and magnified in the predominantly White American academic and professional setting. This myopic view of who they are as doctoral students made them feel invalidated and not understood as the full person that they are, which encompasses all their identities.
Jose saw his experience as influenced by how others “perceive [him].” This perception from others was that gender and racial privilege, in the form of male and White power, played a role in shaping Jose’s experience. As Jose said, “people [my classmates] would assume…that I had it easier in the program because I was a male.” By making this assumption, people in the counseling program perpetuated a narrative which Jose challenged. In challenging the perception, Jose found himself in a double bind because he was further perceived as a male exerting his power to challenge, yet motivated to “call it out.” Jose felt conflicted in how to proceed with challenging this dominant narrative that was for him “just not true.”

In his experience, as in Carina’s and Aryanna’s, being viewed by others as Latino or male played a significant role in professional identity development. These perceptions played a role due to the dominant meaning attached to these identities, which could include not being smart or significant in the power structure of U.S. society. The meanings attached to being Latino were often manifested through experiences of microaggressions. Facing microaggressions and biopsychosocial outcomes were the two subthemes of being one of the few in the predominantly White American profession of counseling.

**Microaggressions: “A painful reality.”** One of the outcomes of being one of the few was experiencing microaggressions. Microaggressions are “brief, commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). Sue et al. (2007) identified three
forms of racial microaggressions: (1) microassaults, (2) microinsults, and (3) microinvalidations (Sue & Sue, 2013; Sue et al., 2007). For the participants in this study, most of the microaggressions experienced were microinvalidations because they excluded, negated, or nullified their psychological experiences.

Microaggressions are examples of racialized experiences and can have deleterious psychological and emotional effects on the recipient (Sue & Sue, 2013). Participants described racialized academic and professional experiences as those moments and interactions when other students or faculty imposed a sense of privilege and power over them, thus perpetrating social inequities (Sue & Sue, 2013; Valdes, 2005). These experiences could be carried over from previous master’s level programs or have occurred in the doctoral program that the participant is currently attending. For example, Aryanna shared this experience:

I had a White female professor in my master’s program who abused her power over me… she invited me on to research with her and it really was just for me to do all the work and I did…and she would call me out and ridicule me [in the classroom].

This excerpt in which Aryanna describes how the professor used her to do “all the work” and ridiculed her in class highlights the power that faculty can impose on a student, thus effecting the classroom experience.

**In the classroom: “The minority experience.”** One setting in which the participants often faced microaggressions while in the doctoral program was in the classroom. The classroom served as the setting where students and faculty interact and
learning takes place. Group discussion also happens in the classroom and was an integral part of exploring diverse topics and building community amongst students. For the participants in this study, the situations in the classroom proved to be colored by “the minority experience” (Aryanna). This experience related to the uniqueness of “being one of the few” in a predominantly White American setting.

As Aryanna expressed about her classroom experience:

Sometimes when I’m sitting in classes where I feel that I’m having very different experiences than others. Sometimes that is like the minority experience of having a lot of emotion happen internally. Just flood of anxiety and things that before I even speak up and then I think what’s really difficult is when I am dismissed…. in classes when I say things I’m wondering as if it landed well or if people are understanding me…

Aryanna felt that she was experiencing a different internal emotional state than her White American counterparts and misunderstood. For her, there was a sense of devaluation of her statement and viewpoints. This experience led her to feel anxious and vigilant about how others perceive her contributions to the classroom discussions. Because of this microaggression, Aryanna had professional identity experiences in the classroom that were emotionally complicated, which may have affected her level of confidence and ability to be participatory. In the counseling profession, active and vocal participation is a valued component in the educational and developmental process (Carlson, Portman, & Barlett, 2006). For many of the participants in this study, actively
participating in the classroom was stunted by anxiety and the effects of being one of the few. For instance, Aryanna shared how she was silenced in the classroom:

I was afraid [in the classroom]. I’d just like be silenced and I wouldn’t even challenge that and so that was really hard I still carry that [into my doctoral program] and that was my second year in my master’s program a little bit before I graduated.

This statement reflects Aryanna’s experience of being afraid and silenced in the classroom. Due to feeling afraid, she did not feel empowered to challenge or speak up in the classroom. Even though this experience happened during her master’s program, Aryanna continued to feel silenced in the doctoral program because of this experience.

In addition to being silenced, the participants felt misunderstood. Feeling misunderstood had to do with the experience of having to censor or question one’s way of being in the world due to reactions received from peers and/or faculty in the program. Carina told this experience, “I felt misunderstood at times as far as my personality goes and the influence of my culture that matches my personality.” She also related how because English is her second language that “my accent will always stay” and be a marker that others will marginalize and make assumptions based upon. Some of these assumptions based on having an accent are that Carina is less smart or capable than others.

Aryanna also stated, “in classes… a lot of times I feel misunderstood…” Miguel too recounted how he felt misunderstood when his classmates and professor expressed surprise at the virtual presence of his mother in the classroom. As he shared:
...so one meeting we were studying for a class and my mom texted me if she could call me and I said sure so then she skype called me so then I brought her into that room ... I think for some people it was really strange ...that’s something that you wouldn’t do.

He too, felt a systemic response to his inclusion of his mother into the classroom. Miguel felt confused because, as he said, “family is so important” so he wondered, why would it be surprising to have his mother in the room. Yet, in his experience, bringing his mother into the room was “something that you wouldn’t do” in this context because people “expect a work life boundary.” For Miguel, including his mother in the classroom was a way of being “authentic and transparent.” Marisol also felt this work life boundary expectation when she stated, “I have this authentic feeling and I want to share that but I can’t be one hundred percent my authentic self of just being hurt and angry because then I’m not teaching somebody something.” In this quotation, Marisol felt a systemic response to her feelings of being hurt and angry that made her feel unable to be fully authentic, and thus misunderstood.

Jose also had a time in the classroom when he felt misunderstood as a male. For Jose, it was “a daily struggle ...to deal with the amount of power that people said that I had because I was a male in a predominately female field and that was really, that really bothered me.” As a result, Jose felt inclined to change behavior in the classroom setting. As he shared, “I’m purposefully not gonna say anything in class today because I don’t want to perpetuate the gender stereotype that you have placed on me.” When he spoke up and advocated about this “gender dynamic” he experienced “push back” and
defensiveness from his classmates. This experience of push back and defensiveness could be understood as the systemic power that plays out in the classroom (Valdes, 2005). This systemic power is used to maintain the status quo (e.g. that males have power and being professional doesn’t mean bringing your mother into the room). For both Miguel and Jose, they felt this power influencing their classroom functioning and level of comfort and acceptance, as one of the few.

These participants shared experiences of being misunderstood in their worldview and way of being. As a result, some were forced to self-check their perceptions. For instance, Aryanna said, “there’s a lot of like me having to check in, you know like am I a crazy person like I’m seeing a lot of things that no one else in the room is bringing up so there’s a lot of that having to trust myself.” For her it helped her cultivate self-trust in her viewpoints, despite being one of the few, and despite the majority of the class not addressing the aspects that she was witnessing.

As a part of the student body, being one of the few meant, as Aryanna said, “at times it can be tricky because sometimes I’m othered.” Being “othered” meant that Aryanna and the other participants were tokenized and/or, as Marisol described, “a part of that check mark” or “box” that Latinos are placed. The check mark or box refers to classifying others based on ethnicity, which is used by the U.S. Census (U.S. Census, 2011).

Due to the ways that ethnic classification are used to define and categorize groups of people who are relegated to lower social status and power, the participants had professional identity development experiences in the classroom that led them to feel that
they were expected to speak for all Latinos. Marisol shared, “… I can kind of see a side an eye waiting for me to start talking about it (the Latino experience) and so I feel like the microaggressions aren’t straight up rude to me but they are there in that undertone.” Here Marisol described a time when her classmates assumed and expected that she speak for all Latinos, thus making her the token minority.

For Marisol, being the “token” resulted in a “weird balance of I don’t want to be the token but at the same time if I don’t speak up and speak to the experience that I have then they might not know about any experience.” Here it is evident the sense of responsibility that Marisol and many other participants had to educate classmates and faculty on the Latino experience. However, taking this role of educator made Marisol feel “weird” and added another component to the classroom experience that White American students possibly did not have. In a way, having to educate others on the Latino experience can be understood as a function of White privilege and power. An expectation that the onus is on the marginalized student to educate others.

Alicia told of this experience, “I was being put on the spot in front of the whole class and being challenged about these things (of being followed in a store) as the only person of color in the room.” Alicia told this story of being invalidated by peers after disclosing her experience of being followed in a store, possibly due to her ethnicity. This quote shows the common response by the dominant cultural group to deny a person’s racialized experience because it causes discomfort (Sue & Sue, 2013).
Raquel shared her story of conceptualizing a case and not feeling as it was received by her classmates. This conceptualization was influenced by her ethnic and racial identities.

…and I really had a very unique conceptualization of this case based on who I was in my experience of being a racial/ethnic minority so it was heard, it was validated in the class but it wasn’t um, it wasn’t as readily received.

For Raquel, in this quote, her experience of conceptualizing a case based on her cultural worldview was “validated” but not “readily received.” This quote sheds light on the classroom tension between validating and fully incorporating a new viewpoint into one’s current way of seeing the world. In other words, the students may have validated Raquel’s conceptualization, yet may have not increased their self-awareness about the specific aspects that Raquel was pointing out. In a way, the students were doing the “right” thing by validating. This response could be understood as a multicultural competence skill, however self-awareness is an equally important aspect of competence (Sue, Arrendondo, & McDavis, 1992). For Raquel, her conceptualization was unique, however the return to the status quo of conceptualizing cases easily occurred despite her contribution; further possibly making her feel invalidated. She also felt, “there was a fear that … I do know what I’m talking about but I don’t know how it’s gonna be received.”

For all of these participants, the minority experience in the classroom involved anxiety, fear, and feeling misunderstood. Due to microaggressions in the classroom and being marginalized, the participants faced a daily struggle of countering these perceptions and interactions. Having such experiences possibly led to professional identity
development situations in the classroom that were different than what their White American counterparts experienced and complicated by how others perceive them based on ethnicity.

**Microaggressions: Outside of the classroom.** Not only did the participants experience microaggressions in their academic and professional lives, they also experienced it outside of these domains. For instance, Mary detailed a time when a stranger said to her “you almost sound American (because you speak English well).” She also had this experience at a doctor’s office:

…well I’m doing my PhD in counselor education and they’re as oh that’s so amazing good for you and the good for you is a way … to say first that is so amazing I feel happy for you but it’s also a way to say I have such low expectations for people sometimes that either look as you, speak like you, or your age, your gender, your level of ability or whatever that it is surprising to me to hear that you’re doing that so I have an issue with differentiating when is one or the other so I want to believe that it’s both and I appreciate it but I get the distaste of listening to that…

In this excerpt, Mary described a microaggression because she felt invalidated when the other person was surprised that Mary was pursuing a doctorate. Mary listed multiple identities (being Latina, age, gender) that could have contributed to their sense of disbelief that Mary could be accomplishing such a task. Embedded in this quote is a common internal response to a microaggression, which is doubt that it is happening and “distaste” because it is happening.
Alicia detailed an experience as a student representative for her counseling program, where a White male faculty member relegated her to secretarial tasks and called her out for using profanity in professional settings. Alicia shared how this faculty’s request to her to perform secretarial tasks as the student representative represented a microaggression. This microaggression represented the idea “of woman of color as like housekeepers, maids, servants” and nothing more.

For the participants in this study, being one of the few led to various professional identity development experiences in all areas of the doctoral program in counseling, impacted by microaggressions: (a) teaching, (b) supervision, (c) research and scholarship, (d) counseling, and (e) leadership and advocacy (CACREP, 2016). Due to the complexity of professional identity development, positive experiences in these areas also occurred. These positive experiences served as disconfirming evidence to the experiences of microaggression, yet do not negate the existence of invalidating situations.

**Teaching.** Teaching is a core component of a doctoral counseling program (CACREP, 2016) and is defined as didactic instruction of master’s level students, in the form of teaching classes, facilitating psycho-educational groups, and clinical instruction (Limberg et al., 2013). The teaching experience provides doctoral students an opportunity to practice and apply teaching and learning theory, and to build confidence as a teacher (Limberg et al., 2013). The participants in this study shared both positive and invalidating teaching experiences during their doctoral program in counseling.

Raquel shared a positive experience: “the professor I’m working with now as a TA, he won’t make any decisions in the class without consulting me I’m as it’s your
class.” This experience made Raquel feel valued, which helped her build her internal confidence as an instructor. At the same time, Raquel also had, “…definite moments when students did not take what I was saying seriously or kind of questioned the content or the certain positions within the multicultural framework. Yeah that kind of undermining the educator phenomenon definitely happened.” In this excerpt, the phenomenon of undermining the educator or challenging her authority occurred. While Raquel had a validating experience with a professor, she also had an invalidating one with the students, complicating her professional identity development. As her internal confidence as an instructor was building, the external feedback from students challenged this confidence and made her question her confidence and competence. This outcome of building and tearing down of internal confidence was an aspect of Raquel’s professional identity development experience that complicated the process.

Alicia expressed her experience of being a woman of color, as a Latina, in academia. She said that “…nothing we do is ever really good enough and we will always be fault and we will always be doing something wrong.” Aryanna also shared in Alicia’s experience of being perceived as incompetent, when she said, “I am presumed incompetent the minute I walk into a room, I… evaluations are always much different than my peers.” For Aryanna and Alicia, their role as instructor was colored by the perceptions that others had of them based on ethnicity. These perceptions were that they are never “really good enough” and are “presumed incompetent” as women of color. Here Alicia points out the societal impact of being Latina and therefore classified as a woman of color. Since ethnicity is embedded in the racialized society of the U.S., all the
participants by virtue of being Latino were considered people of color (i.e. not belonging to the White American racial category).

According to racenicity, ethnicity and race are interwoven social constructs that are not mutually exclusive, rather they are interdependent. Racenicity, as a point of analysis, helps examine how race is a social and historical construction that shapes ethnicity to be a deviant construct vis-a-vis the superiority of being White (Leistyna, 1999). In the experience of the participants, being Latino and classified as a person of color carried racial and ethnocentric undertones. These undertones represented the dominant ideology in this country that any ethnicity other than White American is inferior.

Research supports that women of color in academia more often experience hostility and tension, and institutional racism (Salazar, 2009). As Alicia stated, “woman of color, I think we have more, some more barriers than men of color… in the academic arena.” Alicia shared this experience related to barriers for women of color in academia:

I’ve taught a couple of classes now and that’s been interesting as a woman of color at a predominately White institution… so my evaluation scores have not been terrible but they have not been awesome and on my last evals. I got a comment from a student that one day I wore a dress that was inappropriate and unprofessional and that to me was just so kind of indicative of the culture that I’m in currently and what it’s as to be a woman of color in academia.

Jose, too, shared an aspect of his teaching experience when he said, “you’re teaching multicultural counseling and you always get nervous when you have to talk
about White privilege.” His words spoke to the systemic power of White privilege in the classroom. According to CRT and LatCrit, talking about White privilege is taboo because for many people, it does not exist. In other words, White privilege is so ubiquitous that it becomes the norm and not recognizable (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007; Valdes, 2005). Jose’s experience validates the power of the system in counteracting the topic of White privilege.

Jose, Alicia, Aryanna, and Raquel experienced invalidation by students while in their instructor roles. Raquel had a validating experience with a professor. Overall, their experiences demonstrate the impact of perceptions and interactions with others that were influenced by the dominant narrative in predominantly White American environments. This narrative is that Latino instructors are often perceived incompetent and can be undermined.

Supervision. In the area of supervision, some of the participants also expressed marginalization. Supervision is another major component of a doctoral counseling program (CACREP, 2016) and includes applying theories of supervision to students’ development and ensuring sound clinical practice (Limberg et al., 2013). Supervision also contributes to the students’ professional identity transition from counselor to doctoral-level counselor educator (Limberg et al., 2013).

Miguel’s experience of supervision involved a discomfort with the construct of race. As he stated:

becoming supervisor and being trained in supervision and being surrounded by narratives of nervousness of conversations around race in the counseling session
or in supervision … we don’t really talk about that, we don’t really talk about that unless the client brings it up, am I supposed to bring it up or why is that important I don’t understand why that’s important.

Here Miguel shared his experience with supervisees’ relationship to the race conversation, and how often times they voice discomfort or ignorance about the importance of race in the supervision experience. For Miguel, the invalidation of the importance of race led him to feel angry and was often faced with “push back” by supervisees, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

In supervision it’s been very similar, supervisees of color… in this dual relationship… in this not dual relationship but this dual process of… we have a really good working relationship of multiculturalism in the counseling relationship between the clients and them, between them and I but then when conversations get critical and radical there’s a lot of pushback (from the supervisee), don’t tell me I’m being mean, don’t tell me I’m being insensitive to issues of race or don’t tell me that I’m being insensitive to issues of gender.

Miguel’s supervisory experience shared here depicts the power of the dominant system to give White American supervisee the permission to “pushback.” In this example, Miguel expressed how the supervisee reacted with defensiveness by saying, “don’t tell me I’m being mean … [or] insensitive to issues of race…” This defensiveness to discussions about race in supervision made it difficult for Miguel to engage in critical dialogue necessary for the supervisee’s multicultural competence development. In
supervision as in teaching, the participants experienced resistance to difficult conversations about race and other forms of oppression.

**Research and scholarship.** Conducting research is another important factor in doctoral studies and is vital to identity formation as a doctoral-level counselor (Carlson et al., 2006; Limberg et al., 2013). Creating and disseminating new knowledge becomes doctoral students’ responsibility (Limberg et al., 2013). Doctoral students perceive research and scholarship as a responsibility to the profession and a new way of thinking about professional knowledge. For some of the participants in this study, this area proved substantially challenging.

For many of the participants, being one of the few motivated them to pursue research and scholarship related to the Latino community. For Miguel, making this choice resulted in an invalidating experience within the profession from “White people.” As he stated, “wanting to research what I research and being asked repeatedly and even being asked at job interviews always by White people what does this have to do with counselor ed, never by people of color, never from a counselor educator of color.” This experience related an invalidating experience that led Miguel to feel angry about having to explain the relevance of his research for counselor education. The need to explain this relevance validates the lack of awareness that many in the counseling profession have about the role of power and privilege in the field.

Carina felt a disconnect between the research values of her counseling program and her professional value of preparing competent counselors. “I was conflicted in my values of that and being at a university that was just research … because research is
gonna be more important and for me that was an insult because you’re telling me that
you’re gonna neglect the future possible counselors…”

For Miguel and Carina, the area of research was a place of further marginalization
and challenging professional identity development experiences. Miguel experienced a
microaggression when he was asked what his research on Latinos has to do with
counselor education. Because Carina identified as a counselor and values educating
future counselors, her experience in her program that values research over counselor
education made her feel insulted. She felt insulted because her viewpoint that training
counselors to be multiculturally competent providers was less of a priority than research.
From these experiences, Miguel and Carina had an additional stressor to handle and
integrate into their professional identity development experience. This stressor resulted
from experiencing microaggressions.

Professional conferences are another aspect of identity development that is
promoted and valued in the field of counseling (Carlson et al., 2006). Attending
conferences became both a validating and invalidating experience for the participants.
For Jose, Raquel, and Carina, going to conferences made them feel welcomed and
connected to the field.

As Jose shared about attending conferences, “I already felt welcome [by] the
counseling community… which made me feel… that’s the doctorate I’m gonna go for
because [feeling welcome] was really meaningful to me.” For Jose attending conferences
was a meaningful source of connection and community for him. At the same time, for
some of the participants conferences were a reminder of being one of the few. As Raquel
stated about the lack of racial and ethnic diversity at conferences, “there are not many people who look as me in our profession.”

Jose, Miguel, and Mary described instances where they felt incongruence between their professional values of social justice and the profession’s values of prestige and, as Mary said, “self-serving” actions. Miguel shared his experiences at conferences related to the importance of prestige within the field and the incongruence between the profession professing to value multiculturalism and social justice, and what is represented “in this White space”:

I think in the four years I’ve been a doctoral student that was the first conference that I went to where people intentionally were making space to talk about these things (social justice)…. a young Black woman and she was presenting on race dialogues in the counselor education classroom and the room filled up while other conferences it’s been if you’re not a big name it’s not your table because you’re not talking about… and that makes me feel not very integrated.

Additionally, he shared, “White Americans aren’t showing up, White North Americans aren’t showing up and all of us talked about it, like what does it mean to be a counselor educator when you feel that what’s going on in society is directly related to your identity” and “how important is it to them if they’re not actually there?”

For Miguel, these experiences at professional conferences made him question the congruence between the profession’s belief in multiculturalism and social justice, and the profession’s manifestations of this worldview. As a result, he felt not integrated within the profession and invalidated in his cultural identity. In Miguel’s experience, if the
professionals in your field are not “showing up” to talk about issues related to race and power, then by default they are not addressing cultural identity in one’s professional identity experience.

Alicia spoke about the different experiences she had when she attended a conference hosted by a “White organization” versus one provided by a Latino organization. In particular, Alicia shared that the conference by the Latino organization was more “warm,” celebratory, and “very inclusive” of “everybody’s perspectives,” while at the other one “there weren’t as many …networking opportunities.” For Alicia, the Latino conference served as a place of meaningful and validating connections with others who looked as her and/or shared her similar marginalizing academic and professional experiences:

Yeah it just didn’t feel as warm so there weren’t as many as kind of networking opportunities like specific time set aside for networking, the roundtables that they had were much more…versus (the Latino professional conference) being very inclusive of other people … and bringing in everybody’s perspectives. And (at the “White” organization) there wasn’t a night where we all came together and celebrated together and that seems very central to maybe the ethnic minority professional organizations than it would be to the more White organizations, the traditional ones.

For the participants, professional conferences became a place where their ethnicity and marginalized place as a Latino student surfaced and contributed to their experiences. Raquel said about her experiences at conferences:
…walking into these conferences which is a part of this larger system of our culture and being very aware that there are not other people that look like you and so what implications does this have for my role in this system as doc student, as Latina, as a female and a bunch of other categories that we may self-identify.

As Raquel said having these experiences, where others do not look like her at conferences has implications upon her role as a Latino doctoral student in counseling within the larger system that is mostly White American. This role includes being viewed as Latina in the White world of the professional conference. As explained, being Latino is significant when it is amplified and influences the ways faculty and other students perceived the participants. For Raquel, when she entered the conference she was “very aware” that she was unlike the other attendees in terms of racial and ethnic identity. From this social position within the profession, Raquel questioned her place within “this [White] system” and wondered about how her role will unfold and be shaped.

*Counseling practice.* Counseling practice involves providing psychotherapy services to others. As doctoral level counselors, counseling practice is an additional aspect of the graduate program. Some students have a clinical internship or are employed as counselors during the doctoral program.

Alicia stated about her clinical experience, “as a woman of color who’s in the clinical world kind of battling not just the racial ethnic stuff but the gender stuff too.” She also retold an experience of being microaggressed by a White client in therapy because of her sexual orientation. Alicia’s experiences spoke to the relevance of intersectionality on professional identity development. Intersectionality focuses on how
multiple social identities (i.e. race, ethnicity, gender) relate and connect to one another in a societal context to influence experience and heighten the feelings of marginalization and invalidation (Nunez, 2014). As Alicia stated, she had to “battle” the intersection of her multiple identities (race, sexual orientation, and gender) that were often invalidated.

Mary similarly experienced a time when a client asked her if she was a person of color because she wanted to ensure that she got the best care possible. To Mary, this question represented a microaggression in that the client was making a judgment of Mary’s clinical ability based on her accent.

Alicia and Mary experienced microaggressions from the clients they served in counseling practice. Alicia spoke to her experience of being marginalized for “racial ethnic stuff” and “gender” too. Alicia felt that clients made negative assumptions of her based on race, ethnicity, and gender, which impacted her confidence level as a counselor. Mary’s experience was a judgment on her clinical competence. For them, the importance of being validated by their supervisors was an integral component in their experience and helped them positively deal with these microaggressions in counseling practice.

The participants shared moments in counseling practice when their ethnicity was used to minimize their competence as counselors and to invalidate their confidence as a person of color. When the participants had these experiences in counseling practice they struggled with gaining a sense of internal confidence in their role as a counselor because of invalidating experiences. These invalidating experiences called into question their competence and ability to perform the duties of a counselor. Gibson et al. (2010) described having validating counseling experiences helps the counselor-in-training
develop internal confidence as a counselor. Possibly because the participants faced
invalidating situations in counseling practice, they faced a more challenging process of
developing internal confidence as a counselor and leader in the field.

**Leadership and advocacy.** In the field of counseling, servant leadership and
advocacy is promoted as the ideal leadership model (Ratts, Toporek, & Lewis, 2010).
However, for some of the participants, their experience with leadership and advocacy felt
disconnected and further isolating. This experience emerged out of being one of the few
in their doctoral program and in the profession as a whole. Because they were one of the
few and held leadership and advocacy perspectives that were informed by their
commitment to their ethnicity, some of the participants felt disconnected from the
profession’s perspectives on these aspects.

Mary discussed how she felt disconnected from leadership in the field because of
her views on it based on ethnicity and her marginalizing experiences. Her experience
also related to how she values grassroots leadership and indigenous knowledge, instead
of the Western hierarchical model that values prestige and power. She said about
leadership:

…and the model of leadership that is grounded in service, professional service at
the level of our organizations, I believe is a western thing. So it serves the purpose
of networking and identity … and being a Latina I have not necessarily been
aligned with it.

She further related, “it’s like this professional leadership association, big names in
the field kind of world is so far removed from me.” In these two statements, Mary
revealed how her understanding of leadership was more about service to others than about networking and prestige. As a Latina, she did not feel aligned to the profession’s perception of leadership as a way of gaining power and prestige. Mary also identified herself as an “outlier” as it related to leadership:

I am an outlier because people do not have that kind of goal, the goal is to contribute to the profession in a way that is congruent with the values, you know leadership, service and identity and I get that I know it is needed and important but there are other things that are more needed to… we represent, I think we have the opportunity to create hope for people and it’s hard for me to see that sometimes the profession is so removed [from] who I am.

In this excerpt, Mary shared that she felt isolated because the profession’s goals and values did not align with who she was as a Latino doctoral student. For Mary, being Latino means valuing helping others in the community and building hope for other marginalized individuals. Yet her experience of leadership and advocacy seemed to not meet these goals or promote her values as someone “much grounded in [her] identity as a counselor.”

Mary also depicted how this experience of marginalization within the leadership model of the profession impacts her professional identity experiences:

I haven’t even had the connections to those things so I’m removed from that and I think that is a disadvantage for me honestly … because … it makes me question my ability to find employment and then secure things … also that ties directly with who I am, who I feel I am in this profession.
Due to the experience of feeling disconnected from leadership in the field, Mary had a complex professional identity developmental process of figuring out “who I feel I am in this profession” and made her feel “guilt … about being disingenuous.” She felt disingenuous as a counselor educator because she instills in her students the importance of service and leadership, yet she herself is not engaged in this aspect. Miguel also struggled with the lack of advocacy around racial issues in the profession:

I sat with students of color repeatedly where … so they wanted to sit down because they had very similar experiences and they felt out of place and they’re not really welcome and no one is talking about race and nobody is talking about Black Lives Matter, no one is talking about brown lives matter, nobody is talking about the Dakota Access pipeline, nobody is talking about any of the issues in our society that are related to race and racism and sexism and colonialism… (and asking) why I’m doing this, as why am I talking about this …

Miguel’s experience with the profession, as a whole, is that we are not advocating for societal issues, such as Black Lives Matter or the Dakota Access pipeline. Due to this lack of advocacy, at the societal level, Miguel questions “why I am talking about this” if the majority of the profession is not engaged in the discussion, possibly leading Miguel to feel discouraged and disappointed with the profession.

In addition to feeling discouraged and disappointed with the profession, Miguel also shared a time when faculty and peers made him feel invisible. Aryanna also identified a situation where she was made invisible by professionals in the field. Being made invisible is a common occurrence for people of color in predominantly White
American settings and is a mechanism to invalidate and disempower members of ethnic groups (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). For Aryanna and Miguel being made invisible further complicated their professional identity development by denying that their ethnicity was part of the process.

A common outcome of microaggressions is being made invisible (Sue & Sue, 2014). Two of the participants shared experiences of being made invisible. Being made invisible happened when they were ignored or not recognized as who they were as students and professionals. Aryanna and Miguel shared feeling invisible in the classroom and during a professional conference and that ethnicity was being erased or they were presumed incompetent.

As Miguel revealed:

…there has been a great deal of erasure of who I am and you know being told to calm down and being told that you sound angry or being very clearly communicated to me that I am a person of color and that no matter how much you work or how much you think you’ve made it and how much you think that the experience and the expertise and the letters behind my name are there and they matter, people will remind me that this is still a White man or White woman’s field, like that’s… let’s not forget that and I think this last year has been particularly poignant in that.

Here Miguel reflected upon how his racial identity as a “person of color” led to a “great deal of erasure of who [he is].” He gave the example of how faculty or peers tell him to calm down because he sounds angry. Miguel also identified times when faculty
and peers communicated to him that he will always be racially inferior despite his educational accomplishments. These invalidating situations made Miguel feel as if his racial identity was being made invisible because others wanted him to be calm and know his place in the social power hierarchy. In other words, the message Miguel received was to conform to the predominantly White American idea of how a doctoral students acts and behaves in order to receive respect for his educational accolades.

Aryanna shared how after presenting at a conference, she was ignored by the individuals in the room who asked her White American male co-presenter questions and not her. She also shared how her name was not listed on the presentation evaluation form. She further explained an encounter with a former student who did not remember her despite having had multiple interactions:

There was another experience that was really difficult for me last year…. so I had been teaching four of her courses and she would ride the elevator up with me and she looked scared and was kinda really closed off and then she said oh who are you, aren’t you a doc student and I said yeah I’m [blank] and she’s as oh what year are you and I’m as a second year cause in my head I’m confused cause I teach four of your classes …and I just like walked out of the elevator like what the hell just happened as I am so invisible around here.

For Aryanna being made invisible, when peers did not ask her questions or remember that she was a doctoral student, had direct consequences on her professional identity development because it decreased her chances of being asked to participate in a professional activity. Engaging in professional activities is a required component in
developing a professional identity as a counselor educator (Carlson et al., 2006). Thus, not being asked to participate or not being nominated for the profession’s honor society, as she shared, impacts her level of engagement in the field. Although doctoral students are expected to be active agents in their professional identity developmental process (Carlson et al., 2006) for those who are not considered for involvement are not given the opportunities to do so.

As Aryanna said, “I’m invisible why would you nominate me for something if they rode the elevator up with me mid semester and they don’t even know my name of course that’s not gonna happen … like I am such an invisible person here.” Being made invisible and experiencing microaggressions contributed to the biopsychosocial outcomes that all the participants experienced.

Due to being one of the few, all of the participants experienced microaggressions that made them feel isolated, invalidated, misunderstood, and invisible. Being one of the few meant that ethnicity played a significant role in the participants’ experiences because they were the numerical minority in the program, so were recognized as the Latino in the program and were also subjected to the biases and stereotypes that being Latino could mean in this country. For some of the participants, this meant being presumed incompetent or overly enthusiastic. For others, the “minority experience” (Aryanna) meant that they felt devalued and misperceived for sharing personal experiences in the classroom that involved family members or racialized experiences. Based on the tenets of CRT and LatCrit, students belonging to an ethnic group that is not White regularly
have these racialized experiences in higher education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007; Perez Huber, 2010; Valdes, 2005).

The participants’ experience of being one of the few pervaded all five aspects of their doctoral journey: teaching, supervision, research and scholarship, counseling practice, and leadership and advocacy. Thus, the participants had to figure out how to integrate a part of their personal identity (i.e. race and ethnicity) that was being actively denied and oppressed in their doctoral experiences. From these experiences, the participants had biopsychosocial outcomes.

**Biopsychosocial outcomes: “Knocks me on my ass.”** Being one of the few in the counseling program and profession contributed to many biopsychosocial outcomes for the participants that are captured in this subtheme. Biopsychosocial is a term used to describe the intersection of the physical, psychological, and social aspects of a person’s experience (Broderick & Blewitt, 2010). These include: (a) physical symptoms, (b) psychological stress and emotional distress, and (c) social ramifications.

Mary explained about microaggressions:

…microaggressions of all kinds like that you know sucks because I’m not used to them and you don’t expect them and then they’re here you don’t know what to do with them and then you leave with this weird feeling and you feel you settled and then you’re thinking of all the ways that you could have responded to that.

Her quote details the biopsychosocial outcome resulting from the added psychological stress that microaggressions can impose on a student. It takes extra psychic energy (Gloria, Rieckmann, & Rush, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2014), or as Mary said,
“keeps you thinking a long time,” to negotiate these experiences leading to many biopsychosocial outcomes.

**Physical symptoms.** Due to the additional stress created by the marginalizing experiences of being one of the few in the doctoral program, some of the participants experienced physical symptoms. Aryanna shared her story of having a stomach ulcer after starting the doctoral program. Marisol shared how she had “serious heartburn” and “panic attacks” after starting the doctoral program. Raquel and Aryanna experienced feeling exhausted and emotionally fatigued while in the academic program.

In this quote, Aryanna shared the fatigue she experienced:

…being an other in a predominately White place is… we can’t turn that off, as we react, we’re going to notice a lot of things that our peers and faculty members aren’t noticing and that’s hard you know there’s so much fatigue in that…

For Aryanna, being one of the few and “an other” meant that she was vigilant to “lot of things” involving power and privilege in the classroom. As she described, having to be vigilant about these aspects in the classroom resulted in a level of fatigue that impacted her physical well-being. For Marisol and Raquel, as well, having to be vigilant and deal with many instance of microaggressions contributed to a heightened sense of distress that led to physical symptoms.

Given that the participants were operating within a predominantly White American academic context as a member of a marginalized ethnic group, they were often exposed to racialized experiences that resulted from being one of the few. As a result, the participants’ physical symptoms may have been exacerbated by these experiences.
**Psychological stress.** In addition to physical symptoms, all of the participants experienced psychological stress. As Raquel stated, “(I had) psychological and emotional turmoil because of issues of privilege.” Miguel expressed, “it’s like psychologically it’s been incredibly difficult and emotionally it’s been sometimes overwhelming.” Others shared feeling silenced (Aryanna), shut down (Aryanna), isolated (Mary and Raquel), confused (Aryanna and Carina), anxious (Carina), and feeling a sense of incompleteness or rootlessness (Mary). Aryanna felt silenced and shut down after having invalidating experiences with faculty. Mary and Raquel felt isolated in their professional identity development experiences because they differed from others. Mary felt incomplete because her family does not live in this country, and rootless due to her immigration status.

Along with psychological stress, many of the participants shared feelings of doubt. “I’ve had big doubts, I had a huge ounce of doubt and fear that I felt it was a mistake.” For Miguel, self-doubt became a feature in his professional identity developmental process. This self-doubt was created due to experiences of microaggressions in the classroom that led to a feeling of not belonging within the ranks of doctoral education.

Raquel shared this story about an experience in the classroom: “I was challenging her on privilege and she didn’t take to it well and she became really defensive and pretty much was verbally aggressive towards me in the classroom setting…they were definitely imposing a sense of privilege and so that led to a lot of tears, it led to a lot of questions, it led to a lot of processing, it led to a lot of reflection… really had me doubting my
Jose also shared his sense of doubt when he said “is it because of the actual work that you’ve done or is it because of the path that somebody thinks you came on.” Miguel shared how having an “inch of doubt because you could just be making it up and that’s the worst part.” It was the worst part to doubt that one’s experiences with microaggressions are real and needing to constantly prove it or “support it” (Miguel) with literature on the topic.

Self-doubt is an aspect of the imposter syndrome. The imposter syndrome refers to the feeling that “the jig is going to be over” (Raquel) and “…is very real” (Aryanna). As Miguel said, “…it’s being communicated to you that you don’t belong and that you are not supposed to be succeeding…” This concept refers to having fear that one will be exposed as a fraud, having self-doubt and anxiety about taking credit for success. Experiencing such stress can lead to depression, psychological distress, and low self-confidence (Hutchins, 2015).

In the following excerpt we see Alicia’s low self-confidence due to the imposter syndrome. “It kind of feels as what I’m supposed to be doing (research and clinical accomplishment) so why am I special.” All of the participants expressed feeling this imposter syndrome at many points in their doctoral experience. “I’m good at what I do but then just receiving messages that you shouldn’t be so confident, you should always seek approval you should always doubt yourself” (Miguel). In this quote Miguel shared how even though he knew he was good at what he does, he doubted himself due to the racialized situations that sent him the message that he was not good enough.
An additional component of the imposter syndrome is feeling insecurities based on ethnicity and being a first generation student. As Aryanna explained, “… on top of being a predominately White area, every single one of my peers was White, I was first generation student so like all these layers of insecurity…” Also, Carina shared how she felt insecure about her writing in graduate school:

I have been living in the United States for twenty-six years but my accent will always stay with me so that was another challenge… can they understand me but also expressing myself with my writing especially going into an area of academic writing which can be very challenging … I felt insecure about my writing.

**Emotional distress.** In addition to physical symptoms and psychological stress, the participants also experienced emotional distress. All of the participants also shared having emotional distress throughout their doctoral journey due to being one of the few. Because the participants were one of the few in a predominantly White American profession, they experienced invalidating and marginalizing experiences that made them feel emotional distress.

The participants expressed these emotional reactions: clueless and lost (Carina), anxious (Carina), lonely (Carina and Mary), frustrated (Mary and Miguel), wounded (Raquel and Mary), wounded (Aryanna, Jose, Carina, Alicia), and on the verge of a mental breakdown (Jose). Mary described it this way: “like I have heard things that make me feel like I don’t belong and that has a very deep and internal cost you know emotionally.” This excerpt reveals the emotional pain caused by feeling “like I don’t belong” because of ethnic differences.
Carina’s emotional experience surrounded navigating the graduate program and not knowing the expectations. Carina and Mary felt lonely in their experience as the only Latina in their doctoral cohort. Mary and Miguel felt frustrated at the occurrence of microaggressions in the classrooms and academic settings.

Raquel, Aryanna, Alicia, Carina, and Jose told of times when they felt invalidated and vulnerable in the classroom. Raquel felt wounded following an invalidating classroom experience where her White peer did not recognize the privilege she had. Aryanna felt vulnerable in the classroom because she felt obligated to broach topics related to her ethnicity in her professional identity development, yet unsafe to do so. Alicia also felt vulnerable when she discussed her experiences with microaggressions that were invalidated by her peers. Carina felt vulnerable during her first year as a student due to the imposter syndrome created by racialized ideas of what good scholarly writing looks like. Jose had times during his doctoral journey when he felt “on the verge of a mental breakdown” due to the stress of the academic and professional demands.

All the participants experienced some form of emotional distress throughout their doctoral journey, which is not uncommon (Gonzalez et al., 2001; Watford et al., 2006; Wiedman, et al., 2001). For some, the distress related to the demands and unknown expectations of the doctoral program. For others, the emotional experiences revolved around manifestations of power and privilege in the classroom and professional environment. These manifestations included microaggressions, imposition of privilege, and feeling the imposter syndrome. Having such emotional distress led many of the
participants to practice self-care and to seek out others who validated these experiences. For some of the participants, connecting with others proved challenging.

**Social ramifications.** Another component of the biopsychosocial outcomes of being one of the few, as a Latino doctoral student, was the social ramifications. Mary detailed, “it becomes a journey that is solitary and I have felt that loneliness throughout the process.” Carina shared her experience of feeling disconnected from her peers due to age. Carina was the oldest member in her cohort so for her, she felt a sense of isolation based on age differences, thus making her one of the few older adults in her group. Her experience speaks to the intersectionality of being one of the few as a Latina and as an older adult in a group of younger adults. The interaction of these two dimensions of her identity contributed to her feeling of social isolation as a doctoral student.

Aryanna talked about feeling rejected by the external community that surrounded the campus she attended. She comments how she experienced racism, sexism, and ignorance from members of the external community:

I have been rejected by a community almost every single time that I go out, not even an exaggeration, I have heard racist comments, I experience you know racism, sexism, you know just a lot of ignorance, so I really went inward with that so that was hard for me cause I lived other places and I tend to make friends easily and that sort of thing and then all of a sudden that changed when I came here I was rejected by the community and that was, um I never had an issue going up to people and you know talking to them and you know making friendships but that’s difficult here...
For Aryanna, this rejection that emerged because of the racism, sexism, and ignorance she experienced led to social isolation and made it difficult to form friendships. Not having friendships outside of school made it challenging for Aryanna to engage in social activities that may have brought her comfort and support. Jose and Mary spoke to “having a good work life balance” is important. Yet, due to this social rejection, Aryanna was unable to develop friendships and achieve a healthy work life balance, thus complicating her professional identity development experience. For without this balance, Aryanna had fewer outlets for positive self-care, which is a much needed requirement to cope with the doctoral journey.

As described, the participants often faced marginalization, isolation, and invisibility resulting in complex professional identity development experiences and a sense of not belonging. All of the participants shared multiple instances of feeling “othered,” invalidated, and isolated within their academic program and/or within the professional community of counseling. As a result, all of the participants experienced biopsychosocial outcomes and effects on their professional identity development process.

Not only did being one of the few result in physical, psychological, and social ramifications for the participants in the study, it also pervaded all areas of their doctoral experience. The participants described this experience as invalidating, isolating, as a disadvantage, and as an integral aspect of their professional identity development. In other words, the participants, by virtue of belonging to a marginalized ethnic group, had situations that reminded them of the perception in this country that to not be White
American meant that you were inferior. Often, the participants felt misunderstood, silenced, othered, invisible, and presumed incompetent.

As a result, being one of the few impacted the participants’ level of confidence and ability to participate in the classroom and professional arenas. Due to the experiences of microaggressions, the participants struggled with being active and vocal participants in their professional identity development. By not being active and vocal participants, it may have been more difficult to engage in the self-management aspects that Carlson et al. (2006) described as essential to navigating a doctoral program. One of these aspects included being personally responsible for engaging in professional activities that increase exposure to counselor educator tasks, such as presenting at conferences and publishing scholarly articles.

This experience of being one of the few remained a constant throughout their doctoral journey. Thus, for the students in this study, being Latino mattered for them. Being Latino in a predominantly White American programmatic and professional context meant that the participants’ professional identity development experiences were shaped by how the dominant racial group perceived them and interacted with them. Being one of the few has been found to influence one’s experiences in higher education. For example, research has shown that belonging to a marginalized ethnic group as a graduate student led many to feel disenfranchised and isolated from peers and faculty in the classroom and in the academy (Gasman et al., 2008; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Gonzalez, 2006; Henfield et al., 2013; Herzig, 2004; Nettles, 1990; Vaquera, 2007). This experience often resulted
in, as Raquel said “a lot of barriers” for students belonging to ethnic identities other than White American.

In the next section, I detail the ways in which the participants coped and persisted despite being one of the few and thus experiencing microaggressions and invisibility, and biopsychosocial stresses throughout their process. Navigating such experiences resulted in complex professional identity development.

**Navigating Professional Identity Development: “Making Space”**

Navigating professional identity development as one of the few detailed the second phase in the participants’ process of developing an identity. The aspects described in the first theme continue to be a part of the participants’ experience throughout the navigation of professional identity. Therefore, the first and second themes are not mutually exclusive. They represent a continuum of experience throughout the doctoral journey. Under this second theme of navigating professional identity development are two subthemes: facing White spaces and complicated engagement.

Developing a professional identity within a doctoral program in counseling is a complex and vulnerable process. A process that involves interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences designed to create a paradigm shift in thinking as a counselor to thinking as a researcher, teacher, and leader in the counseling field (Limberg et al., 2013). For the participants in this study, these experiences happened in a predominantly White American context often leading to oppressive experiences that made them feel isolated, marginalized, and invisible. From this social location within the profession, the professional identity experiences of the participants differed from their White American
counterparts in various ways. Thus, being one of the few and marginalized created professional identity development experiences that were complex and challenging.

As a result of having complex and challenging professional identity development experiences, all the participants utilized support systems and harnessed cultural capital to persist as one of the few in their doctoral program. In this way, the participants in this study intentionally made space for themselves within a predominantly White American professional context.

**Facing White spaces: “The boat’s gonna rock back.”** This aspect of navigating professional identity development refers to facing the White American context of the doctoral program and the counseling profession. A lack of representation of Latinos and a tendency to be ignored as an ethnic group contributed to a sense of being in a White world. Additionally, experiencing White privilege in action also reminded the participants of the White space within which they operated.

Beyond being one of the few, all of the participants spoke to the lack of representation in the counseling field of Latino professionals. Aryanna said it this way, “there’s very small representation of Latinos in Counselor Education.” Miguel further elaborated that “…we’re either erased (as Latinos) or we’re lumped in with White people.” Aryanna and Miguel spoke to the small number of Latino professionals in this field and how Latinos tended to be ignored or combined with White people. Miguel’s statement also relates to the lack of representation for Latinos within the Black-White racial paradigm that most people follow (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). In other words, even though Latino concerns are unique and separate from those involving the Black
community, these concerns are often dismissed. “We’re told just wait your turn for whatever your issue is… if you aren’t Black you shouldn’t really talk about these issues” is the message Miguel received about the importance of issues related to being Latino in the counseling profession.

In addition to hearing dismissive messages, some of the participants shared times when White privilege was evident. Miguel shared a time when he was teaching and the students had a lack of awareness about racial and ethnic differences. Miguel reflected on this situation by saying, “this is all within a counselor education program, um where you would think hold on a second how am I teaching a classroom full of students that have all made it some way but this is still happening.” Raquel also said, “she (a peer) asked very innocently what it [a microaggression] meant and I explained to her what it meant but it left me pretty upset that at this level that that wasn’t a construct that she was familiar with and so I provided her with some resources.” These quotes share the sense of disenchantment that the participants felt because counseling peers seemed to not have self-awareness or knowledge of how racism, power, and privilege can play out in the world.

Some examples of how power and privilege played out in the experiences of the participants are documented below. Miguel identified the tendency for White faculty to ignore topics of race:

I think in the context of counselor education …I think it’s racial privilege tangled up with socioeconomic and expert privilege so it’s like you’re a faculty now, you may have lost touch with the communities that you’re supposed to be serving and
forgetting how difficult it is in those communities, about what the real world looks like…[and] when a faculty group gets together and they’re all one race why would they talk about the issues of their students of color, why would any of them think to bring it up and even if one of them was more critically conscious and did bring it up what makes you think it would be given the same level of gravity as some other issue because that’s how privilege works right.

In this excerpt, Miguel reflected on the power of White privilege playing out within a faculty meeting. Here he explained how White faculty tends to not bring up issues pertaining to students of color because there is not a person of color in the room. Further, that the faculty may lose touch with the needs of communities and impose racial, socioeconomic, and expert privilege on their understandings of the experiences of students of color. Jose concurred that it is easy for those in the majority to not be vulnerable about topics of race:

It’s easier for the majority to openly discuss the experiences of minority populations at the expense of those individuals like ourselves having to feel vulnerable and having to feel that anxiety and navigate that world however as soon as you try to put that perspective and talk about it going the other direction and saying okay what can we do about this sort of thing let’s talk about the kind of conversations we have to have and construct these perspectives that we have and lets for one moment maybe place some vulnerabilities and critical self-reflection about the identity of the majority in our profession that is where it becomes more challenging and that’s where I get a lot of resistance.
Jose’s description details the ways that White privilege can cause resistance when racial topics are discussed. As Jose said, “it becomes more challenging” when White individuals are asked to engage in vulnerable discussions about racial power and privilege.

Each of these excerpts reveal a feature of White privilege, which is lack of awareness and denial of power and privilege (McIntosh, 1992) of which the counseling profession is not immune. Because, as Jose shared, we as a profession “have not got there yet…turned the table around…[and discussed] how these kinds of disparities happen and how these kinds of professional identities, these kinds of assumptions and things like that and still occur within the counseling profession.” These experiences often led the participants to feel disenchanted with the profession, and as Jose said, “what faith do I have [that things will change].”

Jose and Miguel expressed their perceptions of how racial, socioeconomic, and expert privilege plays out in the counseling profession. Aryanna’s experience of advocating for a student of color within the White space of the counseling program exemplified another aspect of losing faith and feeling inadequate to make change:

I had to advocate for a student last semester and oh my goodness like I was not down and it was so difficult, in my opinion it was such an abuse of power and it was a White person in charge of it who teamed up with another… and I had a different relationship with the student because I had mentored her the entire time she was in the program and so it was just like I had to fight against this completely White system and I had to like not shut up about it and not let it go
and that was difficult because there were some faculty members that I thought were on my team, that I thought I had an established relationship with that also were not supporting me and that was hard because I was like oh my gosh I thought we had a good established relationship but now you’re so quick to believe your White peer over me even though you don’t have that established relationship with them and so gosh yeah the emotional piece is like holy crap this is hard. Um, and at the end of the day not knowing, not knowing did I put in all my effort and all my energy for people to just turn their face and the system to not really change. Um, and so that’s hard, it’s then hard to maintain that level of professionalism with a peer you know that I think abused power over the student of color.

Aryanna’s story about how she had to “fight” a “White system” to advocate for a student of color also speaks to the emotional and psychological impact of having to advocate for other students who are being treated unfairly because of an abuse of power within the academic environment. Aryanna also felt betrayed by the White faculty who aligned with the White peer despite having formed a strong relationship with her. The tendency for White individuals to join together during times of racial tension can be viewed as an aspect of White power and privilege. For Aryanna, having this betrayal caused some dissonance because the situation came into conflict with her belief that friendships are priority and can be trusted. Instead, Aryanna felt alone in advocating and questioned whether or not she did enough to help the student. She further explained how hard it was to navigate this situation:
Um, that’s hard to navigate and then I think something that was really difficult is I have this student of color as bawling,…and when I tell her that I have to cut our meeting short and I have to make it to my doctoral level diversity and inclusion course and give a presentation about how social justice issues and multiculturalism are lacking in our department at this specific counseling department at this facility…I was trying to manage like I just had a student bawling and I’m so connected to her and what she’s going through, now I get to clean it up and do a presentation on this and I don’t think that that’s the same experience that my peers have. You know they don’t have to walk into a classroom and clean up all the emotional stuff. Um, yeah not to that extent, yeah what we do is difficult and we have students sharing really deep things with us but I think this is an entirely different kind of level and I mean it’s just a different experience. You know, I yeah sometimes as I said I have the emotional energy to fight through and other times it’s as I don’t, unfortunately I can’t speak up for every single injustice that I see just within a department. So yeah that’s difficult.

Not only was it difficult to advocate against injustice in a White space, it was also emotionally taxing. As Aryanna said, having to “clean up all the emotional stuff” can be challenging and adds another dimension of stress to the doctoral experience. Also, her experience of navigating the irony between experiencing White power in action and having to speak on the topic of multiculturalism and social justice to members of this system proved difficult. It also led her to internalize the experience and question whether
she had done enough to advocate, and whether she has the “emotional energy” to continue fighting.

Because as Miguel described about his experience with advocating:

…you get this message that if you rock the boat the boat’s gonna rock back and hit you in the face and that’s really what it’s felt as. So emotionally and psychologically I think the metaphor captures it. You know they teach you to be critically conscious and multiculturally aware, social justice, activist, go and push for change but the moment you do it and be who you are then the boat is gonna come back and hit you in the face.

This excerpt captures the power of the dominant system to resist social justice action. Even though the counseling program promotes multiculturalism and social justice, the power of the system (i.e. “the boat”) to maintain the status quo remained strong. In Miguel’s example, “the boat’s gonna rock back and hit you in the face.” This experience also spoke to the risk involved in advocating and speaking up for social justice. Miguel further explained, “… just watching that message being sent and that radical voices don’t really belong here and don’t really push and don’t challenge because if you do… I might not get hired because of my radical self.”

Here Miguel details a prime example of how being an advocate in our field can lead to resistance and push back from the academy and profession. His experiences had a direct impact on how he felt integrated and perceived by his profession, which can influence his future career opportunities.
In addition to facing risk, these situations shed light on the sense of disillusionment that many of the participants felt facing a White world. Feeling disillusioned and surprised by the lack of racial consciousness in the majority of professionals can create an invalidating and unsupportive environment. Without others who share similar experiences some of the participants felt isolated and alone in their doctoral experiences. In order to navigate such a context the participants utilized support systems and harnessed cultural capital to persist in the program. Figure 2 depicts these three subthemes.

**Figure 2: Facing White Spaces Subthemes**

*Utilizing support systems: Creating safety zones.* Along with the insecurities created by the rigor of a doctoral program, most of the participants felt lonely and vulnerable in their role as Latino doctoral students. Possibly due to this sense of vulnerability and isolation, the participants utilized support systems to create safe places. These safety zones were spaces where the participants felt secure and accepted. Within
these spaces the participants felt validated and able to be open and honest about their professional identity development experiences.

A safety zone is a real or symbolic place where one feels safe, validated, and able to be honest. Trust is a vital component to a safety zone, as is strong and supportive interpersonal relationships. This support system becomes like a family at school where the participant can be who one is without doubting what parts of the self are accepted or not. Having validating experiences that create a sense of safety and community helped the participants feel open to be vulnerable throughout the process.

The participants created these safety zones and community within the profession by creating “consultation groups” (Alicia) outside of school connecting with mentors, and “making a family at school” (Alicia). This family was composed of supportive peers and faculty who validated experience and had a level of critical consciousness that made it possible for the participants to share oppressive experiences. Critical consciousness refers to the degree to which individuals can critically understand social conditions and feel empowered to take action to change those conditions (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014). Specifically, this consciousness allows individuals to recognize how social conditions can limit access to opportunity and perpetuate injustice (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014).

Creating this school family with people they trust was a natural tendency for the participants because of the importance of family in the Latino culture, and became a necessary component to survival in the graduate program. As Miguel said, “…definitely family and relationships and trust is a big one. Trusting that somebody who is in the struggle with you is really there and they’re gonna have your back.” For some of the
participants, this construct of creating safety zones manifested in the composition of their dissertation committee. Carina and Alicia were intentional in selecting validating faculty for their dissertation committee as a way of creating a safe place for themselves.

Being intentional was a pervasive feature in the participants’ experiences of navigating their doctoral program and the counseling profession. Many of the participants shared how they were intentional about a variety of aspects related to professional identity development and academic functioning. They described being intentional and “proactive” (Carina) about spending time with family, accepting service and research opportunities that aligned with their personal values and professional goals, selecting committee members, and designing their dissertation topics. This intentionality served the purpose of creating safety zones where the participants felt safe, comfortable, and happy. It also served the purpose of helping them remain true to their sense of self while navigating professional identity experiences. By being true to their sense of self, the participants created “handrails” (Alicia) that guided them throughout the process.

As Alicia shared, “using my multicultural feminist identity …as a guide like my handrails of what projects I’m working on, kind of what experiences I’m getting…” In this statement, Alicia shared how her multicultural feminist identity served as handrails that guided her intentional selection of professional projects and experiences. By being intentional, Alicia was able to integrate her personal identity with her professional one. In this way, Alicia found voice and support with others who shared her similar ideological viewpoints. Carina also shared how she intentionally selected her committee:
I have intentionally done certain things the way I have selected my committee, the way I have selected my studies, to make sure I had easy access to my participants, all this with a goal in mind I wanted to make sure I graduate on time.

By keeping the goal of graduating in mind Carina was able to make intentional decisions and persist in the program. As Miguel shared, “we have to connect with each other so connecting with AMCD [Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development] and connecting with the Latino interest network and connecting with other counselor educators because we have to make room for ourselves because it’s not being made.” In this quote, Miguel speaks to the creation of this “room” that is “not being made” for Latino counselor educators in a predominantly White American profession. This room within the profession, in the form of sub-organizations, creates safety zones or community within which the participants feel supported and validated by individuals who share similar experiences.

As Marisol, Raquel, and Carina commented, not having any professionals near me “who look like me” can make it harder to connect with others for support and guidance on issues related to being marginalized. For example, Carina and Alicia talked about the lack of mentors who shared in their experiences and who can provide guidance on how to navigate such situations. Someone who looks like you was an echoed sentiment among many of the participants; Carina said, “It serves as inspiration, it serves as additional guidance” and “somebody that’s White cannot ever give me any feedback with experiences like [speaking English as a second language, having an accent, and facing barriers].” Marisol further elaborated that asking others who are a “little bit further along
in an experience” can divulge the “secrets” to success. These secrets relate to the strategies that can be used to successfully navigate marginalizing academic and professional situations. Here we see how connection is vital to survival as one of the few in a predominantly White American profession. Connecting with trusting peers and mentors were two primary ways of creating safety zones within the White space that the participants had to navigate.

**Connecting with peers.** Aryanna explained, “I am the only person of color in my cohort but I do have a lot of support from them.” Carina also shared, “[I] have those discussions [with my cohort]…I think that’s helped a lot to remaining close cause a lot of it is communication and feeling safe to trust each other.” She also stated that “just wanted to have somebody hear you out and you could relate and connect” was vital for her.

Feeling safe, having trust and supportive connections were salient aspects in peer relationships for the participants because it allowed them to share their feelings and experiences without judgment. Alicia shared, “to be able to vent about it…and how awful it made me feel and without worrying about it being inappropriate to share with them…” As Mary stated, “…like my friends, my two very close friends they get me and they respect me and sometimes they don’t understand but they believe…they understand the intention …that has been fundamental to me…”

For Mary, her two close friends in the doctoral program respect her and understand her. They may not understand her unique experiences all the time, but they validated her experiences. She also related how her friends understand her intentions for
pursuing a doctorate and that their support has been fundamental to her. Raquel agreed when she said that she “thrives” in “solid professional relationships” and “they were invested in me.” Raquel also shared this statement about her connection with her cohort:

My cohort it kind of stimulated a trauma bond like we were going through the same trauma of a doc program and we knew what that meant and so we were able to rely on each other for both the academic support and emotional support…[which] helps us keep the motivation going.

In this quote, Raquel sheds light on the importance of peer support in keeping “the motivation going.” She also described the experience of a doctoral program being as a trauma that only fellow cohort members can understand. The trauma is related to the challenges and changes that come with the rigor of a doctoral program. Carina and Aryanna described the “bond” (Carina) and “automatic trust” (Aryanna) that can develop amongst peers who share similar marginalizing experiences. Carina shared this quote about her peer relationships with other Latino peers:

…with my other Hispanic peers we have developed a bond or connected, I have very good friendships because of that, we’re very close with each other. I think we gravitated to each other because we have a commonality being minority, being Hispanic and ... I think it’s important for us … to know each other (other Latino peers) to support each other.

Validation and feeling understood from peers, who “have a commonality” and faculty, who are validating, were vital components in the participants’ experiences that helped them feel like they belonged to an academic and professional community that was
supportive. Having this sense of community reproduced the feeling of collectivism that many of the participants were accustomed to and needed in order to function and succeed.

Collectivism is defined as a way of being where closely linked individuals are motivated by the norms, duties, and obligations promoted by the group (Triandis, 1995). The persons view themselves as part of a larger group (i.e., family, faith community, nation), and prefer doing what is “right” and their duty, even if it requires sacrifices. Members think of themselves as parts of their community and in most situations subordinate their personal goals for those of the community (Triandis, 1995). Community serves as a resource of information, support, guidance, and motivation to keep moving forward and to continue developing as a professional. As Raquel stated about the importance of community for her:

… the sense of community, I’ve been able to even as the only Latina in my program um been able to have really awesome connections with both faculty and peers and so that’s kind of mimicked that community. And for me the community is sacred, it’s you know it’s not just a professional connection it’s actual personal connections, people that I spend time with and have invested in me and I try to invest in them.

In this excerpt, Raquel elaborated on the investment and sacred community that professional connections created for her. Jose also concurred that connection and support were crucial to his ability to persist in the doctoral program:
I mean I work hard as an individual but I’m only able to work really hard as an individual because I have a… because I’m in an environment that support… you know what I mean there’s a lot of supports that are holding you up so I think that’s something that has helped me refrain from being burnt out so I think I know what works for me and I know what prevents me from pushing myself too far in that, it is that connection for myself.

Many participants shared statements about the importance of peer connections and support from others in their doctoral journey. These peer connections created a sense of community that was sacred and trustworthy. Within this community, the participants received support, validation, and motivation to keep going despite marginalizing experiences resulting from being one of the few Latinos in their doctoral programs. Most importantly, community gave the participants a safe place to be without judgment. From this sense of collectivism, the participants felt part of a larger community that accepted them for who they are as Latino doctoral students without racialized perceptions or treatment. Validating mentors were also part of their support system and contributed to the participants’ sense of community.

**Mentors:** “Champion for me.” An additional component of professional connections was to faculty and other professionals who served as mentors. Mentors served as a mechanism of support and created a safety zone for the participants. Mentorship was a component of the subtheme of utilizing support systems to navigate professional identity development.
Mentoring and faculty-student relationships are mechanisms through which students develop a professional identity (Carlson et al., 2006; Creighton, Creighton, & Parks, 2010). Mentoring is an integral component of this socialization process and involves modeling, teaching, and assisting with the development of research interests (Limberg et al., 2013). This mentoring relationship validates students’ identity development, assists in retaining students, has influence outside of the classroom setting, and is often perceived as the most helpful experience in doctoral studies (Limberg et al., 2013; Protivnak & Foss, 2009).

The participants expressed that honesty, transparency, genuineness, “being invested” (Raquel), “very friendly” (Mary), and being able to validate oppressive experiences were hallmark features of a supportive mentor who “really pushed” (Jose) them to learn and succeed. Aryanna offered this quote about her mentor:

I really liked him [my mentor] he was a lot of fun, very animated, very personable person, I never felt marginalized by him. He is a White male, he recognizes his privilege and talks about that and is very open to the discussion.

For Aryanna, her White male mentor was supportive because he “recognizes his privilege” and never made her feel marginalized. By doing so, Aryanna was welcomed to discuss her marginalizing experiences and to feel supported by him. A mentor was also someone who gave inspiration or constructive feedback about academic and professional functioning that motivated the participants to persevere. Many of the participants “sought them out for very specific reasons” (Jose) and felt a “sense of connection” (Jose and Aryanna) with them. Often mentors were sought out for specific
reasons because the participants wanted someone who shared research interests and/or were able to validate their marginalizing experiences. In other words, participants felt a connection with mentors who were validating, aware of racial power and privilege, and able to safely discuss topics related to race and marginalization. Mary reflected about her advisor:

…and also my advisor I mean I think in this structure that she represents and the ways that she can be with me not as a friend but as an advisor she has guided me, she has supported me, she has been there in moments where I feel as I don’t know how to do this she has shown me the next steps… I can go back on my track again, you know she has done that for me and that’s support …

Here Mary described the supportive features of her mentor, “in this structure” (i.e. academia) which were providing guidance to navigate the power system of academia and showing her the “next steps.” Because of this support, Mary was able to “go back on my track” and persist in the program. Some described that they would not be in this position (as a doctoral student) without the support of mentors, and that they want to “emulate” their mentors and learn “the secrets” (Marisol) to succeeding in a predominantly White American environment. For the participants, who were one of the few as Latino doctoral students, having mentors to emulate and learn from was another important aspect of their support system. Supportive and validating mentors reminded the participants that their marginalizing doctoral experiences were valid aspects of operating within a predominantly White American system.
For example, Miguel shared how he experienced a microaggression from a professor who assumed, based on his Spanish last name, that he “needed to write English for an American institution.” His mentor helped him through validation and action, as explained below:

He [my mentor] kind of just sat with it and didn’t really tell me well you’re overreacting and he said well let’s think about how we can write an email back that informs her of the assumptions that she’s made and the very large assumptions that she’s made based on your name and we did and we constructed an email.

This validating experience from a mentor helped Miguel feel supported and that someone advocated for him. Another feature of a supportive mentor was someone who took an active advocacy role in helping participants when they experienced oppression and marginalization based on ethnicity. Sometimes, when a mentor provides this support, the system pushes back. As Miguel shared, “she was trying to support me as a young man of color coming into the profession and this White male faculty trying to kind of put her down.” This quote identifies a time when a faculty advocated for Miguel, as a “man of color,” and the White male faculty engaged in a ploy (by putting her down) to discredit this faculty member. In this way, the dominant power system in academia pushed back (when the White male faculty discredited the advocating faculty) by squelching the faculty’s attempts to confront occurrences of oppression and marginalization.

Mentors served a significant role in the experiences of the participants. Regardless of race or ethnicity, a supportive mentor was someone who validated the
participants’ experiences and had some critical consciousness of power and privilege. Mentors were those individuals who “championed” (Aryanna) the participants and created a safety zone within an often isolating academic and professional environment.

Connecting with validating mentors and peers helped build community and symbolized “a way of unity” (Carina) for the participants. Miguel expressed his view on community:

…there’s community there and there’s community in being a counselor educator of color there’s people who are connected to that experience there’s people who share that experience who are willing to talk about that experience and there’s other people who are struggling in academia to change academia to have it be more reflective, to be more representative to have it be more inclusive, more welcoming in finding ways to tapping into that community and then most recently it’s been confidence in a collective shared confidence in who I am as a counselor educator.

This statement reflects Miguel’s view on community and how belonging to a supportive group of “counselor educators of color” helps him build a “collective shared confidence.” For Miguel, connection with other counselor educators of color who share in his professional experiences of marginalization and who are working to change academia made him feel less isolated and more confident in his role. More specifically, Miguel felt more confident in this role as a critical scholar because others were engaging in similar social justice pursuits aimed at changing the power system of academia.
Feeling validated and understood by peers and faculty gave the participants a safe place within which to thrive and self-explore throughout the professional identity developmental experience. Especially when many of the participants felt isolated and marginalized, having validation and understanding were crucial aspects throughout the doctoral experience. In addition to utilizing support systems, the participants also harnessed cultural capital to persist in the doctoral program.

Harnessing cultural capital: “Faithful to my raizes.” The participants in this study harnessed cultural capital to navigate professional identity development. This subtheme captured the ways that the participants used cultural components to overcome marginalizing experiences and to find a sense of purpose throughout their doctoral journey.

Cultural capital refers to the resources afforded by having knowledge of dominant cultural ways of being and knowing. For example, cultural capital could be language, mannerisms, and skills inherited from parents and other family members. This capital is often used as currency that can be exchanged for other social assets, and can serve as a means of promoting social advantage (Jaeger, 2011). Yosso (2006) expanded on this definition to include community cultural wealth. This concept involves six components: (1) aspirational capital, (2) linguistic capital, (3) navigational capital, (4) social capital, (5) familial capital, and (6) resistant capital.

Aspirational capital refers to maintaining hopes and dreams for the future despite barriers (Yosso, 2006). Linguistic capital is the intellectual and social skills learned through communication experiences in more than one language (Yosso, 2006).
Maneuvering through social institutions encompasses navigational capital. Social capital includes networks of people or community resources. Familial capital is the cultural knowledge transmitted through family and carries a sense of community history, memory, or cultural intuition (Yosso, 2006). The skills cultivated through behavior that challenges inequality captures resistant capital (Yosso, 2006). Carina’s statement reflects this concept of community cultural wealth:

I’m very faithful to my raizes, to my root right where I come from. I never forget where I come from, I am proud of being a Latin woman and for me it was energized or the energy comes from who I am, how I project myself.

Carina shared how her ethnic identity as a Puerto Rican was a source of strength and pride for her. Raquel described her ethnic identity as “those covert and overt rules spoken or unspoken traditions that you come to learn throughout your life and correlates with the sense of community that you feel attached to” and “what I embrace about my own ethnic identity is that it isn’t always categorical it’s more of a lived experience.”

This lived experience is shaped by the Latino cultural values that inform one’s worldview. As Marisol stated about her culture, “it’s an integral part” of who she is and what she brings to the doctoral program. Her ethnicity serves as a source of cultural capital that is harnessed while navigating the program.

Pride was an enduring feature for some of the other participants as well. Aryanna agreed, “there’s pride in being Latina” and Miguel said, “so I think that’s been one of the big values is pride, pride in where you’re from, family, relationship.” For Jose his experience of pride was a bit different:
For me it’s this invisible pride … because it’s not as outwardly [my ethnicity] so I think it breaks a lot of stereotypes because people assume that I’m… I’m just a White person … that’s how I feel as being a Latino is…

In this quotation, Jose depicted his experience of passing as a “White person” and the “invisible pride” he felt when others realized that he was Latino. For Jose, this realization “breaks a lot of stereotypes” and makes him feel proud because he is breaking people’s misconceptions about the Latino ethnic group. Jose’s pride also symbolizes his connection to his cultural roots and is a source of strength and resilience in oppressive academic and professional environments.

Participants harnessed cultural capital by relying on their cultural values, such as personalismo, familismo, the value of education, and having a strong work ethic. Cultural capital became a source of resilience and motivation for many of the participants, and helped them navigate their professional identity development. From a place of pride and connection to cultural roots, the participants navigated the often isolating and invalidating experiences of their doctoral program. By so doing, they were able to maintain a sense of purpose and meaning that was informed through their connection to their cultural identity. This purpose and meaning was that their pursuit of a doctorate was for the empowerment and advancement of their Latino communities and families. In addition, as will be explained, reliance on community cultural wealth allowed the participants to connect with others and keep focused on “the prize” (Raquel), which was the doctorate.
**Personalismo.** Personalismo or valuing and building interpersonal relationships is a common Latino cultural value that promotes collectivism and sense of connection. Since lifelong relationships of mutual dependency and closeness are valued, positive interpersonal and social skills are valued (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). Aryanna spoke to how she values meeting people and getting to know others:

> I love meeting people even in my traveling I just love talking to people and learning more about myself and my interactions that I have with people from across the world… yeah just those experiences of getting to know others.

Carina also shared in this sentiment that interacting with others is valued. “I was the one that made the plans for my cohort to stay together and do things outside the program, to go to my house, I was the one that had the wellness parties.” For Carina, it was important that she connected with her cohort and to develop interpersonal relationships with them. Miguel recounted his relationships with others, “…interpersonal relationships that you build with someone are so important and that coming from that place of family and anyone who I meet very much either becomes a family member.” Here we see how building relationships was a natural consequence of personalismo in that Miguel connected with others as if they were family members.

Carina agreed that wanting connection was an aspect of her doctoral experience, “where I come from [my ethnic background] and always wishing there was more of that connection between us.” Having connection was a vital cultural component that all the participants sought and proactively secured in their academic setting because of personalismo and a cultural tendency towards collectivism. For the participants,
connection was integral because it created a sense of collective community. Within community, the participants were able to have role models to emulate and access when developing a professional identity. As Carlson et al. (2016) described, making professional relationships increases connections to the field, and therefore a sense of integration (Carlson et al., 2016).

Herzig (2004) explained that having a sense of integration occurs when a student feels a sense of connection to, shares values with, and participates in the cultural practices of the professional community (Herzig, 2004). This integration strengthens the students’ goals and commitments, and membership within the professional environment, thus helping students feel supported, validated, and experienced their role as “full participants” (Herzig, 2004, p. 176).

Even though most of the participants felt a low level of integration with the field, they used the connections with others for support and validation. During the often confusing and frustrating professional identity development experiences, having connection helped the participants persevere and feel a sense of responsibility to finish the doctoral program. This sense of responsibility to the community was fueled by a commitment to familismo.

**Familismo.** Familismo refers to the preference to maintain a close connection to family, and emphasizes interdependence, cohesiveness, and cooperation amongst family members (Kuperminc et al., 2009; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). All but two of the participants responded that family was one of their strongest cultural values that they relied on during their doctoral programs. As Jose stated, “you are committed to your
family one hundred percent and you make sacrifices when you need to in order to make sure that your family is, that your generation or the generation that is after you is just a little bit better.” For Jose, his commitment to family supported the need to make sacrifices when necessary. Jose’s belief was that these sacrifices are necessary and done for the family because pursuing a doctorate was helping the family advance in social status. As Jose stated his educational advancement is an example of how his generation is doing a little bit better than the one preceding. In this way, Jose’s sacrifices to complete a doctorate were a representation of his commitment to his family.

Alicia agreed that, “family is a huge value for me” and “just being able to get support from them and talk things through, I think … have been the biggest thing that have impacted my professional development.” Here Alicia reflects on how family has been the “biggest thing” that has impacted her professional development because of the support that they offer. Needing and having support are crucial to overcoming the rigor and marginalizing doctoral experiences as a Latino doctoral student who belongs to an oppressed ethnic group.

Miguel discussed the importance of his mother in his life when he said, “… my mother and I have always been very close I look up to her a lot, she’s one of my bigger role models, biggest role models and I notice that throughout my experience as a doctoral student.” Raquel also related “my family has sustained me” and that:

I’ve been able to maintain and grow as a result of the support that I have both professionally and personally so without my faith and the support system that I
have I would have quit a long time ago but those two things have really kept me in here.

This statement reflects the importance of the family and religious faith in serving as a source of support and motivation to persist in the doctoral program. Harnessing the cultural capital of the family helped many of the participants remain in the program and develop a professional identity. As Alicia shared, “life would be a lot easier if family were around especially when hard things are happening.” Because her family was geographically far away, Alicia reflected on not having access to them as a source of support when “hard things are happening.” Some of these hard things that happened to Alicia were in the form of microaggressions and marginalizing professional encounters. Marisol also shared that her inspiration, “is my family because my goal was to help my siblings through college.” For Marisol completing a doctoral degree was a way of reaching a financial stability that would allow her to help her siblings pay for college, demonstrating her commitment to her family’s well-being.

Being with family, for the most part, became a safe and welcoming place where some of the participants felt free to be themselves without worrying about how they would be perceived. Miguel’s quotation demonstrates this aspect, “being almost always aware and you know in the classroom it’s arisen in meetings but when you’re at home being more yourself I think you don’t have to, always aware of how you’re coming across.” This experience shows how being with family tended to be a safe respite from the situation of having to be vigilant of negative racialized perceptions in the school setting. Aryanna’s experience was counter to this statement. She described how going
home can lead to feeling disconnected because, although she feels happy to be with her family, she also feels as they do not understand her professional identity as a counselor educator:

There’s this loyalty to the family and you don’t talk about those things openly and so there’s like this constant I think stepping in and out of character I think I brought that up before. When I go home I think I’m very happy to be around my friends and family who all look as me and share in that community piece but I also don’t talk about the professional piece which is a large part of my life right now so it’s interesting cause I go there and feel very happy to be around all of the people that I love and care about and there’s still a disconnect in terms of what I do professionally so sometimes that bothers me a little other times I’m just so happy to be home that I don’t care.

In the end, Aryanna was “happy to be home” because she was around others who “look as me” and “care about” her. This sense of caring is an aspect of familismo.

Familismo is a defining concept of the Latino culture, and has three components: (a) family obligations, (b) perceived support, and (c) family members serving as role models (Miranda et al., 2006). The detailed experiences in this section demonstrated these three components. For Marisol, she felt the family obligations to provide financially, other participants felt the support from family members, and Miguel and Jose shared how their family members served as role models.

There is a deep sense of family obligation that overshadows individual needs and maintains the family’s harmony, which stems from a collectivist worldview (Guarnero &
Flaskerud, 2008; Sager et al., 2001; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). The participants felt that their doctoral degree represented more than just themselves and desired to stay close to the family, making familismo a part of their cultural capital in the form of familial capital that they used to navigate the doctoral program. In particular, spending time with family reminded the participants of their purpose for pursuing a doctorate. Also, family time helped refuel the participants’ psychological and emotional well-being by exposing them to a supportive and validating environment. Most importantly, by being with family the participants were surrounded by others who look similar to them, thus countering the experiences of being one of the few around others who do not look racially and/or ethnically similar. Instead of being the token minority, the participants were part of the majority and unconditionally valued as a family member. Within this family, many participants learned the value of education.

**Value of education.** For a few of the participants, the value of education was a prevalent family belief. This belief was very often discussed in the family and was supported. Jose’s experience with the value of education in his family was as described, “they [my family] wanted to make sure that they instilled in us that if we ever wanted to pursue higher education that they would support that” and there was a “very high standard on education.” As result of his family “put[ting] such a high priority on education [it became] “something that is a part of me.” Here Jose spoke to how the value of education became an aspect of his personal identity that motivated him to pursue a doctorate.
Marisol also related her experience with deciding to get a doctorate. “I know I want to get my doctorate...I knew that for me it was important to work on my doctorate, it’s not about the title it’s about the education for me.” Marisol’s experience related to the value of education and not to the title of a Ph.D. For her getting a doctorate was fueled by her passion for education and learning. This passion helped Marisol navigate difficult professional identity experiences by reminding her that her purpose was for education and learning. So despite challenging situations, Marisol kept her eye on her prize, which was to gain knowledge and thus more educational and financial power.

**Strong work ethic.** Having a strong work ethic was another prevalent aspect of cultural capital that most of the participants described. Jose explained how his work ethic or drive to succeed “comes from his family.” Raquel shared how her work ethic was “a part of my ethnic/racial identity growing up and I carried into my doctoral program.” Mary also related “who I am is this drive or investment and hard work.” Miguel recounted how he learned a strong work ethic from his mother, “people ask me where does this work ethic come from, why do you push so much, not why but how do you keep pushing, how do you think of these things,...it’s my mom.”

In all of the above quotes, it can be seen that having a strong work ethic was a belief transmitted within the family. It also became part of the participants’ personal identity and was cultural capital that was leveraged to persist in the doctoral program. Having a strong work ethic helped the participants keep pushing forward to complete a doctorate in light of oppressive academic and professional experiences that pushed them down.
For Carina a hard work ethic was a cultural value that she used in the academic setting to counter feelings of insecurity. Because English was her second language, she compensated by getting extra help with her writing and working really hard on it. This statement explains Carina’s application of a strong work ethic:

So I made sure, I always felt for maybe being the one who was Hispanic and English was not my first language, I always felt that I always had to work a little extra hard, I had to work really hard on my papers but I guess that wasn’t any less a part of my growth but I felt, you always have to work extra hard.

Having a strong work ethic helped the participants remain invested and complete required coursework and tasks. As Jose stated, “we have to work hard to do what we want to do.” He also expressed, “you work hard but you take care of your family, your family is always first and you know you just make sure you do things that reenergizes you.” Here Jose spoke to the priority of family and self-care throughout the doctoral program.

Personalismo, familismo, valuing education, and having a strong work ethic were some of the most prevalent cultural aspects described by the participants that influenced their professional identity experiences. These aspects spoke to the role of connection and interpersonal relationships in the participants’ doctoral experience. As they described, family support and loyalty to relationships were sources of cultural capital and community cultural wealth that sustained them and kept them motivated. Along with having a strong work ethic and a high value of education, the participants focused on the significance of the doctoral degree as being for their family and community. Harnessing
this cultural capital helped many of them persist in the doctoral program that was often an invalidating White space.

**Persisting in academia: “I’ve made it.”** While the participants felt underrepresented in their academic programs, in terms of language spoken, ethnicity, and gender (for the male participants in a female dominated profession), they found ways to remain in the doctoral program. As Aryanna explained about how she persisted in academia:

…they hurt me at the end of the day, yeah it’s hurtful but really it just makes me more ambitious because I like a challenge and so I’m the type of person that’s like tell me I can’t do it and I’ll show you and I feel like that’s the message I get from students and sometimes faculty and sometimes peers and so for me it’s like a realization of yes this is very difficult, there’s a lot of fear of entering the higher ed system and how it’s not built for people like me…

This quote speaks to the experience of being hurt by microaggressions in an academic setting that was “not built for people like me” (i.e. students of color). It also speaks to the collective story to persist in the program to make “space on the map” (Aryanna) for students of color. For Aryanna experiencing microaggressions strengthened her ambition to take the challenge and prove that she can graduate from a doctoral program.

By virtue of being and succeeding in the doctoral program, the participants represented a disruption to the norm (that White American doctoral students are more likely to succeed) and represented counterstories to the current understanding of
professional identity development. Another aspect to these counterstories included the ways in which the participants navigated their marginalizing experiences. Jose’s experience alluded to the aspect of being aware of the systemic situation and making a personal decision to “take a break.”

I need a break and from the school there was just a lot going on and academically it was really, you know your first year in a doctoral program is intense and I needed to take a step back and just recharge and be reconnected both from the academic, the schoolwork but also from the systems that were happening that particular program was having some system stuff happening and I could see from a distance how that was impacting some people. [And] I just knew I needed to kind of unplug to be able to cut back in fresh and not be, I didn’t want to get sucked in so um, that was part of it, that was a big part of it.

In this excerpt, Jose described his experience of recognizing the power of the “system stuff” to suck him in and making a decision to take a summer semester off to “unplug” from the doctoral experience. Some of the other participants also discussed relevant aspects in their experiences that helped them persevere despite feeling marginalized. These aspects included: believing that the degree was worth it, maintaining work-life balance, harnessing and disclosing experiences of racism or invalidation to self-motivate and to motivate peers, having positive educational experiences, focusing on the end goal to graduate, keeping focused on social justice goals, taking a wellness break from the world of academia, and using validating conference experiences to renew one’s sense of personal integration. Alicia explained
that attending a Latino focused professional conference helped her persist in the doctoral program:

…[attending a Latino professional conference] giving me more perspective so after NLPA and seeing all the different ways in which people were carrying themselves professionally I think that took off a lot of pressure so I don’t have to lose such big pieces of me in order to fit in here and like the more we can kind of gently challenge that the better because then more of these different perspectives [are spoken].

In this quote, Alicia spoke to the validating conference experience that helped her navigate her professional identity. As she stated, “[going to the conference] took off a lot of pressure… I don’t have to lose such big pieces of me…to fit in.” For Alicia attending a professional conference where she was surrounded by people that look like her and share her experiences helped her feel empowered to continue navigating her professional identity. More importantly, the conference reminded her that she did not have to “lose such big pieces of [herself] to “fit in” with the professional community. Marisol agreed that attending Latino focused professional events was helpful:

Everything usually ends up falling under AMCD (a student of color organization) most of the time … try to get connected and get involved in those just so that I can see people who are as me because I think it’s extremely important to see somebody you know who is a fellow doc student or who is a professor and who looks like me because then in my mind I’m as oh if you can do it I can do it and you know I can talk to somebody and ask them what’s going on how did they get
through things you know what were their experiences as because there are people who have similar experiences than me.

By connecting with other professionals who “look like me” at conferences, Marisol and Alicia found a place of support and validation. These experiences helped them persist in the program by refueling their commitment to the doctoral degree and reminding them that they are not alone in the process. Jose, Raquel, and Carina also shared how they felt connected to other professionals in the field who shared humanistic values.

To counter feelings of inadequacy and not belonging, the participants found that connecting with others who share similar experiences was helpful, as was self-reliance. Carina shared, “just having to rely on just myself and find outside resources and maybe getting a little bit creative and working a little bit harder.” Miguel expressed how he had to tell himself, “I’m good at what I do I have to remember that.” As a Latino doctoral student in a predominantly White American counseling program, the participants often had marginalizing experiences that made them feel inadequate. As a result, the participants relied on self, outside resources, and positive self-talk to overcome these feelings of inadequacy imposed on them by the predominantly White American doctoral program.

Carina also described this “lesson” that she learned following a silent retreat that she attended to help her cope with marginalizing experiences and persist in the program: the important lesson that I got from the silence retreat was that there’s a lot of lies in our heads that we become slaves of and we tend to follow them and it was
especially my first year and a lot of those fears of mine, inadequacies and insecurities were just big lies, big lies that I decided to leave and I was being a slave of them…. [and] I was feeling a release and freedom to…now I could get those little lies and those little voices that come and talk to me and it’s nice to say you know what this is a lie why am I going to be as this I’m not going to be a slave of that and I just move on to another thought…

This strategy of not listening to her internalized racism that told her that she was inadequate and her professional accomplishments helped her build her confidence. Internalized racism occurs when the individual internally believes the racist stereotypes, values, and ideologies that the White dominant society holds about one’s race and/or ethnicity (Pyke, 2010). Having these internal beliefs can cause a person to feel self-doubt, disgust, and disrespect for one’s racial and/or ethnic group, and of oneself (Pyke, 2010). As Carina described about her increase in confidence:

…so it’s nice not to think so much and I also think my confidence has been… of course it’s just because every little spat every little challenge I have been able to overcome it even when the mountain seems so high up and I’m gonna make it so somehow I finished the manuscript, somehow I got published, somehow I passed this class…

Carina’s experience of overcoming a sense of inadequacy, along with the other participants’ counterstories about making connections in academia, served as testimony to their complicated professional identity development experiences. Their experiences involved navigating White spaces that tended to marginalize and invalidate them. In
addition to meeting the doctoral requirements of the counseling program and developing a professional identity, the participants also had to navigate oppressive situations in their doctoral experiences. For them, their professional identity development involved more than moving from external validation to internal confidence and actively engaging in self-management strategies (Carlson et al., 2006; Dollarhide et al., 2013). It also meant building internal confidence and taking personal responsibility for participating in professional tasks as a marginalized and invalidated Latino doctoral student in a predominantly White American setting.

The utilization of support systems to create safety zones helped them cope with such experiences. The strength that they garnered from their cultural capital from familismo and personalismo, for example, also contributed to their persistence. Because the participants had to persist in academia by harnessing cultural capital and utilizing support systems, they found themselves in a complicated engagement. This complicated engagement describes the participants’ experiences of developing a professional identity within a predominantly White American profession.

**Complicated engagement: “A dance.”** Complicated engagement refers to the participants’ experience of contradiction within their professional identity. Contradiction pervaded their experiences and resulted in a complex process. For example, they were valued and devalued, heard and silenced, validated and attacked, integrated and disconnected. They battled the imposter syndrome, self-doubt, and a disconnection with the profession’s values and beliefs. While at the same time, they felt confidence, had resolve to persist, and felt connection with others in the field.
“To be able to hold these things” (Mary) and “sit in that discomfort” (Raquel) helped the participants navigate these contradictions within the White world of counseling. As counseling programs are most often housed in predominantly White American institutions, they can be considered, “White spaces” (Miguel). Negotiating this White space meant navigating a professional identity developmental process that was “conditioned by” the dominant system. “My entire professional identity formation has had to evolve conditioned by the White spaces that I’m in” (Miguel). Mary likened the navigation of this White space as “a dance between growing as a person, growing as a doc student and also growing in understanding yourself as someone in this context.”

This “dance” described the complicated engagement that the participants had with their professional identity development within a predominantly White American context. The complicated engagement evolved as a response to the contradictions and led the participants to have a cautious involvement in the process. As Jose described about his engagement of, “constantly navigating and juggling” and Miguel said, “[there has] been a lot of push and pulls.” Jose and Miguel were referring to the juggling and management of multiple roles and responsibilities that are often complicated by racialized situations. For example, Miguel experienced the push and pulls related to being a critical scholar-of-color advocating for social justice and the power of the White American system to push back to maintain the status quo. Due to the complexity of their professional identity development process that was complicated by navigating the White space of counseling programs, the participants’ experiences differed in various ways from their White American counterparts.
Alicia noted that her experience was different from others, “I didn’t see other colleagues kind of struggle with those pieces (of being assertive in the classroom).” Due to personalismo and the need to maintain interpersonal harmony, Aryanna often found it hard to be assertive in the classroom. She also experienced being silenced in the classroom because she belonged to a marginalized ethnic group that is sometimes perceived as lacking academic competence. Aryanna said, “I am different [based on ethnicity] and my journey does look different.” Based on being one of the few, Aryanna’s doctoral journey “does look different”. The three aspects of this second sub-theme of complicated engagement captured the ways in which the participants’ experiences were different from their White American counterparts. Figure 3 shows these categories, which are: (1) holding the fear, (2) making sacrifices, and (3) playing it safe.

Figure 3: Complicated Engagement Subthemes

**Holding the fear.** Holding the fear refers to the participants’ experience of facing tension while navigating professional identity development in the predominantly White
American counseling profession. This tension arose from differences in personal and professional value systems. For example, Mary spoke about how her view of leadership came into conflict with the profession’s viewpoint. In the midst of experiencing such tension and value conflict, the participants held the fear associated with being in disagreement with the profession that they are engaged in as doctoral students. In other words, the participants felt a love-hate relationship with the profession. On the one hand, the participants loved their profession and on the other, they disliked the manifestations of power and privilege that occurred throughout their experiences. Mary recounted about her professional identity developmental process:

So my process is because it’s uncomfortable and scary… is about holding that fear and holding that tension and saying okay maybe you don’t know it all so maybe they do things, do you want to be part of it yes or no.

In this excerpt, Mary shared her feelings of discomfort and fear involved in her professional identity development. The fear was associated with recognizing the differences in how “they [the profession as a whole] do things” and how she believes leadership and service should proceed. Her beliefs were informed by her cultural identity as a Latina and an immigrant to this country. She further described that she had to hold that fear and tension to remain engaged in the process. Mary’s complicated engagement with professional organizations resulted from a tension between her personal values and those of the organization’s mission; leading her to question whether or not she wanted to be involved. As she explained, “So I think that’s an additional process but my view of
the association is I think they’re great … but they may be narrow in their intention and mission and actually potential for action.”

In this experience, Mary explained part of the reason for her complicated engagement with the organization. On one hand, Mary values the association and wants to be involved, while on the other hand, she does not want to be involved. She does not want to be involved because she holds a personal value towards action and advocacy, and the association seems “narrow in their intention” and not inclusive. Jose further elaborated about his perception of the counseling profession’s portrayal of social justice, “it’s just like a mask that they [counseling professionals] wear but they don’t really believe it.”

For Mary and Jose, there was a sense of distrust and of disconnection between their personal values and/or social identities with those of the profession. While the profession of counseling professes to value multiculturalism and diversity, Mary, Jose, and Miguel expressed frustration, anger, and confusion at the minimal manifestations of these values in the work that the profession is engaged in. Miguel elaborated on his experience of complicated engagement:

… welcome to counselor education, you are counselor education, our counselor education looks a little bit different from yours cause you’re brown so you have to have your race concerns and your social concerns but for us we have the real counselor education because CACREP is what we do because CACREP is the most important thing, CACREP only has one bullet point on multiculturalism out
of all the bullet points you have to focus on. Let’s focus on multiculturalism everywhere…and it’s like oh I don’t want to be part of that party.

As Mary experienced, Miguel also felt a disconnect with the field and questioned whether or not he wanted to engage. He had this experience because his view of counselor education “looks a little bit different from yours” based on his social justice focus. As Miguel connected, his social justice focus on “race concerns” stemmed from his ethnic identification as someone who is “brown.”

Often, the participants engaged in self-questioning about whether or not they want to get involved in professional activities and in the profession itself. Miguel stated, “I’m actually in the job market right now and getting call backs and having this conversation with myself and some of my family about do I want to stay in [the profession].” In this excerpt, Miguel shared his fear about having to navigate future employment opportunities and making hard decisions about engagement. As Raquel said about her motivation to engage in the profession, “if this is what awaits [microaggressions and invalidations] me in the field then maybe I don’t want to be here or maybe I shouldn’t be a part of it.” Raquel further stated about her professional experiences that, “I wanted to quit and you know crawl up in a fetal position.”

Wanting to quit or having a sense of hopelessness was a shared experience for many of the participants. As Mary shared about her feeling in the counseling program, “[I feel] hopelessness that it doesn’t matter how hard I work, it doesn’t matter how accomplished I am, it doesn’t matter how nice I am, how responsive I am to my clients, to my students, I’m always going to have this shadow on top of me…”
“This shadow” is being Latino in this country, and in counseling programs. As Mary so eloquently stated, “I was not a Latina when I was not living here and so Latino is part of this culture so I am a Latina here.” In this quote, Mary is telling a story of being marginalized, as one of the few, based on socially created ethnic classifications. This classification contributed to racialized professional identity development experiences, for the participants, in the counseling profession that warranted navigation to succeed.

In this country, being Latino matters because it marginalizes individuals based on ethnicity and the perceived inequality of that social category (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Valdes, 2005). It can make someone question whether “…they’re hiring me because they like me, are they hiring me because they need more diversity in their faculty you know like all of those things that I don’t think my White counterparts have to think about” (Aryanna).

Aryanna’s statement sheds light on the professional identity development experiences that the participants navigated that may be different from their White counterparts. For Aryanna, what was different was that she had to think about the program’s motives behind hiring her as faculty. As she wondered, were they hiring her “because they like” her or because they “need more diversity.” In this experience Aryanna identified how she was holding the fear that she may be valued as a token minority and nothing more. Marisol’s excerpt captures the additional aspect of feeling like an imposter:

So hopefully when I graduate you know I’m gonna find a piece of me that is gonna be okay I got this but it has been an imposter feeling everywhere you know
and holding that and being productive even while holding it has been growth promoting absolutely but has been very scary.

For Marisol, holding that fear meant remaining productive despite feeling scared. In this experience that involved the imposter syndrome, Marisol’s professional identity development may have been different than her White American counterparts. For the participants, holding the fear meant navigating the tension between personal and professional value systems. It also meant navigating the imposter syndrome and whether or not they wanted to engage in a field that, at times, was at conflict with who they are as Latino doctoral students. Because who they are as Latino doctoral students defined their viewpoint on social justice engagement and grassroots leadership. Another way it may have differed involved the sacrifices that the participants had to make to succeed.

Making sacrifices: “Because it’s worth it.” Most of the participants shared how they had to make sacrifices throughout their professional identity development. Making these sacrifices added another dimension to navigating an already stressful doctoral experience. For the participants, having to make sacrifices meant giving up something for the sake of achieving a larger goal. Carina, Alicia, Marisol, and Jose shared that spending less time with family members and friends was a sacrifice for them because they valued family. As Alicia shared about the sacrifice she made that resulted in less time from family:

But being so far away from family because I’m about 1300 miles from family so it’s really hard to get back and see them, so either it costs a lot of money, costs a lot of time to travel back and I don’t know how much of a sacrifice that’s
recognized as either by faculty members or if even other colleagues recognize that as a sacrifice they’re making.

Further, Alicia said that not spending time with family resulted in less self-care opportunities, “So I would almost say that’s almost a sacrifice in self-care just not being able to go home for the weekend and be around family, get comfort in that way, so that sacrifice.”

Aryanna and Mary expressed that pursuing a doctorate resulted in being isolated from their family. For Mary, as an immigrant student, she was geographically isolated from her family-of-origin. Aryanna was socially isolated due to racist interactions with external community members of the area surrounding her university. She expressed how “professional life is great, personal life is really difficult here” due to a lack of social connections outside of school. Aryanna further stated that she made sacrifices by being away from home:

I think that there are definitely huge sacrifices that I’ve made and continue to make in terms of pursuing higher education. I mean I’m not home to see my nieces and nephew growing up I’ve missed a lot of things, I get text messages from my family on a daily basis that I’m not there, I’m really far away, I spend a lot of money to go home for any holiday so there’s a lot of financial strain just being far away.

Since Aryanna is away from home she missed out on “a lot of things” and has to “spend a lot of money to go home for any holiday.” Feeling left out from family activities and geographically far from family was an emotional and financial sacrifice for
Aryanna. As many of the participants shared spending time with family is a vital component to coping with the stress of being isolated as a Latino doctoral student. This emotional and financial sacrifice of family played a role in the participants’ experiences possibly due to the importance of familismo in their Latino cultural way of being.

According to familismo, the family is of utmost importance and serves a crucial supportive role during stressful times (Paniagua, 1994). As Aryanna expressed about missing family:

I’m craving those cultural pieces that I don’t have right now so a lot of my Latina friends back home have children, they have their families, they did not pursue higher education so a lot of those very traditional pieces to culture I find myself craving at times and so I call them and talk to them about life you know like how they’ve gone down a much different path and what that looks like for them and yeah just trying to totally disconnect from counseling because I mean I’m in it all the time and I enjoy it but it also tends to throw me off balance in terms of work life balance.

Here Aryanna expressed the longing she felt for her family and the “cultural pieces” that she did not have access to in her doctoral program. Specifically, she spoke about the “traditional pieces to culture,” such as having children that she craves at times. Since Aryanna took a “much different path” in life that was not traditional in her family, she felt disconnected from her family’s experiences. In addition, Aryanna shared in this quote how she struggles to maintain work life balance because she feels too immersed in her professional life and disconnected from her cultural life. In some ways, Aryanna
feels like she cannot relate to her family members because she pursued higher education instead of starting a family.

For the participants, having to sacrifice this aspect of their world can be equated to functioning without an essential part of their cultural self, and can add another layer of loss and sadness to the already demanding doctoral lifestyle. In the process of developing a professional identity, the participants had to make these sacrifices to navigate the program, resulting in a dismissal of an essential aspect of self within professional identity. In other words, the participants faced developing a professional identity that did not fully integrate parts of their personal identity, such as family connections. Even though the current professional identity development models emphasized the successful integration of personal and professional identities, the participants had to sacrifice the part of their identity that was defined and embedded within family. Additionally, the participants had to play it safe to survive in the predominantly White American academic and professional context of the doctoral program.

*Playing it safe to survive.* In addition to making sacrifices to pursue and complete a doctorate, the participants spoke about playing it safe to survive. Playing it safe meant “playing the game” (Carina) and figuring out the professional terrain in order to navigate it and succeed because there are “consequences for everything” (Miguel). Carina shared how she “played their game” by publishing and completing the professional tasks required to succeed in the counseling program. Aryanna and Alicia
shared their experiences related to figuring out “when to put which hat on.” As Aryanna shared about navigating multiple professional roles:

I use a lot of self-disclosure and I just put that out there, hey you know we’re coming from different backgrounds, here’s a little bit of me and how I identify and to have that impacts the relationship that we’re in you know as student learner, instructor, all of those roles.

In this excerpt, Aryanna reflected on the ways in which she uses self-disclosure in her roles as learner and instructor. She felt it necessary to self-disclose in these roles in order to relate to others from a place of cultural identification. For her, this cultural self-disclosure was important because Aryanna wanted to emphasize how she was culturally different than her White American peers and how this difference can impact their relationships. For Alicia her fluid experience of being a counselor-in-training, supervisor, and instructor came into conflict with how her advisor mediated his roles as advisor, chair and supervisor. Alicia also shared about her experiencing of navigating multiple roles:

I guess too knowing when to put which hat on. Um, so I had my chair, was my clinical supervisor for a while and it was hard to talk about what issues when and feeling invalidated, I don’t remember what the feeling was at the time because they had their supervisor hat on when I was I was coming to them more as my advisor, my chair and not getting kind of what I expected to get in terms of support. Um, so me still trying to figure out when I have my clinician hat on, when do I have my instructor hat on.
Here Alicia identified the complexity of figuring out what role she embodied at a particular time with a particular faculty member. For example, Alicia said how she sought support and validation from this faculty, as an advisor, and how he did not provide it because he was in the role of clinical supervisor. At that moment, Alicia was in the role of a vulnerable student who wanted to talk about marginalizing experiences. This quote shows the complexity of navigating multiple roles as a Latino doctoral student whose professional roles are often interrelated instead of disjointed. Alicia had an expectation, based on her cultural worldview, that the advisor/supervisor would be able to shift roles and provide emotional support and validation for her during a “hard time.”

Their experiences signified the need to negotiate multiple roles throughout professional identity development. Embedded in their experiences was an aspect of sharing feelings and being invalidated. For Aryanna and Alicia, figuring out the various roles involved in their doctoral experience proved challenging and confusing because they sometimes came into conflict with the White American manifestation of role management.

Miguel shared his constant internal struggle about how to introduce himself (using his Spanish accented name or not) and how to negotiate other “artifacts of social identities” (as being a queer scholar and Spanish speaker). Miguel made this statement related to first impressions for him, as a student of color:

…there’s a consequence for everything, if you sit across from somebody like they’re gonna read you particularly as a person of color and they’re gonna make, they’re gonna arrive at a conclusion and it’s gonna be very difficult for you to
change that conclusion later on and that’s what White privilege is as …they don’t have to worry about the impression that they already made….like if you get panged as the angry brown man well you’re gonna be stuck with that and if you get panged as the queer scholar then you get stuck with that, if you get panged as the Spanish speaker you get stuck with that you know even these like artifacts of your social identity that people keep reminding you of especially in the job market…

In this excerpt, Miguel shared his experience of being labeled as the “angry brown man” or “queer scholar.” Miguel described that these “artifacts of your social identity” become markers of stereotypes and influence the way other professionals perceive and view you as a colleague, which can impact one’s sense of safety, in terms of reputation, in the professional environment. Miguel pointed out that this lack of safety can have ramifications for his future career options.

Aryanna also expressed how she assesses for safety in the classroom, “I’m constantly assessing for safety and things as that and comfort, I don’t think that my White peers do things like that.” Marisol shared, “so it’s still taking a step back and watching what I say to people almost so they don’t get offended cause if they get offended then they’re not gonna learn from me. It’s not an easy thing to navigate all the time.”

Marisol’s quotation brings up another aspect of playing it safe, which involves monitoring what one says in professional situations for fear of offending someone. Alicia shared a different experience regarding speaking up:
I don’t have that oh I should be silent feel and that bothers people to an extent, especially White faculty members because if I see an issue I’m gonna raise it and keeping bringing it up until we actually start doing something about it.

Miguel also shared, “I had a meeting afterwards from the professor saying they really appreciated me having to say that and they really admire that I’m so willing to speak up about these issues [of race].” Miguel and Alicia’s experiences of speaking up related to Mary’s statement that she, “pass[es] through the gaps for resistance.” In other words, the participants speaking up about topics of race and other areas of marginalization served as a way of resisting the dominant worldview of meritocracy and equality. By speaking up, Miguel and Alicia were able to “pass through the gaps [i.e. disrupt the status quo of not speaking up]” and raise awareness about the ways that power and privilege play out in the world.

Since being one of the few remained a constant throughout their doctoral journey, the participants had to navigate a complex and challenging professional identity development. By utilizing support systems and harnessing cultural capital they persisted in their doctoral program. The participants were intentional about making space for themselves despite feeling ignored and invisible.

Navigating professional identity experiences meant facing White privilege and power, feeling disillusioned and hopeless, and being intentional. The participants were intentional about who they trusted, who they selected to be on their committees, what research they pursued, about spending time with family, and creating community at school. They were also intentional about connecting to their cultural roots and using their
cultural capital to stay proud and motivated throughout their complicated engagement of becoming a counselor educator.

**Becoming a Latino Counselor Educator: Towards a Re-Definition**

The participants’ experience of becoming a Latino counselor educator in a predominantly White American profession involved facing White spaces and engaging in a complicated professional identity development. This development was influenced by how some faculty and peers perceived, interacted, and treated the participants who belonged to a marginalized and oppressed ethnic group as Latinos. Based on the experiences of microaggressions and the resulting biopsychosocial outcomes, the participants were placed in a position where they had to find voice and reclaim power.

The participants’ presence and involvement as doctoral students in counseling represented resistance and disruption to the norm. From this place of resistance, the participants experienced a complicated professional identity development process marked by finding voice, reclaiming power, and disrupting the norm. These subthemes, shown in figure 4, comprised the last theme which was becoming a Latino counselor educator.

![Figure 4: Becoming a Latino Counselor Educator Subthemes](image)
Marisol described this part of the process as a “roller coaster” because of the ups and downs associated with it. All of the participants shared various experiences of navigating professional identity development situations. Because they were viewed as an ethnic other in a White space, the participants often felt a lack of integration to the field, resulting in a consistent experience of tension and disengagement. As Alicia said, “I’ve struggled in different areas [regarding professional identity development]” and “I feel totally weird in this professional world because I don’t have any models for how I should interact with people.” Alicia’s excerpt about feeling weird and not having role models sheds light on the complicated process of becoming a Latino counselor educator. For Alicia, the process was complicated by how she was viewed by others based on her ethnicity, which made her feel weird and without guidance.

Raquel described her process of becoming a Latino counselor educator, as “complicated and evolving.” She also said, “it’s definitely evolving… becoming a scholar, a supervisor, an advocate, all of those things have evolved over the past three and a half years in my program.” In this excerpt, Raquel was referring to the evolution of the multiple roles (being a scholar, a supervisor, an advocate) encompassing a counselor educator, and how it is still evolving. Jose also related how his development as a counselor educator involved becoming a researcher and mentor to other students. Alicia shared her experience of “…feeling much more pulled to a clinician identity than a researcher identity” and yet not feeling that these two roles “encompasses everything.” In these quotes, Alicia is reflecting on the confusion of how she would define her
professional identity, since it is both counselor and researcher. Yet these two roles do not
seem to encompass the totality of professional identity.

Mary also expressed confusion about how to describe her identity. She described
herself as a “doctoral candidate and a quantitative researcher.” Miguel said that he is still
“aspiring” towards an identity. Marisol summarized her experience as, “the roller coaster
too because you don’t know what to expect and once you hit the road you’re like oh crap
there’s no going back now and so there’s been great times and not so great times and I
mean I’m still in it so I guess that’s a good thing.”

Marisol’s statement about development being as a roller coaster is testimony to
the ups and downs of the experience. Marisol also spoke about not knowing what to
expect and the positive and negative situations within the doctoral program. For Marisol,
quitting the program was not an option. All the participants shared in this belief that
quitting was not an option, even though the option crossed their minds. For Mary, her
marginalizing experiences served as motivation to not quit, “that [being grounded in my
marginalizing experiences] has saved me, that’s what to me to be honest the only way,
otherwise I would have quit, I would have left.”

All of the participants did not quit and found ways to sustain their momentum and
presence in the counseling program. As with any educational journey, the participants
partook in a developmental path towards the doctorate. In the beginning, they felt
insecure and nervous about not knowing what to expect in the counseling program;
towards the middle of the program, they began to gain some confidence of the
expectations; and at the end, they knew the expectations and struggled with integrating
self with professional identity. In this excerpt, Carina offered a developmental perspective on her doctoral experience:

I break it into three stages and each stage has been my experiences. So the first year it was emotional struggle to just try and get out of that mess and then the second year I saw it more like a growing process and I was feeling more comfortable on my grounds and so I was really exploring and I enjoyed being a teacher because that was when you are teaching actual classes. This third year, I haven’t really reflected on what my stage here but I look at it more of a freedom and exploration right, so I’m starting to have, to really be okay with who I am and being okay with those identities without having to hide them, I actually voice them, not keeping myself quiet and I’m just ready to explore what my next step is gonna be with those identities. I am gonna be loud, I’m gonna be over enthusiastic.

Here Carina described a growing process wherein she experienced an “emotional struggle” the first year trying to navigate the program. The following year, she felt more comfortable to explore and enjoy the process. In her last year, Carina was still reflecting on it and feels more freedom and internal validation. Her internal validation involved “being okay” with integrating her personal identities, including ethnicity, with her professional identity. Most importantly, she described feeling free to not “hide them” and to “voice them” instead. In other words, she found her voice and reclaimed power. Mary described her identity, thus:
I define myself as a person of color who is engaged in research in teaching and service, in professional service and supervision. Um, my development has been, as I have transitioned this, I mean many things have influenced me I don’t know if it’s only racial or what but like from the beginning developmentally of taking away race, developmentally I see myself as you know this first semester doc student feeling loaded with responsibilities and with the multiple roles that come into play and with this drive to make it to the point where I accomplished and essentially actually finished something but I’m actually finishing right so I think the process has been very rough and it has been full of new first times.

In this statement, Mary identified the developmental aspect to her doctoral journey. As she said, “taking away race” and focusing on her development as a doctoral student, navigating a doctoral program was difficult and achievable. Mary shared how she felt “loaded with responsibilities” and “multiple roles” throughout her doctoral experience, which in her viewpoint had less to do with her racial identity and more to do with the rigor of the program. She also spoke about her “drive to make it to this point” and graduate in light of these challenges. Even though it was “rough” and “full of new first times,” Mary found a way to persevere, thus developing resistant capital. This resistant capital involved her having a strong work ethic or “drive” to make it and desire to graduate. Raquel expressed about her development in the doctoral program:

You’re constantly having to reflect, you’re constantly having to process your experiences on a number of levels, whether it’s gender or ethnicity or age or experience, you’re constantly having to make sure that you’re doing what you
need to do in order to excel, not just get by, excel. It’s exhausting. So the actual coursework and the actual requirements to a certain degree are exhausting but then the emotional and psychological aspects of you know dealing with those insecurities, dealing with those barriers reflecting on your own experiences is also exhausting.

In this quotation, Raquel recounted her experience of constant reflection in order to deal with the emotional and psychological aspects of her doctoral experience. Because she was constantly dealing with insecurities, based on gender, ethnicity, and age as well as barriers, Raquel felt exhausted. However, over time, she described her level of integration with the counseling field at a level 7 out 10, where 10 was most integrated:

…. these past three years as a doc student really digging into literature, really grappling with certain things and growing academically and professionally and emotionally has helped me to get to a seven I think I was not integrated or way less integrated before I started my doc program and I would like to be more integrated I think as I continue to grow as a counselor educator and serve at different capacities.

In this quote, Raquel described the reasoning for the level of integration with the field that she felt and the need to feel more integrated. For Raquel, developing as a counselor educator and serving within this role will help her feel more integrated with the field.

In addition to partaking in a development process in the doctoral program, the participants struggled with defining their professional identity. For Miguel, Carina, and
Mary, their counselor identity grounded their counselor educator identity. As Mary stated about her identity:

I’m grounded in my clinical work throughout my doctoral program I mean I am very proud of that because I don’t think that’s an easy balance to get and I have continuously seen clients even when you know this program has been out of control in a lot of ways in terms of demands, the expectations, the leadership roles, all that so I have remained in contact with my clients and I have continued to do this work and have grown as a clinician, as a therapist, as a counselor so I think part of my answer is response to that you know to the fact that I’m very much a counselor first.

Here, Mary described how she intentionally maintained her counselor identity by seeing clients. Even though continuing to practice as a counselor throughout her doctoral program led to moments of feeling “out of control,” she continued. Her commitment to seeing clients resulted from her dedication to her counselor identity. Many of the participants related how their counselor identity was paramount and fueled by their ethnic identity.

Carina’s experience spoke to the conflict between what her program promoted and what she wanted to do as a counselor:

…coming back to my identity has, is how can I detox from being brainwashed, I have to go out there and get a job in a research one school and accepting the idea that I’m not open because my husband, finances just doesn’t make any sense to move that maybe I will not be a traditional professor of how can I make amends
with that without feeling a loser, a loser is a strong feeling, I’m cutting myself short that I have done, I’ve worked so hard for. If I decide that I’m just gonna be an adjunct professor is that enough, is that good enough and then go back to my private practice.

For Carina, her experience related to finding congruence between her researcher and clinician identities. In her quote, we can see her internal dialogue surface. A dialogue that was created within her doctoral program that is at a research intensive university and labels her as a “loser” if she emphasizes her clinician identity. Due to the professional stance of her doctoral program, becoming a scholar-researcher was paramount to practicing as a counselor. Yet, for Carina being a counselor superseded being a scholar-researcher because she wanted to help communities through clinical work. Because, as Carina stated, “when it comes to research are we really making an impact in the community or is it making an impact on my tenure, promotion.” Based on Carina’s connection to her ethnicity, helping communities was a vital part of being Latina.

Miguel shared about his identity:

I’m a part of Counselor Ed and I love counseling and I’m passionate about counseling and I want to research the experiences of counselors of color and counselor educators of color but that’s not because Counselor Ed supported that, that’s not because Counselor Ed said hey yeah this is important.

Miguel’s quotation alluded to the process of finding voice and self-validation in a world where such external validation may be lacking. Finding voice was a substantial
aspect in the participants’ experiences of becoming a Latino counselor educator. The need to find voice implied being silent and losing voice as a Latino doctoral student in a predominantly White American counseling program and profession.

**Finding voice.** Due to the experiences of marginalization and oppression, some of the participants faced a period of being silenced and misunderstood. Aryanna felt silenced, “I shut down, I didn’t even know how to use my voice” and Carina stated, “…this was a professor who… not once taking into consideration my culture, my ethnicity or this is just who I am do I really need to sacrifice that?” Based on the professor’s neglect of Carina’s ethnicity, she wondered if she needed to sacrifice that part of herself. Questioning, “do I really need to sacrifice that” led Carina and other participants to engage in a process of finding voice. This process of finding voice as a Latino doctoral student in counseling involved: (a) finding congruency between personal and professional identities, (b) integrating self with work, and (c) being an advocate.

This process of finding voice resulted from a need, as Marisol said, “to defend who I am [as a Latina].” Carina also shared, “I’m not gonna stop being who I am, I shouldn’t stop being enthusiastic, it’s good for me.” Similar to Marisol, Carina felt a need to defend cultural aspects of her that were actively denied in her encounters with some faculty and peers. For Carina, being enthusiastic is an aspect of extroversion that is reinforced in her culture.

In many Latino cultures, being personable and astute at interpersonal communication and connection is highly valued because maintaining harmonious social relationships is crucial within a collectivistic society. This experience complicated her
ability to feel connected with the faculty in the program, and thus created a disconnect between her personal identity, as a social person, and her professional one. Trying to find a way to integrate personal and professional identities was a large part of finding voice in a predominantly White American profession. As Alicia expressed, “it was a constant struggle to be congruent to who I am.”

Finding congruency. One of the goals of finding voice was discovering a sense of congruency between personal and professional selves. As Aryanna shared she was, “…still integrating that part of my identity into my professional work…” Raquel supported that, “there’s definitely an overlap with my professional identity, my personal identity, my ethnic/racial identity, they’re not neatly categorized, they kind of ebb and flow and grow together.” Marisol explained, “…you need to learn to integrate that [the personal and professional] together …my professional life then as a doctoral student … just helped solidify it more, who I am.”

In these examples, Aryanna, Raquel, and Marisol detailed the inevitability of integrating their personal and professional selves. Raquel further elaborated that her personal and professional identity development occurred simultaneously. Marisol stated how her professional identity development as a Latino doctoral student solidified her personal identity even more because it was an aspect that was denied. From this place of feeling that a significant part of her cultural self was being denied in the White space of counseling, Marisol felt empowered to claim it.

Alicia further explained, “[that I have to figure out] how to fit all the pieces together” in such a way “that feels consistent with my cultural values.” This reference to
fitting all the pieces together reflected many of the participants’ experiences of finding voice and ultimately congruency as it aligned with their personal identities, including ethnic identity.

For many of the participants, being one of the few Latinos in the doctoral program propelled them into another stage of ethnic identity. As Alicia described, “[I] kind of stick out more as a person of color here I would say especially in a PhD program,” which led me to “start to identify as a racial other.” This critical incident of being a “racial other” propelled this participant to engage in cultural exploration of her ethnic identity by connecting to her Mexican roots. This connection to her roots helped her learn more about what being a Latina meant for her. Mary also agreed that:

It [my ethnic identity] didn’t have the same meaning that it does today… having my identity being so present because if I’m gonna teach a class, …just be introduced, I mean my last name you know it’s just so present, it’s like I have this thing on top of me now. So sometimes it feels like a load that I was not expecting to have… and being here it’s clear that wherever I go that’s [my Spanish last name] gonna be part of how I am perceived and how I’m read.

So for Mary, her ethnicity in this professional context held meaning that was absent before. This meaning was associated with how her students would perceive her based on her Spanish last name. As a result, Mary had an extra “load” to manage throughout her professional identity development. This experience also spoke to the centrality of ethnicity within this process.
In addition to ethnicity being central in the participants’ professional identity, it was also an aspect that had to be downplayed, at times. Jose had an experience where he “[had to] downplay my identity.” Alicia shared how she had to decide on what personal parts to integrate in her professional identity, “…it’s deciding which pieces of you that you’ve had your whole life are acceptable to be presented as part of your professional identity.” She also shared, “it’s grieving in that way and feeling as I’m losing places to connect with others and not being able to see where I’m gaining new ones I guess because I’m seeing the loss more than anything.” Alicia experienced professional identity development as a “grieving process” because she felt that she had to sacrifice parts of her to find congruence.

Despite at times feeling as though one had to sacrifice parts of them to find congruence, the participants maintained a strong ethnic identity. All of the participants had a strong sense of their ethnic identity as Latinos which informed their professional identity development. Raquel, from her experiences in the doctoral program, came to a realization that “I don’t feel like I’m being a fake Latina anymore.” Also, as Miguel said:

“My values as a [Latino] and my personal…experiences have played out in my experiences as a doctoral student and in my professional identity but it’s also been paralleled by extreme experiences of invisibility and erasure and judgment and questioning that I haven’t…that I’m still working through.

In this statement, Miguel elaborately explained his complicated process of developing a professional identity that integrated ethnicity. He discussed how even though his ethnicity has played out in his doctoral experiences, that it was also erased and
used to place judgment on him. This excerpt reflected the complexity of integrating ethnicity with professional identity within a predominantly White American profession. Because, “…if others don’t see me for who I am within my different ethnicities then you’re not seeing me as a person” (Marisol). Not being seen as a person, with ethnicity, can feel dehumanizing and invalidating. Yet, developing a professional identity involves integrating the personal with the professional (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003).

In a way finding congruence in an attempt to develop a professional identity as a Latino counselor educator brings the participants’ experience full circle. It brings them back to a sense of incongruence and disconnection with the field that values individualism, prestige, and power. Thus, making the professional identity development experiences of the participants a constantly evolving, complicated, and aspiring rollercoaster process. Unlike their White American counterparts who may move from a sense of internal confusion to a sense of internal validation and congruence of their personal and professional identities, the participants in this study experienced it differently.

For the participants in this study, their personal identities were intricately connected to their ethnicity, which “seeps into every area” (Aryanna). As Carina shared, “…my ethnicity that’s what comes with the history, my culture, my values, and that’s the part that I try to defend or be possessive or try to protect and want to keep…” [for] “…staying true to who I was or who I am in the program and that could mean sharing my ethnicity with others.” These quotes show Carina’s sentiment that her ethnicity needs to be protected and shared with others throughout her doctoral journey. Jose also shared,
“I’m proud of the work that I’ve done as a counselor, as a researcher and I’m also proud of where I came from but I’m not placing one over the other because they’re both pieces of who I am.” Here Jose explained how his personal and professional identities are both equally important pieces of who he is as a Latino doctoral student in counseling. Miguel concurred, “I believe that family and the self and your personal identity was really important to the work that you do.”

**Integrating self with work.** For most of the participants, the work that they did integrated ethnicity within professional responsibilities. In particular, the participants infused their clinical and professional practice with cultural aspects derived from their ethnic identity as Latinos. For example, Aryanna shared how:

- If you walk in my office you see maracas and things as that so I feel as, I haven’t found a Mexican flag yet but I want a little Mexican flag as well… because I do want, you know those students of color to feel comfortable that I am an ‘other’ just as they are and I think in the counseling profession that’s really important.

This statement reflects Aryanna’s belief that representing her culture in her office by displaying cultural artifacts, such as maracas and a flag, is “really important” in the counseling profession. She deemed it really important because of how the profession has made her an “other” because of her ethnicity. So representing her ethnicity promotes an inclusive environment for her students of color, who are also facing being one of the few in the counseling profession. She also shared how she integrated pictures of her family into her teaching:
I co taught a cultural course last week and brought a lot of that in, a lot of my personal cultural stuff like I usually show pictures of my family in terms of talking about coming from a collectivist culture and how important that is to me. I also presented in another class on my dissertation and so there’s a lot of culture pieces in there. I played two songs in Spanish so those types of things just continue to incorporate that in my own educational experiences.

In these excerpts, Aryanna demonstrated how she “…started to explore [her] Latina identity more and bring more of that into the classroom as a student, as an instructor, as a peer.” Bringing her family into the classroom was testimony to her collectivistic worldview and connection to her family. She further shared, “…I’ve seen a lot of benefit from it… I am a lot more connected, I feel a lot more like myself like I don’t have to keep those worlds separate and play different roles at different times…” Here, Aryanna spoke to the sense of personal integration she felt as a result of including her Latina identity in the professional work that she does. As a result, Aryanna felt like herself again and realized that when she does share her ethnic identity it is “much more impactful not just for [her] but for everyone around.”

Carina and Alicia also shared in this sentiment that integrating ethnicity into professional experiences was beneficial. Carina and Aryanna commented about the importance of the Spanish language or linguistic capital in their professional identity development experience. Carina referred to her “bilingual brain” as a strength she loved and admired. Most importantly, she stated that being bilingual meant “there’s nothing wrong with me that I can’t dominate the English language.” Aryanna shared how she
incorporated Spanish in her clinical work, and Alicia brought Spanish music into the classroom when she taught. Raquel and Mary also emphasized how using the Spanish language helped them to connect with clients and the Latino community. As Raquel said about speaking Spanish as a way of connecting:

Being able to speak a language that is also commonly spoken in a lot of marginalized communities is a guarantee for you know confronting these issues head on and so being a Puerto Rican, being Latina, being Spanish speaking, it really was a catalyst of going back cause I recognize that there was not a lot of people who were in tune with the needs of my community, our community and that was you know that was a big part of me pursuing my doctoral studies.

In this quotation, Raquel related how belonging to a Latino community was a catalyst for her to pursue a doctorate. Also, because she spoke Spanish and was able to relate to Latino communities, she felt obligated to earn a doctorate and provide multiculturally competent service to them. Mary also expressed how she intentionally brought ethnicity to inform her scholar identity and interactions with communities:

[I bring my ethnicity in] that I intentionally attend processes that are local and believe in the knowledge that emerges from the margins instead of you know the authority in their own saying, dictating what it is, I think the knowledge needs to be built in community, I think that it is socially just and culturally responsible to have methods that reflect that and that engage communities of people who we’re writing about and we’re talking about in this scholarly task of writing and
presenting and things like that so I am an insider of that scholarly aspect and identity so I present, I write, I do research…

In this excerpt, Mary detailed her commitment to community and engaging with those in the “margins.” Resulting from her integration of her ethnicity, Mary designed her professional work to be “socially just” and “culturally responsible.” More importantly, Mary described her Latino doctoral student identity as an aspect that places her as “an insider” both in the Latino and scholar community.

Miguel gave this quote to depict how he integrates self with work. He shared that his “critical race feminist” identity was informed by what his mother taught him about being an advocate and knowing the colonial history of their country:

The more I align with critical issues like that the more I bring them into my classroom and into supervision and into my mentoring and into my counseling and into my meetings and into my research team meetings, into my writing, I think the more I align with being [from a Caribbean island] that’s critical and thinks about these issues, the more I read about the history of [my country of origin] and what it’s dealt with the more that I bring it into my work and I think that it’s different than my White counterparts here it’s more than they expect and sometimes it’s more than they quite get with the connections.

From this knowledge and connection to historical roots of oppression, Miguel developed a critical race professional identity. Gaining this knowledge about the oppression of his ethnic group fueled his passion for social justice work and was an aspect that his White counterparts may not have had access to. For some of the
participants having a connection to their roots and an understanding of their cultural
history helped them to become critical thinkers about the role of culture and race in their
experiences. From this understanding, the participants brought another perspective to the
classroom and profession. A perspective that explored the importance of discrimination,
immigration, marginalization, and culture on lived experiences.

As Alicia stated about her clinical perspective, “I understand the discrimination piece too and documentation and being able to talk about those struggles with my families [in her clinical work].” Because Miguel had knowledge of how “[his ethnic group are in this] grey space where you’re not welcomed in a lot of Latin American cultures because you’re part of the U.S. but you’re not really welcomed in the U.S.” helped him be aware of the “grey space,” ambiguity, and the negotiation of this space. Miguel leveraged this knowledge in his counseling practice to be empathic about issues related to the effects of colonialism.

In the following excerpt, Mary showed how her experience of being “part of the margins” informed her teaching philosophy. Mary shared how she felt like an outlier in the profession:

Well I am an outlier… I am part of the margins… I am a leader in relationship… I am recognized as this outstanding thing sometimes, whereas I value that but my main work happens in the room and in the relationship with my students and I believe in transformative connections and pedagogy and I take that very seriously. She also stated how she took her role as a counselor educator “seriously” because she was developing relationships with students and promoting “transformative
connections.” For Mary, making these transformative connections for her students was a way of resisting and countering the dominant ideologies that oppress ethnic groups who are “outliers” in the current U.S. societal structure.

In response to understanding what life is like as an ethnic other in a predominantly White American context, some of the participants shared how their clinical practice was shaped by their ethnicity. For example, Alicia stated that she brings an “understanding of the greater context of what was happening [in society]” and “knowing how to approach them and interact with them with more compassion and empathy and patience, I really think I get that from my personal journey [as a Latino doctoral student].” Aryanna also related feeling that she is “more patient,” “gentle,” “can tap into compassion and empathy,” and was able to “meet the client where they are at” because of her personal invalidating experiences related to being an ethnic other.

Aryanna also shared how she viewed her clients as “cultural beings.” Miguel summarized this aspect when he said:

… in my professional identity I think it’s played out in how I approach clients is one thing, so you know obviously being told oh you’re a very humanistic counselor, you kind of take your client at face value and you listen to them and you meet them where they’re at so they kind of what to put that humanistic label on it, it’s person centered, but for me it’s always just been, how else would I approach someone, how else would I approach a client. I’m not gonna come in and be this colonializing force that says you have to think about therapy in this way, how you’re going to do this work in this way and that’s led up to me
identifying as a critical race feminist counselor and I kind of work a lot on who somebody is when they walk in and how that helps them or hinders them… but I think that’s always come from the place of growing up in [a Caribbean Island] where you were very much… there’s very much a sense of unity because you’re not part of the U.S. but you’re also not part of the U.S. and you work with that.

In this phrase, Miguel identified how being humanistic and client-centered was his way of not being a “colonializing force” in the counseling relationship. In other words, Miguel defined his understand of being person-centered through his ethnic identity and oppressive experiences. For him, to be humanistic meant to not further oppress or impose a particular way of conducting counseling. It also meant to get to know the client as a cultural being and to join with them in their marginalizing experiences because unity begets empowerment.

For Miguel, Aryanna, and Alicia interacting with clients from a cultural place was a natural tendency for them. Due to the value of personalismo and hospitality in the Latino culture, the participants felt comfortable employing humanistic principles in counseling. Moreover, they tapped into their personal experiences of marginalization to have “more compassion and empathy and patience” to “meet the client where they are at.” An additional aspect of finding voice as a Latino doctoral student was being an advocate.

**Being an advocate.** For most of the participants, being a counselor first meant that they were advocates for clients, for other students of color, and for themselves. The participants decided to use their “voice as a professional” (Raquel) to, as Marisol said,
“speak up for community” and to advocate. As Mary stated, “we need to advocate to take down those barriers.”

When asked about how ethnicity made her professional identity development different than her White counterparts, Raquel responded, “…the first thing that comes into my mind is the word advocacy…” Raquel spoke to how being an advocate manifested itself in her role as a counselor:

…there’s a different flavor of advocacy for me… when I work with people both in a clinical context and in other areas of my life really kind of allowing for that Maslow’s hierarchy of needs to take place so really focusing on the actual needs.

In this quote, Raquel shared how her advocacy had a “different flavor” due to her ethnic connection and commitment to empowering clients. For example, her level of advocacy may include helping clients meet basic needs that are often not met due to marginalization and oppression. Being an advocate and taking on a social justice role involved times when some of the participants felt compelled to confront peers and speak up when someone made an oppressive statement, often in the form of a microaggression.

Many participants shared how they were often sought after by other students of color or minority students (such as students belonging to the gay community) to provide support and validation for them. Often many of the participants found themselves advocating for the needs of these students with faculty and/or higher education administration. As Carina shared, “becoming more of an advocate to make sure that we increase representation since we are marginalized especially as a counselor educator.” In
this quote, Carina reflected on the need to advocate as a marginalized counselor educator in a predominantly White American profession.

Being an advocate was a complicated role because the participants were often facing the same marginalizing situations that the other students of color were. While the participants were helping others, they were also trying to cope with the same oppressive academic environment, making advocating rewarding, yet difficult and stressful. In the process of being an advocate, integrating self with work, and finding congruency, the participants were able to reclaim power.

**Reclaiming power: “I just do me and do what I do.”** Because the participants faced invalidation and invisibility as a Latino doctoral student in their counseling programs, they were stripped of power. An outcome of being marginalized and ignored in professional realms was a loss a power. The participants felt disempowered as doctoral students and professionals. They were often silenced and made to feel inferior as Latino doctoral students in the White world of counseling. By navigating these oppressive professional identity development experiences, the participants were able to reclaim power.

Similar to the professional identity development task of moving from external validation to internal validation (Dollarhide et al., 2013), participants experienced a process of finding voice and building confidence. In other words, the participants arrived at an internal realization that they will no longer be silenced by the marginalizing experiences. Raquel retold her experience of reclaiming power taken from her because of insecurities by finding voice:
It was because of that [experiencing microaggressions] that I needed to continue to learn how to use my voice and to use it in a way that was productive and effective and reflective of some of those who don’t have voices and so you know eventually I got to the point where I was able to work through that insecurity.

Raquel also shared how she faced fear and anxiety to become internally confident. “[For me] a few different angles of that fear and anxiety in my own journey of finding my voice and right now I’m at a place where I’m more internally confident.” Mary said how she reclaimed power by committing to graduate:

I have had a lot of support but I think in terms of like making it and holding and realizing this is a very como un ambiente como muy inhóspito [inhospitable environment] but at the same time I need to make it through…

Further, Mary recounted this experience of empowerment:

…it just something flipped inside and I think it comes from anger, it comes from being done with that, it comes from, nobody empowered me to say oh look at your potential, it was something internal.

Mary described how anger at the invalidating experiences caused her to become empowered. “Something flipped inside” and she developed an internal sense of power that helped her persevere and “make it.”

Alicia was able to come to this conclusion, “I feel like I can voice my opinion and it should be heard.” Carina said it this way: “I’m not gonna stop being who I am, I shouldn’t stop being enthusiastic.” The process of regaining voice in the doctoral program experience also signified a reclaiming of power. Reclaiming power meant that
the participants were, as Miguel stated, “making room,” not only for oneself but for Latino counselor educators as a group. From this place of power, the participants were able to use their educational privilege to make meaningful contributions to the field and to their communities.

**Using educational privilege.** Most of the participants expressed recognition of the educational privilege afforded by a higher education and a doctorate. Aryanna said, “there’s so much privilege in higher education.” Raquel recognized her fortune for being near the end of her doctoral journey:

> I’ve been fortunate and maybe it’s because I’m really close in dissertation right now and I feel like had you asked me that question a year ago I would have had a different answer but I feel like a lot of the difficult part of managing full time work, full time doc studies and family, other personal responsibilities, a lot of that is in the rear view mirror for me.

From this place of privilege the participants grounded their professional identity in a spirit of social justice and of giving back. As Mary stated about her privilege:

> [my educational privilege] puts me in the position of putting in those contributions and that’s the way of resisting and I’m gonna do something different with that, I’m gonna teach from that, I’m gonna ground myself on that [my experiences of marginalization].

This quote detailed the ways in which Mary grounded her identity as a counselor educator on her experiences of marginalization. From this place, Mary used her educational privilege of having a doctorate to make meaningful contribution and “do
something with that.” Mary would do something that would effect change in the lives of other marginalized and oppressed groups of people.

Participants used their educational privilege to advocate for marginalized communities, to take action for social change, and to inform counselor education curriculum and practices. For example, Marisol said she asked her students to “challenge the book,” thus developing their critical thinking skills. Aryanna shared how she was “transparent with students” by “sharing with them your experiences” about marginalization as a way of creating a safe place for exploration of power and privilege. Mary stated how she would define her leadership in the field as making connections with organizations and training counselors to be inclusive:

I would definitely try to find a way to use the skills that I have and what I represent with this degree and my ability to speak a different language to build you know connections between agencies and would I be able to work to benefit, to infuse training in a way that is gonna create counselors that think of difference, diversity differently and invite organizations from the community.

Many are also pursuing research agendas focused on the Latino community because they felt passionate about giving back and had a strong connection to the community. Aryanna similarly stated “I want to dedicate my work to Latino populations.” Mary asked, “how am I finding ways to use all the privileges that I have in terms of access to information and my degree and visibility and all that to counsel people and start initiatives in South America?” Miguel said about his dedication to social justice, “we have to be involved you have to be active we have to go into the
communities we have to do the work to think more about social issues and issues that really affect the communities we’re working with.” Alicia stated that her work as a counselor educator is:

To eventually heal our communities right, I mean I think that’s another big piece of why I went into the work… so it’s not just White researchers or White clinicians going into these communities, and not really knowing a whole lot, and maybe even causing more damage than they do help because of cultural differences. You know we see a lot of White researchers going into communities of color and never giving back, so taking all this information from people and never kind of giving anything back. So wanting to make sure that we have the right people going into the right places if that makes sense, so a little bit of all those things. So the mentoring piece, making sure communities are actually being treated well, and I think for me wanting to pursue my research, which is in micro aggressions and wanting to kind of dig deeper into that and I can do that within the academic position.

This statement showed Alicia’s commitment to healing Latino communities. She intends to use her educational privilege to mentor, conduct non-oppressive research, and monitor that communities are being treated fairly and respectfully. Alicia will work from her academic position to have “a good seat at the table, a position where we can influence change in a meaningful way, in an inclusive way” (Raquel).

A doctorate is “not for me, it’s not for my family, it’s for my community at large” (Alicia). Marisol also shared that, “I’ll be the first person to be holding a doctorate in my
family and so it’s not just about me it’s about my whole family and they’re all proud and they’re claiming this.” For the participants, the completion of a doctoral degree held a communal significance. As part of a collectivistic culture, the participants’ individual achievement (i.e. a doctoral degree) is testimony to the community and not only to their personal pursuits. The doctorate was also a way of giving back to the Latino communities from where the participants emerged.

**Sense of giving back: “The ripple effect.”** An additional piece of reclaiming power and using educational privilege to heal communities was to also give back. The participants’ doctoral work was most often focused on giving back to the Latino community. Advocating for others and creating awareness about the oppressive experiences of the Latino community were ways that some of the participants contributed to the advancement of their communities. This sense of responsibility for the Latino community is another feature of a collectivistic worldview and further gave meaning to the participants’ pursuit of a doctoral degree in counseling. As Carina stated about her dedication to giving back:

So my identity without a doubt is a clinician and educator, a passionate educator that hopes to instill that in other students, which I think is just as important as being a researcher that can you know help the community as well.

Aryanna shared about her role as a mentor in giving back to students of color:

I really enjoy teaching … but just like the relationship that I just with my mentors um and my faculty members, that was something that really stood out to me, that mentoring piece and how I want to be able to do that for other students, and now
more recently, even more so for students of color and I think it’s so important that they see someone that looks like them standing in front of the classroom with the perceived power in the room because I know that was a big deal to me and there’s just not a lot of people of color in counselor education much less Latinas, even fewer and that’s just something that yeah that I really enjoy. I wanted to go on mostly for the teaching piece, for the mentoring piece.

In Aryanna’s situation, becoming a mentor was an important piece of giving back and using her educational privilege. It was important to her because she remembers the importance of having a professor of color, with the “perceived power in the room” being present in the predominantly White American counseling profession. Jose, Marisol, Carina, and Miguel also believed mentorship to be a vital component in giving back and helping other students of color succeed. As Marisol stated about giving back:

I think that’s been instilled in me growing up of the concept of giving back and so that definitely informs every milestone I’ve hit in my education is giving back to somebody cause I do want to give back to my community and make a difference and I don’t wanna see people struggle.

In this statement, Marisol spoke to the valued component of most of the participants’ definition of being a doctoral level professional. This valued component was being able to mentor other students of color and give back. Also, the participants reflected on not forgetting where they came from and remaining humble and connected to their cultural roots. For the participants, giving back and using their educational privilege
to make meaningful contributions were defining features of reclaiming power to disrupt the norm.

**Disrupting the norm.** As Latino doctoral students in predominantly White American counseling programs, the participants disrupted the norm of what and who an emerging counselor educator can look like and behave. The current norm of the ideal counselor educator is someone who is White American, aligned with White cultural values, and interested in self advancement. In contrast, the participants in this study were Latino, aligned with Latino cultural values, and invested in social justice action and service to marginalized communities.

As Alicia stated about resisting the norm in academia by considering non-European ways of viewing the world:

There are many things that are indicative of how we resist in academia, resist falling into the European, as the Western European ideas of how the world works, which is still super prevalent in the entire field.

Similarly, Mary said, “and the fact that I can show up to these rooms of White PhD professors disrupts you know and delivers a message of survival so I think I carry that everywhere.” In this quote, Mary iterated how her presence in the classroom disrupted the norm of what a professor looks like. As a Latina instructor, she carries with her the story of survival and disruption to the norm. Her survival was succeeding despite being one of the few and facing invalidating professional experiences in her doctoral journey.
Participants spoke about using educational privilege to disrupt the stereotypical image of a doctoral student. Being at the PhD level sends a message that disrupts the dominant narrative. It says that Latino individuals can be doctoral students and can succeed at the task. It disrupts the typical images of who a counselor educator is, which is most often a White American female given the current demographics of the profession.

Alicia discussed about her ability to thrive despite not being expected to succeed, “I’ve got what it takes to get my degree…[I was someone] who isn’t expected to be in this profession but to be that person and not only to kind of survive within the profession with these constraints but to thrive in it.” Mary also stated about her role in disrupting the norm:

When I walk in a classroom and I am the professor with this anguish and my accent and this hair and this skin I carry that delivers a message to the students about possibility and why not, disruption...it [my presence] is a sense of disruption because I’m not supposed to be here you know, I’m not supposed to be in that classroom…we look at the popular discourse, I shouldn’t have these high expectations and aspirations and dreams [yet I am].

Yet she is. Mary is still here despite having an accent, dark hair, and brown skin. Her presence disrupts the norm that a counselor educator is White American. Although Mary felt “anguish” at the prospect of entering the classroom as a Latina instructor with an “accent”, she felt empowered that she was there disrupting the norm of what an instructor should look and sound like. She experienced anguish because of her marginalizing experiences as a Latina doctoral student that reminded her that she did not
belong and was perceived as inferior. Mary’s success sent a message that a Latino, who “shouldn’t have these high expectations and aspirations and dreams” can complete a doctorate and become a counselor educator.

Not only did the academic and professional system create an invalidating environment, it also actively engaged in the construction and definition of a professional identity as a counselor educator. This definition incorporated White American-based values and beliefs about success in the counseling profession, such as writing scholarly in English and being assertive.

For example, Miguel shared how one professor made this comment, “you belong to an American institution and therefore you need to learn to write English for an American institution.” This comment reinforced the notion that writing in English is the only form of scholarly writing that will lead to success. Jose shared an experience with a professor who assumed that English was his second language (even though it was not) because of his Spanish last name, which made him feel self-conscious about his writing ability. He also reported feeling confused and “weird” about the experience as a result. Carina also shared this counterstory:

It was a struggle of having insecurities especially as far as my writing aspect, feelings challenged with being able to put on paper what was in my head and ironically I was a very good creative writer, I love to write actually creative writing but again that’s in Spanish as well not English. So it’s translating those dry academic ideas in English was always a challenge so I struggle through that in my first year.
In this story we see the role of context and professional expectations on feeling secure or insecure. Although, Carina was a “very good creative writer [in Spanish],” she felt insecure about her scholarly writing abilities in English because of the professional value on writing in English. This experience spoke to the role of context and professional expectations on personal well-being and academic functioning.

Miguel also told of this time during his doctoral program when his classmates were speaking abstractly and theoretically, “like doctoral students are supposed to,” and that he felt disconnected as a result. For Miguel, being authentic and using accessible language were values that he saw important to incorporate into his role as a doctoral student and future counselor educator.

Aryanna shared a time when a professor questioned her ability to succeed in doctoral studies because she viewed Aryanna as someone who did not “speak up in class.” This comment related how the professor came to an understanding that not speaking up in class equated to being unsuccessful. Alicia’s experience related to this situation as well when she stated, “my humility has been somewhat of a barrier for me [because] I don’t as to boast about myself that feels icky to me doing that kind of self-serving talk.” Marisol agreed, “…my dad reminded me to just stay humble and just cause I have an education doesn’t mean that I’m better than anybody else.” While in the Latino culture humility is a valued aspect of personalismo, in the world of academia being assertive is valued. These experiences served as examples of how personal and professional expectations can come into conflict and cause internal reactions. Additionally, this conflict can have direct effects of professional identity development.
because they can hinder the participants’ engagement in necessary activities and can make them feel confused and frustrated about “…what kind of counselor educator [one] wants to be” (Jose).

The experiences of Miguel, Jose, Carina, and Aryanna show how systemic viewpoints and assumptions can impact the participants’ construction of a professional identity. Jose said it this way, “it’s like all this stuff that’s trying to make it more complicated for my professional identity.” Miguel concurred, “you’ve been conditioned to know it’s not your field that you’re coming into a field that’s already been created and that you have to follow certain norms or rules and those rules are always shaped by the status quo.”

The status quo is aligned with the dominant narrative that White American worldviews and values are considered superior to other racial and ethnic ways of being. In the counseling profession, this narrative defines the “norms or rules” to which students are “conditioned,” and thus creates a “White space” (Miguel). Professors and other peers served as a conduit for the construction and definition of professional identity in the field. Miguel said about his experience of frustration with his peers, “[I was] really frustrated because that’s just how you’re supposed to speak, but the message was that’s how you’re supposed to speak when you’re a doctoral student.” Navigating this White space contributed to complex professional identity development experiences that often led to a disruption of the norm. The following statement relates how Raquel viewed her role in disrupting the norm:
It’s kind of cool to be able to be at the forefront or to be a part of the few who are forging that path but you know it’s a role that I take seriously, you know as a teacher, as a supervisor, as a clinician, as a scholar, no matter which one of those hats I’m wearing I’m still me, I’m still Latina, I’m still a female, I’m still me and so by me bringing who I am into each one of those roles… it’s exhausting but it’s pretty cool.

Here Raquel talked about the intersectionality of roles as a Latina and a female and how she integrated these identities into her counselor educator identity. Even though it was “exhausting” it is “pretty cool” because Raquel is using her educational privilege to deconstruct the dominant viewpoint of who a counselor educator is. For Raquel, a counselor educator is a Latino woman who is “forging that path.” Miguel also recounted how he was forging a path by disrupting the norm of how a counselor educator is defined:

My identity as a Latino doctoral student in counseling is one of looking for change, looking to push the envelope, to continue rocking the boat, a radical counselor educator, one that connects and relies and depends on the relationships that he has with others, with other critical minds and other counselor educators of color Latino and otherwise. And one that really takes, that’s really working to make our discipline in who we are and think more critically about it.

For Miguel, becoming a Latino counselor educator involved “looking for change, looking to push the envelope, to continue rocking the boat.” Miguel identified as a “radical counselor educator” who promotes collectivism by depending on relationships with others. He also stated how his role as a Latino counselor educator is to critically
examine our discipline and encourage more social justice action. He also stated regarding being a critical scholar:

My identity as a Latino doctoral counselor education student is one that looks or wants to look at the roots of who we are and where we come from and really tries to uproot that a little bit and to talk about what it means to be, really to be a counselor educator. Who gets to define what it means to be a counselor and what it means to be a counselor educator and what that looks like and in my research what that looks like as a counselor educator with diversity in the institution of academia and how who we are...how who I am will disrupt that and that I want it to and I want it to disrupt that and I don’t want to be quiet and I don’t want to be told that I’m angry or you’re too angry, you push too hard, that is what I was told in the meeting with the department chair...you’re approach is change change, move forward move forward my approach is more of the long game.

This powerful statement by Miguel introduces another way of defining and being a counselor educator. Instead of promoting prestige and power as a counselor educator and accepting the norm, Miguel identified various ways to disrupt it. For example, he shared how he intends to critically analyze the profession’s worldviews and practices, to deconstruct what it means to be a counselor educator, and re-define it. Miguel detailed how he claimed his ethnic identity as part of his professional one and is invested in change for the “long game.”

For Aryanna, the “long game” included intentionally seeking employment in a program that held social justice principles. As she stated about seeking employment:
I’ve been very limited in places that I’m applying at because it’s as no I have to find the right fit for me and so for me that is schools that are focused solely on social justice I’m going to be around as minded people who will accept me for who I am fully and truly.

Aryanna’s statement about wanting to be accepted for who she is “fully and truly” implied a lack of acceptance of who she is a Latino doctoral student. As with all the participants, Aryanna experienced invalidation and a sense of being valued as the token minority. In this quote, she reclaimed her power by being intentional about future places of employment. Aryanna elucidated the aspect of disrupting the norm that meant being true to oneself. Being true to oneself entailed self-defining one’s professional identity to encompass ethnicity.

For all of the participants in the study, being Latino mattered to them in their professional identity development. In addition, many of their personal identities related to gender, sexual orientation, SES, and immigration status were manifested in their professional identity. Ethnicity and personal identities were integral aspects of the participants’ professional identity that colored and shaped their experiences and understanding of who they were as doctoral level counselors.

This last theme of becoming a Latino counselor educator, as one of the few, involved navigating complicated professional identity development that was still evolving. Most of the participants described that they were still figuring out who they were as Latino counselor educators within the predominantly White American profession. The participants voiced continuing to have a strong counselor identity and
some questioned whether they would pursue a career in the academy. All of them had a commitment to integrating their ethnicity with their professional identity. At the same time, they were cognizant of the fact that they were one of the few. However, being one of the few now became a source of connection and strength. The participants found voice, reclaimed power, and disrupted the norm simply by being Latino doctoral students engaged in the process.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I detailed three themes related to the professional identity development experiences of the participants in this study. The first theme was being “one of the few.” The second was navigating professional identity development. The last theme was becoming a Latino counselor educator. All of these themes included an action verb to capture the process associated with developing a professional identity within a predominantly White American academic and professional context.

What emerged from this study were the ways in which the participants’ professional identity development experiences differed from their White American peers. Operating as a Latino doctoral student in a predominantly White American academic and professional context contributed to these differences. Based on ethnicity, the participants belonged to a marginalized ethnic group in the U.S., and therefore had an uphill battle to achieve internal confidence and respect from faculty and peers in the profession. As the data showed, being one of the few resulted in racialized academic and professional experiences that led to a complicated engagement in professional identity development. The participants navigated their complex professional identity development to emerge as
symbols of resistance and disruption to the norm of what it means to be a counselor educator. The following sections will summarize the three themes of this study that captured the participants’ experiences.

**Being One of the Few**

Since all of the participants were one of the few Latinos in their doctoral programs, and often the first in their families to attend graduate school, they experienced marginalization. Due to microaggressions and being marginalized, the participants faced a daily struggle of countering erroneous perceptions and invalidating interaction. Having such experiences resulted in biopsychosocial outcomes and led to professional identity development situations that were different than what their White American counterparts experienced. Their experiences were different because the participants did not ethnically belong to the White American group and were invalidated as a result. Due to this ethnic classification and how others viewed them as racially and ethnically inferior, the participants navigated professional identity development that involved facing White spaces.

**Navigating Professional Identity Development**

The participants, as members of a marginalized ethnic group, navigated facing White spaces by utilizing support systems, harnessing cultural capital, and persisting in academia. Facing White spaces referred to the participants’ experience of operating within a predominantly White American academic and professional context. This context also represented the lack of other Latino faculty and peers who could share in the participants’ experience of being marginalized.
One factor of facing White spaces was experiencing White privilege in action. For example, Miguel and Raquel identified instances where faculty and peers seemed to be unaware of the ways that power and privilege played out in the world. These incidents led them to feel disillusioned with the counseling profession that professes multiculturalism and diversity, and yet White power and privilege continued to persevere. Miguel likened the power of the White system to persevere as the “boat that’s gonna rock back.” This metaphor captures the tendency for the White power structure to resist situations where racialized moments are called out. For instance, Aryanna and Miguel discussed times when they advocated against oppression in their academic experiences and the faculty did not provide support or validation. Instead, their actions focused on maintaining the status quo. As a result, some of the participants lost faith that the profession will advance towards social justice viewpoints that address racism, ethnocentrism, and oppression in the field. Some of the participants also felt inadequate to make change in the current power structure of the counseling profession that is embedded in the larger White spaces of academia and the U.S. The participants also shared that advocating in a White American system can be emotionally taxing and draining.

The participants utilized support systems to navigate being marginalized in the White American world of counseling. They created safety zones of trustworthy, supportive and validating peers, faculty, supervisors, and mentors. Within these spaces, the participants felt secure, accepted, and able to be open and honest about their professional identity development experiences. In a way, these safety zones became a
family at school where the participants could flourish and excel. By having this safe space, the participants were able to find a place of personal nourishment and acceptance. More importantly, this place provided the participants with other faculty and peers who shared similar experiences and/or were aware of the role of power and privilege in doctoral programs. The participants relied on this community for support and to learn the “secrets” of successfully navigating a predominantly White American world.

The participants also relied on the cultural values of personalismo, familismo, a high value on education, and a strong work ethic to further navigate professional identity development. Personalismo related to the ways in which the participants naturally and easily engaged in making meaningful social connections and relationships. Familismo referred to their commitment to their family and community. Within family, some of the participants learned the value of education as a means of social advancement. Most of the participants also learned a strong work ethic that they harnessed to complete tasks and persevere in the face of challenging situations. All of these cultural factors were an outcome of the participants’ dedication to their cultural roots and sense of pride in their ethnic identity as Latino doctoral students. One of the most profound aspects of this part of the participants’ experience was how their cultural connection defined their understanding of their purpose in pursuing a doctorate. Many spoke about how their doctoral degree was not only for themselves; it was also for their family and community.

Participants used their support systems and cultural capital to persist in academia. They practiced self-care to maintain a work-life balance, as often as possible. The participants also found it rejuvenating and empowering to attend Latino focused
professional conferences and to connect with ethnic based organizations. They also described being self-reliant to find external and internal resources to persist and counter external messages that they were not good enough to be in a doctoral program.

Hearing these messages and navigating professional identity development led to a complicated engagement. Complicated engagement referred to the participants’ experience of contradiction within their professional identity. Contradiction pervaded their experiences and resulted in the participants being cautious in their professional identity development engagement. Being cautious while navigating the marginalizing academic and professional experiences as one of the few meant that the participants were constantly juggling multiple roles, obligations, and contradictory experiences. It also involved the push and pull related to being a Latino doctoral student in a predominantly White American setting and contributed to a sense of being in a dance. This dance involved holding the fear, making sacrifices, and playing it safe.

The subtheme of holding the fear revealed the participants’ experience of facing tension between their personal and professional value systems. Having this tension contributed to a complicated engagement, or dance, in professional identity development. In other words, the participants had a love-hate relationship with the profession and often faced ambivalence about being involved in professional activities, such as leadership. This love-hate relationship resulted from the participants’ dislike of the manifestations of power and privilege in the counseling field that were not addressed. The participants described feeling discomfort, fear, frustration, anger, confusion, mistrust, and
disconnection during their doctoral journey because of the lack of social justice oriented professional activities.

Participants detailed making sacrifices to succeed in the doctoral program. These sacrifices were spending less time with family due to professional obligations and/or being geographically far from family. For some of them, this time away from family had ramifications on their ability to practice self-care. Aryanna also shared how she longed for time with family as it gave her access to her cultural traditions that made her feel secure and comfortable. This sacrifice can be equated to functioning without an essential part of their cultural self, and can add another layer of loss and sadness to the already demanding doctoral lifestyle. Moreover, these sacrifices resulted in a dismissal of an essential aspect of self within professional identity. In other words, the participants faced developing a professional identity that did not fully integrate parts of their personal identity, such as family connections.

Playing it safe meant “playing the game” (Carina) and figuring out the professional terrain in order to navigate it and succeed. This subtheme also captured the challenge of figuring out how to navigate multiple professional roles as a doctoral student. Playing it safe involved consciously deciding on what parts of the self one will reveal in what setting. For example, Miguel shared how he often considered how to pronounce his name (with a Spanish accent or without), and how to mediate his behaviors so others do not label him as the “angry brown man.” However, many of the participants also expressed how they did speak up against injustice while playing it safe. The dance that ensued within this complicated engagement revealed the manner in which the
participants faced contradictions and had to constantly react and adapt to an environment that at times, was inhospitable. Being in this environment created an opportunity for the participants to deconstruct and re-define their professional identity as Latino counselor educators.

**Becoming a Latino Counselor Educator**

For the participants, their process of becoming a counselor educator involved finding voice, reclaiming power, and disrupting the norm. Finding voice included finding congruency between personal and professional identities, integrating self with work, and being an advocate. In particular, the participants described how their ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation were integral parts of their emergent professional identity. As such, the participants were intentional about incorporating cultural artifacts, such as maracas and Spanish music to their professional work and offices. They were also driven to social justice advocacy and speaking up against injustices in academia and in the lives of their clients. In so doing, the participants found voice.

By finding voice after being silenced, the participants reclaimed the power that was taken from them by the experiences of marginalization in the counseling doctoral program. Reclaiming power involved continuing to find voice, becoming empowered to graduate, and using educational privilege to give back to marginalized communities. Some of the participants spoke about the need to use their educational privilege and power to advocate for the needs of marginalized communities. They also expressed their commitment to research and service that advanced the well-being of oppressed
individuals and communities. In this way, the participants reclaimed power by using their educational privilege to give back; and to honor their cultural roots and history.

Participants also shared how their marginalizing professional experiences grounded their identity and work in the field. From this place of knowing invalidation and invisibility, the participants committed to teaching, doing research, and counseling in a manner that did not perpetrate oppression or further marginalization. In so doing, the participants disrupted the norm. They disrupted the norm by de-constructing and re-defining what it means to be a counselor educator.

Simply by being a Latino doctoral student in counseling programs, the participants disrupted the norm of what kind of student can and will succeed. As Latino doctoral students in counseling programs, the participants represented a collective story of resistance. As Mary stated, “my presence is resistance and the fact that you’re doing this [dissertation] that is resistance, and the fact that I’m being interviewed is resistance and with resistance comes hope.” This dissertation serves as a story of hope for all marginalized and invalidated students in doctoral programs. In the following chapter, I discuss the interpretations of these findings and its implications for our field. In addition, I describe the limitations of this study and future directions for research.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

In this dissertation, I presented the collective story of eight Latino doctoral students in counseling programs navigating professional identity within a predominantly White American profession. Their counterstories provided an additional way of understanding the professional identity development for doctoral students in counseling programs. Specifically, their stories represented a diverse understanding of how Latino doctoral students experienced professional identity development as they negotiated being in a predominantly White American context. The concept of a rollercoaster emerged as a metaphor for understanding the complexities of their experiences. Embedded within the rollercoaster is the role of ethnicity. The three themes that captured the role of ethnicity included: (1) being one of the few, (2) navigating professional identity development, and (3) becoming a Latino counselor educator.

In this chapter, I provide an interpretation of the findings. This interpretation includes the metaphor of a rollercoaster and the role of ethnicity as described by the three themes that emerged from the data. I also explain the implications for counselor education, doctoral counseling programs, and Latino doctoral students in counseling programs. I end the chapter with an explanation of the limitations of this study and directions for future research.

The Rollercoaster Experience

The professional identity development of the eight Latino doctoral students in this study differed in various ways from how the current models described the process
unfolding. Across all the current models of professional identity development in counseling, the integration of personal and professional identities is the ultimate goal and outcome for the student (Dollarhide et al., 2013; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). These models explained the process through which the students developed internal confidence and took responsibility for their professional growth (Dollarhide et al., 2013). The models also described a somewhat linear process where the student arrives at some type of congruency and sense of fit within the profession and the professional community (Gibson et al., 2010).

Unlike the White American doctoral student experience of resolving the emotional dissonance experienced during professional identity development (Dollarhide et al., 2013), the participants in this study experienced emotional and psychological challenges at all developmental points. The participants often felt confused and doubtful throughout their doctoral journey. They vacillated between feeling defeated to feeling empowered. Figure 5 depicts this process.

![Figure 5. The Rollercoaster](image-url)
Due to the power and privilege that can play out in predominantly White American professional contexts, the participants experienced marginalization and oppression based on ethnicity. As a result, their process of integrating personal and professional identities was complicated and in constant tension. This tension impacted their sense of integration with the field and how they engaged in the socialization process of developing a professional identity. Instead of following the linear path described by the current models on professional identity development, the participants experienced ups and downs in the process.

In the beginning, the participants described feeling excited about pursuing a doctorate. As the program progressed and the experiences of being “othered” accumulated, the participants became disillusioned and doubtful. They doubted their place in the program and whether or not the degree was worth it because of the psychological and emotional pain felt in an environment where they were marginalized. However, these marginalizing events led to a constant process of negotiating one’s place in the program, in the profession, and within oneself. This process of negotiating who one is and who one wants to be as a Latino counselor educator was a recursive experience and involved self-reflection, discussions with others, and a reconnection to cultural roots. From this negotiation, the participants engaged in the evolving process of becoming a counselor educator.

Upon entry to the doctoral program, the participants felt excitement and joy at their choice to pursue a doctorate in a field that they loved. As they enjoyed the uphill ride in the doctoral program, they began to experience times of invalidation and
invisibility due to being one of the few. Because they were one of the few, as a Latino doctoral student in a predominantly White American profession, the participants felt the biopsychosocial effects of microaggressions. As these effects accumulated during the doctoral program, the rollercoaster entered a decline.

During this decline, the participants felt disillusioned and defeated. When they started to navigate these experiences, the participants found a way to shift the rollercoaster yet again. Now, the rollercoaster began to incline and the participants felt empowered and motivated. Since the effects of being one of the few persist throughout this process, the participants experienced a dip in the rollercoaster. This decline was less severe as previous ones and began to represent the transformation from wanting to quit to wanting to finish.

Pride and cultural capital remained consistent throughout this process. These two factors were motivators for the participants and emphasized the role of ethnicity in their experiences. Being one of the few also remained constant in the process. Their status of being one of the few was now a source of strength, resistance, and disruption to the norm. Because the participants’ experience followed a non-linear path, the metaphor of a rollercoaster emerged as a helpful visual to understand this process. Also, given that power and privilege played a role in their professional identity development experiences, the rollercoaster metaphor captures the ebbs and flows of this process. The role of ethnicity, as described in the three themes, illustrates that power and privilege were factors in the participants’ professional identity development experiences.
The Role of Ethnicity

From the beginning of the doctoral experience, being Latino mattered. Being Latino mattered in the ways that the participants were treated by others, how they navigated professional identity development experiences, and in the process of becoming a counselor educator. Being one of the few, as a Latino, meant that the participants’ presence in the doctoral program and in the counseling field held significance. This significance was that the participants were different from their White American counterparts based on ethnicity. As a result, they not only had to meet the professional and academic requirements of the doctoral program, they also navigated racialized experiences.

These racialized experiences created many contradictions. For example, they were valued and devalued, heard and silenced, validated and attacked, integrated and disconnected. They battled the imposter syndrome, self-doubt, and a disconnection with the profession’s values and beliefs. At the same time, they felt confidence, had resolve to persist, and felt connection with others in the field. In a way, they operated in the borderlands or in-between cultures (Andzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal, 1998), as someone who belonged to the counseling profession and as someone who did not belong based on ethnicity.

Figure 6 shows this in-between space and the intersection between ethnicity and professional identity in the participants’ experiences.
Figure 6: Being In-Between

From this in-between place, the participants’ socialization process resulted in a re-definition of professional identity. They defined their professional identity in terms of ethnic identity and connection to community. For example, many of the participants integrated their ethnicity with their professional identity by bringing cultural artifacts (such as maracas and Spanish music) into the classroom. The participants used their educational privilege to give back to community through mentorship, clinical service, and scholarship. The participants had a sense of responsibility for community and were active advocates.

They were intentional about future employment selections and were mindful about working at a place that had social justice principles and practices. The participants wanted to find a work place that was safe and aligned with their social justice identity. All of the participants seemed to have a strong social justice orientation, possibly resulting from being one of the few. Many described how their personal experiences of
microaggressions compelled them to pursue social justice actions. This orientation was also fueled by their sense of responsibility and commitment to community.

Most of the participants spoke about the primacy of community in their experiences as Latino doctoral students in counseling programs. Community signified connection, safety, validation, support, and provided motivation to complete the doctorate. Hinkle, Iarussi, Schermer, and Yensel (2014) also found, through a qualitative study of 35 doctoral students (3 of which were Latino), that succeeding for family and community amid obstacles was a source of motivation for pursuing a doctorate. Further, they stated, “external factors of family and community were also identified as motivating in the pursuit of a counselor education and supervision degree, particularly for participants of color” (Hinkle, et al., 2014, p. 9). Similarly, the results of this study support that for Latino doctoral students (who are considered participants of color) that family and community were motivating and protective factors in their professional identity development.

For the participants, their professional identity was defined and shaped within community and connection to ethnicity. For instance, while the current professional identity development models emphasized individuality and autonomy (Carlson et al., 2006; Dollarhide et al., 2013) the participants’ experiences emphasized these factors within connection and community. In other words, the participants expressed their individuality and autonomy within their familial and communal roles. Instead of seeking prestige and power, the participants sought to make their families proud and to make meaningful community relationships. This finding is similar to what Ortiz and Santos
(2009) discovered from their qualitative study of Latino college students. In their study, many Latino students reported developing greater political consciousness and a collectivistic awareness regarding their actions and future plans as scholars. They viewed education as the primary vehicle towards improving the status and power of their ethnic group and of themselves (Ortiz & Santos, 2009).

Because ethnicity carried a significant meaning in the doctoral program, the participants engaged in ethnic identity development by connecting to roots and integrating ethnicity with professional identity. All of the participants explained that their ethnic identity was “strong” and became more salient when they entered and progressed in the doctoral program. It became more salient because they were one of the few Latinos in their doctoral program, thus making their ethnicity more paramount within that context (Saylor & Aries, 1999; Wilkenson, 2010).

Ethnic identity served as a buffer and was an integral part of professional identity development. In addition to accommodating to the counseling profession’s values the participants also integrated ethnicity into their professional identity to expand upon what it means to be a counselor educator. In much the same way as the college students in the above referenced study did, the participants in this study forged a new hybrid professional culture that integrated ethnicity. As Ortiz and Santos (2009) stated, the students “[were] becoming Americanized and forging a new hybrid culture they found to be personally and collectively beneficial, one that did not entail sacrificing valued and treasured elements of their Latino culture and heritage” (p. 314). Instead, they claimed voice and disrupted the norm to persevere and make space for themselves in a White
world. The manner in which the participants made this space and figured out their professional identity were captured in the following three themes.

**Overview of Themes**

The three themes that emerged from this qualitative study of the professional identity development of eight Latino doctoral students in counseling programs were: (1) being one of the few, (2) navigating professional development identity, and (3) becoming a Latino counselor educator. Figure 7 presents the visual depiction of this framework.
Even though the data were categorized into three major themes and multiple subthemes, it is important to remember that the themes are not mutually exclusive; instead they represent a process. In other words, the participants’ experiences as being one of the few carried over into navigating professional identity, which informed how
they became Latino counselor educators. In the following section, I provide an overview of the three major themes that emerged from this study.

**Being One of the Few**

The first theme was being one of the few Latino doctoral students in the counseling program and profession as a whole. Being one of the few as a marginalized Latino doctoral student meant that they were subjected to racialized experiences that made them feel invalidated, invisible, and misunderstood. According to CRT and LatCrit tenets, all educational experiences are racialized and influenced by power and privilege that maintains White American power over other cultural groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Levin, Jaeger, & Haley, 2013; Truong & Museus, 2012). As a result, the participants faced microaggressions and a daily struggle of countering erroneous perceptions and invalidating interactions that were influenced by ethnicity. Having such experiences resulted in biopsychosocial outcomes such as physical, psychological, and social ramifications, and led to professional identity development situations that were different than what their White American counterparts experienced.

**Navigating Professional Identity Development**

The next theme, navigating professional identity development, demonstrated these differences in how the participants were forced to navigate professional identity as one of the few Latinos in their cohort and in the profession. The participants, as members of a marginalized ethnic group, had to face racialized professional experiences in the White space of the counseling program. These racialized situations were fueled by how faculty and peers viewed them as members of a marginalized ethnic group, which led to a feeling
of invalidation and a dismissal of academic and professional competence. Navigating such experiences led to a complicated professional identity development process for the participants. The three subthemes, (1) holding the fear, (2) making sacrifices, and (3) playing it safe, described the ways in which the participants’ experiences were complicated by racialized situations.

As Latino doctoral students in a predominantly White American professional setting the participants had experiences that led to value conflict and confusion. Often, the participants felt tension between their personal values (that were informed by ethnicity and promote collectivism) and those of the profession (that tend to promote individualism and competition). Some of the participants described holding the fear related to navigating the tension between their personal and professional value systems, while knowing that involvement with professional activities was a requirement. In other words, the participants had a love-hate relationship with the profession and had to hold this fear, of engaging despite some value conflict, in order to participate in the professional tasks required of a doctoral student. As a result, they felt that it was hard to be authentic and that they were being hypocritical because they were aligning with both their personal and professional value systems. For example, on the one hand, some of the participants taught and encouraged counselors-in-training about professional leadership, yet some of the participants did not engage in leadership because of the value conflict and dissonance it created for them as Latino doctoral students in a White space. Having to hold this fear created by the tension between value systems created an additional aspect to the participants’ experience of professional identity development.
The participants also detailed the many familial, personal, and financial sacrifices that they made to attend and continue in doctoral programs. Many participants felt guilt about not being able to include their family in their journey and were not able to attend family functions on a regular basis. Others spoke about the lack of self-care time and the financial strain involved in visiting family who lived very far away. Because of these sacrifices, it can be said that the participants had to function without an essential part of their cultural self (i.e. their family connections), which added another layer of loss and sadness to the already demanding doctoral lifestyle. Moreover, these sacrifices resulted in a dismissal of an essential aspect of self within professional identity; the participants developed a professional identity that did not fully integrate parts of their personal identity that included their connection with their family.

They also played it safe by figuring out and abiding by the professional “game.” Playing the game meant meeting the professional obligations of the doctoral program in order to succeed despite racialized experiences. It also meant deciding on what parts of the self they would reveal in what setting, how to navigate multiple professional roles, and monitoring what one says. Often, the participants had to react and adapt to an environment that was inhospitable.

By utilizing support systems, harnessing cultural capital, and persisting in academia, the participants navigated these experiences and persevered. The participants relied on trusted colleagues, family support, and maintained a strong work ethic to persist in academia. The participants also found respite in their families of origin. Harnessing the strength of the family, personalismo, and having a strong work ethic also helped the
participants navigate their professional identity development. By reconnecting to family and cultural roots the participants reminded themselves of their sense of purpose in pursuing the doctorate, which was for the advancement of their family and community.

Because they were astute at making connections due to the cultural value of personalismo, the participants naturally networked and formed relationships with others. When they doubted their place in the program and wanted to quit, the participants relied on their value of education and a strong work ethic to continue on their doctoral journey. As they continued on their doctoral journey and developed a professional identity as a counselor educator, the participants described an evolving process. They explained that they were still aspiring towards a professional identity and were still engaged in the process. The last theme captured this process.

**Becoming a Latino Counselor Educator: Towards a Re-definition**

The last theme, becoming a Latino counselor educator, captured the participants’ evolving resolution of their professional identity experiences. Their process of becoming a counselor educator involved finding voice, reclaiming power, and disrupting the norm. Finding voice involved finding congruency between personal and professional identities, integrating self with work, and being an advocate. By finding voice, the participants reclaimed the power that was taken from them by the experiences of marginalization in the counseling doctoral program. Reclaiming power included continuing to find voice, being empowered to graduate, and using educational privilege to give back to marginalized communities.
Participants disrupted the norm because they were aligned with Latino cultural values that promote collectivism, and were invested in social justice action and service to marginalized communities. They pursued a doctorate for the advancement of family and community. These findings were contrary to what the research on the experiences and motivations of counselor education doctoral students tended to be. Two qualitative studies explored the doctoral student persistence and motivation of mostly White American samples (Hinkle et al., 2014; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). The researchers found individualistic reasons for pursuing the doctoral degree, such as personal achievement and fulfillment (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005), and to be a professor and to prove oneself as capable (Hinkle et al., 2014). The results of the present study show that this sample of Latino doctoral students were motivated by collectivistic reasons instead of individualistic ones.

For the participants, becoming a Latino counselor educator involved a process of re-defining and de-constructing what it means to be a counselor educator. The participants integrated their complicated process of developing a professional identity that involved a push and pull phenomenon. For instance, while the participants played it safe they also disrupted the norm; while they took risks, they reclaimed power; and while they felt silence, they found voice. While they felt integrated into the field, they also felt not integrated. For example, one of the participants played it safe by publishing scholarly research articles, yet disrupted the norm by focusing on clinical work that benefits Latino communities. In focusing on clinical work she went against the norm of her graduate program, which encouraged scholarly research over counseling practice. Because the
participants engaged in this type of push and pull throughout their professional identity development, their experiences served as counterstories to what is currently known about the process.

The three themes that I described provide another way of understanding the professional identity development for students who do not identify as White American. The collective counterstory of the eight participants in this study detailed the complex and multifaceted ways that their professional identity development was different and influenced by power and privilege.

**Discussion**

My analysis of the data from a LatCrit perspective revealed the ways in which the participants’ experiences of developing a professional identity development differed in various ways from their White American counterparts. The ways they differed involved two major aspects. First was how the participants integrated ethnicity with professional identity. They described how ethnicity was an integral part of their development and could not be kept separate from professional identity. The second aspect was that the participants’ professional identity development was like a rollercoaster and did not follow a linear path.

According to our current understanding of professional identity, doctoral students follow a somewhat linear path that leads to a successful integration of personal and professional identities (Dollarhide et al., 2013). This model along with the CACREP standards and self-management strategies provides the profession with guidelines of how many doctoral students begin to identify as counselor educators. What the
aforementioned guidelines did not provide for were the racial and ethnic differences in
the socialization process by which Latino doctoral students may develop a professional
identity as a counselor educator. In this way, the current understanding of professional
identity perpetuates the dominant ideology that promotes colorblindness, equality, and
meritocracy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). By promoting this colorblind approach to
identity development, the profession is unwittingly sending a message to doctoral
students that they must conform and assimilate to the current idea of what comprises a
counselor educator identity. Assimilation refers to the process through which ethnic
groups change cultural patterns to fit in with the mainstream culture (Parrillo, 2013). By
default, assimilation negates ethnic differences for the sake of conformity and sameness.

Beyond a colorblind approach, the results of this dissertation lend to a much more
colorful view of how professional identity development can evolve. This colorful view
included the ways in which the participants did not negate their ethnic differences for the
sake of conformity. Instead, the participants harnessed their ethnic differences as cultural
capital to accommodate within a predominantly White American profession. The
participants integrated ethnicity into their professional identity development and proved
that their reasons for becoming a counselor educator were embedded in cultural
worldviews and a sense of collectivism.

Therefore, the participants’ active construction of a professional identity
integrated ethnicity into their re-definition of what it means to be a counselor educator.
The data debunks the myth that professional identity is colorblind, based on merit, and
equal amongst all students. On the contrary, professional identity development, for the
participants in this study, was not colorblind. Their experiences explicated the powerful role of ethnicity that created a colorful picture of how professional identity development can proceed in a less linear fashion.

**Implications**

The results of this study showed that the participants’ experience of developing a professional identity development was more like a rollercoaster and affected by racialized situations in all five areas of doctoral studies: teaching, supervision, research, leadership and service, and counseling. Similar to the recommendation of infusing multiculturalism into all areas of counseling programs instead of isolating it to one class (Stadler, Suh, Cobia, Middleton, & Carney, 2006), the implications for this study detail ways that diversity can be integrated into our profession and doctoral counseling programs.

Following the results of this study that indicated that ethnic identity development, validation, connection, and support were vital to the participants’ ability to persist and graduate, the following recommendations provide some ways to address these factors. Validation, connection, and support were central to the emergent themes due to the participants’ marginalizing experiences. Because of these experiences, the participants needed validation, social connection, and support to overcome racialized situations and to re-focus their efforts towards completing the doctoral degree. The recommendations promote inclusivity, create community, and provide support services for Latino doctoral students in counseling programs. In addition, the recommendations help create an environment where the students’ ethnic identity can flourish and the students can develop a strong professional identity. Dollarhide et al. (2013) emphasized the development of a
strong professional identity for counselor education doctoral students so they can provide adequate education to future counseling students. Additionally, doctoral students can benefit from a strong ethnic identity that can be harnessed when teaching counseling students about their cultural identity in their professional role.

Doctoral education is more than acculturating students to the field of counseling, it is also about cultivating students’ professional identity that is congruent with who they are as cultural beings. It is an opportunity to produce counselor educators who have a strong sense of their ethnic identity and how that defines and shapes their professional work. By so doing, doctoral education can take an active role in moving the counseling profession to a place where multiculturalism and diversity are core values. The following recommendations can aid in this process.

**Recommendations for the Counseling Profession**

One way to cultivate diverse understandings of professional identity is by promoting inclusivity. All members of the counseling profession can have personal and meaningful conversations about the ways that power and privilege are manifesting in counseling programs and in the profession. These conversations could be conducted at the local and national levels. At professional counseling conferences, staff, faculty, or organizational divisions (such as Counselors for Social Justice) could facilitate these conversations. The Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) can take an active role in having conversations and dedicating time, effort, and thought in the pursuit of inclusivity for all students.
From these discussions designed to encourage all professional members to be open and honest about their perceptions of power and privilege, action plans can be created. Some actions could include advocacy efforts designed to promote inclusion, community, and supportive services. Professionals might provide training and workshops on racial and ethnic identity and how they play a role in professional identity experiences. The profession’s scholarly journals can incorporate research about race and ethnicity into their regular publications as well as special issues. Advocacy statements that validate the Latino experience and provide language from which to cultivate discussions on power and privilege could also prove helpful.

The profession as a whole can provide family friendly professional conferences that emphasize and incorporate family and cultural aspects. Because family and culture are integral components in the professional identity of Latino doctoral students, these aspects can be included in professional activities. For example, family could be invited to the orientation events of the program and to any other social events planned for students. By doing so, Latino doctoral students may feel that their family and cultural aspects are more integrated with their professional identity.

Professional conversations and trainings about race, power, and privilege can promote an inclusive environment where invalidation and microaggressions can be minimized and dealt with openly. From this place, professionals within the profession can engage in intrapersonal and interpersonal activities to further inclusivity, promote community, and create supportive environments.
Recommendations for Counselor Education Doctoral Programs

As a subset of the profession, counselor education doctoral programs can also cultivate diverse understandings of professional identity through inclusion, community, and supportive services. The following recommendations can be implemented within counseling programs. Department chairs, deans, staff, faculty, and students can engage in implementing some of these ideas by dedicating time, effort, and thought to it.

Counseling programs can encourage inclusivity by providing professional development and training about the various expressions of professional identity development amongst students of color. For example, department chairs and advisors can practice conversation skills aimed at acknowledging and discussing the role of power and privilege in the students’ experiences. The curriculum for doctoral students can incorporate the research from this study and others similar to it, in order to expand on the current understanding of professional identity development. In particular, the curriculum can acknowledge the ways that power and privilege play a role in the development of students of color and how this experience is different from White American counterparts because of racialized situations. Course time could be dedicated to this topic and to informing students how to navigate such racialized situations in the program and in future employment settings, including in the world of academia as junior faculty.

Cultivating mentorship between faculty and doctoral students can also be helpful in teaching students how to navigate the world of academia. Mentorship can also create a validating and supportive community when the mentors have a level of critical consciousness that would make them more likely to validate racialized experiences. In
addition to having a high level of critical consciousness, mentors from various ethnic
groups other than White American can create an environment where doctoral students of
color feel that there are others who look like them. Having such an environment lends to
a comforting feeling of community.

Creating community is crucial both in the program and outside of school. Counseling programs can cultivate an academic family by creating consultation circles and allowing group authored dissertations. Because the results of this study indicated that the participants harnessed their cultural capital of familismo and personalismo by creating family at school and connecting with others, group authored dissertations would allow for collaboration. In collaboration, Latino doctoral students could build community that would shield them from the feeling of marginalization often faced in predominantly White American environments. Programs could provide ethnic based student organizations where students could share their marginalizing experiences. In much the same way that ethnic focused organizations on campus served to retain students of color (Ortiz & Santos, 2009), having a supportive community can help the participants to persevere and find a place of solitude, connection, and respite.

Programs can also provide support services for financial and emotional health. For example, a list of therapists-of-color in the community who the students can visit for counseling services can be provided. Therapists-of-color are more likely to provide validating counseling services because they may share in similar racialized experiences as the Latino doctoral students. As the results of this study indicated, the participants sought others who shared in their experiences and looked like them. By having
therapists-of-color available to them, programs would be providing counseling options
that acknowledge that students of color need professionals who share similar ethnic
identities as them. Counseling programs can create events that incorporate the students’
family and encourage community based connections outside of school. Graduate student
funding or fundraising to help provide financial support for travel to visit family or to
bring family to campus would prove helpful in cultivating community and family
connections.

**Recommendations for Counselor Educators**

Beyond what the counseling profession and counseling programs can do to
promote inclusivity, create community, and provide support services, counselor educators
have the opportunity to affect the lives of Latino doctoral students in counseling
programs. Counselor educators can have one of the most influential roles in the
professional identity development of doctoral students in counseling programs. The
following ideas for counselor educators can be a starting point from which to cultivate
more ideas on how to create an environment where Latino doctoral students feel
validated and can flourish.

Counselor educators, being the ones touching the lives of doctoral students, can
actively contribute to diverse understandings of professional identity through inclusion,
community, and supportive services. Counselor educators can promote inclusion by
openly discussing race and ethnicity as it affects the doctoral journey of their students.
Their role could entail being an ally by increasing their critical consciousness and
cultivating students’ ethnic identity development by integrating ethnicity. Counselor


educators could participate in professional development and other self-educating activities to increase their personal critical consciousness. In so doing, the faculty member will be more likely to recognize and validate incidents of microaggressions and racialized situations as they happen. In this way, the counselor educator can provide a safe relationship within which the Latino doctoral student can express feelings and thoughts associated with racialized moments in their professional identity experiences.

In addition, faculty and supervisors can have a discussion about the student’s level of acculturation and ethnic identity as it relates to their identification with cultural values that may influence their professional identity development. There are multiple Latino focused clinical and supervision assessments and models that can help faculty and supervisors meet this goal. Engaging in cultural exploration enables counselor educators and supervisors to open the door for more discussion on the topic. They may also be providing students with awareness and insight about their ethnic identity that had not been discovered before this experience. As the results of this study showed, cultivating ethnic identity is imperative to the student’s successful integration of personal and professional identities.

Along with encouraging ethnic identity development, counselor educators can empower students to incorporate aspects of their ethnicity into their professional work. This can be done by asking students about any cultural artifacts they would like to incorporate into teaching, supervision, or counseling. Another way would be to encourage students to incorporate cultural aspects into their research interests as a way of grounding their research agenda within connection to their ethnicity. Faculty,
supervisors, and mentors can inquire about a student’s reasons for pursuing a doctorate, research interests, and future career goals. They can be intentional about encouraging the student to pursue their personal interests that may align with ethnic identity and connection to community. In so doing, counselor educators provide an inclusive setting where all research ideas and interests are welcome and pursued.

Beyond providing a safe and validating relationship with students, counselor educators can also be responsible for advocacy. Being an advocate for Latino doctoral students in counseling programs is needed because of the potential for racialized situations to occur. As this study indicated, racialized situations can create a harmful environment for Latino doctoral students in counseling programs. Counselor educators can increase the retention rate for Latino doctoral students in counseling programs by advocating against such practices and helping students have the opportunities to engage in racially-based research and other professional activities.

**Recommendations for Latino Doctoral Students**

Not only is the counselor educator an active contributor to the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students, so too are the students themselves. Students can bring their ethnicity and other personal identities into the conversation and the work that they do in the program. When they feel safe and validated within their relationships with faculty in the counseling program, students may feel more open to discuss their ethnicity. In this type of validating setting, students can be vocal about culture and other personal identities and how they play a role in professional identity. Also, they can ask for family oriented academic and professional activities. Students can
also be intentional and mindful about having family time and maintaining a work-life balance. This intentionality can be done through scheduling family time and self-care activities that can be part of the doctoral journey. Students can harness cultural capital to persist intentionally by incorporating ethnicity and work-life balance in the counseling program.

Students can also participate in networking events with multicultural groups, both online and in person. For example, there are the Latino Researcher’s Network, National Latino Psychological Association, and Latinas Completing their Doctoral Degree Facebook page. These groups can provide a place for students to feed their soul by being around others who look like them and are facing similar challenges. In this way, students can create safety zones where they can seek validation, understanding, and support to counter oppressive experiences that happen in their doctoral journey. On a personal note, I engaged in these activities to feed my soul throughout my doctoral experience.

Given that Latinos have the potential of comprising one third of the college student body in the coming decades (U.S. Census, 2011), the counseling profession can continue grappling with and eliminating the negative consequences of power and privilege. This can be done by building critical consciousness as a profession and dismantling the dominant ideology that permeates the current understandings of professional identity development. In so doing, the profession can arrive a little closer to creating “developmentally focused counselor education programs” (Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990, p. 527) that include cultural diversity and social justice practices (Ratts et al., 2015) that foster “systemic change” (Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990, p. 524). In this way,
the profession can continue to evolve towards an inclusive and validating environment for all students.

**Limitations**

As with any qualitative research study, certain limitations exist in the interpretations and application of the findings. I detail three limitations of this study: my positionality as the researcher, sample size, and the diversity of the sample. These limitations can affect the degree to which the findings of this study can be applied to other populations, and opens the data to re-interpretation.

Because I was the primary researcher, the findings provided one viewpoint on the professional identity development of the participants. My positionality as a Latina critical race researcher lent to an analysis that focused on the ways in which power and privilege played a role in the participants’ experiences. From this perspective, the analysis of the data revealed that ethnicity was significant in the participants’ professional identity developmental process. In particular, my analysis focused on the ways that power and privilege in the predominantly White American counseling profession impacted the professional identity development of the participants based on ethnicity. In this way, the analysis was limited to this theoretical framework and may have been different if viewed from another perspective. An additional limitation to my analysis was the amount of peer review that I participated in. Due to time restrictions, it was not possible to perform more than one peer review. Having additional peer reviews may have revealed other themes from the analysis that I did not capture.
The sample size of eight participants likewise limits the application and transferability of the results to other individuals who are not similar to the population studied. Hence, the findings are limited to understanding the experiences of the participants and others who share similar situations (i.e. enrolled in a doctoral program in counseling and identify as Latino) and lack the ability to be generalized to other populations. Despite the small sample size, the depth and richness of the data gathered from three interviews from each of the eight participants led to the compilation of a collective story that was profoundly revealing. One of the benefits of this type of thick descriptions is that it provides a thorough understanding of how the participants make meaning of their professional identity development in a predominantly White American profession (Creswell, 2012; Hunt, 2011; Tuohy et al., 2013). Also, given the dearth of research on this topic, generating rich descriptions through a qualitative research study helps the field learn more about the personal introspective and subjective experiences of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Mertens, 2005). Through this method, multiple avenues of future research are generated.

The demographics of the participants in regards to gender and sexual orientation further served as a limitation to the study. The majority of the sample was female and heterosexual. The experiences of males and individuals identifying with other sexual orientations were not fully captured; therefore the results more likely reflect the experiences of female, heterosexual Latino doctoral students in counseling programs. By not knowing more about the experiences of men and others who identify with other
sexual orientations can limit the generalizability of the findings to individuals who share these identities.

**Future Research**

Based on the limitations of this study and from new questions that arose from the interview process, the following ideas for future research are provided. These ideas can help us learn more about the intricacies of developing a professional identity as a Latino doctoral student in a predominantly White American profession. More specifically, we can learn about the ways that power and privilege manifest in our profession and impact professional identity development for all students. Future research can help us learn what we are missing in our understanding of this complex process.

It may be worthwhile to explore the development of a model of Latino professional identity development in counseling programs. This model could be developed from the experiences of more than eight participants from various programs across the nation. The model could emphasize ethnicity and other marginalized personal identities that have not been incorporated in our current understanding of professional identity. Further, we could deconstruct our current models and explore the reason for the omission of race and ethnicity.

Another area for research would be to understand the experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs not in predominantly White American institutions. For example, how do students in Puerto Rico make meaning of their professional identity development? This is a unique question because students in Puerto Rico belong to a predominantly White American profession, yet may not face the same
racialized situations like Latino students in the U.S. Exploring their navigation of professional identity within this context would prove helpful in expanding how the counseling field understands the professional identity development for students who are not attending doctoral programs in the U.S. or for international students attending a predominantly White American program in the U.S. As the profession expands and grows internationally, it is likely that doctoral programs will emerge outside of the U.S.; thus exploring this topic in other countries would be helpful. It would be helpful because it can provide diverse understandings of professional identity development that can be used to validate the experiences of international students.

It was interesting to note that the Latino cultural value of spirituality did not surface as significant in the experiences of the participants. One participant shared how her doctoral education and her feminist scholar identity led her to no longer feel connected to her Catholic religious beliefs. She explained that this outcome happened because of value conflicts between her personal worldviews and those of the religion. Another participant expressed that her faith and religion held a prominent place in her professional identity development. Beyond these two experiences, no one else spoke to the relevance of spirituality within their professional identity development experiences. Given the cultural importance of this aspect and the lack of its emergence in this study, future research could explore the role spirituality plays in professional identity development for Latino doctoral students.

Racial identity was another aspect that can be further explored. The participants expressed that their racial identity was Latino and did not choose the racial categories
provided by the U.S. Census classifications. Exploring more about this choice would be another area of research as it possibly speaks to another area of resistance to the U.S. racial classification system. Interviewing or surveying Afro-Latinos or other Latinos who identify with a racial identity other than White may be another line of inquiry.

Another topic for future research would be to more fully understand the influence of guilt in professional identity development experiences. Guilt arose as a common experience for some of the participants; however the intricacies of how guilt played a role was not fleshed out. In addition, most of the participants in the study did not have children. Future research could explore the role of being a parent in professional identity development, especially given the importance of family in the Latino culture. It would be meaningful to understand how parents integrate this identity with their professional identity.

Finally, it would be helpful to learn more about the social justice identity and how it manifests in professional identity. Since all of the participants described having a social justice identity, it would be beneficial to more fully understand the process and purpose of this identity with development. Along the lines of identity, exploring more fully the ethnic identity process of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs would also be another line of research, as well as learning more about students’ levels of critical consciousness.

These additional aspects are significant because spirituality, racial and ethnic identity, being a parent, and having a social justice identity can further complicate professional identity development. Given that the results of this study implied that the
participants’ development was shaped by ethnicity and power and privilege, it would also seem that these other components may also play a role. Future research can address these aspects and provide a more holistic view on how Latino doctoral students integrate multiple identities into their professional identity.

Since this was a qualitative study, subsequent studies could explore the factors in their experiences from a quantitative viewpoint. For instance, how might mentorship or support systems serve as a predictive or protective function in professional identity development? Given the complexity of the professional identity development of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs, much qualitative and quantitative research could be conducted. This research would provide much needed depth and knowledge to our current understanding of the topic.

Conclusion

This study began to highlight the significance of ethnicity and how power and privilege played a role in professional identity development of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs. According to LatCrit, power and privilege pervade the educational experiences of Latino students. Power and privilege operate in U.S. society to maintain the current power structure that is White dominated (Valdes, 2005). Within this power structure, Latinos are perceived as inferior and are made to be invisible. The participants in this study experienced invisibility not only based on ethnicity, but also on sexual orientation, gender, and class. Yet, despite the efforts by the dominant academic and professional system to maintain the status quo (i.e. that power and privilege is held by White Americans), the participants reclaimed their power by sustaining themselves
within meaningful connections to family, culture, validating individuals, and to social justice principles.

Contrary to the established research on the topic of professional identity development for counseling doctoral students, the participants’ experiences told of a less linear process, and rather more like a rollercoaster. Their professional identity development was more like a rollercoaster because the participants had racialized experiences that made them doubtful about their position in the doctoral program. Since the participants faced moments of doubt and confusion, their professional identity developmental process ebbed and flowed depending on how they navigated the racialized situations. Due the role of ethnicity in the process, the participants countered these moments of doubt and were able to find confidence to persevere.

Due to the rollercoaster experience as it was influenced by racialized situations and ethnicity, the participants shared a collective counterstory that expanded our current understanding of the professional identity development process. Their counterstories of professional identity development tell the experience of resistance and disruption to the norm because, even though the power of the predominantly White American profession made them feel doubtful, they resisted. Their experiences, albeit ridden with moments of marginalization and defeat, tell of a much bigger picture, a picture full of pride, resistance, community, altruism, and perseverance.
References


Price, P. (2012). Race and ethnicity: Latino/a immigrants and emerging geographies or race and place in the USA. *Progress in Human Geography, 36*(6), 800-809.


Ramirez, E. (2011). "No one taught me the steps": Latinos' experiences applying to graduate school. Journal of Latinos and Education, 10(3), 204-222. doi: 10.1080/15348431.2011.581105


doi:10.1023/A:1026123508335


APPENDIX A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview Protocol

Step one: Introduce self and thank participant for their time.

Step two: Tell participant that the interview will be recorded, and begin the recordings.

Step three: Review informed consent and explain the purpose of the study.

Step four: Clarify any questions that the participant may have.

Step five: Provide a brief cultural description of myself.

Step six: Begin the interview process.

Part I: Professional Identity Development

1. Are you a doctoral student in counseling or related field?

2. Describe what being a doctoral-level counseling professional means to you.
   a. What brought you to pursue a doctoral degree in the field of counseling?
   b. Are you involved in professional organizations? If so, in what way?
      - In what ways have your experiences with counseling professional organizations impacted your professional identity development?
   c. What has been your level of involvement in these organizations and the profession?
      1. Have you presented at conferences?
      2. Held leadership positions?
      3. Published research articles?
d. How have you navigated the interplay between your personal and professional identities as you are becoming a doctoral-level professional in counseling?
   - What and/or who provides support throughout this process?
   - What additional services are needed throughout this process?

Part II: Intersection of Identities

1. Describe some cultural values, beliefs, or worldviews that you feel represent your ethnicity?

2. Describe the role of ethnicity in your professional work as a doctoral student.
   i. What role have your personal and cultural values played in this development?
   ii. How strong is this ethnic identity in your life, is it something that informs your decisions and experiences as a doctoral student or not?
   iii. What does your ethnic identity mean to you?
   iv. How do you perceive this relative to being doctoral students, in doctoral programs, and developing professional identities?

3. How would you describe the interplay of your ethnicity with your professional identity as a doctoral student?

Part III: Member checks and Exploration of Power and Privilege:

1. After reviewing the member check document, what is your feedback?
   a. How well did I capture the meaning of your experiences?
b. Where did I not capture your meaning?

2. I’m wondering if we could focus on some Latino Critical Race elements such as racism or oppression, ethnocentrism, discrimination, so when you look at those systemic aspects at your professional development within a predominately white American profession what role did belonging to a marginalized ethnic group play in that process do you think?

3. My final question is about my role as a researcher since I am becoming a Latina critical race scholar I want to have the opportunity to hear from you like my role as a researcher in the process, was I respectful, was I egalitarian, did I empower you, and what role did my white racial identity play if any?
APPENDIX B

1. How old are you?

2. What is your gender?

3. Do you identify as Latina/o (someone with origins in the countries of Latin America, including Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, South or Central America, or the Iberian Peninsula, regardless of race)?
   o If yes, what ethnic group do you identify with (Puerto Rican, Mexican, etc.)?
   o What racial group do you identity with (White or Black)?

4. Where were you born?
   o If not in U.S., when did you come to this country?
   o How long have you been in the U.S.?
   o If in U.S., where your parents born in the U.S.?
   o Are you a United States citizen?

5. What languages do you speak?
   o Which one do you consider to be your primary language?

6. How would you describe your socioeconomic background?
   o Are you currently employed? If so, what is your employment

7. Are you married?
   o If so, do you have children? How many?
   o What is the ethnic and/or racial background of your spouse?

8. Are you a doctoral student in counseling?
   o Are you a first generation student?

9. How many semesters have you completed?
   o What stage of your dissertation are you in?
APPENDIX C

Invitation Letter

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about the experiences of Latino doctoral students in counseling programs regarding professional identity development. This study is being conducted by Anna Flores Locke from the Counseling Doctoral Program at Montclair State University. This study will involve confidential in-person or online discussions about your experiences as Latino doctoral student in your counseling program. It will take about 45-60 minutes of your time for each interview. There will be between 1-3 interviews conducted at separate times.

If you are Latino, a doctoral student in counseling, counselor education, or related field, and attend a predominantly White American academic institution you may be eligible to participate.

If you have any questions, please contact Anna Flores Locke at 773-203-0057 or locke2@montclair.edu. Thank you for considering participation in this study. This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board (FY16-17-292).

Sincerely,

Anna Flores Locke, Doctoral Candidate
locke2@montclair.edu

Counseling Doctoral Program
Montclair State University
APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM FOR ADULTS

Please read below with care. You can ask questions at any time, now or later. You can talk to other people before you sign this form.

**Study’s Title:** Latino Doctoral Students in Counseling: Identifying within a Predominantly White Profession.

**Why is this study being done?** This study is being done to explore the experiences of Latina/o doctoral students in counseling navigating personal and professional identities within a predominately-White profession. The findings will be published in a dissertation and in future publications to share knowledge with others about this topic.

**What will happen while you are in the study?** You will be contacted by the researcher via email or phone to discuss the study in detail and to schedule a time for the first interview. During this first interview you will be invited to share your experiences about developing your professional identity as a doctoral level counseling student. After this interview, a second interview may take place if I need to ask you further questions to clarify your story. You will be contacted via email or phone to schedule this second and last interview. These interviews will be digitally audiotaped. These audiotaped sessions will be transcribed and kept in a password protected computer.

**Time:** This study will take about 45-60 minutes for the first interview and 30-45 minutes for the second and/or third interview. The time between the interviews will vary but will take place at least 4 weeks or at most 8 weeks apart from one another.

**Risks:** You may experience psychological feelings related to sharing your stories about your professional identity development as a doctoral level counseling student and how this experience is influenced by your various personal identities. Should you need to discuss these feelings further, this researcher can refer you to a counselor in your area. Since your story will be held in confidentiality and in secured locations, the risks on your employability or reputation will be minimized, as much as possible.

In order to maintain your privacy, please do not use real names of yourselfs, colleagues, organizations, contexts of employment or people you work with during interviews.

Data will be collected using the Internet; we anticipate that your participation in this survey presents no greater risk than everyday use of the Internet. Please note that email communication is neither private nor secure. Though we are taking precautions to protect your privacy, you should be aware that information sent through email could be read by a third party.
Although we will keep your identity confidential as it relates to this research project, if we learn of any suspected child abuse we are required by NJ state law to report that to the proper authorities immediately.

**Benefits:** You may benefit from this study by learning more about how your professional identity has been influenced by your various personal identities.

Others may benefit from this study by/because they will expand their understanding of the experiences of Latina/o students developing a professional identity within the field of counseling.

**Who will know that you are in this study?** You will not be linked to any presentations. We will keep who you are confidential by linking each transcription and digital recording to you by a confidential identification number that will be held in one secured place in this researcher’s locked office. Also, pseudonyms will be used in the final report and for presentations to protect your identity.

**Do you have to be in the study?**
You do not have to be in this study. You are a volunteer! It is okay if you want to stop at any time and not be in the study. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Nothing will happen to you.

**Do you have any questions about this study?** Phone or email Anna Flores Locke, 1 Normal Ave, Montclair, NJ, 773-203-0057, lockea2@mail.montclair.edu or Dr. Dana H. Levitt, 1 Normal Ave, Montclair, NJ, 973-655-2097, levittd@mail.montclair.edu

**Do you have any questions about your rights as a research participant?** Phone or email the IRB Chair, Dr. Katrina Bulkley, at 973-655-5189 or reviewboard@mail.montclair.edu.

**Future Studies**
It is okay to use my data in other studies:
Please initial: _____ Yes _____ No

**Study Summary**
I would like to get a summary of this study:
Please initial: _____ Yes _____ No

As part of this study, it is okay to audiotape me:
Please initial: _____ Yes _____ No

**One copy of this consent form is for you to keep.**

**Statement of Consent**
I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. My
signature also indicates that I am 18 years of age or older and have received a copy of this consent form.

Print your name here

_______________________________

Sign your name here

_______________________________

Date

Anna Flores Locke, MA, LPC

Name of Principal Investigator

Signature

Date

Dr. Dana H. Levitt

Name of Faculty Sponsor

Signature

Date