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In educational systems, students of color experience oppression and subtle forms of racism (i.e., microaggressions), often directed towards them by their peers and faculty in the program (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; McCabe, 2009; Sue, Lin, Capodilupo, Torino, & Rivera, 2009). As a result, students of color experience discomfort, self-doubt, exhaustion, and isolation (Gildersleeve et al., 2011; McCabe, 2009). Further, race related experiences (such as microaggressions) in academia have been noted to impact an individual's social connectedness (or sense of belonging) with peers, faculty, and the academic program (Clark, Mercer, Zeigler-Hill, & Dufrene, 2012; Solórzano, 1998; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). There is a need to quantify the impact of racial microaggressions on social connectedness in a heterogeneous sample that can be generalized to students of color in higher education, and more specifically to doctoral students of color in Counselor Education (CE). As doctoral programs recruit more students of color, we must strive to examine the dominant discourse that inadvertently oppresses students of color in academia, specifically the important role of mentoring in fostering social connectedness in CE programs. The purpose of this study was to address the gap in literature on the prevalence of racial microaggressions in CE programs and to examine how racial microaggressions and the moderating role of mentoring by one's advisor/dissertation chair could impact doctoral students of color's social connectedness within their academic program.

A descriptive, correlational design was utilized to examine this impact of racial microaggressions and the buffering relationship of relational mentoring on social connectedness. Relational Cultural Theory (RCT; Miller, 1976, 1986) was the theoretical framework used to boundary the relationship between racial microaggressions and social connectedness because it explained the overall negative impact of racial microaggressions on social connectedness. Results from this study indicated that racial microaggressions do exist in CE programs and negatively impact the social connectedness of doctoral students of color within their academic department. Further, relational mentoring by a dissertation chair/academic advisor did buffer this impact of racial microaggressions on social connectedness. The results provide important outcomes for counselor educators and CE programs as we strive to promote diversity, equity, recruitment, and retention of doctoral students of color. Implications for counselor educators, doctoral students, and researchers are discussed based on the results of the study.

EXPERIENCES OF RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS, RELATIONAL MENTORING,
AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AMONG DOCTORAL STUDENTS OF COLOR
WITHIN COUNSELOR EDUCATION PROGRAMS

by

Shreya V. Vaishnav

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Approved by

Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by SHREYA V. VAISHNAV has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____
Dr. Kelly Wester

Committee Members _____
Dr. Connie Jones

Dr. Ayesha Boyce

Dr. Carrie Wachter Morris

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Students of color continue to experience marginalization, in the form of racial microaggressions (Chakraborty, 2013; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; McCabe, 2009; Ong, Burrow, Fuller-Rowell, Ja, & Sue, 2013; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015; Sue & Constantine, 2003; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009; Wong, Derthick, David, Saw, & Okazaki, 2014). Microaggressions have been documented in classrooms, in interactions with faculty and peers, as well as in the campus environment (Henfield, Owens, & Witherspoon, 2011; Henfield, Woo, & Washington, 2013; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015; Sue et al., 2009). Experiencing microaggressions can have negative physical, social, and psychological implications on the well-being of students of color (Chakraborty & McKenzie, 2002; Ong et al., 2013; Schoulte, Schultz, & Altmaier, 2011). As a result of these consequences, students of color experience discomfort, self-doubt, exhaustion, and isolation (Gildersleeve et al., 2011; McCabe, 2009). Race related experiences in academia, as well as the abovementioned outcomes, also have been noted to impact an individual's social connectedness (or sense of belonging) with peers, faculty, and the academic program (Clark et al., 2012; Solórzano, 1998; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). However, most researchers have focused on the qualitative experiences of undergraduate students with racial

microaggressions. The impact of racial microaggressions on the social connectedness of students of color within their academic program, particularly for doctoral students of color, remains unexplored.

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT; Miller, 1976, 1986) can boundary this relationship between racial microaggressions and social connectedness because it explains the overall negative impact of racial microaggressions on social connectedness. RCT theorists suggest that increasing an individual's social connectedness through fostering individual relationships could possibly help heal the emotional wounds caused due to experiences of discrimination (Hogg & Frank, 1992 in Townsend & Mcwhirter, 2005). A mentoring relationship could be one such individual relationship that can foster social connectedness. At a graduate level, doctoral program completion rates across various disciplines remain low at 41% to 50% (Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), 2010; 2016). Mentoring has been recognized as one of several ways that can help doctoral students succeed through program completion (CGS, 2016; Lamar & Helm, 2017). Given this knowledge, fostering mentor relationships could help build this social connectedness for doctoral students of color, and buffer the impact of racial microaggressions on students' social connectedness.

Racial Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions are defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). In today's world, microaggressions perpetuated in verbal

as well as non-verbal ways are so subtle that the targets often blame themselves, thus leading to internalization of these experiences (Sue et al., 2007). For undergraduate students in academia, racial microaggressions occur in academic spaces such as classrooms, in interactions with faculty, peers, and teaching assistants, and in social spaces such as campus social events (Solorzano et al., 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2015). African American and Latinx undergraduates report feeling drained, invisible, frustrated, and alienated as a result of their experiences with racial microaggressions (Solorzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2015). These racial microaggressions reduce their sense of belonging and hinder participation in campus life (Solorzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2015). Participants report that peers and faculty have low expectations from them due to their minoritized status and question their intelligence in academic spaces (Solorzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2015). Sometimes, this has impacted their academic performance and students consider dropping a class or changing universities (Solorzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2015).

While most researchers have explored undergraduate students' experiences of racial microaggressions, a few researchers have started to explore these experiences among doctoral students, which have findings similar to results from research with undergraduate students (Constantine & Sue, 2007; Soloranzo, 1998; Torres, Driscoll, & Burrow, 2010). In African American doctoral students, experiencing racial microaggressions in their academic environment resulted in underestimating their own personal ability (Torres et al., 2010). This was associated with greater levels of perceived stress which led to an increase in depressive symptoms (Torres et al., 2010). Chicana and

Chicano doctoral scholars felt that their professors had lower expectations of them and often felt out of place in academia due to their race and gender (Soloranzo, 1998). Results from both these studies align with results from previous studies, which connect experiencing racial microaggressions with lower well-being, isolation, and lower sense of belonging (Ong et al, 2013; Soloranzo et al., 2000; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). While these studies generally provide insight into the impact of racial microaggressions, most of the studies at both undergraduate and graduate levels are qualitative in nature and focus on one specific racial and ethnic group (Ong et al., 2013; Soloranzo et al., 2000; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Further, results from these studies cannot be generalizable to other students of color across various disciplines due to a small and homogeneous sample.

Racial microaggressions are one of the most important forms of race related discriminatory experiences impacting engagement and well-being of minoritized graduate students in academia (Clark et al., 2012). First, racial microaggressions are added stressors during an already demanding time in their academic careers and second, because the subtleness of microaggressions often creates self-doubt for minority students (Clark et al., 2012). Therefore, it is important to examine how racial microaggressions can impact a doctoral student's social connectedness within their academic program and identify ways to mitigate these negative consequences.

Social Connectedness

Undergraduate and graduate students of color have reported experiencing repeated racial microaggressions within their academic programs which has led to disconnection from faculty and peers (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2011, 2013;

Solorzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2015). Students also indicated questioning their ability and fostering feelings of self-doubt as a result of experiencing racial microaggressions (Solórzano, 1998; Yosso et al., 2015). All these outcomes can have an impact on an individual's social connectedness in their environment.

Social connectedness is defined as “an enduring and ubiquitous experience of the self in relation with the world, as compared with social support, adult attachment, and peer affiliations, which represent more discrete, current relationships” (Lee & Robbins, 2000, p. 484). Social connectedness is an aggregate of distal and proximal relationships with peers, community, and society (Lee & Robbins, 2000). Economic, political, ethnic, and social forces such as racism, sexism, war, and other current events can disturb an individual's social connectedness (Townsend & Mcwhirter, 2005). Furthermore, people who experience acute or repeated interpersonal failures are more likely to experience low social connectedness (Lee & Robbins, 1998). Disconnected individuals may feel cut off from the social world despite having successful relationships with colleagues, professors, family, and friends (Townsend & Mcwhirter, 2005). This low social connectedness, or disconnectedness, can lead to self-alienation and loneliness (Comstock et al., 2008). However, a strong sense of social connectedness can lead to positive psychological adjustment outcomes (Gummadam, Pittman, & Ioffe, 2016).

An example of a form of social connectedness is a sense of belonging to school or to one's ethnic group. School belonging (sense of belonging specific to a school or university environment) was negatively associated with depressive symptoms, and positively associated with perceived self-worth, scholastic competence, and social

acceptance (Gummadam et al., 2016). A strong sense of belonging to one's ethnic group can also be a protective factor for those feeling disconnected from their college (Gummadam et al., 2016). Therefore, it seems that a higher social connectedness seems to have positive implications for students from minoritized racial and ethnic backgrounds. Given that social connectedness has positive implications for mental health and well-being and acts as a protective factor for isolation and self-worth, while the experience of racial microaggressions has a negative impact, it is important to examine the implications of racial microaggressions on a student's social connectedness with their academic environment (peers, faculty, academic spaces).

Racial Microaggressions and Social Connectedness

Current literature on the impact of racial microaggressions on an individual's sense of belonging/social connectedness is sparse, with only a few researchers having examined the impact of university environment and racial microaggressions with social connectedness (Liao, Weng, & West, 2016; Wells & Horn, 2015; Wilson, 2017).). In undergraduate Asian American students, perception of fit with university was significantly associated with sense of belonging (Wells & Horn, 2015). When these students felt that their culture did not align with institutional culture, they felt lower social connectedness. In undergraduate Black Americans, perceived racial microaggressions was positively associated with anxiety (Liao et al., 2016). In this study, social connectedness to one's ethnic community served as a buffer to experiencing anxiety as a result of racial microaggressions (Liao et al., 2016). However, experiencing racial microaggressions was negatively associated with social connectedness to the

mainstream community (Liao et al., 2016). In school psychology minority graduate students, experiencing racial microaggressions related to lower perceptions of belonging (Clark et al., 2012). Here, belonging was measured by assessing perceptions of overall social support from teachers and peers (Clark et al., 2012). While this connection is noteworthy, we do not have sufficient information on the impact of racial microaggressions on an individual's social connectedness within their academic program, especially for doctoral students of color. Therefore, it is important to understand how racial microaggressions may impact doctoral students of colors' social connectedness as this may in turn impact other outcomes such as anxiety, overall well-being, and completion of the doctoral degree.

RCT theorists like Miller (1976; 1986) and Jordan (2000) described experiences of marginalization as chronic disconnections leading to the *central relational paradox*. The central relational paradox is when individuals who are yearning for connection use certain strategies to cope with emotional distress caused because of disconnections (Comstock et al., 2008). In previous research, authors have highlighted that doctoral students of color often cannot be their authentic self and need to hide parts of their identity to fit in (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2011, 2013). Therefore, it could be hypothesized that marginalized groups may have a difficult time with growth fostering individual relationships, especially when they cannot maintain authenticity and feel disconnected due to oppressive experiences of microaggressions in academia. This disconnection with individual relationships can influence doctoral students' overall social connectedness with their academic program.

A core tenet of Relational Culture Theory (RCT) is that establishing connection fosters fulfilling human relationships while disconnection, as a result of unfulfilling relationships, is known to have adverse effects on individuals (Comstock et al., 2008). Comstock and colleagues (2008) asserted that relational development of individuals is linked to their social, racial, and cultural identities. Often, disconnected individuals feel hurt, rejected, isolated, and marginalized (Miller & Stiver, 1997). When individuals of color experience microaggressions based on their identities, they may experience the central relational paradox which in turn impacts their ability to connect authentically with others (Comstock et al., 2008; Miller & Stiver, 1997). These disconnections lead to feelings of isolation, shame, and rejection (Comstock et al., 2008). Increasing an individual's social connectedness through fostering relationships could possibly help heal the emotional wounds caused due to experiences of discrimination (Hogg & Frank, 1992 in Townsend & Mcwhirter, 2005). One example of this can be through fostering a mentoring relationship in the academic program. This could help build growth fostering relationships and buffer the impact of racial microaggressions on an individual's social connectedness. Therefore, through an RCT framework, feeling socially connected with individuals in a given environment is essential for growth fostering relationships which in turn can reduce the negative impact of racial microaggressions experienced.

CE doctoral students of color experience more pressure to prove themselves academically to their colleagues and faculty (Baker & Moore, 2015). They note that their peers from the dominant racial group are given more opportunities and preferential treatment for faculty mentoring opportunities (Baker & Moore, 2015). Despite this

information, there is limited research on whether experiencing these racial microaggressions impacts overall social connectedness with peers and faculty for doctoral students of color in CE programs. This is especially important since social connectedness is positively associated with perceived self-worth, scholastic competence, and social acceptance while negatively associated with depressive symptoms (Gummadam et al., 2016). To date, this causal relationship of the impact of racial microaggressions on CE doctoral students of color's social connectedness within their academic program has not been examined. Doing so would provide an opportunity to initiate discussions around the impact of racial microaggressions and a reexamination of program climate and structure.

Relational Mentoring

Mentoring plays a key role in supporting doctoral students in academia (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011; Curtin, Stewart, & Ostrove, 2013; Roberts, Tinari, & Bandlow, 2019). Effective mentorship can support doctoral students succeed in academia (Council of Graduate Schools, 2016; Curtin, Stewart, & Ostrove, 2013; Roberts, Tinari, & Bandlow, 2019). A supportive advisory (or mentor) relationship has been associated with a stronger sense of belonging (Curtin et al., 2013; Cockrell & Shelly, 2011) and form of support (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011) for doctoral students across different programs. Further, doctoral student satisfaction has been significantly correlated with advisor (or mentor) relationship and advisory practices (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011). Advising/mentoring could impact the experience of racial microaggressions on social connectedness with their academic program by providing formal support to doctoral students of color. While

mentoring/advising is important and relates to satisfaction and successful completion, it has not been explored in relation the social connectedness or impact of racial microaggression nor do we know if it can be a protective factor to some of the consequences of racial microaggressions, such as isolation and disconnection.

Mentoring and departmental culture is important for doctoral students in CE programs (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009a). When explored, program mismatch and lack of advisor/mentor seem to be main reasons why students leave doctoral programs in CE (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009a). However, most of the participants in these studies in CE have been predominately with White/Caucasian students (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). More depth is needed on program culture and mismatch, as reasons for the mismatch are unknown. Additionally, the needs of doctoral students of color in CE in relation to their academic program remains unexplored. Minoritized graduate students encounter lack of role models, culturally insensitive mentorship, limited financial support, and a negative program climate (Clark et al., 2012). It could be that students selected a program that they thought would fit their educational and career needs, but they experienced microaggressions related to their identity, which resulted in feeling disconnected from the program in general.

Yet, according to RCT, experiencing a positive mentoring or supportive relationship can also buffer the impact that racial microaggressions may have on overall social connectedness. RCT theorists recommend *relational mentoring*, which closely follows the principles of RCT in mentoring practices (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). Relational mentoring is “an interdependent and generative developmental relationship

that promotes mutual growth, learning and development within the career context” (Ragins, 2005, p. 10). However, researchers have not explored the relationship between relational mentoring and doctoral students of color in CE programs. Similarly, researchers have yet to examine the impact of relational mentoring on the relationship between racial microaggressions experienced by doctoral students of color and their social connectedness within their academic program. Investigating the impact of this relationship can help support CE programs revisit their mentoring framework with their doctoral students of color.

Statement of Problem

The Council for Accreditation for Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) determines the standards for CE doctoral programs. The 2016 CACREP standards underscore that “the academic unit makes continuous and systematic efforts to attract, enroll, and retain a diverse group of students and to create and support an inclusive learning community” (p. 6). There have been efforts to attract, enroll, and retain diverse groups of students in CE programs. Almost half of the students (41%) in CACREP accredited programs are students of color (CACREP, 2016). We know that doctoral students of color in CE feel that they need to ‘play the game’ to prove themselves to people in their department (Baker & Moore, 2015). They feel that their White counterparts are given priority for opportunities, especially mentoring opportunities (Baker & Moore, 2015). Often, racial microaggressions are enmeshed in these different interactions that students have with peers, faculty, and in the academic environment (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2011, 2013; Vaishnav, 2018). Yet,

despite this representation of doctoral students of color and their experiences in the program (Henfield et al., 2013), there has been only one study exploring the qualitative experiences of racial microaggressions within CE programs (Vaishnav, 2018). Further, little is known about the about the impact of faculty mentoring and experiences social connectedness of doctoral students of color enrolled in CACREP accredited CE programs.

Several factors influence the success and attrition rates of doctoral students in CE programs. Program-match and advisory support are important factors in program completion rates (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). Additionally, perceived success impacted the participant's self-efficacy and self-doubt (Hoskins & Goldberg). Participant's lack of connection with their faculty and peers lead to attrition (Hoskins & Goldberg). We don't know if this is true for doctoral students of color in CE. Yet, CACREP highlights the importance of representation of diverse groups of students. To support the success of doctoral students of color in CE programs, we need to explore their experiences of racial microaggressions, the impact of racial microaggressions on social connectedness within their program, and whether relational mentorship within the program buffers this impact.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to address the gaps in literature on the impact of racial microaggressions on doctoral students of color's social connectedness within their CE programs and to explore whether relational mentoring can buffer this impact. This study can provide further insight by examining how racial microaggressions impact social connectedness and whether faculty mentoring can moderate this relationship.

Addressing these gaps will provide important outcomes for counselor educators as we strive to promote diversity, equity, recruitment and retention of doctoral students of color. Finally, results from this study could lend itself to advocacy for students in CE programs.

Significance of the Study

Doctoral students of color experience racial microaggressions in their academic environment (Solorzano, 1998; Torres et al., 2010; Vaishnav, 2018), yet we do not have data on the prevalence of racial microaggressions, especially in CE programs. This study will establish this prevalence of racial microaggressions in CE programs. Further, racial microaggressions, ineffective mentoring, and lack of connection within a program can contribute to attrition. Addressing these factors in CE programs and providing effective mentoring as a protective factor to reduce the disconnection could possibly help increase retention of doctoral students of color. Findings will also support incorporating RCT and culturally competent mentoring practices for CE programs. These findings will also have important research implications. Results can strengthen the need to re-examine the current research mentorship competencies and practices. Findings will establish a path to examine other outcomes of RCT informed relational mentoring for doctoral students of color.

Research Questions

1. To what degree are racial microaggressions experienced by doctoral students of color in CE programs?
2. Does experiencing racial microaggressions relate to an individual's social connectedness within their program?

3. Does relational mentoring moderate the relationship between experiencing racial microaggressions and a doctoral student of color's social connectedness with their CE program?

Definition of Terms

Racial Microaggressions are defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental dignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). Sue and colleagues (2007) identified three forms of racial microaggressions: Microassaults, Microinsults, and Microinvalidations.

Microassaults are defined as verbal or non-verbal explicit racial derogations and are often intentional in nature (Sue et al., 2007).

Microinsults are messages that convey rudeness and are demeaning in nature and can be unintentional or intentional in nature (Sue et al., 2007).

Microinvalidations are acts that exclude, nullify, or deny the experiences, feelings, and thoughts of people of color (Sue et al., 2007).

Social connectedness (or sense of belonging) “is an enduring and ubiquitous experience of the self in relation with the world, as compared with social support, adult attachment, and peer affiliations, which represent more discrete, current relationships” (Lee & Robbins, 2000, p. 484). For the purpose of this study, social connectedness has been defined as the experience of the self in relation with the *academic program*.

Relational mentoring is an “an interdependent and generative developmental relationship that promotes mutual growth, learning and development within the career

context” (Ragins, 2007, p. 10). In this study, participants were asked to think of their faculty advisor/dissertation chair in their program while responding to the measure that assessed the quality of relational mentoring.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Racial Microaggressions

The term microaggression was first coined by Chester Pierce in examining subtle forms of racism experienced by African Americans that led to stress and negative emotional responses (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1978). Pierce and colleagues defined racial microaggressions as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’” of people from minority and marginalized statuses (Pierce, et al., 1978, p. 65). Three decades later, Sue and colleagues (2007) re-examined racial microaggressions in the context of clinical practice in counseling psychology and published a seminal article defining racial microaggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). In today’s world, microaggressions are perpetuated in verbal as well as non-verbal ways and are so subtle that the target often blame themselves, thus leading to an internalization of these experiences (Sue et al., 2007). Since the publication of Sue et al.’s article, several researchers have examined microaggressions in social, community, and academic contexts to understand the impact they have on the daily experiences of individuals

identifying with one or more marginalized (Solorzano et al., 2000; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015; Sue & Constantine, 2003; Sue et al., 2008; Torres et al., 2010).

Conceptualization of Racial Microaggressions

Sue and colleagues (2007) identified a gap in the conceptual framework for racial microaggressions as it relates to clinical and counseling settings. Specifically, the lack of taxonomy around the concept of microaggressions. Therefore, they developed a comprehensive taxonomy to explain microaggressions. The researchers identified three forms of racial microaggressions: Microassaults, Microinsults, and Microinvalidations. *Microassaults* are defined as verbal or non-verbal explicit racial derogations and are often intentional in nature (Sue et al., 2007). Examples include, using derogatory language to describe people of color or intentionally serving White patrons before individuals of color. *Microinsults* are messages that convey rudeness and are demeaning in nature and can be unintentional or intentional in nature (Sue et al., 2007). Examples of microinsults include, individuals stating they do not see color or asking a person of color how they got their job, implying that they may not be qualified or received the job due to affirmative action or quota. Lastly, *Microinvalidations*, are acts that exclude, nullify, or deny the experiences, feelings, and thoughts of people of color (Sue et al., 2007). Some examples are, repeatedly asking a 3rd or 4th generation Asian American where they are from or complimenting their English-speaking skills, implying that they do not belong in this country and are perpetual second-class citizens. Authors also identified nine categories of implicit thoughts and messages that people of color receive as a result of these three forms of racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007). These messages are: being an alien in

one's own land, ascribed intelligence, colorblindness, criminality/assumption of criminal status, denial of individual racism, myth of meritocracy, pathologizing cultural values/communication styles, second class status, and environmental invalidation (Sue et al., 2007). Researchers have utilized these nine categories as a guide for developing scales to measure racial microaggressions (Nadal, 2011; Torres-Harding, Andrade, & Romero Diaz, 2012).

Responding to Racial Microaggressions

Individuals of color who are victims of racial microaggressions experience a catch 22 while deciding whether to respond to the perpetrator (Sue 2010). If they confront their perpetrator, their experience may be invalidated, leaving the victim to wonder if they should have called out the behavior in the first place. Sue and colleagues (2010) outline five dilemmas that lead to this catch 22 in deciding whether to respond to the microaggressions.

1. **Attributional ambiguity:** Attributional ambiguity is experienced as a result of not knowing the intentions of the perpetrator. Persons of color spend time and energy trying to unpack the motives of the perpetrator rather than focusing on the tasks at hand. Sue labels these as “double messages.” On one hand the action of the perpetrator can be viewed as rational and bias-free but on the other, the intentions behind these actions are questioned when they seem to repeatedly happen only towards marginalized groups.
2. **Response indecision:** One of the greatest concerns for people of color is the consequences of confronting perpetrators. Therefore, individuals may experience

indecisiveness in responding to acts of microaggressions. The fear of negative consequences can lead to a dilemma in whether to address and how to address these aggressions when they take place.

3. Time limited nature of responding: Microaggressions can often take place in a larger context of communication (example: person of color being ignored in a conversation, opinion not valued). Responding right when they take place can disrupt the flow of the conversation. However, waiting to address it later may be too late since the conversation may have moved on to something else.
4. Denying experiential reality: Due to the subtle nature of microaggressions, when confronted, perpetrators often deny the experiences of the victim or individuals make excuses for the perpetrators' microaggressions ("I'm sure he did not mean it that way," "You are overthinking"). This leads to victims engaging in self-deception—by believing this event did not happen. Victims question their reality or ability to interpret events accurately.
5. Impotency of actions: Because of the above-mentioned reasons, victims may feel that no matter what they do, their actions will have minimal impact on the situation. This creates a sense of helplessness and hopelessness.
6. Fearing the consequences: Persons of color have an additional fear of the consequences of confronting perpetrators of racial microaggressions, especially if there is a power differential. For example, a student of color may fear retaliation if they were to confront a professor who was microaggressive towards them in the classroom.

Consequences of Racial Microaggressions

As a result of these implicit messages and the dilemma in responding to microaggressions, individuals experiencing microaggressions encounter stress which can lead to health disparities (Sue, 2010). This can show up as different physical, mental, and psychological symptoms that can be harmful over time if not addressed. There are four different effects of microaggressive stress: biological and physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral (Sue, 2010). Biological and physical effects include anxiety, somatic symptoms as a result of stress, and greater susceptibility to illnesses. Emotional effects of stress related to experiencing microaggressions include feeling exhausted, tired, and isolated. These effects are often a result of experiencing disconnection from others, such as peers, faculty, and the overall academic environment. Cognitive effects include making meaning of the microaggression experienced, disrupted cognitive processing, and stereotype threat. Students experience microaggressions in the classroom by peers and faculty which leads to students questioning their ability in academic spaces. Behavioral effects hypothesized by Sue (2010) are “1. Hypervigilance and skepticism towards dominant groups, 2. Forced compliance, 3. Rage and anger, 4. Fatigue and hopelessness, and 5. Strength through adversity.” Sue (2010) suggests that these behaviors are used in reaction to a negative and hostile environment as a result of microaggressions. All these effects are as a result of a direct impact of racial microaggressions as well as the toll of the dilemmas in responding to these racial microaggressions.

Microaggressions in Academia

Since Sue et al.'s (2007) seminal article, researchers have studied racial microaggressions in university, clinical, and community settings (Constantine & Sue, 2007; Henfield et al., 2013; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Michael-Makri, 2010; Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Sue et al., 2011; Wong et al., 2014). For the purpose of this study, I will be focusing on the current discourse of racial microaggressions in academia.

Racial microaggressions are commonly experienced in classrooms, social spaces, and work environments (Soloranzo, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). In classrooms, instructors and students belonging to dominant groups are most likely to be microaggressive and often, these acts of microaggressions are not remediated right away (Sue et al., 2009). Sue and colleagues (2009) state that microaggressions that go unaddressed by faculty in classrooms can reinforce the western worldview, while oppressing marginalized narratives. Suarez-Orozco and colleagues examined microaggressions in vivo in classrooms of three community college campuses by observing four participants as they attended their classes (Suarez-Orozco, Casanova, Martin, Kastiaficas, Cuellar, Smith, & Dias, 2015). Evidence of microaggressions existed in 30% of the classrooms observed (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). There were 51 recorded acts of microaggression which were placed under four categories: intelligence related, cultural/racial, gendered, and intersectional microaggressions (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). Authors identified the most common perpetrators of these microaggressions were instructors and the victims were most often students (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015). These experiences can have important

implications and can possibly lead to students of color feeling unsafe in classroom and social environments.

Researchers affirm that African American and Asian American undergraduate students experience psychological and physical outcomes such as exhaustion, isolation, self-doubt, feeling invisible, and somatic symptoms because of encountering racial microaggressions (Ong et al., 2013; Solorzano et al., 2000). For example, Solorzano and colleagues (2000) studied the impact of racial microaggressions on 34 African American undergraduate students attending three predominantly white, elite, research 1 (R1) universities, through a framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Participants experienced microaggressions in academic and social spaces within the university which impacted their academic and social life in their respective institutions (Solorzano et al., 2000). For example, within classrooms, participants often felt invisible, ignored, or stereotyped, which created self-doubt (Solorzano et al., 2000). Outside of these classroom spaces, these students felt discomfort, racial tension, and felt like they were not wanted (Solorzano et al., 2000). Participants also felt that people perceived them as threats in social settings (Solorzano et al., 2000). As a result of these experiences, students felt tired, isolated, and frustrated which in turn impacted their academic performance (Solorzano et al., 2000). Ong and colleagues (2013) examined the everyday experiences of 152 Asian American freshmen through measures of positive and negative affect, somatic symptoms, and racial microaggressions. Over three quarters (78%) of the students had experienced a form of racial microaggression in their everyday interactions (including university and social spaces) which predicted an increase in somatic symptoms

and negative affect (Ong et al., 2013). Therefore, as per these researchers, occurrence of racial microaggressions in classrooms, social spaces, and other interactions can negatively impact mental and physical health (Soloranzo, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Chakraborty & McKenzie, 2002; Ong, Burrow, Fuller-Rowell, Ja, and Sue, 2013; Schoulte, Schultz, & Altmaier, 2011).

Racial Microaggressions and Doctoral Students of Color

Graduate students with minoritized identities encounter negative race related experiences such as lack of role models, culturally insensitive mentorship, limited financial support, and negative program climate (Clark et al., 2012). Racial microaggressions may be the most important form of race related discriminatory experiences negatively impacting engagement and well-being of minority graduate students for two possible reasons (Clark et al., 2012). First, racial microaggressions are added stressors during an already demanding time in their academic careers and second, because the subtleness of microaggressions often creates self-doubt for students with minoritized identities (Clark et al., 2012). Despite this information, there is limited research on microaggressions experienced by doctoral students of color in academia.

While understanding the impact racial microaggressions have on undergraduate students of color is important, it fails to capture the impact of racial microaggressions on doctoral students in academia (Truong & Museus, 2012). Only a few authors have studied the experiences of racial microaggressions on doctoral students of color and affirm the findings from research with undergraduate students (Constantine & Sue, 2007; Soloranzo, 1998; Torres, Driscoll, & Burrow, 2010). For example, Torres and colleagues

(2010) examined the impact of racial microaggressions on African American individuals who were either doctoral students or recent graduates across several disciplines. Their results indicated that underestimation of doctoral students' own personal ability was associated with greater levels of perceived stress, which led to an increase in depressive symptoms (Torres et al., 2010). Soloranzo incorporated CRT to examine the experience of race and gender microaggressions among Chicana and Chicano pre-doctoral, dissertation, and post-doctoral fellows (Soloranzo, 1998). Participants felt that their professors had lower expectations of them and often felt out of place in academia due to their race and gender (Soloranzo, 1998). Results from both these studies align with results from other, more recent, studies, which connect experiencing racial microaggressions with lower well-being and isolation (Constantine & Sue, 2007; Torres et al., 2010).

Racial microaggressions have been documented in supervision interactions in the field of counseling and clinical psychology (Constantine & Sue, 2007). Participants in Constantine and Sue's study were black supervisees in counseling and clinical psychology programs. Microaggressions directed by supervisors towards the supervisees and their clients included invalidating race and culture, stereotyping black clients, cautious of providing feedback to supervisee in fear of being viewed as racist, focusing on clinical weakness, thinking of clients of color as the cause of their own issues, and offering culturally inappropriate treatment recommendations. As a result, participants spent time and energy processing their experiences as well as to find ways to cope with these microaggressions directed towards them (Constantine & Sue, 2007). Yet,

supervision is only one small component of a clinical doctoral program. So, while understanding microaggressions that occur in supervision are important, it leaves out the larger departmental and program culture where microaggressions have been documented and provides a limited view of the experiences of doctoral students of color in Counselor Education throughout their educational program (Baker & Moore, 2015; Clark et al., 2012; Henfield et al., 2011, 2013).

Doctoral Students in Counselor Education (CE). Results from qualitative investigations of experiences of doctoral students of color in Counselor Education programs indicate a prevalence of racial microaggressions (Vaishnav, 2018). Further, experiences of doctoral students of color are impacted by interaction with peers, department culture/program climate, and interaction with faculty (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2011, 2013; Robinson, 2012). Racial microaggressions are often enmeshed in these different interactions that students have with peers, faculty, and in the academic environment (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2011, 2013; Vaishnav, 2018).

The first factor that influences doctoral students of color's experiences is interactions with peers. Henfield and colleagues (2013) examined phenomenological experiences of 11 African American CE doctoral students within their university, classroom experiences, program, and as advisees. Many of the experiences of participants refer to experiences of racial microaggressions. For example, one participant felt that her peers did not take her contributions seriously in classroom discussions, while another participant felt that he had to work twice as hard to prove himself in his department

(Henfield et al., 2011). Supporting, and extending the findings from this study, Henfield and colleagues conducted a similar study in 2013 with 11 African American CE doctoral students using a CRT approach to focus on the challenges experienced by these doctoral students. In this study, students felt disconnected from their peers due to poor quality of program orientation and lack of classroom interactions (Henfield et al., 2013). Poor quality of program orientation led to poor relationships with White peers (Henfield et al., 2013). One participant further added that peer relationships were disrupted due to faculty's preferential treatment towards White students (Henfield et al., 2013). Interactions in classrooms were disrespectful and classmates would question participants' opinions, giving the impression that participants were not competent enough. Some participants did not enter their programs with a cohort and felt isolated in their classes (Henfield et al., 2013).

Continuing to expand the work of Henfield and colleagues, Baker and Moore (2015) conducted a study to qualitatively examine the experiences of underrepresented doctoral students in CE programs using a CRT lens. Similar to Henfield et al. (2013), these doctoral students also felt they had to work harder to be viewed as equal to their white peers (Baker & Moore, 2015). Peers would make assumptions based on stereotypes associated with participants' racial identity. For example, a Japanese-Chinese-Hawaiian participant noted that his peers would assume he was good at quantitative research and statistics, perpetuating the minority model myth, even when he had previously expressed that he was not good at it (Baker & Moore, 2015).

More recently, Vaishnav (2018) conducted a study that explored doctoral students' experiences of racial microaggressions in their Counselor Education programs. Doctoral students of color reported feeling disconnected from peers often because they were the only person of color in their cohort and/or did not feel supported by their peers who belonged to the dominant racial group. Further, participants reported having to work harder than their peers in order to be viewed as their equal by faculty (Vaishnav, 2018). One participant shared that she was the only person of color in her cohort of three and even though she shared some of her struggles with her cohort, they never reached out to her (Vaishnav, 2018). Some participants felt that they had to hide parts of themselves for the concern of being stereotyped by peers and faculty in their program (Vaishnav, 2018).

The second factor identified was students' interactions with faculty. Doctoral students of color noted that faculty's actions either exemplified cultural competence or contradicted it (Baker & Moore, 2015). Doctoral students of color experienced disrespect due to faculty's cultural incompetence. One participant shared that her advisor discouraged her from conducting research on black females because many people were conducting similar research (Henfield et al., 2013). Participants also felt that their faculty set expectations of them to get along with all their peers. As a result, CE students felt they had to pretend or hide their identities and code switch to facilitate the perception to their faculty that they got along with their peers. Participants also reported instances of faculty being culturally insensitive towards their racial and ethnic identities (Henfield et al., 2013). Often, participants were called on in class to speak on behalf of their racial identity and culture (Vaishnav, 2018). Baker and Moore's findings are consistent with

Henfield and colleagues (2011; 2013) in the sense that participants stated that they had to “play the game” by masking their cultural identity or using it in order to succeed (Baker & Moore, 2015). This was because participants were expected to assimilate to the dominant culture. Finally, participants also reported instances in which faculty favored their White peers for opportunities in times of conflict and for mentoring relationships (Baker & Moore, 2015). One participant shared that she was often the last to find out about opportunities (Vaishnav, 2018). Further, when she did find out, it was through her peers who had been informed of the opportunities by the faculty in her program (Vaishnav, 2018).

The last factor that emerged from different research studies is the department/program climate (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2011, 2013). Anecdotal experiences of environmental racial microaggressions have been documented to commonly occur in academic programs (Baker & Moore, 2015). In Henfield and colleagues’ study in 2013, participants felt isolated due to underrepresentation of doctoral students of color (Henfield et al., 2013). Many participants reported being the only person of color in their cohort (Vaishnav, 2018). One participant shared a negative interaction with a master’s student and when she reached out for support, faculty did not step in to help whereas when her white peer reached out for a similar issue, a faculty stepped in immediately to address it (Vaishnav, 2018). Prior marginalized experiences as a minority student in academia also aided to experiencing isolation (Henfield et al., 2013). These qualitative results affirm that minoritized individuals in CE doctoral programs have oppressive experiences. While most of these experiences are a result of microaggressions,

authors do not explicitly connect these experiences to racial microaggressions. Measuring racial microaggressions and its outcome on social connectedness within the academic program may provide an important link to understanding the outcomes of racial microaggressions for doctoral students of color.

In previous qualitative studies, researchers note that marginalized doctoral students experience disconnection and isolation as a result of oppressive experiences (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2011, 2013). Yet, there are no quantitative studies examining the impact of these oppressive experiences (i.e., racial microaggressions) to sense of social connectedness within the academic program. To date, there is only one quantitative study examining the prevalence of racial microaggressions on master's and doctoral students of color in Counselor Education programs. Participants were 187 master's and doctoral level students from CACREP accredited programs across the nation (Michael-Makri, 2010). Sixty-two percent of the participants were masters level students and 38% were doctoral level (Michael-Makri, 2010). The Daily Life Experiences scale (DLE; Harrell, 1997) indicated the degree to which participants experienced racial microaggressions in their academic programs and whether there was a difference in prevalence within racial and ethnic groups, within doctoral and masters level students, and gender. Masters and doctoral level students experienced moderate level of racial microaggressions in their counseling programs (Michael-Makri, 2010). There were no statistically significant differences between racial groups, between masters' and doctoral level students, and gender of participants in their experiences of racial microaggressions. The author highlighted the need to continue examining racial

microaggressions in counseling programs, specifically, encouraging faculty to examine their own racial identity development, promote diverse cultural programs, and work on faculty-student collaboration. This study only measures the prevalence of racial microaggressions in master's and doctoral level students of color in CACREP accredited programs but does not examine the impact of racial microaggressions on individual's different outcome variables such as social connectedness.

Despite documentation of racial microaggressions experienced, little is known about its impact on social connectedness among peers and faculty within one's academic department. While students have identified disconnection and sense of isolation, this has not yet been explored specific to one's academic department, nor specifically among doctoral students in CE. Specifically, the needs and challenges of doctoral students of color as they navigate their program culture have not yet been explored. Exploring the impact of racial microaggressions on doctoral students of color in CE programs is imperative given the desire to increase the diversity of students and faculty within the field (CACREP, 2016). As doctoral programs recruit more students of color, we must strive to examine the dominant discourse that inadvertently oppresses students of color in academia, resulting in students feeling isolated or disconnected. Additionally, it is important to explore factors that may facilitate, or buffer, the impacts of racial microaggressions on students of color, such as the role of mentoring in fostering social connectedness in CE programs.

Social Connectedness

Social connectedness is defined as “an enduring and ubiquitous experience of the self in relation with the world, as compared with social support, adult attachment, and peer affiliations, which represent more discrete, current relationships” (Lee & Robbins, 2000, p. 484). It is an aggregate of distal and proximal relationships with peers, community, and society (Lee & Robbins, 2000). Current events, economic factors, war, and racism are some factors that can impact this social connectedness (Townsend & Mcwhirter, 2005).

Racial microaggressions are prevalent in the day to day experiences of people of color and can have negative implications on social connectedness for students of color (Sue et al., 2007). Repeated exposure to racial microaggressions creates interpersonal conflicts, especially when perpetrators are colleagues, peers, and faculty in an academic environment. Individuals who experience repeated interpersonal failures are also likely to experience low social connectedness (Lee & Robbins, 2000). Sue and colleagues refer to disconnection as an emotional effect of microaggressive stress. This low social connectedness, or disconnectedness, can lead to self-alienation and loneliness (Bellingham, Cohen, Jones, & Spaniol, 1989). Students’ lack of connection with their faculty and peers can also lead to attrition (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005).

Yet, while Sue and colleagues highlight the emotional effect of racial microaggressions, quantitative research on the relationship between racial microaggressions and social connectedness is sparse. From the few studies conducted, we know that university environment and racial microaggressions impact an individual’s

social connectedness which in turn can impact well-being in students of color (Liao, Weng, & West, 2016; Wells & Horn, 2015). For example, in a sample of 116 undergraduate Asian American students, perception of fit with university was significantly associated with sense of belonging (Wells & Horn, 2015). When these students felt that their culture did not align with institutional culture, they felt a lower social connectedness (Wells & Horn, 2015). In another study of 126 undergraduate Black Americans, perceived racial microaggressions were positively associated with anxiety and negatively associated with social connectedness to one's mainstream community (Liao et al., 2016). However, in this study, social connectedness to one's ethnic community served as a buffer to experiencing anxiety as a result of racial microaggressions (but important to note that it did not alter one's connectedness to the students' mainstream community; Liao et al., 2016). Continuing to support the social disconnection felt as a result of racial microaggressions, experiencing racial microaggressions was related to lower perceptions of belonging among 87 school psychology minority graduate students (Clark et al., 2012). Here, belonging was measured by assessing perceptions of overall social support from teachers and peers (Clark et al., 2012). While results from these studies are noteworthy, we do not have enough information on the impact of racial microaggressions on an individual's social connectedness within their academic program, especially for doctoral students of color.

Relational Mentoring

While exploring the impact of racial microaggressions on social connectedness within one's academic program is important, it is also imperative to explore factors that

may positively influence social connectedness as well. One way to support social connection in academia can be through mentoring relationships. Traditional academic mentoring can be defined as a relationship between two individuals where one individual is more experienced and plays a role in supporting the advancement of the other individual's career (Fletcher & Ragins, 2008). Ragins argues for *relational mentoring* and defines this as “an interdependent and generative developmental relationship that promotes mutual growth, learning and development within the career context” (Ragins, 2005, p. 10). RCT can provide an effective framework for mentoring in academia which can lead to growth fostering relationships between the mentor and the mentee.

There is scarcity in research examining the relationship between mentoring and doctoral students; however, when mentoring has been explored, it has been found to have positive results. In one study of 841 international and domestic students who had completed one year of their doctoral studies, advisor support fostered a stronger sense of belonging (Curtin, Stewart, & Ostrove, 2013). In another study of 141 doctoral students, participants identified having a mentor (formal or informal mentor/student relationship) as an important form of support (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011). Further, student satisfaction with advisor relationship was significantly correlated to advisor support and advisory practices (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011). Authors recommend that doctoral programs could pay close attention to relationships between students and their advisors (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011). Yet, with such positive results being provided out of these few studies, a limitation to studies highlighting the impact of the mentoring specifically to overall social connection is needed. It also needs to be noted that the term mentoring is used

interchangeably with advising across research studies, creating confusion and difficulty in parceling out what is being explored.

In CE programs, factors such as advising, mentoring, and department culture have a positive impact on progress and attrition/persistence for doctoral students (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) conducted a qualitative investigation of 33 doctoral students in CE programs to investigate the level of persistence in their respective programs. Program-match was an important factor in program completion rates among their participants, while lack of connection with their faculty and peers led to attrition. Protivnak and Foss (2009) explored themes that influenced experiences in CE among 141 doctoral students from CACREP (88.7%) and non-CACREP accredited programs completed a survey of open-ended questions. Factors that positively and negatively influenced experiences of CE students were departmental culture, mentoring, academics, support systems, and personal issues (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). While the sample consisted of majority participants identifying as Caucasian (70.9%), the authors found these results to be applicable to participants of color in their sample as well (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). A limitation to both these studies was that participants were predominantly identified as Caucasian (84% and 70.9%, respectively) and therefore these results cannot be generalized to include experiences of doctoral students of color in Counselor Education programs (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). This can be supported by the idea provided by Borders et al. (2012) that suggests that mentoring is less effective if the mentee perceives racial or gender bias or if there is a culture of competition in the counseling program.

Theoretical Framework: Relational Culture Theory

Relational Culture Theory (RCT; Miller, 1986, 2012) is a theoretical framework that helps boundary the relationship between racial microaggressions, social connectedness, and mentoring. RCT came into fruition in the late 1970s in Psychiatrist Jean Miller's book on *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (2012). Traditional theories emphasize individuation, separation, and autonomy as goals towards a healthier lifestyle (Comstock, Hammer, Strentzch, Canon, Parsons, & Salazar II, 2008). However, these theoretical orientations fail to acknowledge the multicultural differences of women, people of color, and other marginalized individuals (Comstock et al., 2008). Miller noticed through her clinical work with women that the role of relationships did not match those roles outlined in traditional theories, moving her to write a book highlighting the differences of contextual and relational experiences of women (1976). As a result, four women, including Miller, began meeting to highlight the incongruencies found between their work with women and the traditional theories as well as to brainstorm alternate theories to support their experiences (Comstock et al., 2008). As a result, Stone Center Relational Culture Theory was formed and over time, it developed into Relational Culture Theory as conversations expanded beyond women to other marginalized groups (Comstock et al., 2008).

RCT is unique from other traditional theories because it highlights that relational development is linked to social identities (Miller, 1986). RCT theorists consider the role of power and marginalization in the lives of individuals and believe that these oppressive experiences consequently impact the mental health of marginalized groups (Comstock et

al., 2008). They also acknowledge the centrality of “healing through mutual, empathetic, and growth fostering relationships” by mutually breaking down barriers of power and oppression in different relationships (Comstock et al., 2008, p. 279).

RCT is multiculturally and social justice informed because it strives to identify the context and sociocultural challenges that impact an individual’s ability to sustain growth fostering relationships. RCT complements the social justice movement by affirming that “although oppression is often institutionalized at societal levels, it is necessarily enacted in the context of interpersonal relationships” (Birrell & Freyd, 2006, p. 52 in Comstock et al., 2008), and acknowledging that “the fragmentation caused by the violation of human bonds can only be healed by new and healing human bonds” (p. 57). RCT is also based on the assumption that isolation, shame, microaggressions, marginalization, and many other negative experiences are relational violations and traumas that hinder a society from functioning effectively (Comstock et al., 2008; Lenz, 2016).

RCT provides a unique approach to theorizing human relationships which is not solely based on western-world ideologies of individualization and autonomy (Comstock et al., 2008). Instead, it is based on the assumption that happiness and well-being are a result of growth-fostering relationships (Lenz, 2016 & Jordan, 2008, 2010). RCT theorists believe *that mutual empathy, relationship authenticity, and response ability/empowerment* are core to growth fostering relationships (Jordan, Walker, and Hartling, 2004). The core tenets of RCT, as highlighted by (Jordan, 2000, p. 1007) are:

1. People grow through and toward relationship through-out the life span.

2. Movement toward mutuality rather than separation characterizes mature functioning.
3. The ability to participate in increasingly complex and diversified relational networks characterizes psycho-logical growth.
4. Mutual empathy and mutual empowerment are at the core of growth-fostering relationships.
5. Authenticity is necessary for real engagement in growth-fostering relationships.
6. When people contribute to the development of growth-fostering relationships, they grow as a result of their participation in such relationships.
7. The goal of development is the realization of increased relational competence over the life span.

Another core value of RCT is *connection*. Examining instances of disconnection can help understand experiences of marginalization (Miller, 1986). RCT draws upon traditional theorists such as Adler who believe that belonging is important in an individual's psychological development (Comstock et al., 2008). For growth fostering relationships, individuals need relational connection which can be obtained through '*relational awareness*.' Relational awareness is defined as the ability to identify, resist, and overcome disconnections (Miller, 1986). Miller believes that the outcome of connection in relationships are experienced through the *5 good things*: "a sense of zest, a better understanding of self, other, and the relationship, a sense of worth, an enhanced capacity to act or be productive, and an increased desire for more connection" (1986, p.

3). When the 5 good things are present in connections, they can lead to mutually empathetic, authentic, and growth fostering relationships.

On the flip side, theorists believe that unresolved disconnections lead to feelings of isolation. Isolation in turn leads to shame which pushes individuals to hide parts of self from others, often forming strategies to survive and trying to reconnect in these non-mutual relationships. This experience has been defined as the *central relational paradox*. The central relational paradox is experienced when individuals who are yearning for connection use certain strategies to cope with emotional distress caused because of disconnections (Comstock et al., 2008). These strategies are used to avoid perceived risks, feelings of hurt, and rejection. However, Miller and Stiver note that these strategies have the opposite effect and cause further disconnect and isolation (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

Comstock and colleagues (2008) further state that individuals could realize and acknowledge these feelings of isolation and shame. This fear of disconnection among individuals creates a yearning for others to empathetically acknowledge their vulnerabilities (Comstock et al., 2008). Day-Vines and colleagues (2016) recommend using broaching to empathetically connect with an individual's experiences of marginalization. I hypothesize that faculty mentors in academic programs could step into this role of empathetic support – through relational mentoring - to guide marginalized students in re-connecting and forming growth fostering relationships.

A factor that plays a role in this process of connection-disconnection is *relational images* (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Miller and Stiver describe relational images as

“expressions of individuals’ expectations and fears of how others will respond to them” (Miller & Stiver, 1997 in Comstock et al., 2008, p. 284). These expectations are set by individuals based on their past experiences of chronic disconnections. For example, an individual with past experiences of discrimination may not expect equity in any context in future interactions (Comstock et al., 2008). Comstock and colleagues noted these as “chronic exposure to disaffirming stimuli” such as racism and racial microaggressions. These lead to feelings of self-doubt and unworthiness of growth-fostering relationships (Walker, 2005 in Comstock et al., 2008, p. 284). Relational images can hinder authentic and growth fostering relationships and altering these images can be a central challenge for mentoring relationships.

RCT theorists also introduce the term *controlling images*, defined as messages that normalize experiences of marginalization. These are especially explored in context of dominant groups promoting certain messages regarding marginalized groups, thus controlling the narrative and normalizing systemic oppression (Comstock et al., 2008). Jordan (2002) suggested that building diverse communities of resistance in schools, universities, and workplaces can challenge these controlling images. RCT informed mentoring that focuses on authenticity, mutuality, empathy, and empowerment could be especially beneficial for marginalized groups in these institutions. Relational mentoring within institutions can validate marginalized experiences and provide an opportunity to connect through a growth fostering relationship. Theorists also caution regarding ‘*power over dynamics*.’ This takes place in an unresolved conflict in which the person with the least power becomes inauthentic.

Racial Microaggressions, Social Connectedness, and Mentoring through an RCT

Lens

Theorists like Miller and Jordan describe experiences of marginalization as chronic disconnections leading to the central relational paradox, wherein individuals try to hide parts of self to connect with individuals furthering them into isolation. In previous research, authors have highlighted that doctoral students of color often cannot be their authentic self and need to hide parts of their identity to fit in (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2011, 2013). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that marginalized groups may have a difficult time with growth fostering relationships, especially when they cannot maintain authenticity and feel disconnected due to oppressive and microaggressive experiences in academia.

Establishing connection is an integral aspect of RCT that fosters fulfilling relationships (Comstock et al., 2008). Comstock and colleagues (2008) assert that relational development of individuals is linked to their social, racial, and cultural identities. Disconnection, as a result of unfulfilling relationships, is known to have adverse effects on individuals. Disconnected individuals often feel hurt, rejected, isolated, and marginalized (Miller & Stiver, 1997). When individuals of color experience microaggressions based on their identities, they may experience the central relational paradox. For example, when facing a catch 22 dilemma in responding to racial microaggressions, an individual may fear retaliation and avoid confronting the perpetrator, especially if there is a power difference in the relationship. This could lead to build up feelings of fear, frustration, and invalidation. This central relational paradox in

turn impacts their ability to connect authentically with others (Comstock et al., 2008 & Miller & Stiver, 1997). These disconnections lead to feelings of isolation, shame, and rejection (Comstock et al., 2008). Therefore, through an RCT framework, feeling socially connected with individuals in a given environment is essential for growth fostering relationships.

One way to support connection in academia can be through mentoring relationships. Relational mentoring is unique in three ways. First, it challenges the view that mentoring is a one-sided relationship (Fletcher & Ragins, 2008). Second, traditional mentoring measures success through career advancements, autonomy, and differentiation from others (Fletcher & Ragins, 2008). RCT challenges this concept by viewing career development through interconnectedness with others and the acquisition of relational skills. Third, RCT mentoring acknowledges power dynamics in the relationship (Fletcher & Ragins, 2008). Fletcher and Ragins note that practicing mentoring through an RCT lens means practicing “*power with*” mentee rather than mentor having a “*power-over*” relationship that tends to exist in most hierarchical relationships (2008).

Purgason and colleagues argued for the importance of RCT informed advising for doctoral students in Counselor Education programs (2016). Purgason and colleagues believe that RCT’s core ideas on mutuality, authenticity, connection, and empowerment are all important functions of a positive and strong mentoring experience (Purgason, Avent, Cashwell, Jordan, & Reese, 2016). In addition to these key aspects, RCT comes from a multicultural and social justice oriented framework, providing opportunities for mentors and mentees from diverse backgrounds to have deeper connections with each

other (Purgason et al., 2016). They affirm that this can especially support doctoral students of color who may experience chronic disconnections in the academic environment. In RCT informed mentorship, mentors pay attention to their mentee's relational images and support their mentee by creating a mutually empathetic and authentic relationship that can lead to empowerment (Purgason et al., 2016). RCT informed mentoring requires intentionality with consideration to power dynamics (Purgason et al., 2016). A mentoring relationship can work towards mutuality by setting goals collaboratively (Purgason et al., 2016). The authors further recommended RCT to be integrated with research mentorship guidelines that can aid conversations around power and culture (Purgason et al., 2016).

As doctoral programs recruit more students of color, we must strive to examine ways to support these students in a system that inadvertently oppresses students of color in academia. Mentoring can play an important role in fostering social connectedness for students of color in Counselor Education programs. This argument is rooted in recognizing the importance of growth-fostering relationships with peers and faculty and to move away from disconnection and towards a general feeling of connectedness, which in turn leads to positive mental health outcomes (Comstock et al., 2008). Through this study, I want to examine the impact of racial microaggressions on an individual's social connectedness with their academic environment. Because mentoring aids in fostering connection while microaggressions may negatively impact feelings of connection, I hypothesize that having mentoring experiences will moderate/buffer the effect of racial microaggressions on social connectedness. Specifically, experiences of faculty mentoring

will have a moderating effect on the relationship between racial microaggressions experienced and its impact of the social connectedness with the academic environment for doctoral students of color.

Conclusion

In the current discourse on racial microaggressions, specifically within academia, several negative outcomes of racial microaggressions have been documented. Repeated experiences of microaggressions leads to disconnection with peers, faculty, and the academic environment (Henfield et al., 2013). Students experience mental health symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and somatic symptoms (Ong et al., 2013). Students also question their ability and self-worth in academia (Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Yosso et al., 2015). They feel invisible and receive messages that their opinions are not valued (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013). Students also experience isolation and exhaustion as a result of these experiences (Solorzano et al., 2000). Additionally, there is a disproportionate amount of qualitative research focusing on experiences of students of color using focus groups and interviews (Wong et al., 2014). While researchers have focused on students of color at different levels of their education, I believe that examining a heterogeneous sample of doctoral students of color, a population that experiences heightened levels of stressors, in CE, could help support their growth and the overall attrition rates of CE programs in the nation.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this descriptive, correlational research study was to first, understand the prevalence of racial microaggressions among doctoral students of color in CE, and to examine the relationship between experiences of racial microaggressions and sense of social connectedness. The second purpose was to explore the moderating effect of relational mentoring on social connectedness, in doctoral students of color who are currently enrolled in CE programs. The following research questions and hypotheses were addressed in the study:

1. To what degree are racial microaggressions experienced by doctoral students of color in CE programs?

Hypothesis 1: Doctoral students of color in CE programs experience racial microaggressions above a moderate degree.

2. Does experiencing racial microaggressions relate to an individual's social connectedness within their program?

Hypothesis 2: Experiencing racial microaggressions will negatively relate to an individual's social connectedness within their program

3. Does relational mentoring moderate the relationship between experiencing racial microaggressions and a doctoral student of color's social connectedness with their CE program?

Hypothesis 3: Relational mentoring moderates the relationship between experiencing racial microaggressions and a doctoral student of color's social connectedness with their CE program.

Participants

Participants were doctoral students enrolled in CACREP and non-CACREP accredited CE programs. Inclusion criteria for participants was that they identify as persons of color, were over the age of 18 and identified as a current doctoral student who has attended at least one semester within their program to ensure they are able to talk about their experiences in the program. *A priori* tests using G*power with power size of 0.80 to reduce Type II error, moderate effect size, and alpha as 0.05 determined the sample size of 68 participants was needed.

Procedures

Participants were recruited through purposive convenience and snowball sampling via email listservs and word of mouth. The researcher reached out to faculty at CACREP-accredited doctoral programs in the U.S. and requested them to disseminate the recruitment email with the link to the survey. The survey included the consent form, a brief demographic questionnaire, the Daily Life Experiences (DLE; Harrell et al., 1997), the Relational Health Indices-Community (RHI-C), and the Relational Health Indices-

Mentor (RHI-M) scales (Liang et al., 2002). The first 75 participants received a \$15 Amazon gift card as compensation for their participation in the study.

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire. The researcher created a demographic questionnaire to collect data on participant's age, gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, year in the program, and program type (part time/full time and cohort/non-cohort).

Daily Life Experiences Scale (DLE; Harrell et al., 1997). The DLE was a subscale from the Racism and Life Experiences Scale (RaLES), which specifically focuses on experiences of racial microaggressions (Harrell, 1997, 2000). The DLE is divided into the Daily Life Experience-Frequency (DLE-F) and the Daily Life Experience-Bother (DLE-B). The original 18-item DLE-F has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 and the DLE-B has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94 (Harrell, 1997, 2000). The revised DLE has 20-items. The purpose of this 20-item, six-point Likert-type scale, is to assess the frequency (0 - *never* to 5 - *once a week or more*) with which participants experience microaggressions in their lives and how much are they bothered (0 - *has never happened to me* to 5 - *bothers me extremely*) as a result of these experiences. Scores can be calculated in one of two ways. A frequency score (DLE-F) and a micro-stress/bother (DLE-B) score can be calculated as ratio scores by summing the total item scores and dividing it by 20, resulting in a range between 0 to 5 for both subscale scores (Harrell, 1997). Alternatively, a total of all item scores could also be used, resulting in one overall scale measuring the experience of racial microaggression. A higher score indicates a

greater experience of racial microaggressions within one's academic program (Harrell, 1997). In the current study, the combined total score will be used, which is the sum total of all the ratings.

Example questions on the DLE include: "Your ideas or opinions being minimized, ignored, or devalued," "Others expecting your work to be inferior," "Being mistaken for someone else of your race (who may not look like you at all)." The construct validity for DLE has been established with other measures, including Social Desirability, Racial Identity Salience, and Collective Self-Esteem (Identity) (Harrell, 1997). A positive relationship between scores of DLE-B and psychological and trauma related symptoms established criterion validity (Harrell, 1997). The instructions for the DLE-F and DLE-B are: "The statements below include experiences that some people have as they go about their daily lives. Thinking about the past _____, please **first** indicate generally how often you have had each experience because of your race, ethnicity, or racism. Use the scale in the first column and write the appropriate number on the first blank line. **Next**, use the scale in the second column to indicate how much it bothers you when the experience happens." Researchers have modified the instructions on the DLE to fit a specific environment (such as "counseling program with faculty and other students" (Michael-Makri, 2010). In this study, the instructions will be modified to ask participants to reflect on their experiences with individuals in their CE program while responding to the questions. They will also be asked to think about their time in their academic program while reflecting on these experiences.

Relational Health Indices (RHI; Liang et al., 2002). The RHI was a 37-item self-report measure to assess growth fostering connections with peers, mentors, and the community (Liang et al., 2002). The researcher used the RHI-community (RHI-C) and RHI-mentor (RHI-M) subscales for this study: (1) RHI-community to measure social connectedness among participants in the current study and (2) RHI-mentor which will assess the relational mentoring for participants. The participant responses were measured on a 5-point Likert-scale (1 - *never* to 5 - *always*) and scored as the sum total of participant item responses for each subscale (RHI-C and RHI-M). Higher scores reported higher relational health (Liang et al., 2002).

The RHI's convergent validity was established in comparison with the Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire (MPDQ; Genero, Miller, Surrey, & Baldwin, 1992), the Quality of Relationships Questionnaire (QRI; Pierce, Sarason, Sarason, Solky-Butzel, & Nagle, 1997), and the Friend Support subscale of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). In a principle component analysis, the mentor and community scores had low to moderate correlations, indicating that the scales could be used independently (Frey, Beesley, & Newman, 2005). Information on each subscale is provided below.

Relational Health Indices-Community. The RHI-Community subscale measured the sense of belonging or social connectedness to one's academic department in the current study. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale is 0.90 (Liang et al., 2002). In this study, doctoral students of color in CE programs were asked to respond to each item in relation to their academic department (including peers and faculty). This was a slight

alteration of items and instructions as on the RHI-Community subscale, as instructions usually refer to “community” (Liang et al., 2002, p. 28). A sample item for the community subscale included, “There are parts of myself that I must hide from my community.” This was replaced by, “There are parts of myself that I must hide from individuals in my academic department.”

Relational Health Indices-Mentor. The RHI-mentor subscale assessed for the quality of mentoring relationship and whether this relationship moderates participant’s social connectedness (with peers and the Counselor Education community). The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.86 (Liang et al., 2002). Liang and colleagues (2002) defined a mentor as “An adult who is often older than you, has more experience than you, and is willing to listen, share her or his own experiences, and guide you through some part or area of your life.” In this study, participants were asked to complete the scale by thinking of their advisor/dissertation chair. For the purpose of this study, instructions and items were altered to change the word mentor to advisor/dissertation chair. A sample item of RHI-M was, “My mentor tries hard to understand my feelings and goals (academic, personal, or whatever is relevant).” This was replaced by, “My advisor/dissertation chair tries hard to understand my feelings and goals (academic, personal, or whatever is relevant).”

Data Analysis

The SPSS statistical software was used to analyze data collected from the Qualtrics survey. Descriptive statistics determined the extent to which participants experienced racial microaggressions in their respective CE programs. A linear multiple

regression examined whether experiencing racial microaggressions predicted social connectedness in CE programs. A hierarchical regression analysis (Baron & Kenny, 1986) determined whether relational mentoring had moderating effects on sense of social connectedness with peers and community in the CE program.

Limitations

The sampling methods used in this study were non-randomized, thus did not accurately reflect the population being studied, and additionally did not allow the ability to calculate response rates. However, the sampling methods used were necessary given the smaller percentage of doctoral students of color within CE programs. Thus, using the various methods were needed to ensure a large enough response to the survey to ensure statistical power. Measures used in the study were in self-report format. Therefore, social desirability bias may have played a role in participant's response to these measures. Additionally, given that the nature of this study was cross-sectional, the buffering effect of relational mentoring on social connectedness over a period was measured; nor was the cause and effect of the constructs determined. Given that the RHI-C (DV) and the RHI-M (moderator) were being taken from the same measure, this could have resulted in correlations; however, it was believed that this would not be a confounding factor given that the RHI-C and RHI-M scales had low to moderate correlations with each other in previous studies, revealing that they measure distinct constructs (Frey, Beesley, & Newman, 2005). Further, RHI-M was used as a moderator, and not explored as a main effect to RHI-C.

Additionally, racial microaggressions experienced outside the academic program that could have impacted an individual's social connectedness were not explored. Racial microaggressions could impact an individuals' social connectedness in more than one environment, just as social connectedness to individuals outside of the academic environment (e.g., religious or spiritual organizations, family, community) could provide a buffer for a doctoral students' of color connectedness within their academic program; however, only the experiences within the academic environment was measured. Further, while participants were asked to think of their advisor/dissertation chair in completing the RHI-M, they could have had relational mentoring relationships with other faculty that could have impacted social connectedness but was not captured in this study.

Pilot Study

The purpose of the pilot study was to determine the clarity of the modified instructions on all the surveys.

Research Question

1. Are the instructions, and the modified items, on the three scales (DLE, RHI-C, RHI-M) clear?

Participants

Participants ($N = 3$) were doctoral graduates of CACREP accredited Counselor Education programs. Two participants had graduated within the last few months while one participant had graduated a few years ago. All three participants were female, over the age of 18, and identified as individuals of color.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through purposive convenience and snowball sampling via email and word of mouth. Inclusion criteria for participants were that they identify as persons of color, over the age of 18 and are current doctoral students or have graduated from a doctoral program in the past 5 years. The survey was administered in person, over phone, and via video call. Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences as doctoral students in their respective CE programs. Participants completed all measures, noted below, and were also asked additional follow up questions to answer the pilot study question. There was no compensation for participation in the study.

Measures

In addition to administering the demographic questionnaire, DLE, RHI-M, and RHI-C scales (see above for details of each measure), participants in the pilot study were asked follow-up questions after completing each scale.

Follow Up Questions. Participants were asked follow-up questions after completing each scale (DLE, RHI-C, RHI-M). The questions were as follows:

DLE

1. Were the instructions for this scale clear?
2. After you read the instructions, who was included in the individuals you considered when reading the items? What context(s) did you consider when you read the items on the DLE?
3. What addition or alteration to the instruction do you believe would have helped you think about your interactions with peers and faculty in the academic program?

4. Were there any items that felt unclear to you?

RHI-C

1. Were the instructions for this scale clear?
2. What contexts did you consider when you read the items on the RHI-C?
3. What addition or alteration to the instruction do you believe would have helped you think about your academic program while responding to the questions?
4. Were there any items that felt unclear to you?

RHI-M

1. Could you talk more about your thought process in identifying an individual that fit this definition of mentor and in answering questions based on the relationship with this individual?
2. Did you have more than one mentor that you thought of? If yes, how did you select the individual for the scale?
3. What might have been helpful in instructions to help identify a mentor or narrow it to one person?
4. Did the instructions and selection of an individual within your program lead to the ability to answer the questions?
5. Were the questions clear and did they make sense in relation to the mentor that you picked?
6. Were there any items that were unclear?

Data Analysis

The research question was answered using subjective data from the follow up questions. The Institutional Review Board deemed this pilot study as exempt from needing approval since all information collected was for the clarity of instructions and item presentation.

Results

Clarity of DLE. For the DLE, two participants noted slightly confusing wording in the instructions for the scale where participants were asked to “first indicate generally how often you have had each experience because of your race, ethnicity, or racism.” They suggested rewording it to “first indicate generally how often you have had each experience because of racism and/or your race, and ethnicity.” The third participant noted that the instructions implied that participants had to reflect on their subjective experiences which can be a limitation to the study. One participant also suggested changing the wording from “write the appropriate number on the blank line” to “select the appropriate number on the blank line” since the scale was administered online.

In considering the context while responding to items on the DLE, one participant thought of interactions with faculty in her program while one thought of interactions with peers in the program. Only one participant thought of both peers and faculty while responding to the items. One participant also added that while they did not think of their interactions while supervising master’s level students, she had experiences within this context too and it would be helpful to include this context in the instructions. When asked if they had suggestions to modify instructions so that participants could think of faculty

and peers in their program, they suggested providing examples of various contexts in an academic program within brackets in the instructions. One participant felt that two items in the DLE made her think of a context outside of the academic program. The item, “Being observed or followed while in public places” made her think of places like the convenient store and the item, “Being stared at by strangers” made her think of the general campus environment. All three participants felt that the items on the DLE were clear.

Clarity of RHI-C. Participants were asked questions regarding the RHI-C scale. All three participants felt that the instructions for this scale were clear. When asked about the clarity of items on the scale, all three reported having to re-read one particular item to understand what was being asked (“I feel mobilized to personal action after meetings within my academic program”). One participant noted that this item could be confusing because there were instances when she would feel mobilized to personal action as a result of a negative interaction with an individual in her academic program. This participant also noted that the item, “My academic program has shaped my identity in many ways,” can be slightly misconstrued because for her negative interactions with individuals in the academic program forced her to shape her identity. One participant reflected only on faculty members while responding to this scale while the other two thought of interactions with peers and faculty members.

Clarity of RHI-M. For the third and last scale, RHI-M, two participants were easily able to identify mentors in their academic program that fit the definition of mentor provided in the survey. One participant had to think of a mentor outside of her academic

program. This participant noted that there needed to be a clear transition from these questions to the instructions for the RHI-M since the first few questions asked about identifying a mentor outside of the program and the scale instructions asked for reflecting on the relationship with their academic advisor. All three participants felt that the instructions for the scale and the items were clear.

Discussion

Based on the results from the pilot study, minor changes were made to the instructions for the three scales. Instructions for the DLE and RHI-C will specifically include contexts such as peers, faculty, supervision, classrooms while asking participants to reflect on their experiences within their academic programs. The instructions in the DLE will also be modified from “Thinking about the experiences in your academic program, please first indicate generally how often you have had each experience because of your race, ethnicity, or racism. Use the scale in the first column and write the appropriate number on the first blank line. Next, use the scale in the second column to indicate how much it bothers you when the experience happens. Write the appropriate number on the blank line” to “Thinking about the experiences in your academic program (*including, but not limited to, interactions with faculty, peers, and supervisees, in classrooms, supervision, and in meetings with faculty*), please first indicate generally how often you have had each experience because of *racism and/or your race and ethnicity*. Use the scale in the first column and write the appropriate number on the first blank line. Next, use the scale in the second column to indicate how much it bothers you when the experience happens. *Select* the appropriate number on the blank line.”

While one participant indicated confusion with the items, “Being observed or followed while in public places” and “Being stared at by strangers”, as it made them think of settings and incidents outside of the academic program specifically, they will not be modified since the instructions will now specify the context within the academic program.

Participants did not express concerns with the instructions on the RHI-C. However, a few items were expressed as misleading. For example, the item “My academic program has shaped my identity in many ways,” a participant noted that this was due to negative experiences and not because of positive support available within the academic program. The item will be modified to state, “My academic program has *positively* shaped my identity in many ways.”

Prior to participants taking the RHI-M, they were provided with questions designed to identify a mentor within the participants’ CE program. These questions will be modified to be more specific to the CE community. For example, instead of asking, “Can you think of a faculty member in your academic program that fits this definition of a mentor: “An adult who is often older than you, has more experience than you, and is willing to listen, share her or his own experiences, and guide you through some part or area of your life,” the survey will ask participants to respond to items on the RHI-M while thinking of their relationship with their dissertation chair/advisor in their CE program. The word “mentor” will be replaced by “dissertation chair/advisor” for all items on the RHI-M. Once participants complete this survey, they will be asked a follow up question on whether they also consider this dissertation chair/advisor to be a mentor.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The following chapter explores the results from the data analysis of the participant responses to the survey. Results were analyzed using descriptive statistics, linear regression, and hierarchical regression in SPSS.

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 143 participants responded to the survey. From these, 41 participants were excluded from the survey. Reasons for exclusion included not completing the survey ($n = 27$), not meeting criteria for inclusion (i.e., not identifying as doctoral students in Counselor Education programs ($n = 3$), not having completed their first semester in the doctoral program ($n = 6$), or identifying as Caucasian/White American ($n = 6$)). This left a final sample of 101 participants that was used for data analysis.

As noted in Table 1, more than half the sample identified as Black/African American (53%) followed by Latinx/Latinx American (25%), Asian American (7%), Native American/Alaska Native (1%), Multiracial (6%), or Race/Ethnicity not reflected in the options (9%). The sample consisted of majority females (79%), followed by males (21%), and gender non-binary (2%). The majority of participants identified as heterosexual (79%) while others identified as lesbian (5%), gay (3%), bisexual (7%), or (6%) sexual orientation not reflected in the choices provided. The majority of the

participants identified as second year doctoral students (45%) followed by third year (32%), fourth year (12%), other (7%), and first year (5%). Those who identified as other noted their year in the program as beyond 4 years. In this sample, only 14% identified as international students. Eighty-six percent of the participants were enrolled in their program full-time, while the remainder (15%) were enrolled in their doctoral program part-time. Finally, almost all of the participants were enrolled in a face-to-face program (89%), with a few participants being enrolled in either an online only program (4%) or a hybrid program (8%).

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Demographics	<i>n</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Race/Ethnicity		
Black/African American	53	53
Latinx/Latinx American	25	25
Asian American	7	7
Native American/Alaska Native	1	1
Multiracial	6	6
My Race/Ethnicity not reflected above	9	9
Gender		
Male	21	21
Female	78	78
Gender Non-Binary	2	2
Trans (M-F, F-M)	0	0
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	80	80
Lesbian	5	5
Gay	3	3
Bisexual	7	7
Not reflected above	6	6

Year in Program		
First	5	5
Second	45	44
Third	32	31
Fourth	12	12
Other	7	7
International Student	14	14
Full time	86	86
Part time	15	15
Program Type		
<i>Demographics</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Face-to-Face	89	89
Online	4	4
Hybrid	8	8

Preliminary Analysis

Table 2 provides the mean, standard deviation (SD), and Cronbach's alpha (α) for each of the three scales, Relational Health Indices-Community (RHI-C), Relational Health Indices-Mentor (RHI-M), and the Daily Life Experiences Scale (DLE Total), and for the two DLE subscales—DLE-Frequency and DLE-Bother. Each scale and subscale had strong reliability as evidenced through high Cronbach's Alpha values (Table 2).

Table 2

Mean, SD and α for the Three Scales and DLE Subscales

Scales and Subscales	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha α
Relational Health Indices – Community (RHI-C)	46.72	10.72	0.87
Relational Health Indices – Mentor (RHI-M)	37.71	11.04	0.95
Daily Life Experiences – Frequency (DLE-F)	33.85	17.71	0.93
Daily Life Experiences – Bother (DLE-B)	44.73	20.05	0.91
Daily Life Experiences – Total (DLE Total)	78.58	35.22	0.95

Research Questions

Research Question 1. Descriptive statistics using SPSS were conducted to determine the prevalence of racial microaggressions among doctoral students of color in counselor education programs. The overall score for the DLE was obtained by the total summed score of the sub-scales. Low scores indicated lower level of racial microaggressions while higher scores explained high levels of racial microaggressions. In this study, the average DLE total score for all participants was 1.96 on a scale of 0 to 5, indicating moderate levels of racial microaggressions experienced. Exploring the DLE subscales reveals that participants experienced racial microaggressions on average less than one time a year to few times a year (DLE-F, $M = 1.69$, $SD = 0.88$), and felt bothered little to somewhat by the experiences of racial microaggressions (DLE-B, $M = 2.23$, $SD = 1$). Analyses were conducted to verify whether DLE scores differed by demographic information. No significant differences were found within race and ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

Table 3

Mean, SD, and Range for Daily Life Experiences Scales

	Total Mean Score	SD	Range
DLE Total	1.964605	0.88	4.22
DLE Frequency	1.692575	0.88	4.40
DLE Bother	2.236635	1.00	4.85

Research Question 2. A linear regression analysis was conducted in SPSS to determine whether experiencing racial microaggressions relates to social connectedness for doctoral students of color in CE programs. The regression model was significant ($F(1,99) = 21.75, p < .001, R^2=0.18$). In the model, racial microaggressions did relate to social connectedness. Further, racial microaggressions was negatively and moderately related ($\beta = -0.4, SE = 0.028, p < .001$) to social connectedness, suggesting that as the experience of racial microaggressions increases, the social connectedness to one's department decreases.

Research Question 3. A stepwise hierarchical regression was conducted to explore the moderating impact of relational mentoring on social connectedness. The model was significant ($F(1, 98) = 22.71, p < 0.001, R^2=0.31$), explaining 31% of the variance of social connectedness. Relational mentoring moderated the relationship (see Table 4) between racial microaggressions experienced and social connectedness.

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression

	Variable	B	β	SE
Step 1	DLE Total	-0.29*	-0.42	0.028
Step 2	DLE Total x RHI Mentor	0.004*	0.618	0.001

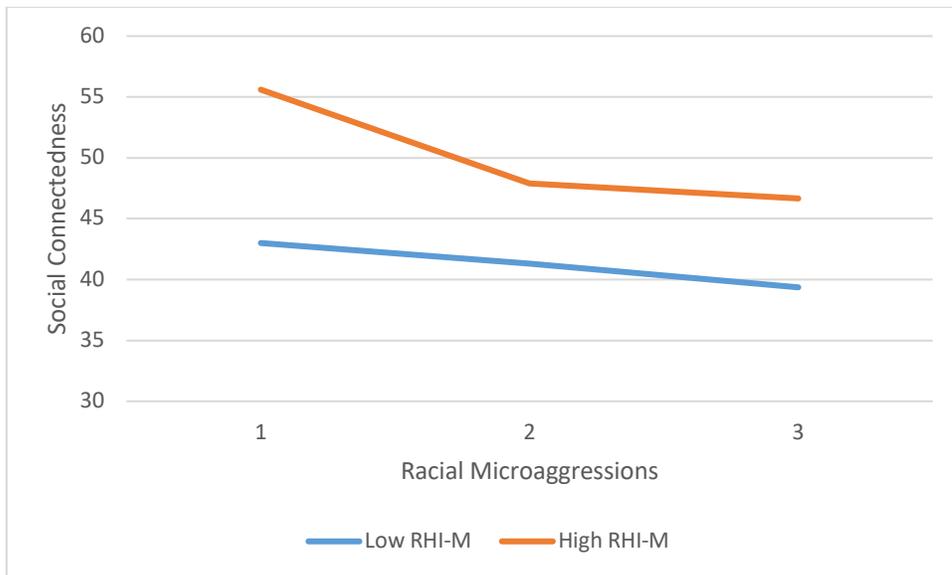
*p<0.001

To graph the interaction effect of relational mentoring on racial microaggressions and social connectedness, racial microaggressions was split into three categories – low, moderate, and high – based on quartiles, while relational mentoring was divided into low and high. The interaction (Figure 1) revealed that relational mentoring, overall, seems to impact or buffer the potential impacts of racial microaggressions on the social connectedness to the program, as those with higher levels of experiences of racial microaggressions tended to have lower sense of social connectedness regardless of experiences of relational mentoring. However, individuals who received low relational mentoring from their advisors/dissertation chairs seemed to drop consistently in social connectedness as the racial microaggressions increased, resulting in lower social connectedness as the experiences of racial microaggressions increased. Yet, the relationship between racial microaggressions and social connectedness was not as linear with students who reported high levels of relational mentoring. The overall social connectedness decreased as racial microaggressions were experienced, regardless of the level of relational mentoring. Those with high levels of relational mentoring seemed to

have an overall higher social connectedness as experiences of racial microaggressions increased, with a greater increase in social connectedness when racial microaggressions were low.

Figure 1

Interaction Effect of Relational Mentoring on Racial Microaggressions and Social Connectedness



CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Racial microaggressions are one of the most common race-related stressors experienced by students of color in academia. Researchers have noted the existence of racial microaggressions in counselor education programs (Michael-Makri, 2010; Vaishnav, 2018). However, the impact of racial microaggressions on doctoral students of color and resources that help buffer this negative impact has not yet been explored. This is important in determining the barriers and support for success and retention of doctoral students of color in CE programs. This research study explored the impact of racial microaggressions on an individual's social connectedness within their academic program and whether faculty relational mentoring buffered this impact.

Overall, participant responses support the three hypotheses regarding the prevalence of racial microaggressions, its impact on social connectedness, and the buffering impact of relational mentoring. The results of this study indicate that racial microaggressions have a strong and negative relationship with social connectedness, and that faculty mentoring, interacts with the students' experiences of racial microaggression in relation to the social connectedness to one's academic program.

Research Question 1

The first research question explored the prevalence of racial microaggressions in CE doctoral programs in the U.S. When looked at individually, students reported experiencing racial microaggressions, on average, a few times a year, with some students reporting experiencing racial microaggressions in their departments monthly to few times a week. On average, students report a moderate impact from these experiences, specifically stating these experiences were moderately bothersome, with some students reporting that this bothered them extremely. This aligns with the catch-22 experience and the dilemmas of responding to racial microaggressions as noted by Sue and colleagues (2010). Participants may be bothered by experiences at a higher intensity because of the dilemmas they may face while responding to microaggressions, such as, attributional ambiguity, response indecision, time constraints in responding, denial of experiential reality, impotency of actions, and fear of consequences. This has been captured qualitatively where doctoral students of color in CE programs have reported experiencing self-doubt and questioning their reality as a result of experiencing racial microaggressions (Vaishnav, 2018).

The average scores for DLE-F ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 0.88$) and DLE-B ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1$) in this study were low as compared to a similar study conducted 10 years earlier (Michael-Makri, 2010) where the mean scores were 2.35 and 2.37, respectively. There could be several possible reasons for this change in scores. First, our field continues to push for higher standards of multicultural competencies within the academic curriculum, which could have led to the possibility that racial microaggressions have decreased over

the last decade within academic programs. This push for higher standards is evidenced by a number of scholarly strides in the CE field such as, the development of Multicultural and Social Justice Competencies for counselor educators (Ratts, Singh, Nasser-McMillan, Butler, McCollough, & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015) and several content based and empirically published articles in exploring the prevalence and implications of racial microaggressions across several disciplines which could have led to an overall increased awareness of microaggressions in our field – thus potentially decreasing experiences students have within their departments.

A second explanation for lower DLE scores among students in the current study is that the DLE was developed to measure experiences of microaggressions in daily life experiences, and not within academia specifically. Therefore, while the instructions were altered to reflect this, certain items (e.g., “Being observed or followed while in public places”) may not fit with the general experience of microaggressions within academia, resulting in items becoming less relevant to life within a department or possibly confusing participants and, as a result, skewing the total score of the scale. While this may be a concern, the DLE scale has been used for a study examining experiences of racial microaggressions for master’s and doctoral students of color in CE programs (Michael-Makri, 2010), and thus seemed appropriate to use in the current study. Third, it is important to consider respondent biases such as threat of exposure and social desirability which could have skewed participant responses (Krumpal, 2011). This is further elaborated in the limitation section of this chapter. Regardless, racial

microaggressions are occurring in CE programs, and they are impactful and bothersome to doctoral students experiencing them.

Research Question 2 and 3

For doctoral students of color, in the current sample, experiencing racial microaggressions had a strong, negative correlation to social connectedness within academic programs, and relational mentoring moderated the relationship between experiencing racial microaggressions and social connectedness in one's department. This supports the findings from previous qualitative studies on students of color and their experiences of racial microaggressions in academic programs (Solorzano, 1998; Torres et al., 2010; Vaishnav, 2018), which students highlighted led to negative outcomes like disconnection (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2011, 2013). We know that undergraduate students from minoritized racial identities experience racial microaggressions which negatively impacts social connectedness with the community (Liao et al., 2016). However, there has been limited research on graduate students, particularly doctoral students of color in counselor education. Two studies in the field of psychology reported that for Black doctoral students, racial microaggressions negatively impact sense of belonging (Clark et al., 2012; Regis, 2016). The current study with doctoral students of color in CE programs affirms findings from previous qualitative studies at undergraduate and graduate levels. Further, given the importance of mentoring in supporting doctoral students, as evidenced by the interaction effect (Figure 1), findings support the implementation of relational mentoring as a buffer for negative consequences of racial microaggressions.

Overall, the results of this study support the use of relational cultural theory to understand the impact of racial microaggressions on disconnection and the incorporation of relational mentoring, a growth fostering relationship, for doctoral students of color in CE. This is because RCT theorists conceptualize experiences of marginalization as chronic disconnections leading to the central relational paradox, wherein individuals try to hide parts of self to connect with individuals furthering them into isolation. This behavior is supported by previous research wherein authors have highlighted that doctoral students of color often cannot be their authentic self and need to hide parts of their identity to fit in (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2011, 2013; Vaishnav, 2018) due to experiences of marginalization which lead to disconnection. Relational mentoring takes into account these chronic disconnections as a result of microaggressions and provides an opportunity for students to feel validated and authentically connect with individuals in their academic program. Further, Fletcher and Ragins (2008) noted three ways in which relational mentoring is unique. First, it challenges the view that mentoring is a one-sided relationship. Second, traditional mentoring measures success through career advancements, autonomy, and differentiation from others. RCT challenges this concept by viewing career development through interconnectedness with others and the acquisition of relational skills. Third, relational mentoring acknowledges power dynamics in the relationship. Practicing mentoring through an RCT lens means practicing “*power with*” mentee rather than mentor having a “*power-over*” relationship that tends to exist in most hierarchical relationships (Fletcher & Ragins, 2008). Thus, having a relational mentoring relationship, similar to what is described here within RCT, moderates the

relationship that experiencing racial microaggressions has on students' reported social connectedness to the department. Specifically (and put your interaction here in a sentence or two explaining what it means.

Limitations

While the findings in this study are important, the limitations need to be noted. First, the sampling strategy in this study was non-randomized, thus restricting the ability to calculate response rates and limiting generalizability. This sampling strategy was necessary given the population (i.e., doctoral students of color) consisted of a small subset of the counselor education community. Therefore, recruitment strategies were more intentional and through word of mouth, emails, and listservs. Additionally, since the DLE, RHI-C, and RHI-M are self-report measures, there is possibility of social desirability bias. Krumpal (2011) notes that when socially sensitive topics (such as racism) are discussed, respondents may misreport or underreport their experience in order to represent socially desirable attitudes and norms. Another concern that participants may experience is the threat of disclosure, that is, whether their responses would be exposed to third party individuals resulting in risk of retaliation from peers, professors, and their academic institution.

Some limitations exist regarding the measures that were used. The DLE was adapted to have modified instructions asking participants to respond to the items as they related to their experiences in their academic program. Since the DLE measures experiences of microaggressions in daily life, some of the items in the DLE scale could have been confusing such as "Being ignored, overlooked, or not given service" or "Being

observed or followed while in public places” because of their focus on experiences in the environment rather than the academic program. For the RHI-M, participants were asked to think of their dissertation chair/advisor in their doctoral program rather than a mentor while responding to the items, since many programs do not assign a mentor and not all students have a mentor. Therefore, participants may have had other mentors – inside or outside of the department – who could have impacted their overall experiences of feeling connected in their respective academic programs, but that relationship was not captured in this study. Further, if participants had more opportunities to connect to one another in the program, that might buffer the impact of racial microaggressions, or make them feel more connected to the program even without a faculty with relational mentoring. Finally, the RHI-C and RHI-M were two subscales adapted from the same scale (Relational Health Indices). This could lead to confounding issues. For this study, the inter-item correlation between the two subscales was 0.458, suggesting moderate correlation and indicating that the sub-scales were related but distinct.

Implications

Counselor Education Programs. The results from this study support the use of RCT as a framework for understanding the impact of racial microaggressions on social connectedness and the buffering role of relational mentoring. First, CE programs could actively take steps to reduce microaggressions in their academic programs. This could be through workshops, brown bag sessions, training of faculty, and infusing multicultural and social justice principles in all curricula. For example, for every chapter or learning unit in any course, counselor educators can bring in conversations regarding how this can

apply to individuals with intersecting identities. Educators could also invite scholars from minoritized identities as guest speakers who have expertise in different content areas. Next, CE programs could incorporate relational cultural theory principles in their interactions and relationships with doctoral students of color. This could be achieved through faculty relationships with students (such as advisor, supervisor, dissertation chair) that embody core principles of mutual empathy, relationship authenticity, and response ability/empowerment that are necessary for a growth fostering relationship (Jordan et al., 2004). When the 5 good things of “a sense of zest, a better understanding of self, other, and the relationship, a sense of worth, an enhanced capacity to act or be productive, and an increased desire for more connection” are present in connections, they can lead to mutually empathetic, authentic, and growth fostering relationships (Miller, 1986, p. 3). Doing so would not only minimize disconnection that is experienced as a result of microaggressions but could also provide relational mentoring that would foster growth and development for students of color. These practices can provide support and motivation for students to continue their doctoral studies. This is important given the need for an increase in faculty of color who can serve as role models and cater to a diverse population of students in our field. In order to recruit and retain faculty of color, CE programs need to recruit and retain the doctoral students of color within their programs. One of the many ways to do this is by providing a supportive, relational, and positive, growth fostering educational experience.

CE programs can also implement orientation programs that can be comprehensive and pair incoming students with more experienced students and with faculty. CE

programs could also invite student representatives in their faculty meetings to serve as liaisons between students and faculty. This can create an open line of communication and the opportunity to discuss issues like racial microaggressions within the academic program. CE programs could also formulate and incorporate relational mentoring for doctoral students, especially doctoral students of color, given that there is evidence supporting its buffering impact on social connectedness within academia. A few authors have called for incorporating relational mentoring strategies within CE programs, especially for students from minoritized backgrounds (Purgason et al., 2016). This study supports the buffering impact of relational mentoring for doctoral students of color and its mitigating effects on social disconnection as a result of racial microaggressions.

Doctoral Students. This study provides empirical support and validation to doctoral students of color who experience racial microaggressions and experience the catch-22 dilemma in ways to navigate these experiences. This is the only study that explores the negative impact of racial microaggressions towards social connectedness and also provides a strengths-based approach to help support students who feel disconnected from their program. Doctoral students of color can advocate for relational mentoring programs within their academic program or connect with a faculty member that they can form a formal or informal relational mentoring relationship and can support their well-being as they navigate their experiences in CE programs. They could set expectations with their mentor for frequency of meetings and ask for mentoring around specific challenges, particularly navigating racial microaggressions within their academic programs. Further, advanced doctoral students of color could encourage incoming

doctoral students of color to connect with a faculty member who could serve as a relational mentor.

Future Research

The results from this study indicate the possibility of several directions for researchers. Researchers could formulate a formal guideline for relational mentoring in graduate programs and explore the efficacy of this program within CE for doctoral students of color. This research was limited to doctoral students of color in CE programs and could be explored within master's level students of color, students from other marginalized backgrounds, and could develop into an interdisciplinary study that could expand into other academic fields.

Conclusion

Racial microaggressions are a part of doctoral students' experiences in CE programs and therefore, understanding the prevalence and the impact could help future researchers in examining ways to reduce experiences of racial microaggressions within academia. Further, by utilizing a strengths-based approach of relational mentoring for doctoral students of color via faculty in their department buffers racial microaggressions. This provides additional insight for researchers and counselor educators, in supporting and retaining students of color within academia

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APPENDIX A
DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

1. Are you a doctoral student in a Counselor Education program?
 Yes No

2. Have you completed at least one semester in your program?
 Yes No

3. Current year in program:
 First Year

 Second Year

 Third Year

 Fourth Year

 Other _____

4. Please identify your program:
 Face-to-face

 Online

 Hybrid

5. Are you a full-time student?
 Yes No

6. Are you an international student?

7. Yes No

8. Please enter your age:

9. What is your gender?

Male

Female

Transgender (M-F)

Transgender (F-M)

Gender Non-Binary

My gender is not included: _____

10. What is your sexual orientation?

Heterosexual

Gay

Lesbian

Bisexual

My sexual orientation is not included: _____

11. What is your race/ethnicity?

Black/African American

- Asian American
- Latinx American
- Native American/Alask Native
- Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander
- White American/Caucasian
- My race/ethnicity is not included: _____
- Multiracial: _____

APPENDIX B
INSTRUMENTS

The Daily Life Experiences (DLE) Scale

The statements below include experiences that some people have as they go about their daily lives. Thinking about the experiences in your academic program (including, but not limited to, interactions with faculty, peers, and supervisees, in classrooms, supervision, and in meetings with faculty), please first indicate generally how often you have had each experience because of racism and/or your race and ethnicity. Use the scale in the first column and write the appropriate number on the first blank line. Next, use the scale in the second column to indicate how much it bothers you when the experience happens. Select the appropriate number on the blank line.

How often because of race?	How much does it bother you?
0=never	0=has never happened to me
1=less than once a year	1=doesn't bother me at all
2=a few times a year	2=bothers me a little
3=about once a month	3=bothers me somewhat
4=a few times a month	4=bothers me a lot
5=once a week or more	5=bothers me extremely

How often because of race?	How much does it bother you?
-------------------------------------	---------------------------------------

1) Being ignored, overlooked, or not given service

(in a restaurant, store, etc.)

2) Being treated rudely or disrespectfully _____

3) Being accused of something or treated suspiciously _____

4) Others reacting to you as if they were
afraid or intimidated _____

5) Being observed or followed while in public places _____

6) Being treated as if you were "stupid",
being "talked down to" _____

7) Your ideas or opinions being minimized,
ignored, or devalued _____

8) Overhearing or being told an offensive
joke or comment _____

9) Being insulted, called a name, or harassed _____

10) Others expecting your work to be inferior _____

11) Not being taken seriously _____

12) Being left out of conversations or activities _____

13) Being treated in an "overly" friendly
or superficial way _____

14) Being avoided, others moving away
from you physically _____

15) Being mistaken for someone who serves others _____

(i.e., janitor, bellboy, maid)

- 16) Being stared at by strangers _____
- 17) Being laughed at, made fun of, or taunted _____
- 18) Being mistaken for someone else of your same race _____
(who may not look like you at all)
- 19) Being asked to speak for or represent your entire _____
racial/ethnic group (e.g., “What do _____ people think?”)
- 20) Being considered fascinating or exotic by others _____

Relational Health Indices-Community (RHI-C)

Next to each statement below, please indicate the number that best applies to your relationship with or involvement in your Counselor Education academic program.

1=Never; 2=Seldom; 3=Sometimes; 4=Often; 5=Always

1. I feel a sense of belonging to this academic program.
2. I feel better about myself after my interactions with this academic program.
3. If members of this academic program know something is bothering me, they ask me about it.
4. Members of this academic program are not free to just be themselves. (R)
5. I feel understood by members of this academic program.
6. I feel mobilized to personal action after meetings within this academic program.
7. There are parts of myself I feel I must hide from this academic program. (R)
8. It seems as if people in this academic program really like me as a person.
9. There is a lot of backbiting and gossiping in this academic program. (R)
10. Members of this academic program are very competitive with each other. (R)
11. I have a greater sense of self-worth through my connection with this academic program.
12. My connections with this academic program are so inspiring that they motivate me to pursue relationships with other people outside this academic program.
13. This academic program has positively shaped my identity in many ways.
14. This academic program provides me with emotional support.

*(R) indicates that the item should be reverse scored prior to calculation of a mean score.

Relational Health Indices-Mentor (RHI-M)

Next to each statement below, please indicate the number that best applies to your relationship with your dissertation chair/academic advisor.

1=Never; 2=Seldom; 3=Sometimes; 4=Often; 5=Always

1. I can be genuinely myself with my dissertation chair/academic advisor.
2. I believe my dissertation chair/academic advisor values me as a whole person (e.g., professionally/academically and personally).
3. My dissertation chair/academic advisor's commitment to and involvement in our relationship exceeds that required by his/her social/ professional role.
4. My dissertation chair/academic advisor shares stories about his/her own experiences with me in a way that enhances my life.
5. I feel as though I know myself better because of my dissertation chair/academic advisor.
6. My dissertation chair/academic advisor gives me emotional support and encouragement.
7. I try to emulate the values of my dissertation chair/academic advisor (such as social, academic, religious, physical/athletic).
8. I feel uplifted and energized by interactions with my dissertation chair/academic advisor.
9. My dissertation chair/academic advisor tries hard to understand my feelings and goals (academic, personal, or whatever is relevant).

10. My relationship with my dissertation chair/academic advisor inspires me to seek other relationships like this one.

11. I feel comfortable expressing my deepest concerns to my dissertation chair/academic advisor

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Experiences of Racial Microaggressions, Relational Mentoring, and Social Connectedness among Doctoral Students of Color within Counselor Education Programs

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor: Shreya Vaishnav and Kelly Wester

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

Please print a copy of this form for your records. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

What is the study about?

The primary goal of this research study is to identify and discuss racial microaggressions experienced by doctoral students of color in counselor education programs. Specifically, microaggressions experienced through departmental culture, advisory and supervisory relationships, and in classrooms and their impact on a student's academic performance and well-being. We hope that understanding your experiences with microaggressions within counselor education departments and their impact on you will provide important outcomes for counselor educators as we strive to promote diversity, equity, recruitment and retention of doctoral students of color.

Why are you asking me?

We are asking doctoral students of color enrolled in counselor education programs, who have completed at least one semester of their doctoral program, if they would like to participate in this study. All participants need to be over 18 years old.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

You are being asked to take part in a study that includes a demographic form and three survey instruments.

Is there any audio/video recording?

There will be no audio/video recording.

What are the risks to me?

It is possible that participants may experience emotional distress while reflecting on their experience in responding to these questions. However, we consider the occurrence to be rare (approximate incidence < 1%). Should a participant experience this, mental health resources will be provided upon request. You can contact the PI, Shreya Vaishnav, at svvaishn@uncg.edu for these resources.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Shreya Vaishnav (svvaishn@uncg.edu), Principle Investigator, and Kelly Wester (klwester@uncg.edu), Faculty Advisor. If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

Your participation in this research may help inform policies and training in counselor education programs to minimize microaggressions experienced for future doctoral students of color.

Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

The first 75 participants will receive a \$15 gift card for Amazon.com

How will you keep my information confidential?

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing. The data collected will be stored in a password protected computer up to 5 years or once the study is published. Once published, this data will be permanently destroyed.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By moving forward in the survey, you are agreeing that you have read and fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study and to be contacted by the principal investigator. You are also agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older, a doctoral student of color, enrolled in a counselor education program, have completed at least one semester in your doctoral program, and are agreeing to participate in this study described to you.

Shreya Vaishnav, MC, NCC, LPCA

Principal Investigator

Doctoral Student

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG)

svvaishn@uncg.edu

APPENDIX D
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Subject: Doctoral Students of Color & Racial Microaggressions: \$15 Amazon.com Gift Card for the First 75 Participants!

Dear Dr. [Last Name],

I hope this email finds you well. I am a third-year doctoral candidate at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). Dr. Kelly Wester personally recommended that I contact you regarding my dissertation study. My study examines the impact of racial microaggressions on doctoral students of color in counselor education programs. Findings from this study have the potential to increase retention of doctoral students of color in counselor education programs by identifying barriers and support systems that are important for the growth and development of these students. I am reaching out to see if you would forward this recruitment email to doctoral students of color in your department. No institution identifying data will be collected and responses will be kept confidential. I will also send a reminder email to you within one week.

If you would be willing, please copy paste the following recruitment email to your doctoral students:

Dear Prospective Participant,

I am a third-year doctoral candidate at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). My study examines the impact of racial microaggressions on doctoral students of color in counselor education programs. Findings from this study have the potential to increase retention of doctoral students of color in counselor education programs by identifying barriers and support systems that are important for the growth and development of these students. Interested participants will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and three surveys. To be eligible for this study, participants must be:

- 18 years or older
- A doctoral student currently enrolled in a counselor education program
- Have completed at least one semester in your doctoral program in counselor education
- Identify as a person of color

The first 75 participants will receive a \$15 gift card to Amazon.com to compensate for their time.

This survey should take about 10-15 minutes to complete. If interested, please follow this link for the informed consent form and the survey:

https://uncg.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_4UUEy93nWS5dORf

For the best experience, please take this survey on a laptop or computer. If you know any other doctoral students interested in participating, please feel free to forward this to them. I sincerely thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Shreya Vaishnav, MC, NCC, LPCA

Doctoral Candidate

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

svvaishn@uncg.edu

APPENDIX E
EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE

Shreya Vaishnav <svvaishn@uncg.edu>
To: shelly.harrell@pepperdine.edu

Mon, Feb 4, 2019 at 11:09 AM

Dear Dr. Harrell,

Hope this email finds you well. I am a second-year doctoral student in Counselor Education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. For my dissertation study, I am interested in examining the impact of racial microaggressions on doctoral students of color in Counselor Education programs and the impact of their experience on social connectedness within their academic programs.

I am interested in using the Racism and Life Experiences Scale, specifically the Daily Life Experiences sub-scale. I wanted to ask for your permission to use the scale for my dissertation study. If I have your permission, could you also share the scale(s) (RaLES-B, 1994; RaLES-S, 1995) as well as the psychometric properties? I would greatly appreciate it! Thank you.

Sincerely,
Shreya

Shelly Harrell, Ph.D. <shelly.harrell@pepperdine.edu>

Tue, Feb 26, 2019 at
1:38 PM

To: Shreya Vaishnav <svvaishn@uncg.edu>

Thank you for your interest in the RaLES! Please find the scales and supporting documents attached to this email. You can also find the Daily Life Experiences scale in the PsycTESTS database. You have my permission to use any of the RaLES scales for your dissertation research. Good luck with your work!

Best,
Shelly P. Harrell, Ph.D.