COUNSELOR EDUCATION IN TECHNICOLOR: RECRUITING GRADUATE STUDENTS OF COLOR

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ABSTRACT

The dearth of ethnic diversity in the counseling field requires increased attention to strategies for recruiting graduate students of color. A case study of graduate students of color was conducted to identify factors that encouraged and discouraged them from pursuing careers in counseling. The participants in this study indicated that diversifying the counseling field, exposure to helping professionals, location of the graduate program, lack of student diversity, and program admissions requirements influenced their decision to pursue graduate degrees in counseling. Based on the findings of this study, implications for recruiting graduate students of color into counselor education programs include the need for graduate programs to demonstrate a commitment to diversity, increased clarity in admissions requirements, and providing students with guidance through the admissions process.

Keywords

graduate students of color; recruitment; diversity; counselor education; admissions

RESUMEN

La falta de diversidad étnica en la profesión de consejería requiere mayor atención a las estrategias de reclutamiento de estudiantes graduados de color. Se realizó un estudio de los estudiantes graduados de color para identificar los factores que animaron y desalienta estos estudiantes en seguir carreras en consejería. Los participantes en este estudio indican que querían diversificar la profesión de consejería, la familiaridad con consejeros profesionales, la ubicación del programa de graduados, la falta de diversidad de los alumnos en programas graduados, y los requisitos de admisión influyó su decisión de inscribirse en una programa graduado en consejería. Basándose en los resultados de este estudio, las implicaciones para el reclutamiento de estudiantes graduados de color en los programas de educación de consejeros incluyen la necesidad de programas graduados que demuestren un compromiso con la diversidad, mayor claridad en los requisitos de admisión, y la orientación para los estudiantes a través del proceso de admisión.

Palabras clave

estudiantes graduados de color; reclutamiento; diversidad; consejero educador; admisiones

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LA EDUCACIÓN DE CONSEJEROS EN TECNICOLOR: RECLUTAMIENTO DE ESTUDIANTES GRADUADOS DE COLOR

The low numbers of students of color in post baccalaureate programs is a major concern for higher education scholars and practitioners (Griffin, Muniz, & Espinosa, 2012), as an ethnically diverse student body is thought to be an educational and social benefit to universities and graduate programs (Poock, 2007). Specifically, in counseling training programs, educational experiences in ethnically diverse classrooms are argued to increase the cultural competence of all students (McDowell, Fang, Brownlee, Gomez Young, & Khanna, 2002; Rogers & Molina, 2006). The importance of ethnic diversity in counseling, in specific, is reinforced by the American Counseling Association (2014) Code of Ethics that calls for counselor educators to recruit diverse students into graduate training programs. Regrettably, there is a void in the literature on strategies for recruiting graduate students of color into counselor education programs.

Further complicating the development of strategies for recruiting graduate students of color into counselor education is a limited literature base on: why students of color pursue graduate degrees in counseling (Olive, 2014), barriers for students of color in pursuing graduate education (Zhou, Bray, Kehle, Theodore, Clark, & Jenson, 2004), and strategies for recruiting ethnically diverse students at the graduate level (Chandler, 2011). As such, there exists a need for research examining what motivates students of color to pursue graduate degrees in counseling and for research on effective strategies for recruiting students of color into such programs (Griffin & Muñiz, 2011; Poock, 2007). In order to identify why students of color pursue degrees in counseling, we conducted a case study of students of color enrolled in a counselor education program in the Western United States. Our goal was to highlight factors that encouraged and discouraged graduate students of color from pursuing careers in the counseling field. It is hoped the findings of this study will aid in developing recruitment strategies to diversify the student populations enrolled in counselor education programs.

Counselor Education

The academic field of counselor education is concerned with the training of competent counseling professionals (Hill, 2004). Counselor education programs provide counselors in training with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary to work with diverse clients in a therapeutic setting. Counselor education programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (the U.S. national counselor education accrediting body) require students to complete coursework in the areas of ethical practice, social and cultural diversity, human growth and development, career development, theories of counseling, group counseling theories, assessment and testing, and research and program evaluation. (CACREP, 2016). Further, CACREP (2016) requires that counselors in training partake in skill development training through supervised clinical practice. The field of Counselor Education prepares professional counselors who will work directly with clients, in a variety of settings, to address their client's life challenges and promote growth and health oriented perspectives.

Recruiting Ethnically Diverse Students

Underscoring the need for this research study, the authors were only able to identify eight articles that specifically examined the recruitment of ethnically diverse students into graduate programs in counseling, marriage and family therapy, psychology, and school psychology. To further our understanding of recruiting ethnically diverse students, we also reviewed literature related to graduate diversity officers and graduate student recruitment. Based on this literature four strategies for recruiting graduate students of color were identified: university and program commitment to diversity, the need for personal contact with potential applicants, conducting outreach events, and providing financial support to graduate students of color.

University and Program Commitment to Diversity

The commitment of the university and the graduate program to diversity was identified as a preliminary condition to successfully recruiting graduate students of color. This is due to the need for support, in terms of funding and advocacy, from senior leadership and faculty to shift the cultural values and priorities of the institution (Griffin & Muñiz, 2011; Griffin, Muñiz, & Espinosa, 2012; McDowell et al., 2002). An initial step to this end is ensuring that the institutional culture is affirmative of ethnic diversity (Chandler, 2011; Griffin et al., 2012; Rogers & Molina, 2006). Prior to recruiting ethnically diverse students, campus officials are called to ensure that resources (in the form of academic, social, and psychological services) exist to support students of color (Chandler, 2011; McDowell, et al., 2002). Although the elimination of bias and racism on college campuses is likely unattainable, the existence of bias, especially from faculty was a barrier to increasing student diversity (Griffin et al., 2012; Rogers & Molina, 2006).

It also is recommended that diversity be addressed in the program mission (Robinson, Lewis, Henderson, & Flowers, 2009) and that issues of diversity be incorporated throughout the curriculum (Chandler, 2011; Proctor, Simpson, Levin & Hackimer, 2014). Specifically, McDowell et al. (2002) called for open discussion of diversity, privilege and oppression in all graduate courses. Finally, inauthenticity or misrepresentation in a program's commitment to diversity will likely hurt efforts to diversifying the graduate student body (Chandler, 2011).

Personal Contact with Applicants

Numerous authors discussed the importance of personal contact between university personnel and potential applicants for the successful recruitment of graduate students of color (McDowell et al., 2002; Quarterman, 2008; Zhou et al., 2004): This contact should be initiated prior to their application and continued throughout the admission process, and to new student orientation (Proctor et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2009). Further, it is recommended to involve faculty and graduate students in these recruitment efforts (Chandler, 2011; Griffin & Muñiz, 2011; McDowell et al., 2002; Proctor, et al., 2014; Rogers & Molina, 2006). Zhou et al. (2004) called on faculty to initiate contact with applicants of color in order to discuss the applicant's interests, provide information on the program, and answer questions. Griffin & Muñiz (2011) went as far as to suggest that without relationships with faculty, students of color would not apply to graduate programs.

Graduate students of color can be important allies in recruiting ethnically diverse students. Graduate students of color can play a mentor role to potential applicants by supporting applicants through the application process and after acceptance (Proctor & Truscott, 2013; Robinson et al., 2009). As such, Chandler (2011) and Rogers and Molina (2006) recommend that graduate programs provide applicants of color with contact information of ethnically diverse graduate students and alumni with whom applicants might contact for program related questions.

Outreach Events

The literature on recruiting ethnically diverse graduate students also addresses the need to raise awareness of counseling careers in communities of color and in creating pipelines with minority serving institutions (MSIs). In their study of African American School Psychologists, Proctor and Truscott (2013) found that prior exposure to the school psychology profession through program personnel or students, family members who attended school psychology programs, or completing undergraduate education at the same institution where the school psychology graduate program was located were key factors in study participants desire to pursue the profession.

Consistent with this finding, various authors expressed the need to increase awareness of careers in counseling through outreach events to communities of color (Chandler, 2011; Proctor et al., 2014; Proctor & Truscott, 2013). These community outreach events should target youth across a wide age spectrum, dispel myths about careers in counseling (Proctor et al., 2014; Proctor & Truscott, 2013), and

address pursuing a careers in counseling can help an individual uplift communities of color (Chandler, 2011). This last point is particularly important as Chandler (2011) found that the desire to empower communities of color was a driving factor in why African American graduate students pursued a career in school psychology--these students were willing to be numerical minorities in their program and in the profession in the name of uplifting the community. Finally, authors called for graduate programs to create relationships with MSI in order to form pipelines (Proctor et al., 2014; Rogers & Molina, 2006). Specifically, graduate programs were called to attend recruitment fairs, career days, and initiate cross faculty collaboration with MSI (Griffin & Muñiz, 2011; McDowell et al., 2002; Quarterman, 2008).

Financial Support

The importance of financial support for attracting students of color to graduate study is widely endorsed by authors. In fact, graduate diversity officers, who participated in the research study of Griffin et al. (2012), expressed that without financial support students of color would not attend their institutions. It is crucial to note that financial support in the form of assistantships, scholarships, grants, and tuition waivers were viewed most favorably (Chandler, 2011; Griffin et al., 2012; Poock, 2007; Proctor et al., 2014; Proctor & Truscott, 2013; Robinson et al., 2009; Rogers & Molina, 2006; Quarterman, 2008; Zhou et al., 2004). Proctor and Truscott (2013) found that student loans were not viewed as a favorable form of financial support--many of the participants in their study opted to work to pay for school rather than take student loans.

Although the above literature provides some important considerations for recruiting graduate student of color into counselor education programs, the voices of students of color are largely absent in the existent literature. In order to address this gap and to expand the literature on why students of color pursue counselor education programs, we conducted a case study of graduate students of color in a counselor education program in the Western United States. The authors sought to understand what attracts students of color to the counseling field in general and to their specific graduate program. It is hoped the findings of this study will provide insights into strategies that might be successful in recruiting graduate students of color into counselor education programs.

Method

Case Study Methodology

In order to better understand the motivation of graduate students of color for pursuing a counselor education program a case study methodology was implemented in this study. The goal of case study research is to examine the experiences of a bounded group of individuals, in this case graduate students of color, past their second year of study, and enrolled at a university in the Western U.S. (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Additionally, case study methodology can be used to explore a unique case that requires more detailed investigation (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). As has been noted, there is a limited amount of literature examining why students of color pursue counselor education programs and ethnically diverse classrooms are thought to increase the cultural competence of all students (McDowell et al., 2002; Rogers & Molina, 2006)—this this represents a unique case in need of more investigation

Positionality

The first author identifies as a cisgender, Chicano, counselor educator in his late 30's of upper middle SES. The second author identifies as a cisgender, Latina, in her early 50's whose socioeconomic status has encompassed working poor to lower-middle class status. The interest of the first and second author for pursuing this research study was to identify strategies for recruiting students of color into the graduate program at their current institution. Their biases were that students of color would be attracted to programs that espoused a commitment to diversity and social justice and programs with increased ethnic diversity in students and faculty. The third author identifies as a cisgender, Latina, graduate student in her early twenties of middle SES. Her involvement in the study began with being hired as a research assistant: this was followed by personal interest in how to diversify the professionals in the counseling field.

Setting

This study took place at an urban university in the Western region of the United States. To protect the identity of the participants we will refer to this institution as Western U.S. University. The university is a public, research intensive institution with a counselor education program that enrolled over 240 graduate students across four concentration areas.

Participants

Participants were recruited by way of the email listserv for all graduate students enrolled in the counselor education program at Western U.S. University—as was required by the IRB. Potential participants received an email describing the nature of the study and direction to contact the third author if they were interested in participating. A follow up email was sent to the graduate student listserv two weeks after our initial email, no further reminders were sent. In order to assure the anonymity of participants, the third author responded to all inquiries about the study. When participants indicated a desire to volunteer for this study, the third author arranged a meeting and secured informed consent. The study participants consisted of three Latinas, three Asian American females, one Latino, and one Asian American male. Data collection concluded once saturation was reached—following the 8th interview— when the authors believed that interviews produced repetitive information. In order to protect the anonymity of participants no demographic information was collected on their age, SES, or program of study and pseudonyms were used. Only the third author knows the identity of the participants.

Data Collection

All data collection was conducted by the third author by way of semi-structured, audio recorded, individual, face-to-face interviews. The interview protocol included eight questions that asked participants about their desire to pursue a career in the counseling field and reasons for attending their current graduate program. These questions include: "Can you recall what first drew your interest to the counseling field" and "Were there any specific factors that drew you to this program". Interviews ranged in length from 30 to 60 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

During data analysis the research team had follow-up questions for most participants. When this occurred the third author attempted to schedule follow-up interviews. The third author was able to schedule follow-up interviews with six of the eight participants. Unfortunately, the third author was unable to schedule an in-person follow-up interview with two participants: in both cases follow-up questions were emailed to participants and their email responses were treated similarly to the transcribed data.

Though the use of multiple data sources (such as interviews, document analysis, and observations) is encouraged in case study research (Yin, 2014), the authors relied on interview data in order to preserve the anonymity of participants. As of Fall of 2015, only 46 students of color (19% of all students) were enrolled in the counselor education program at Western U.S. University. When considering that our inclusion criteria required students to have completed one full year of graduate study, the number of available participants was even smaller. As such, the authors feared that utilizing additional sources of data would compromise the anonymity of participants—potentially limiting their willingness to share openly about their experiences and lead to retribution from faculty for what participants shared. Yin (2014) acknowledged that the use of a single data source (such as interviews alone) in case study research is common and acceptable.

Data Analysis

In order to meet the goals of our study we decided to examine the experiences of our participants as a collective. The research team followed three steps of data analysis. During the first step of data analysis the research team independently completed a line-by-line reading of each transcript and developed preliminary codes. The group later met to compare codes and resolve any disagreements. The

research team allocated 15 minutes to resolve any single disagreement and attempted to reach consensus, but when consensus could not be reached the interpretation of the majority was ultimately endorsed.

During the first step of coding the research team disaggregated data into push factors (those that encouraged students to pursue graduate training) and barriers (those factors that dissuaded students from pursuing graduate training). Whenever possible, the research team used participants' words as codes for segments of data. During the first round of coding over 300 segments of data were identified. The length of these segments of data ranged from a couple of lines to a paragraph. Sample codes included lack of community, faculty, location, family, and self-doubt.

For the second and third steps of data analysis, push factors and barriers were treated separately in order to identify the unique experiences that either promoted or inhibited entry into counselor education programs. In the second step of coding, the research team first consolidated similar codes within participants and then between participants. For example, the codes of knowing the campus, stay close to family, city, and location were consolidated into one code titled location. Additionally, codes unrelated to the research questions for this study were deleted. At the end of this stage, 20 codes remained.

In the final stage of data analysis, the research team again consolidated similar codes and deleted those codes that were less relevant. Those codes that best captured push or supportive factors and barriers for graduate students of color in pursuing counselor education were retained. This led to the identification of three push factors (diversifying the field, exposure to helping professions, and university location) and two barriers (lack of student diversity and admissions requirements). It is worth noting that no difference was found in these themes based on participants' gender or ethnicity.

Trustworthiness

Various strategies exist for ensuring trustworthiness, accuracy of interpretations and reduction of bias (Yeh & Inman, 2007); for the purposes of this study the authors' utilized reflective memoing, member checking, and an external auditor. Throughout the study the authors kept reflective journals where we documented assumptions, follow up questions for participants, and important decisions.

We also attempted to conduct member checks with all case study participants. Unfortunately, only three member checks were ultimately completed—this low rate of participation is due to the graduation of some study participants and other students taking full-time employment in the summer when data analysis was completed. Of the three students who provided member checks, all generally agreed with the findings. However, one participant felt that finances should have been added as a barrier to pursuing graduate training: As this theme was not expressed by any of the other participants, the research team decided against its inclusion. Additionally, an outside researcher familiar with qualitative research was asked to review the data and conclusions from this study. It was the opinion of the outside researcher that the findings and interpretations associated with this study were justified.

Results

Case study participants described three push factors (diversifying the field, exposure to helping professions, and location) and two barriers (lack of student diversity and admissions requirements) to pursuing graduate degrees in the counseling field. The following sections describe each of these themes and provide quotes to demonstrate how these themes manifested for case study participants.

Diversifying the Field

Seven participants provided 14 coded segments describing the perceived need for diversity in the counseling field and how this was a motivating factor in pursuing a graduate degree. The theme of diversifying the field described participants' desire for diverse program faculty, a diverse campus environment, and a graduate program that emphasizes diversity in its mission and curriculum. Leigh described her personal experiences in counseling and her frustrations with not finding a therapist with whom she could relate:

> I guess I ultimately just decided to pursue it [a career in counseling] because I felt like there weren't a lot of folks with my identities...in the counseling field...I was looking for counselors of color…and those people like weren't available. So I felt like I wanted that to be different...I just felt like it was a need and something I felt like I could do.

Many participants shared similar perspective to Leigh feeling that as people of color there were elements of their lived experience that could be best understood by someone of a shared cultural background. Generally, participants felt that by pursuing a counseling degree they could be role models and provide the counseling services that were lacking in their cultural community.

Similarly, Zoraida discussed experiences in counseling where she felt that she was not understood, because of cultural differences between her and her therapist, and her desire to enter the counseling field.

> And there was kind of a realization that there's a lack of diversity in the counseling field...I've seen a counselor or two and never really felt they understood where I was coming from or were making that much of an effort to understand where I was coming from. So again, having to perceive that need…to provide that level of service… in a more culturally responsive way.

One might expect that a negative experience in therapy would not only dissuade one from returning to therapy, but would sour one's opinion of the field. However, Zoraida was ultimately driven to pursue a career in counseling because she felt she would be able to connect with ethnically diverse clients and, thus, would be able to provide a higher standard of service. Although not all participants described negative experiences with therapy, seven participants did recognize a lack of diversity in counseling providers and a desire to increasing the diversity in the field—most with the specific motivation to improve counseling services to communities of color.

Exposure to Helping Professions.

Seven participants provided 17 codes explaining how previous exposure to the helping professions pushed them to pursue a graduate degree in counseling. Participants described exposure to helping professions through seeing family members working in and having personal experience in counseling related fields. Jon L. describes his professional experience in the criminal justice system, his realization that there was a need for increased advocacy for children and families, and how it pushed him to pursue a career in counseling:

> My past history work has been with criminal justice, working with pretty much urban families, mostly adolescents that were going to court systems...I would have to gather information for the court and I noticed that there was some bias in the courtroom, so I felt a need to be more an advocate for the kids in the family and there were just limitations because I was pretty much confined to like policies and procedures of the company I worked for.

Jon L. took time to research various professions that might better align with his personal and professional goals. In his research Jon L. learned that advocacy was an important component of the counseling field. Thus, he decided to pursue the counselor education program at Western U.S. University. Similarly, other participants described professional experience working with counselors, psychologists, and in residential therapy settings and how this inspired them to pursue graduate training in counseling.

Some case study participants described how having family members who worked in helping professions served as motivation to pursue a career in counseling. For example, Selma was exposed to women in her family who had jobs in a variety of helping professions.

> Well my mother is a CNA and a telemetry technician and she's been doing that since I think she was a teenager and my great-grandmother was a curandera [cultural healer] and… the midwife in the town and she did all the healing stuff and medical stuff… and my grandmother was very much a caretaker so that kind of healing tradition…was just something really important in my family tradition.

It should be noted that within Selma's culture, helpers are viewed with honor. This cultural honor and the fact that women in her family have served in helping fields allowed Selma to view helping professions positively and ultimately contributed to her decision to pursue a career in counseling. The vast majority of participants in this study had some form of exposure to helping professions that raised awareness in them about the counseling profession and inspired them to pursue a career in counseling.

University Location

All eight participants described how university location was a push factor in applying to their specific graduate program. Many reported being drawn to a program in an urban city and for others the location meant staying near family. Location as a factor for physical closeness to family is exemplified in Zoraida's experience. For her, the location of the university was important in order to have family support and also the ability to help her parents and sister. Additionally, in-state tuition made it affordable for her to attend a graduate program:

> I knew I wanted to stay local because I quite frankly couldn't afford to go anywhere else. And I knew that if I did go somewhere I'd never be able to get back here or not as often as I would like to see my family. So it was important for me to stay close and to continue to be able to be a resource [for] my folks, both of whom have pretty significant health issues and my little sister who also has pretty significant health issues.

Zoraida and other participants described the importance of familial support or the need to provide care to family members. Other participants described the need to support family either financially or emotionally and how the university's location made this possible.

Another participant, Ana, chose the counseling program for a different reason, to get out of her hometown and live in an urban area. For Ana, moving to an urban city was about having new experiences:

> Another aspect was that it was looking like, with my current partner, that we were going to settle in [a southern town] and that was never necessarily part of the future that I had seen for myself. And, being able to come to [Western city] for school was kind of an excuse to have like a last hoorah and live in a big city...and it was always a place that I could see myself living. So being able to come to Western city, work toward my degree, have my little last hoorah, and get the [Western U.S. University] education.

Though the counselor education program at Western U.S. University historically has attracted primarily in-state students, the out-of-state participants in this study described a desire to attend school in an urban city. Many of these students, like Ana, came from smaller and more rural areas of the country. These students were attracted to Western U.S. University in part because of its location and the opportunities that come with living in an urban environment. Although location meant different things for the participants in the study, location was a significant factor in the decision to attend Western U.S. University University for all participants in this study.

Lack of Student Diversity

Three participants identified lack of student diversity as a barrier to pursuing a graduate degree in counselor education. Specifically, these participants highlighted their disappointment with the rhetoric of diversity provided by academic institutions and the reality of minimal consideration of diversity. Jon L. best captures his frustration with the lack of student diversity in some counselor education programs:

> The second program after my interview um, what I saw was their mission was about embracing diversity but what I saw in the interview panel like the speakers were all just stereotypical white women so I like, okay that's not really making me feel comfortable joining a program with all faculty pretty much white women, or looked like white women.

Not only did the lack of diversity in applicants and program staff create a sense of discomfort in Jon L., he was frustrated by what he saw as deception in this program's recruitment materials which espoused a commitment to diversity. Ultimately, Jon L. decided to attend the program at Western U.S. University

because he felt the program demonstrated an authentic commitment to diversity as evidence in the diversity of program staff and faculty.

Leigh also describes hesitancy in pursuing counselor education due to a perceived lack of diversity in the field. As a woman of color, Leigh worried that her classmates would not understand her:

> I mean I share some of those experiences as a woman but I don't share those experiences in terms of like race identity. And I think that that sometimes limits the kind of people that are doing the work, this work. So I don't think that was necessarily about the program but I worried about that in terms of would that actually be true when I got into the program. Um… I think that was sort of one of my bigger hesitations.

For three of the participants, the lack of diversity within graduate training programs and within the counseling field created skepticism. Further, the participants worried about being token representatives of diversity and not being understood by classmates and program faculty. Fortunately, the participants felt that Western U.S. University provided a more diverse and racially affirming environment.

Admission Requirements

Three participants described admission requirements as a barrier to pursuing a graduate degree in counseling. The theme of admission requirements referred to students' concerns of meeting program admissions standards. This concern created self-doubts or lead to disillusionment in the participant when they felt they did not adequately satisfy the conditions for admission. As a first generation college student and a student of color, Andrew questioned his ability to successfully complete a graduate program: "Just the thought of whether or not I could do it and being a non-traditional first generation… it was tough I didn't know if I could do it or not." These doubts nearly prevented Andrew from applying. Ultimately, through the encouragement of an Uncle and faculty member, Andrew applied at Western U.S. University and, recently, successfully completed the program.

Despite his desire to pursue a career in counseling, Jon L. was discouraged from applying due to his perceived academic shortcomings:

> Yeah, it was like I said the requirements and it was pretty rigorous essay writing and the math scores, the GPA scores, all the paperwork was pretty intimidating because I didn't fit the requirement if you looked on paper it was poor, well not poor but it was just a low GPA to what the standards were, I didn't score well on the MAT.

Interestingly, Jon L.'s hesitance in applying to graduate school was based on his perception of what a competitive applicant should look like, not any hard data, and his belief that he would not meet these criteria. In reality, Jon L. was a well-rounded student whose professional experience made him a desirable applicant. Fortunately, Jon L. was encouraged to apply and helped through the admissions process by a student support staff member at Western U.S. University. Jon L. credited this staff person for his admittance to Western U.S. University.

Zoraida provides a different perspective on admission requirements as a barrier. For her, the interview process at Western U.S. University left her with a strong feeling of discomfort:

> The interviewing process was a trip…So I guess that was more than I necessarily bargained for in the sense that we watched a clip that was from "The Color of Fear". Which nobody told me that was happening. And again, it was kind of uncomfortable talking about these very sensitive issues in a room full of people I didn't know...Talking about race in a room full of strangers is difficult. It's not that I won't do it, cause I think it's important but it's definitely uncomfortable.

As part of their commitment to diversity and social justice, the interview process for the counselor education program at Western U.S. University requires students to engage in various dialogues about diversity and social justice. Zoraida perceived these discussions as a barrier due to a lack of comfort in engaging in these dialogues with a group of strangers. It might also be the case that Zoraida felt tokenized as she was one of the few students of color who were interviewed. Three participants in this case study described admissions requirements as a barrier to pursuing a graduate degree in counseling. This barrier is

likely due to a lack of mentorship on how to navigate the admissions process, self-doubts regarding one's academic qualification, and the challenges of going through the interview process as one of a few students of color.

Discussion

The results of this study are consistent with many of the themes in the literature regarding recruiting graduate students of color into counselor education. In particular, participants in this case study reinforced the importance of university and counselor education programs' commitment to diversity. Numerous authors have discussed the role of diversity in a program's mission statement and throughout the program's curriculum in attracting students of color (Chandler, 2011; McDowell et al., 2002; Proctor, Simpson, Levin & Hackimer, 2014; Robinson et al., 2009). Three participants in this study described the importance of counselor education program addressing diversity. Specifically, Jon L. described how Western U.S. University's commitment to diversity, as evidence through the diversity of faculty and the interview process, was what ultimately led him to enroll in its counselor education program. Going beyond the existent literature, participants in this study described how lack of student diversity and perceived inconsistencies in programs mission statement regarding diversity served to dissuade graduate students of color. This is evident in Jon L.'s experience of interviewing at a program where diversity was discussed in the mission statement and absent in its students and faculty. Additionally, Andrew, Jon L., and Leigh also described how lack of student diversity was a barrier to pursuing graduate study.

Diverging from the literature, participants from this study did not describe direct contact with faculty as a reason for pursuing graduate education. Chandler (2011), Griffin and Muñiz, (2011), McDowell et al. (2002), Proctor, et al. (2014), and Rogers and Molina (2006) all recommended that faculty and graduate students be involved in the recruitment of students of color. Only one participant, Andrew, discussed a previous relationship with counseling faculty as a reason for enrolling at Western U.S. University. A reason for this divergence might be the limited role of faculty in recruitment at Western U.S. University. This limited role for faculty might be due to the college that houses the counselor education program at Western U.S. University having a specific diversity recruitment office. In fact, Jon L. described how his positive interactions with this recruitment office ultimately led to him to attend Western U.S. University. Although the contact with faculty did not rise to a level of significance in this study, it is clear that connections with faculty and staff did positively influence two participants in this study.

The results of this study also reinforced the importance of educating communities of color regarding careers in the counseling field. Chandler (2011), Proctor et al. (2014), and Proctor and Truscott (2013) called for programming to increase knowledge about the counseling field, dispelling myths, and understanding how counseling could be used to empower communities of color. Though none of the participants described involvement in community outreach programs, such as those described by Chandler (2011), Proctor et al. (2014), and Proctor and Truscott (2013), seven of the case study participants described having previous exposure with the counseling field and how this inspired them to pursue graduate study. Through their previous experience with counseling, via receiving services, professional experiences, or academic experiences, these seven participants learned about the field and its potential benefits for communities of color. For example, Ana, Leigh, and Zoraida all described their motivation to pursue a career in counseling as coming from a dersire to serve their cultural community. Further, Jon L. entered the profession to be an advocate for children and families. As such, it appears that knowledge of and experience with the counseling field might increase the appeal of the field for students of color.

Although not widely addressed in the extant literature, location was a major push factor for the participants in this study. Only Proctor and Truscott (2013), in a study of African American school psychology students, discussed the importance of location for graduate students of color. Proctor and Truscott (2013) found that two thirds of their sample chose graduate programs near family members. Though all participants described the importance of location for selecting their graduate program, Andrew, Claire, Leigh and Zoraida specifically chose their training program to remain close to family.

This finding tentatively indicates that universities might establish connections with local communities of color in order to improve their diversification efforts at the graduate level.

Implications

Although this study did not examine specific strategies for recruiting students of color, participants in this study shared factors that encouraged them and discouraged them from pursuing counselor education. Though tentative, these findings might be useful for counselor education programs seeking to diversify their student populations. The students of color who participated in this study desired a graduate program with a demonstrated commitment to diversity. For three students in particular, the lack of diversity in some counselor education programs discouraged them from entering the counseling field. These participants looked for a genuine commitment to diversity, beyond the mission statement, and through all aspects of the program, including the program faculty, staff, and students. As such, we suggest that counselor education programs place increased emphasis on issues of diversity in their mission statements and throughout the curriculum of their program. We also suggest that programs recruit more diverse faculty. For as Leigh and Jon L. noted, a lack of diverse program faculty discouraged them from enrolling in other programs.

We also recommend that counselor education programs consider efforts to increase exposure of communities of color to professions in the counseling field. The majority of participants in this study described some previous experience with helping professions. These experiences not only made the profession tangible, but also taught these participants how counseling and therapy could be used to empower communities of color. Though additional research will be needed to assess the link between community education programs and desire to pursue careers in counseling, the findings of this study appear to tentatively indicate that exposure to the profession might inspire students of color to pursue a career in counseling.

Based on our findings, we also recommend that counselor education programs increase communication and clarification of admission requirements. More than a third of our participants described a lack of understanding or feeling overwhelmed by admission paperwork and requirements. Further, a lack of role models for how to navigate the admissions process can lead to self-doubt as evidenced by Andrew and Jon L.'s stories. We recommend that counselor education programs appoint a staff or faculty member to work with and support students of color applying to their program. Jon L. specifically expressed how meaningful it was to receive encouragement from staff during the application process.

Finally, we recommend that counselor education programs adopt more holistic admissions requirements. Various students expressed doubt over their ability to gain admissions into a graduate program, due to low standardized test scores or low undergraduate GPA's. Interestingly, these students had extensive counseling related professional experience as well as rich personal experiences. Fortunately, these students were encouraged to apply by Western U.S. University program staff. If counselor education programs reinforce that students' professional experience and background will be considered, perhaps more students of color might feel confident in applying. Although additional research is necessary to understand how to improve the recruitment of students of color, the findings associated with this study provide some initial indications of strategies to increase the ethnic diversity of counselor education programs.

Limitations and Future Research

The institution setting and the participants represent two limitations for this study. This case study was conducted in a counselor education program where the graduate student population is predominantly White. As such, the findings of this study might not be representative of the factors that encourage or discourage graduate students of color to pursue graduate training at more ethnically diverse programs. Additionally, this study focused exclusively on graduate students from a single institution. Griffin and

Muñiz (2011) noted that the majority of research studies on recruiting graduate students of color are single institution studies and expressed a need for cross institutional investigation of recruitment.

Unfortunately, graduate students of African American and Native American descents are dramatically underrepresented in the counselor education program at Western U.S. University and were not represented in this study. Therefore, the findings of this study might not be representative of the factors that encourage and discourage African American and Native American graduate students from pursuing careers in counseling. Future research on the recruitment of graduate students of color would do well to include African American and Native American students. Additionally, of the eight participants, only two identified as male and no one identified as transgender or queer. As such, we recommend that future research examine the recruitment strategies for the recruitment of male, transgender, and queer students of color.

Finally, we would like to note that this study focused on factors that encourage and discourage students of color from pursuing counselor education. Thus, we are unable to identify specific recruitment strategies that are efficacious in increasing the diversity of graduate student populations. Additional research should examine the efficacy of specific recruitment programs targeted at graduate students of color in counselor education.

Conclusions

This case study provides initial insights into the factors that encourage and discourage students of color from applying to counselor education programs. These findings are significant as they emphasize the role of diversity in the field and prior exposure to the counseling field in encouraging students of color in applying to graduate training programs. Additionally, the findings of this study highlight the need for counselor education programs to demonstrate a commitment to diversity beyond their mission statements and importance of having personnel to aid students of color through the application process. We hope that these findings provide some initial resources for counselor education programs that seek to actively recruit graduate students of color.

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