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Learning from the Standpoints of Minoritized Students: An Exploration of Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Training

Julie A. Cohen

University of Calgary, julieanne.cohen@ucalgary.ca

Anusha Kassan

University of British Columbia, anusha.kassan@ubc.ca

Kaori Wada

University of Calgary, Kaori.wada@ucalgary.ca

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Abstract

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Keywords

counseling psychology, multiculturalism, social justice, training, non-dominant identities, feminist standpoint theory, phenomenological interpretative analysis

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Learning from the Standpoints of Minoritized Students: An Exploration of Multicultural and Social Justice Counselling Training

Julie A. Cohen¹, Anusha Kassan², and Kaori Wada¹

¹University of Calgary, Canada

²University of British Columbia, Canada

The results of a feminist research endeavour that explored multicultural (MC) counselling and social justice (SJ) training experiences from the standpoint of eight culturally non-dominant doctoral students are presented. Participants represented students within the five counselling psychology programs accredited by the Canadian Psychological Association. Specifically, the research aimed to address the following research question: How do counselling psychology doctoral students who self-identify with non-dominant cultural identities perceive their experiences of MC and SJ training? This research adopted a feminist standpoint theory epistemology to guide an interpretative phenomenological analysis to reflect the culturally rich, complex, and situated experiences of participants, while concurrently emphasizing the role that systems of privilege and oppression play in influencing these experiences. Results point to seven superordinate themes, including: (a) MC and SJ are personal and rooted in identity; (b) Instructors—their role and impact; (c) Classmates—a mixed bag; (d) Perceptions of MC and SJ courses; (e) Perceptions of clinical supervision; (f) Systemic engagement with MC and SJ principles; and (g) The emotional and psychological burden of MC and SJ training. Findings are discussed considering sociocultural practices in North America, and MC and SJ training implications are explored.

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Introduction

The development of multicultural (MC) and social justice (SJ) competencies are foundational in the professional growth of a counselling psychologist (Collins, 2018; Dickson et al., 2010; Thrift & Sugarman, 2019). MC and SJ courses enhance cultural self-awareness, promote openness to others' worldviews, and increase culturally competent knowledge and cultural sensitivity (Collins et al., 2015; Malott, 2010; Smith et al., 2009). In addition, these courses are linked to personal growth, influencing both cognitive and affective processes (Sammons & Speight, 2008).

Many counselling psychology scholars have advocated for the integration of MC and SJ values into counselling psychology training programs in Canada and the United States (Audet & Paré, 2017; Sinacore & Ginsberg, 2015; Speight & Vera, 2004). Researchers have evaluated and then suggested how to structure multicultural counselling competency (MCC) education (e.g., Buckley & Foldy, 2010; Fouad & Arredondo, 2007), examined the effectiveness of pedagogical strategies (e.g., Arthur & Achenbach, 2011; Constantine et al.,

2008), and explored students' perceptions of MCC, reflecting on implications for the overall delivery of MCC education (e.g., Kagnici, 2014; Malott et al., 2010). At the same time, most of this research has relied on the experiences of participants who hold multiple dominant identities and social locations (Collins, 2018; Dupuis-Rossi, 2018; Huezo, 2018). The culturally inclusive perspective—one that recognizes the intersectionality and multiplicity of identities—has been missing. Originated by Black feminist and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, the concept of intersectionality is rooted in Black feminist theory and critical race theory (Potter, 2015). These theories emphasize the socially constructed nature of race, the every-day commonplace of racism in society that cannot simply be remedied by law, and the disproportionate privilege that the legal system extends to some races over others (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Moreover, these theories highlight the experiences of marginalization of people of Colour and the multiple consciousnesses inherent in their lives (O'Brien Hallstein, 2000). Given the experiences of living on the margins of society, intersectionality and critical race theory posit that people of Colour may be positioned to articulate their experiences and perspective on social, legal, political, intellectual, and economic realities (Potter, 2015). Without considering the intersectionality of identities when exploring MCC, researchers have oversimplified the cultural influences that impact experiences (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, [dis]ability, socioeconomic status, and language) and the role that power, privilege, and oppression play in this training is not yet fully understood.

Given efforts to recruit and maintain a diverse student body in counselling psychology training programs (American Psychological Association, 2017b; Canadian Psychological Association [CPA], 2011; Clawson et al., 2008), MC and SJ training must not overlook the needs of culturally diverse students. There have been increasing calls for the investigation of MC and SJ training from the perspectives of students who hold “culturally non-dominant identities,” defined here as those identities that are minoritized by dominant discourses and structures (Arthur & Collins, 2014). With this climate in mind, the aim of this study was to understand culturally non-dominant students' experiences of MC and SJ training within counselling psychology, with emphasis on how systemic discrimination, oppression, and power relationships impact these experiences.

Culturally Non-Dominant Identities and MCC Development

A handful of qualitative studies have reported that students from non-dominant racial and ethnic backgrounds found MC course readings, discussions, and supervision helped them become more reflexive, conscious of their own biases and prejudices, informed about subjects such as oppression and privilege, and racially aware (Curtis-Boles & Bourg, 2010; McDowell, 2004; Seward, 2014; Smith & Ng, 2009). However, a closer examination suggests the MCC training needs of students with non-dominant cultural identities differ from those of students with culturally dominant backgrounds. Specifically, racially non-dominant students reported that the content of their MC courses lacked depth and was geared towards students with dominant identities (Curtis-Boles & Bourg, 2010).

Evidence shows that MC courses often reactivate painful memories of racism and incite strong emotions about Eurocentrism among students with non-dominant racial identities (Curtis-Boles & Bourg, 2010; Seward, 2014; Smith & Ng, 2009). Seward (2014) found that racially non-dominant students engaged in a process of decision-making about the extent of their participation in class to manage uncomfortable experiences. These students described either intellectually withdrawing to protect themselves and their racial groups or deciding to speak up based on a perceived pressure to educate, represent, and advocate for their racial groups. Additionally, rather than being given the opportunity to be active learners, they felt their cultural identities positioned them as the primary objects for study (Seward, 2014).

Furthermore, these students reported, among other things, that MCC courses were often emotional experiences that rarely met their developmental needs.

Such findings were substantiated in Baker and Moore III's (2015) qualitative investigation of 19 racially non-dominant doctoral students who disclosed feeling stereotyped by faculty and peers, being treated as a token or visual representative of diversity in their programs, and needing to conform to dominant narratives. Furthermore, Curtis-Boles et al. (2020) examined the critical racialized incidents that 14 students of colour experienced in their doctoral psychology graduate classroom and demonstrated that racism was a common and persistent experience. The authors found six overarching themes: (a) intersectionality and manifestation of power differentials; (b) personal devaluation, invalidation, and/or shaming; (c) projection of racial stereotypes onto students of colour; (d) uncontested racist comments; (e) differences in communication styles and preferences; and (f) institutional devaluing of racial diversity. Another key finding of this research was that instructors were central to the racial aggression, acting directly or indirectly as perpetrators or silent agents, respectively.

Scholarship has also shown that students with non-dominant racial identities prefer different pedagogical strategies. Using a mixed-method design, Coleman (2006) explored counselling students' perceptions of MCC training and compared these perceptions across culturally dominant and non-dominant groups. Students who identified as culturally non-dominant reported didactic and experiential training experiences as most beneficial to their MCC development whereas their culturally dominant counterparts more often identified interacting with racially/ethnically diverse others as most beneficial to their MCC development (Coleman, 2006).

Research has led to better recognition of the ways in which racial and ethnic factors influence students' MCC development. However, MCC courses still tend to lack content that supports varied learning needs (Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001; Collins et al., 2015; Sinacore & Ginsberg, 2015; Treicher et al., 2020). In fact, Hansen et al. (2006) argued that MCC courses mostly offer a one-size-fits-all approach and rely too heavily on a single model of training (e.g., didactic teaching without the incorporation of experiential learning). This approach is not in line with research that contends that the design and teaching of MCC courses should consider the students, their cultural identities, their diversity-related developmental levels, and the dynamics that may be characteristic of their MCC learning experiences.

Canadian Context

The concept of multiculturalism and diversity within Canadian counselling psychology has been largely rooted in seminal work from the United States (Sinacore et al., 2011). However, Canadian scholarship has greatly contributed to the evolving understanding of certain aspects of MC and SJ. Specifically, Canadian scholars have focused on: (a) culture as inclusive of multiple and intersectional identity dimensions (e.g., Arthur 2018; Kassan & Sinacore, 2016); (b) theoretical conceptualizations of diversity (e.g., Taylor, 2012); (c) MC and SJ counselling models that position the counsellor and client within the broader familial, social, economic, and political contexts (e.g., Arthur, 2018; Audet & Paré, 2017; Collins, 2018; Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010); (d) the needs and considerations for therapeutic intervention with various non-dominant populations (e.g., Dupuis-Rossi, 2018; Fowler et al., 2011; Huevo, 2018); and (e) non-Western perspectives of healing, well-being, counselling pedagogy, practice, and interventions (e.g., Ansloos et al., 2019; Fellner, 2018; Ishiyama, 2003; King et al., 2016).

Despite the unique Canadian emphasis on the embedded nature of MC and SJ competencies within counselling psychology, there is limited Canadian research that examines MC and SJ training from the perspectives of culturally non-dominant students. More

intentional Canadian research would shed light on how to best support students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Given this situation, the goal of this study is trifold: (a) to understand non-dominant students' experiences of MC and SJ training within counselling psychology in Canada, (b) to unearth the systemic barriers that contribute to these experiences, and (c) to identify avenues to create a more culturally responsive ambience within Canadian counselling psychology training programs.

Researchers' Subjective Stance

It is important to begin with a reflection on the research team's subjective stance to ground their identities and social locations in the current body of work, and to outline their perspectives and assumptions going into this endeavor.

The research team consisted of three able-bodied, cis-gender, straight women, one of whom, the primary author, was a doctoral student at the time of the research. Across the three researchers, a wide variety of non-dominant identities and social locations were also represented (e.g., ethnic and racial identities, socioeconomic statuses, and religious beliefs, to name a few). Throughout this research endeavor we intentionally reflected on and articulated our subjective stances, acknowledging and challenging the ways in which our differing worldviews interacted with, influenced, and were influenced by the research process. For transparency, we will outline the primary author's subjective stance, whose dissertation was the impetus for this research, to outline in more nuance her interests, investments, and motivations for this body of work.

I (Julie Cohen) begin by acknowledging my privilege. I am an ethnically Italian and racially white¹, normatively sized, straight woman in my 30s. I migrated to Canada from the United States, an affluent country, with my family when I was six years old. Thus, I understand that I do not belong to groups that have traditionally been minoritized in Canada; my straight identity represents the dominant discourses around sexuality, I am able-bodied and neurotypical, and my first language is English which reflects the dominant language in Canada. As such, I recognize that I write from a place of privilege and that my lived experiences differ in many ways from the participants in this study. That being said, my interest in this research topic stems from a very personal place. Throughout my life, I have constantly felt pulled in opposing directions. I grew up in a Catholic and Jewish household and attended both French immersion school and Hebrew school in my adolescence. As a result, I was always questioning what religion I belonged to, and what values I held growing up. Having moved to Canada at a young age with two American parents from New York, I became confused as to what nationality I held. What at the time felt like binary choices, made me feel disconnected, and at times, isolated? These distressing feelings were compounded when Canadians would discriminate against Americans in my presence. In these circumstances, I felt I was left with two options—to either speak up for all Americans or to stay silent, keeping that aspect of my identity hidden. Oftentimes, I chose to remain quiet.

¹ The American Psychological Association (2017a) suggests capitalizing proper names of ethnic groups, including white. However, the term white, when used throughout this article refers to more than ethnic heritage; that is, it reflects social location, and the positioning of relative privilege that is inherent to the dominant ethnic groups in North America (e.g., white settler, white privilege). Following the example of feminist, MC, and SJ scholars, I have chosen to use the lower-case spelling of white to deconstruct and dismantle the power and privilege imbued within it. In juxtaposition, I have also chosen to capitalize names of non-dominant ethnic groups "in solidarity with the freedom, right, and power of these peoples to self-define and to reclaim their collective cultural identities in a way that enacts self-determination, demands recognition, and disrupts ongoing colonization" (Collins, 2018, p. 8).

These experiences continued throughout my life, and even occurred in my classrooms throughout my education. These small encounters with discrimination led me to wonder what others, who held less social and cultural privilege than me must experience in the face of discrimination; what aspects of people's identities and experiences might they be keeping hidden and silent to protect themselves? These silenced moments led me, through my master's research, to try to better understand the process by which emerging adult newcomers to Canada navigate their cultural identities. Continuing with my doctoral degree, I had many opportunities to consolidate my knowledge and awareness of MC and SJ related issues. First, I noted that although there has been an increase in incorporating MC and SJ principles into counselling psychology training, this movement is not new. Second, I recognized that counselling psychology presents universal understandings and frameworks of mental health and well-being to the exclusion of cultural values that do not fit a Western, reductionist, and individualistic set of frameworks. Third, although I recognized the great strides forward that the field of counselling psychology has taken in promoting and instilling MC and SJ principles in the broader field of psychology, based on my experience as a doctoral student, I realized that there was more that needed to be done to infuse these principles into training efforts. Counselling psychology pedagogy holds the assumption that it has come a long way, and has, in the face of systemic barriers related to embedding MC and SJ principles within programs, begun to burn out. However, if meaningful change is to occur, the call for MC and SJ competency must be reissued with newfound support from stakeholders (e.g., university systems, counselling psychology departments, faculty, and students).

Given these experiences and my understanding of the extant literature, I also note that current counselling psychology education is rooted in a post-colonial framework that impacts our training and research practices. Furthermore, groups who have experienced marginalization and discrimination, due to the post-colonial tropes that dominate our daily discourses and determine our norms, are more primed to perceive these experiences as they occur. As such, there are many benefits to integrating MC and SJ practices with the view to uncovering and promoting these students' inherent strengths, as well as finding ways to overturn the outdated and harmful post-colonial tropes that have found their way into counselling psychology education and training. For this reason, the distinctive and contextual perspectives and experiences these groups and individuals have of MC and SJ training form the basis for this research.

Given our respective insider/outsider positionings, various steps were taken (e.g., reflexive journaling, on-going peer and research team debriefing, and member checking) to ensure that our beliefs were made transparent and that the findings accurately portrayed the participants' experiences within the context of their training.

Method

In this investigation, we used a pluralistic approach that adopted a feminist standpoint theory (FST) epistemology to guide an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to answer this research question: How do counselling psychology doctoral students who self-identify with culturally non-dominant identities perceive their experiences of MC and SJ training?

Epistemology

Standpoint theory is an epistemology created by feminist scholars such as Nancy Hartsock (1983; 1985), Patricia Hill Collins (1986, 1989, 1990), Donna Haraway (1988, 1991, 1993), Sandra Harding (1991, 1998, 2004, 2014), and Dorothy Smith, (1987, 1990). As a

research framework, FST emphasizes that knowledge is both situated and grounded in experiences and social and historical practices and values, and is socially organized (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002). FST scholars posit that members of minoritized groups are more likely to have had experiences that are epistemically salient for identifying and assessing assumptions that have been systematically made less visible as the result of power dynamics (Harding, 2014; Intemann, 2010). Through intellectual and political struggle, members of oppressed or minoritized groups can develop a standpoint that inherently sees beneath the normative ideological surface of social relations (Harding, 2009). In unearthing these standpoints, this epistemology aims to apply new collective knowledge towards social change, and the elimination of oppression and marginalization (Brooks, 2011).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Influenced by phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, IPA is committed to understanding the subjective lived experiences of an individual through the meanings they assign to these experiences in context (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Moustakas, 1994; Smith et al., 2009). Drawing on the work of Heidegger (1927/1996), IPA philosophically adopts the notion of viewing individuals as “beings-in-the-world” or *Dasein*. With this concept, Heidegger argued that individuals exist within a pre-established world in which they create meaning about their experiences (Pollio et al., 1997; Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, IPA posits that passive observation is not possible, and that a researcher always applies interpretation to participants’ processes of meaning-making (Eatough & Smith, 2017). IPA researchers are implicated in facilitating and making sense of participants’ accounts, interpreting and synthesizing them across descriptions (Shinebourne, 2011).

Procedures

Following institutional review board approval, we contacted the directors of training and graduate program administrators of the five CPA-accredited doctoral counselling psychology programs in Canada (i.e., Universities of British Columbia, Alberta, Calgary, and Toronto, and McGill University). We asked them to electronically forward the study information and recruitment flyer to their doctoral students through their secure student list-serv. To be eligible to participate, individuals had to self-identify with one or more culturally non-dominant identities and had to have either completed the first year of their counselling psychology doctoral training or graduated recently from one of the above programs. Eligible participants were sent electronic copies of the consent form and a demographics questionnaire to be completed and sent back prior to the interview. Participants were offered a \$20.00 electronic gift card for participating, and a semi-structured interview was employed to elicit rich, detailed, and first-person accounts of MC and SJ training experiences and standpoints (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Harding 2009).

Six interviews were held over Skype, and two were held in-person. Historically, scholars have argued that remote methods of interviewing (e.g., telephone or Skype) vary from adequate and necessary (Cachia & Millward, 2011; Holt, 2010), to inherently inferior (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The principal concern for many scholars is the question as to whether remote methods of interviewing undermine the quality of data collection (Johnson et al., 2019). More recent scholarship, however, has shown that remote methods of interviewing such as Skype were able to build intimacy, create rapport building, and generate exceptional disclosure in comparison to in-person interviews (Jenner & Myers, 2019). Given that remote methods can result in quality data collection, and that it is uniquely suited to overcome challenges of geographical distances, Skype interviews were deemed important and necessary in the present

research to allow doctoral students across Canada to participate in the study. All interviews lasted between 90-180 minutes, were audio recorded, and later transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy by the primary author using the software MAXQDA 2020 (VERBI Software, 2019). To ensure participant's confidentiality, all transcripts were kept within files in the MAXQDA software which was installed on the primary author's personal computer, and was encrypted, and password protected.

Participants

The eight participants who were recruited self-identified as having one or more non-dominant cultural identities and were counselling psychology doctoral students from one of the five Canadian accredited institutions. Participants were in their early 20s to late 30s, with an average age of 31 years. They represented a variety of gender identities including male, female, and non-binary, and different sexes including male, female, and intersex. Participants self-identified as having a variety of sexual/affectional orientations including heterosexual, bisexual, pansexual, and queer. Some identified as having (dis)abilities and expressed experiences of deafness/hard of hearing, mental health challenges, learning disabilities, and chronic pain. They represented working and middle-class families, and self-identified as Christian, Protestant Christian, Agnostic, "Agnostic-ish," and as holding no religious or spiritual affiliation. Participants reflected a wide range of ethnicities including African, Chinese Canadian, Eastern European, East Indian, Italian, Russian, Taiwanese, and White, and an array of nationalities including American, Canadian, Dutch, Kenyan, Nigerian, and Taiwanese. They represented Canadian citizens, permanent residents, and international students, and all identified English as their primary language. Among the other languages spoken were Cantonese, Dutch, French, Mandarin, Spanish, and Taiwanese.

Participants represented doctoral students in the 2nd to 6th year of their degree, with an average completion of three years. All held other degrees and training including undergraduate and graduate degrees as well as training in a range of related disciplines. Two participants indicated they had never formally taken a MC course, and five participants indicated they had taken additional MC and SJ training, including workshops, research training, coursework, internship, and teaching assistantship. All participants indicated an interest in MC training and practice, and said it always informed their practice.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis focused on examining and coding sources of direct or indirect inequalities and power dynamics in participants situated and subjective experiences of MC and SJ training. Using the software MAXQDA 2020 (VERBI Software, 2019), data analysis followed Smith et al.'s (2009) six steps: (a) reading and re-reading each transcript for accuracy, and to allow the participant to become the focus of analysis; (b) initial noting to produce a comprehensive set of notes and comments on the data, paying attention to the experiential, semantic, and linguistic content; (c) developing emergent themes to transform initial notes into concise phrases, capturing the essential quality of each participant's experiences; (d) searching for connections across emergent themes and developing superordinate themes; (e) moving to the next transcript to complete steps (a) to (d); and (f) looking for patterns of convergence and divergence across the analyzed transcripts, and for the most salient superordinate themes representing the entire sample.

After step (d) of data analysis, we created preliminary data tables based on each interview that outlined superordinate themes, preliminary descriptions, and extracts from the transcript to enrich these themes. Each participant then checked their corresponding data table

and offered feedback. All participants responded to member checking, and their feedback informed data interpretation.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research (see Connelly, 2016; Kirk & Miller, 1986) while simultaneously attending to the standards of critical-ideological research, we relied on the criteria of reflexivity, representation, authenticity, and consequential validity (see Guba & Lincoln, 1989, 2005; Morrow, 2005). To meet these criteria, we engaged in ongoing reflexive journaling and peer-debriefing with the research team and colleagues—all of which was used to critique assumptions, biases, methodology, and interpretations. Further, to maintain balance between our interpretive analysis and remaining close to participants' experiences, we maintained an inquisitive stance, kept an audit trail of the analysis, and engaged in member checking and peer debriefing (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Lastly, we implemented several strategies to ensure the research increased social consciousness and empowered participants (e.g., emphasizing differing perspectives in the research protocols and deepening participants' understanding of their experiences through participation). Following the FST principle of emancipation (Ponterotto, 2005), participants were invited to hear how their contributions informed MC and SJ training and how they could continue to engage with the dissemination of the findings.

Results

The present study aimed to position data analysis within an FST lens and IPA framework, which encourages the understanding of an experience as an iterative and dialectical interplay between the researchers' understanding of the phenomenon of interest and the participants' process of meaning making. As such, the following results reflect a co-creation of understanding between our interpretive analysis and the participants' voices and reported experiences. This analysis led to the development of seven superordinate themes. These themes represent the overall experiences of MC and SJ training and include: (a) MC and SJ are personal and rooted in identity; (b) Instructors—their role and impact; (c) Classmates—a mixed bag; (d) Perceptions of MC and SJ courses; (e) Perceptions of clinical supervision; (f) Systemic engagement with MC and SJ principles; and (g) The emotional and psychological burden of MC and SJ training.

Most of the superordinate themes encompass several subordinate themes that reflect the convergences and divergences among participants' accounts (see Table 1).

Given that the sample size in this research is considered large for an IPA project, a group-level analysis was undertaken (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). Superordinate and subordinate themes are summarized and illustrated by participant extracts that best exemplify the main experiences. For confidentiality, participant-selected pseudonyms are employed, and program names are omitted.

Table 1
Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

Superordinate theme	Subordinate theme
MC and SJ is personal and rooted in identity	n/a
Instructors—their role and impact	Creating safety in the classroom MC and SJ competencies at the forefront
Classmates—A mixed bag	n/a
Perceptions of MC and SJ courses	Positive impact on personal and professional identity Deciding if it is worth their time Missed opportunity for deeper learning
Perceptions of Clinical Supervision	Degree of MC and SJ orientation and knowledge
Perceptions of Clinical Supervision (cont.).	The power to shape safety
Systemic engagement with MC and SJ principles	Microaggressions in the classroom Superficial endorsement of MC and SJ principles Lack of Research and Funding Opportunities Lack of program oversight and evaluation of MC and SJ
Emotional and psychological burden of MC and SJ training	Unmet expectations and disillusionment Need to fill the MC and SJ training gaps Holding less power Making non-visible identities known

MC and SJ are Personal and Rooted in Identity

Participants described how their non-dominant intersectional identities were at the forefront of their professional identities. They explained further that holding non-dominant cultural identities became a MC and SJ lens through which they viewed all their training. They shared how their lived experiences gave them an inside understanding of the struggles and strengths experienced in many minoritized communities. For example, Alex shared: “I think that the more your own experiences and identity, or intersectional identities differ from the main dominant one, the more you’re already going to be aware of those differences and have

thought about them.” Further, participants felt their personal MC and SJ lenses allowed them to critically analyze their MC and SJ training, as illustrated by Stephen:

There’s always been awareness of culture, growing up as an ethnic minority ... that’s always a blatant part of my identity that I draw upon It gives me not only tools but also a rootedness in terms of my identity as a person, and as a counsellor ... I think automatically when you’re presented with certain theories or ideas, that’s the lens that you see things by, and you wonder if they’re applicable. I think to an extent, it’s made me quite critical of the information that I’m provided You need to do a double take of everything.

All participants echoed Alex and Stephen and expressed that given their own culturally non-dominant identities, they felt better positioned to empathize and be responsive to people of varying backgrounds, and more equipped to understand and address systemic influences on clients’ presented challenges.

Instructors—Their Role and Impact

Participants reported that the way instructors interacted with MC and SJ principles varied and that this deeply impacted their sense of comfort, safety, and belonging in their programs. Further, their experiences existed not only across the context of MC and SJ courses, but also within other courses and the broader program. From among their courses, participants felt most engaged in MC and SJ topics and were willing to be vulnerable around instructors who were able to “create safety in the classroom,” which was one of the subordinate themes in this area. Willow shared:

It was co-taught in a way It was very egalitarian, and I think it was representative It was well aligned with what it could look like in the real world as opposed to being this untouchable teacher [who] makes PowerPoint slides and stands up Even his stance ... he sat, he didn’t stand, he didn’t write on the board ... so it felt like we were all in it together and that all of our perspectives were valid and important ... and that we were all learning from each other.

Several participants agreed and said that a sense of safety emerged when instructors balanced teacher-student power dynamics, were open to different perspectives, and contained and facilitated sensitive discussions about students’ values and viewpoints.

In contrast, participants’ sense of safety, comfort, and belonging were negatively impacted when instructors did not take an active role in creating safety in the classroom. Participants emphasized that an instructor’s lack of facilitation, containment, and debriefing of emotional and intense MC and SJ discussions had a significant impact on their sense of well-being and motivation to participate. For example, Alex recounted one experience in which he felt the instructor did not contain an emotional class discussion:

That’s a situation where I felt like everyone failed. The prof was so hands-off and like, “I’m not going to get involved with this,” and there was no follow-up. It was extremely heated and stressful I had to push the prof [after class] ... I was like, we need to address this ... you need to come back to this and sort of process what happened here.

Other participants also gave examples in which instructors did not shoulder the responsibility of facilitating difficult conversations, and where there was a perceived gap in facilitating safety. In such cases, some participants felt the onus was on them to lead discussions and process subsequent emotions on their own. These participants often expressed feeling that no one in a position of power (e.g., instructors) cared enough about them or the related cultural discussion to follow up.

Participants also indicated that their engagement was influenced by an instructor's ability to actively demonstrate that "MC and SJ competencies were at the forefront" of their pursuits (another of the subordinate themes). They felt most comfortable participating in classes when instructors actively infused MC and SJ perspectives into their professional and clinical work—folding this orientation into all teaching endeavours. Further, instructors who embodied these values often held non-dominant cultural identities themselves and made it a point to self-disclose these identities, positionalities, and related clinical experiences rooted in these contexts. Fern spoke of such instructors:

They can speak about experiences and nuances, to systems of oppression or privilege that is meaningful and makes it applied, makes it authentic and approachable They're able to approach it more genuinely, making it seem a little bit less projective or stereotypical.

Participants reported feeling appreciative, yet disappointed, when instructors passively infused MC and SJ competencies into their courses. For example, in terms of MC and SJ topics, Jane stated: "Some teachers have been very open to me bringing it up and I'm deeply appreciative of that, but had I not [brought it up], it would've never been talked about in my courses." Participants felt overlooked, frustrated, and disappointed when instructors were not open to different perspectives and instead showcased a limited awareness of their privilege. Willow shared:

There's this kind of blind spot ... especially if the classes are being taught by cis-, het-white people ... that diversity isn't really thought about because it doesn't need to be thought about. There's this way of seeing the world ... either "everyone is like me or they're not" ... it's not considered important because it hasn't needed to be considered important for these profs.

An instructor's ability to demonstrate MC and SJ competencies was not only relevant in the context of courses. Participants also described how their sense of belonging was impacted when MC and SJ competencies were prioritized by instructors within the program. For example, Chloe explained: "Having a lab, and to really share the same values, [was] very important. I had a sense of belonging and felt empowered ... So yeah, appreciation for the [research] lab, [a space developed by my professor]. It just makes me feel this is possible, meaningful." Conversely, when instructors demonstrated limited MC and SJ competencies in other academic spaces, participants felt let down and discouraged. Importantly, when limited MC and SJ competencies were evidenced by those deemed to be experts in the field of MC and SJ competencies, participants reported feeling disappointed in these experts' positions of power and the impact their lack of MC and SJ awareness had on students. For example, Fern shared:

There are people in the field that I've been most excited to meet because they're supposedly the experts, but meeting them face to face and/or hearing the stories ... I saw an incongruence in them not practicing what they preached. ... At a workshop I attended I could hear binary thinking and cisnormativity in the way

they spoke and the way they interacted with people. I could hear things that were very disappointing that I would not have expected for someone who's supposed to be this preeminent expert in Canada. You know if someone's talking about social justice and understanding positions of power and privilege ... I still see ... this gap between what they do and how they wield power against students.

Classmates—A Mixed Bag

Participants identified their classmates as another important component of their experiences of MC and SJ training. Specifically, participants' sense of comfort and safety to engage in class were greatly impacted by their classmates' level of commitment to MC and SJ perspectives. When classmates shared a similar level of commitment and held culturally non-dominant identities themselves, participants were able to have a richer experience. For example, Willow reported: "There's a few other folks in my cohort who are queer ... so I felt like I [had] allies in the classroom ... I wasn't the only one." These richer experiences included the ability to safely explore vulnerable aspects of their own identities. Classmates' levels of commitment to MC and SJ were viewed as supportive when they demonstrated diversity-related knowledge and awareness in class. For example, Stephen shared, "I had one classmate that was very brilliant, is still very brilliant ... he had very similar viewpoints and openness ... it was very helpful to have that individual [in the class]." Other participants also emphasized that their classmates showed more commitment when they were engaged and open to differing perspectives and were willing to share their personal experiences in a respectful manner.

When their classmates demonstrated openness towards MC and SJ training yet displayed a lower level of competence, participants' sense of comfort in their classes and the overall program were not threatened. They acknowledged their classmates' good intentions and recognized that the misuse of terminology and MC and SJ concepts were related more to competence than to commitment. However, participants felt hurt and rejected, and withdrew from class participation when classmates disengaged from discussions and actively dismissed MC and SJ training. For example, Jane shared how classmates' disinterest affected her:

You would say something heartfelt and ... no one would talk ... six people would be on their computers buying clothes ... other people seemed not ready ... they were like, "this [MC and SJ] thing isn't gonna be a thing that I'm doing" ... you could tell they weren't really engaged. So, for me to work through what was happening with me ... publicly with a bunch of people who really don't care ... it just felt wrong in several different ways.

Perceptions of MC and SJ Courses

Participants identified their specific MC and SJ courses as another critical component of their overall training experiences. These courses helped participants develop a deeper understanding of themselves, appreciate other worldviews, and gain skills that would allow them to work more responsively with clients. In this way, they shared those certain aspects of their MC and SJ courses had a "positive impact on their personal and professional identities," which was a subordinate theme in this domain. Miranda shared one such example:

There was [a student] in my class that was able to feel comfortable saying that [they] didn't feel comfortable ... and then we were able to talk that through and create a space where [they] felt a little more comfortable [That] was

valuable If we can create a space that's safe enough, then if things do come up ... we can have discussions that, at the end of the day, will hopefully lead to stronger relationships.

Other participants also emphasized how these courses, at times, supported them in learning how they might balance power dynamics within research and clinical work, create safety in the therapeutic relationship, and conceptualize culture more inclusively within clinical practice.

Despite the positive impacts described by participants, they also expressed dismay over the fact that MC and SJ courses were often not required. As a result, participants felt their programs placed less value on MC and SJ competencies. Furthermore, participants often expressed that when MC and SJ courses were made available, they did not seem appealing (e.g., Identity of the instructor, the lack of current and relevant curriculum content, and negative feedback from trusted colleagues, to name a few). Consequently, some participants were averse to taking them and articulated, in another subordinate theme in this area, that there was a need to "decide if it was worth their time" to take a stand-alone MC and SJ course. For example, Alex stated:

I don't take elective courses because I have enough on my plate already. But also, I've heard things about the class from other people who have taken it that makes me wonder if it would be worth my time, how much would I gain from it that I don't already have? Also, I've heard some things about the content of the course that makes me think that it's maybe not ... how can I say this diplomatically ... as up to date as it could be in terms of all the developments that have happened in the last couple of decades with respect to social justice and intersectional identity politics For some people it will be more valuable or newer than others ... when you [don't have marginalized identities] some of this coursework might be newer and more challenging and more on the helpful side.

Participants said that the factors that influenced their decision to take these courses included the identity of the instructor, the curriculum content, whether the course would meet their MC and SJ developmental needs, and the feedback of trusted classmates who had taken the course. Echoing Alex's attempt to "say this diplomatically," other participants also used qualifiers to soften their criticism of their MC courses, and actively reflected on how to represent their experiences in a way that would come across as uncontroversial.

When participants chose to take the MC and SJ courses offered, they expressed an overwhelming sentiment that the courses often represented a "missed opportunity for deeper learning," another of the subordinate themes that arose in the analysis. They reported that MC and SJ discussions were often shallow and that assignments did not focus on higher-level MC and SJ clinical skill development. For example, Miranda expressed:

I call it [an] intro course it's a missed opportunity when the materials are being presented in a checkbox way that's sort of surface level and doesn't really dive into what this actually looks like in practice and maybe why it's important ... like why is this actually important? What kind of impact does this have? ... why is it important to develop these competencies? ... how does it impact our clients when we're doing the work well versus when we're ... not attending to these pieces?

Similarly, Tolu shared:

It was more textbook style ... read this chapter, come back, discuss it. Well, it's more surface level, when there were tensions in the class across opinions, perspectives, identities, experiences ... it was quickly summarized and brushed over and moved quickly past ... the focus was more on covering as many topics as possible than really the larger issues. So, that class felt more like an information session or workshop.

Several participants reported that even after they took the course, they still did not understand how to apply MC and SJ concepts into practice and they felt that the course missed an opportunity to better instill these competencies.

Perceptions of Clinical Supervision

Participants indicated that their clinical field supervisors were critical to their MC and SJ training experiences. Their clinical field supervisors' "degree of MC and SJ orientation and knowledge" had a profound impact on students' ability to open and feel supported, which was a subordinate theme in this area. When MC and SJ discussions occurred during supervision, participants felt more personally accepted, found their clinical experiences were more rewarding, and evaluated their supervisors as more knowledgeable and competent. As Alex illustrated:

It was nice to tell that she was thinking that way and not just helping me to think that way ... also personally in that placement, I felt very accepted, everyone was using my preferred pronouns and acknowledging what I thought was my gender identity at the time.

Conversely, when clinical field supervisors lacked diversity-related knowledge, participants felt disillusioned and lost trust. This shift impacted the supervisee-supervisor dynamic and subsequently influenced participants' receptiveness to their supervisors. For example, Jane shared:

I've experienced derogatory things from supervisors that have just felt hurtful and un-useful ... [it's been] a mixed bag. I've had a bunch of supervisors and it seems like multiculturalism is not a pervasive concept ... [which] usually de-values the supervision for me It clears out any idealism that I may have had or ... it makes me need to present things more carefully and in a more articulate fashion It makes me feel pretty defensive usually... [and] very protective of my clients, extremely protective.

Participants also highlighted that their clinical field supervisors had the "power to shape the safety" of the atmosphere in their clinical practicums, which was another subordinate theme. Supervisees felt safer to process their clinical experiences when supervisors demonstrated curiosity, openness, and willingness to discuss MC and SJ perspectives openly. In contrast, when clinical field supervisors were not open to discussing MC and SJ related issues, participants felt unsafe to be honest about their clinical experiences and did not feel they could grow their competencies. For example, Tolu said she could not expand her clinical skills and worldviews without an open-minded clinical supervisor to create the safety needed to grapple with the tension that existed between her beliefs and those espoused by MC and SJ principles:

[My professor] also mentioned that in the context of supervision I should always have to be watchful for what supervisor is open to these conversations. So, I think she recognized that not every [clinical field supervisor] has these competencies or will stretch themselves to have these conversations, especially when it's controversial both politically and within the field.

Systemic Engagement with MC and SJ Principles

Participants reported that their programs' overall commitment to and engagement with MC and SJ principles played a significant role in their experiences. While their respective programs communicated a foundational stance towards multiculturalism, diversity, and SJ in their mission statements, the cultural climate caused participants to, at times, question their programs' true commitment. The cultural climate was shaped by day-to-day lived experiences within programs, which either reinforced or undermined participants' perceptions of their program's commitment to MC and SJ principles. Participants all shared that their programs adopted a "superficial endorsement of MC and SJ principles," which was a subordinate theme that emerged in this area. This superficiality was described as an emphasis on MC and SJ orientation in theory but not in practice. For example, Stephen expressed:

I remember us trying to advocate for certain things and talking to other [students] who had been at [name of doctoral program], and I remember them saying they tried to advocate for the same thing 10 years ago. It just felt like a program that was just so stuck in its nature.

Echoing the "stuck" nature of his program and the profession, Alex stated:

We're still operating from a Eurocentric model We see social justice as another field of the humanities that is separate, as if there is this discreet boundary The social context of mental health is still an afterthought ... as a profession we're still [asking] to what extent social justice advocacy should be considered a component of our work ... which is kind of crazy, of course it should be! We're psychologists ... being a human and living life is our business, so why is that even a question?

Other participants also shared examples in which their programs superficially endorsed MC and SJ principles: treating multiculturalism and diversity as "checkmark" topics; failing to include diversity-related topics throughout the curriculum; and allotting too little time for MC and SJ training.

Another major factor that negatively impacted cultural climate was the experience of "microaggressions in the classrooms," which was another subordinate theme that emerged in the analysis. Despite the efforts made towards greater inclusivity in the programs, participants recounted a range of microaggressions that left a lasting negative impression on them. For example, Fern shared:

I was explicitly told in a comment by [someone in my faculty] that if you need to worry about [your finances], maybe a Ph.D. isn't for you It seemed so ignorant of socioeconomic status and social justice and how the accessibility of education is a social justice issue It's again, another missing piece that makes me feel like an outsider, like I don't belong and potentially have to work harder.

Reflecting a similar degree of anger, Chloe reported:

I have been treated as a token ... an advocate, a cultural ambassador for all Even though I would never identify as being from [name of an Asian country], they would all just turn to me [and] be like, "Oh ... what do you think of [Asian country's] culture?"

Participants described experiences in which they felt dismissed for holding certain beliefs, were stereotyped because of biases about gender, class, and religion, or felt invisible in the program. As a result of these microaggressions, participants felt overlooked and superficially reduced to their non-dominant cultural identities. Moreover, some participants shared how microaggressions led to the unintentional internalization of hegemonic sociocultural perspectives. For example, Chloe shared: "I started feeling that it was my fault, that this is a me problem I feel like I have been putting up this brave face for the past six years I just felt so ashamed to recognize that I'm not from here."

In addition, participants stated that a "lack of MC and SJ research and funding opportunities," another subordinate theme in this area, negatively impacted their perceptions of their program's overall cultural climate. While participants often felt an allyship with their research supervisors due to having a shared understanding of the magnitude of this scholarship, that supervisor was often the sole faculty member who specialized in MC and SJ related work. Moreover, outside this dynamic, participants felt at an even greater disadvantage when applying for research funding given that other faculty members and funders were perceived as viewing MC and SJ research as "niche" or "fashionable." For example, Willow cautiously, shared:

I perceive there to be this idea that ... "We can't fund too many LGBT projects because it's just not considered important ... it's a small area of the population" I don't feel like it's a valued area of research. I know that is a very broad contentious statement to make, but that's been my experience now doing this research for almost ten years. I've actually had profs say to me, "You might want to consider changing your topic if you're trying to get funding because it's just not something that's readily funded" ... and that's frustrating to me I don't want to change my topic of research because other people don't deem it important ... so if that means fighting an uphill battle for the rest of my Ph.D. and never getting funding, then so be it.

Participants shared further criticism regarding their programs' perceived attitude toward MC and SJ oriented research. Like Willow's careful articulation of how her experience was "broad" and "contentious," other participants described their experiences with hesitance, while actively contemplating how to articulate standpoints that might be perceived as overly critical or controversial.

Lastly, participants indicated, in a final subordinate theme in this area, that a "lack of program oversight and evaluation of MC and SJ training" negatively contributed to their perceptions of the cultural climate. An absence of oversight included a lack of evaluation of MC and SJ competencies for instructors, students, and clinical supervisors. For example, Tolu shared:

There are other [instructors] who are not pushed to embed MC and SJ, or are not required to, or [are] not adhering to the standards of counselling psychology

in general in Canada, or not doing that in their own courses ... and they're getting away with it.

Tolu's frustration and astonishment were echoed by participants when their programs allowed instructors and students to move smoothly through the program without adopting a genuine commitment to MC and SJ principles, as illustrated by Jane:

I imagine the student who [was] saying a bunch of things that [were] pretty awful didn't learn anything and just moved on in their life and continued to do that, and ... it kills me that this person will go on to be a psychologist and perpetuate really dangerous stereotypes about people that are very inaccurate.

Additionally, participants were angry that their MC and SJ training was left solely to their clinical practicum experiences as these placements often varied in their MC and SJ commitments. Fern stated:

I think there's a little bit of handwashing by the programs. We don't know who practicum supervisors are or what these organizations are that students are being embedded within to get this practical training I think there's a lot of trust and eye-closing that happens.

Emotional and Psychological Burden of MC and SJ Training

There were emotional and psychological consequences throughout their training that deeply impacted participants' experiences. For example, they reported that there was a high emotional and psychological toll associated with having to step into the role of educating themselves and others on diversity-related topics. Further, they expressed both vulnerability that resulted from standing up for MC and SJ principles, and fear about being perceived as different based on their values and culturally non-dominant identities. One emotional and psychological consequence was a felt sense of "unmet expectations and disillusionment." This subordinate theme impacted participants' feelings of belonging, comfort, and overall sense of hope in terms of their program's ability to give them the education they desired. For example, Chloe shared:

I pretty much have to teach myself if I don't know something For example, if I wanted to know how emotionally focused therapy is informed by multiculturalism ... I'd have to educate myself because nobody would really be there to answer this question I was accepted to educate myself independently, but ... I also think, shouldn't that be the department's mission? Shouldn't that be the program's ... benchmark ... instead of ... "Oh, just do the research," you know? "You're in a Ph.D. program, you should be able to find it" ... If I can do all the research myself, why would I need you?

Many participants similarly expressed understanding the need for independent learning. However, in relation to this self-education, participants wanted their knowledge acquisition to be better supported through ongoing faculty support and dialogue.

Another emotional and psychological consequence was the "need to fill the MC and SJ training gaps," an additional subordinate theme that emerged in this area. Filling the gaps included speaking up in support of MC and SJ issues, challenging dominant discourses, and educating others on MC and SJ perspectives. Participants described advocating for MC and SJ

perspectives as a duty—an experience that participants felt took emotional and psychological energy. Moreover, participants were frustrated, angry, and derisive that a gap existed at all, and that it fell upon them to fill. Fern stated:

When there's something that needs to be said or that no one else seems to be naming ... especially when it comes to MCC stuff ... I definitely feel compelled to speak out and to do it publicly rather than privately because I don't want these kinds of lessons to go unchallenged, especially with people who are just starting in this world ... I can't sit back and let that silence dominate I need to say something to correct something, to contextualize a comment that somebody may have made, especially the instructor.

Another emotional and psychological consequence that arose was awareness of “holding less power” than faculty members and other students, which was another subordinate theme that emerged. Participants were aware of the power dynamics within their programs which made them feel vulnerable because, given their non-dominant cultural identities, they felt they held the least amount of power. Chloe shared her frustration:

As an international student it feels like I'm begging for attention Why do international students have to feel bad about being an international student? Why do international students have to feel shame? I don't feel like I'm [getting any] kind of support ... I only get the sense that, “Oh, you are an international student, they never take international students!” so I should feel grateful for that. Other than that, nothing.

Participants felt defeated in their ability to make meaningful changes in their programs and needed to weigh the emotional risks associated with speaking up from a lower position of power. One of the overwhelming risks associated with holding less power was garnering a negative reputation for continually advocating for MC and SJ perspectives. Participants described this as being perceived as “that person” who is “always nagging” or “arguing,” or who is thought of as the “social justice warrior.” Participants worried that this reputation could come back to “bite them,” making it more difficult to move smoothly through their programs. Given their perception of consequences, participants often stated that to challenge dominant ways of thinking, they needed to actively evaluate whether speaking up was worth the energy, exposure, and risk. Moreover, holding less power, they were cautious not to “rock the boat” and would actively watch their language and tone when offering MC and SJ related knowledge. For example, Miranda shared hesitantly:

Being a doctoral student, I am in a position of some power. I mean, maybe not within the academic structure ... this is just an example, but if this person is the head of the department ... that's someone that I don't really want to challenge because that could create problems ... I don't want to create too many waves ... or I don't want to be known as the person who's always arguing with everything.

The awareness of power dynamics and risks of challenging dominant discourses was so prevalent in participants' MC and SJ training experiences that one doctoral student, Fern, articulated worry on behalf of one of the authors of this paper, namely the doctoral student conducting the interview:

It's nice to have an outlet to critique our programs ... and we shouldn't be afraid of doing this ... so, it's good to be able to talk about this ... I was about to say openly ... but I mean more openly because ... I do feel this is a bit risky to talk [about], because again, going back to the vulnerability of students and our position of holding less power ... we are looking inward here and the faculty are going to be really interested in seeing what's going on, and they won't want to hear that they're potentially reproducing harms and that they're potentially hypocritical ... very hypocritical, they won't want to see that, and I don't know that they're ready to hear this, but they need to. And if this is the way to do it so other students can feel freer, so I can feel free to say this stuff, then I'm grateful for it ... I feel bad for you though ... now you're vulnerable.

All participants shared their fear while “walking the tightrope” of advocating for MC and SJ principles and speaking out about their beliefs.

A final emotional and psychological dimension reported by participants was trying to decide whether to share about their non-visible identities. Speaking up on behalf of MC and SJ values salient to their sense of self often necessitated “making their non-visible identities” (e.g., religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc.) known to others in their programs, another subordinate theme in this area. Tolu shared her experience related to making her learning disability visible:

It's a double-edged sword ... sometimes when I bring it up to a prof their expectations go from [high to low]. So, I don't want to always bring it up so that I can also be grilled and refined like every other student ... it gets a little dicey.

Other participants, too, stated that drawing attention to their non-visible identities was psychologically challenging. On one hand, they were reticent to disclose their non-visible identities, as they feared they would be judged, viewed differently, or would have to become the representative of their respective minoritized communities. On the other hand, when they did not make these identities visible, participants felt unseen and misrepresented.

Discussion

Using an integrated research approach, this study went beyond descriptive experiences and identified the hegemonic discourses and mechanisms of social systems that perpetuate the status quo (Harding, 2004; 2014). We now examine the findings considering the sociocultural practices in North America that devalue and marginalize non-dominant cultural identities and worldviews, including: (a) catering to dominant cultural identities, (b) facilitation gaps and cultural microaggressions, (c) unequal distribution of MC and SJ responsibility, (d) stigmatization of social advocacy, and (e) lack of a culturally sensitive climate.

Catering to Dominant Cultural Identities

Our study contributes to the body of literature that examines the systemic barriers for students with culturally non-dominant identities in higher education settings. Consistent with previous research, our study demonstrates that MC and SJ courses lack depth and complexity for culturally non-dominant students (Baker et al., 2015; Seward, 2014) in part because they tend to cater to students who hold dominant cultural identities. There are many reasons why the trend of prioritizing the dominant cultural identities' needs and experiences over others

occurs. First, the foundation of this trend is based on the way that normative hegemonic discourses are reproduced within everyday communities, including within counselling psychology training programs (Collins, 2018). Second, according to research, academic institutions may seem to cater to culturally dominant students as the coursework often emphasizes the academic work of white theorists and is founded in Western frameworks of health and pathology (Haskins et al., 2013). For example, MC coursework often focuses on privilege, movement away from culturally blind attitudes, and discussions of culturally different groups (Bartoli et al., 2015).

Facilitation Gaps and Cultural Microaggressions

Participants expressed a desire for instructors to facilitate, contain, and debrief emotionally laden conversations that arose in their MC and SJ courses more actively. Research into instructors' approaches to conflict-resolution in MC courses found that they used a limited set of empirically supported interventions (e.g., accurate listening and reflection) when presented with hypothetical classroom conflicts (Burton & Furr, 2014). Our findings contribute to this literature as it highlights instructors are still having difficulty intervening meaningfully in MC and SJ discussions in the classroom. Barriers to instructor intervention could include resource and training shortages, which could exacerbate common social barriers to facilitating conversations about race, privilege, gender, and oppression. Research indicates that many culturally dominant counselling educators often feel overwhelmed and inauthentic when addressing issues related to systemic oppression, racism, and racial inequality (Smith et al., 2017). Conversely, culturally non-dominant counselling educators may hesitate to intervene due to experiences of animosity from students, exhaustion from negative classroom exchanges, and the tendency to receive lower course evaluations overall when compared to culturally dominant instructors (Chesler & Young Jr., 2007; Reynolds, 2011; Yoon et al., 2014).

Furthermore, our findings contribute to the above literature as they highlight that experiencing microaggressions in the classroom was a chief source of the intense emotional experiences related to difficult class discussions. Consistent with North American socially constructed stereotypes, and prior research, these microaggressions included reports of racial, ethnic, and gender essentialism, assumptions of academic inadequacy, and being superficially reduced to their non-dominant cultural identities, at the exclusion of other important identity characteristics (Curtis-Boles et al., 2020). Incidents that were described as most hurtful were those that led to the internalization of hegemonic sociocultural perspectives. This finding is important as the persistent experiences of microaggressions in higher education settings could have significant impact on graduate programs' ability to recruit and maintain a diverse faculty and student body. Given that counselling psychology as a field has been moving towards SJ initiatives, it is important to understand what dynamics are causing the perpetuation of microaggressions in the classroom (and presumably in the program as a whole) so that they can be addressed.

Unequal Distribution of MC and SJ Responsibility

The nature of participants' feelings when pursuing diversity-related material in class or with experts in the field was contingent on the degree to which the instructor lived up to MC and SJ principles. Uniquely, our research shows that those instructors perceived as embodying MC and SJ values typically self-identify as culturally non-dominant themselves. However, such instructors were not common and were often considered the sole MC and SJ expert within their departments, singlehandedly bearing responsibility in this area. This finding is notable given that Fujimoto (2012) contended that although diversity within the student population has

continued to increase, diversity among faculty and instructors has not changed significantly. Moreover, our findings unearth how unequal distribution of MC and SJ responsibility may contribute to students' perceptions of a lack commitment to these principles. In fact, Ahluwalia et al. (2019) concluded that "the most marginalized teach about diversity" (p. 191) which included untenured faculty of colour or adjunct instructors designated to teach these courses.

Similarly, our study highlights that there is also an unequal distribution of MC and SJ responsibility across the study body, with culturally non-dominant students feeling a need to support this learning for themselves and their peers. This was related to the experience that, at times, culturally dominant students chose to opt out of or rebuff MC and SJ training. One interpretation of this finding is that students are misunderstanding the applicability and significance of MC and SJ competencies, and that these competencies are not being sufficiently emphasized by their programs. Moreover, culturally dominant students may be opting out due to the discomfort (e.g., feelings of anger, fear, and guilt) related to confronting challenging MC and SJ topics (DiAngelo, 2011). Our findings suggest that more research is needed to better understand why some students have different psychological and behavioural responses to MC and SJ training so as to promote shared responsibility across students and faculty alike.

Stigmatization of Social Advocacy

Our findings also highlight the emotional and psychological labour required in challenging culturally encapsulated views. Consistent with the findings of earlier studies, participants engaged in a complex process of decision making when determining whether to speak up and/or challenge their peers and instructors for fear of being personally labeled, silenced, and misunderstood based on their identities (Seward 2014; Seward & Guiffreda, 2012). However, elaborating on previous scholarship, our research shows that in addition to personal discomfort and worry about being marginalized, participants were also fearful about how voicing a progressive political stance would affect their academic reputation and standing.

Simi and Futrell (2009) noted that committed activism is not a role easily turned on and off, but rather a moral position central to self-identity that permeates thoughts and interactions across contexts and situations. Committed activism is not often seen in educational settings such as counselling psychology training programs in North America. Consequently, activists are often stigmatized and labeled as deviants (Simi & Futrell, 2009). Similarly, participants in our study said it was neither safe nor advantageous to challenge dominant discourses and worldviews, for fear of being labeled as deviant and/or penalized in their programs for "burning bridges." This was evidenced not only in what participants said but also in how they said it, hesitantly, and using expressions to hedge their meaning. Withholding one's true perspectives out of fear is one of several commonly identified coping mechanisms used by socially minoritized individuals; others include avoiding communication, code switching, and self-censoring (Sun & Starosta, 2006). Although these may keep participants safe, they simultaneously limit their ability to be heard, fulfill their needs, and take pride in their self-identities (Sun & Starosta, 2006). These findings are particularly salient as it speaks to a felt reality that counselling psychology training programs are inadvertently sending culturally encapsulated messages that undermine their MC and SJ initiatives.

Lack of a Culturally Sensitive Climate

Adding to the perception of a lack of culturally sensitive climate, participants' felt that their programs treated MC and SJ competencies as "checkmark" topics. One of the main reasons for this perception was the fact that MC and SJ courses were often offered as electives. This substantiates the findings of earlier work, which reports that students encounter barriers

(e.g., available time and finances) when taking on additional elective coursework or seeking out external MC and SJ training (Singh et al., 2010). Our findings also add nuance to the extant research that has found a widespread decrease in public funding for postsecondary education, increased tuition fees and accumulation of student debt (Goghari, 2019), and to the criticisms that higher education systems are “built and organized according to taken for granted, middle- and upper-class cultural norms, unwritten codes, or rules of the game” (Stephens et al., 2012, p. 1178). Moreover, making MC and SJ courses electives may be connected to the perception that students (and instructors) can opt out of this training.

In addition to the above findings, our study findings highlight that there are many issues related to participants’ perceptions that their programs held a superficial commitment to MC and SJ training. For instance, regardless of direct support from their research supervisors, participants often had trouble getting both internal and external sources of funding and felt that their programs insufficiently evaluated the MC competencies of their community practicum supervisors. Given the above findings, it would be valuable to better understand how MC and SJ competencies are being evaluated within counselling psychology training programs, and to examine the effectiveness of the communication between graduate programs and practicum sites (Hage et al., 2019).

Implications for Counselling Psychology Training

For a full discussion of implications for counselling psychology training, please see (Cohen et al., 2021). Increasingly, North American counselling psychology has committed to promoting SJ, multiculturalism, and diversity for individuals, across cultures, and in research methods (Bedi et al., 2011; Speight & Vera, 2004). The field has been at the forefront of fostering MC and SJ change on systemic levels and encouraging introspection of the inclusivity of their pedagogical and training practices. The very nature of this study’s inward reflection speaks to the fields’ achievements in instilling MC and SJ lenses for research, practice, and pedagogical reflexivity. However, further examination of practices and the incorporation of feedback from various sources including culturally non-dominant students are warranted. By exploring a wide range of wisdom and insight, we can advance current methods of training and deliver a more inclusive and nuanced level of education.

Broadly, findings suggest implications for the continued commitment of instructors, training programs, and broader systems to MC and SJ through reflexivity and the mitigation of power dynamics (Curtis-Boles et al., 2020). This includes deconstructing power hierarchies in the classroom through self-reflection, emphasizing classrooms as communities, and establishing safety using conflict-resolution interventions (Burton & Furr, 2014; Chung et al., 2018). Further, it entails institutional responsibility for the ongoing MC and SJ training of faculty through the creation of affirmative spaces that foster faculty mentorship and through opportunities for experiential learning (Ahluwalia et al., 2019; Lee, 2018). Lastly, it also includes a systemic level commitment to examining and adjusting MC and SJ accreditation standards as needed to create increased transparency and evaluation of these competencies across all topics in counselling psychology training curricula (Ansloos et al., 2019; Sinacore & Ginsberg, 2015; Thériault & Gazzola, 2019).

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

This study is one of the first Canadian research endeavours that explores students’ perspectives on MC and SJ training on a national level. Moreover, it is the first in North America to examine MC and SJ training from the perspective of culturally non-dominant students. It also centers an inclusive definition of culture which allows greater direct reflection

on aspects of identity beyond race and ethnicity and creates space for a more nuanced understanding of how culturally diverse students experience their MC and SJ training.

However, there are also limitations. Although steps were taken to protect participants and the information they shared, given that the counselling psychology community across Canada is small, there is the possibility of participants becoming identifiable (Kleinberg, 2000). This reality may have influenced the details participants felt comfortable sharing in their interviews. Moreover, while the current research was shaped by an inclusive definition of culture, many cultural identities were not represented (e.g., Indigenous identities, non-Western religions, etc.). Thus, the current findings cannot shed light on how current training practices incorporate other ways of knowing and healing. Given these limitations, we must continue to explore multiple individual and experiences to create more data about MC and SJ training (Smith et al., 2009). To enhance these findings, research that explores different cultural perspectives and training experiences (e.g., Indigenous students, culturally dominant students, and instructors) is recommended. Moreover, building on the foundations of FST, future research may benefit from a focused exploration of the systemic mechanisms that contributed to participants' experiences (e.g., an in-house MC and SJ competencies evaluation). Intentionally centering a variety of voices, especially those that are minoritized, and prioritizing their experiences of MC and SJ training will usher us into new and exciting directions that provide culturally responsive, socially grounded, and holistic conceptualizations of MC and SJ training.

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Author Note

Dr. Julie A. Cohen and Dr. Kaori Wada are currently affiliated with the University of Calgary, Educational Studies in Counselling Psychology, Werklund School of Education; 2500 University Dr. NW, Calgary, AB T2N 1N4, Canada. For Dr. Cohen, please direct correspondence to julianne.cohen@ucalgary.ca. For Dr. Wada, please direct correspondence to kaori.wada@ucalgary.ca.

Dr. Anusha Kassan is currently affiliated with the University of British Columbia, Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education; Vancouver Campus, 2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC Canada V6T 1Z4. Please direct correspondence to anusha.kassan@ubc.ca.

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