

Experiences of Cross-Racial Trust in Mentoring Relationships Between Black Doctoral Counseling Students and White Counselor Educators and Supervisors



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The literature is replete with research and references to racism experienced by Black faculty and students in counselor education. Although explorations of the mistrust in relationships between races is extant, empirical investigations into trusting cross-racial relationships in counselor education have been scarce. To address this void, the researchers conducted a phenomenological qualitative study with 10 Black doctoral counseling students concerning their experiences of cross-racial trust with White counselor educators and clinical supervisors who were mentors. Researchers identified three superordinate themes during data analysis: reasons for trust, reasons for mistrust, and benefits of cross-racial mentoring. The researchers also identified several themes and subthemes that delineated the interpersonal and intrapersonal factors that helped generate cross-racial trust, despite participants' ubiquitous experiences of racism. The participants' experiences are discussed, and implications are offered for enhancing trust in cross-racial relationships in mentoring, supervision, counseling, and training programs.

Keywords: cross-racial, trust, supervisors, mentors, counselor educators

The counseling profession purports to value racial inclusivity, cultural competence, and social justice (e.g., American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs [CACREP], 2015; Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2015). Yet, this vision remains unrealized. Black counselor educators and students report that White racism is pervasive (Baker & Moore, 2015; Brooks & Steen, 2010; Henfield, Woo, & Washington, 2013; Holcomb-McCoy & Addison-Bradley, 2005). Although empirical studies have documented the negative experiences of Black people within counselor education because of the prevalence of racism (Baker & Moore, 2015; Cartwright, Avent-Harris, Munsey, & Lloyd-Hazlett, 2018; Haskins et al., 2013; Henfield et al., 2013), research regarding positive interracial relationships, specifically involving successful Black–White mentoring connections, has been scarce (Fleig-Palmer & Schoorman, 2011; Leck & Orser, 2013). Our study sought to address this inequity and incongruence by using a strength-based lens to explore successful, trusting, cross-racial mentoring relationships.

Racism in Counselor Education

Baker and Moore's (2015) qualitative study examined the experiences of 19 ethnic minority doctoral students in counselor education, 12 of whom were Black. The student participants voiced their frustrations with the pressures they felt to suppress their ethnic identity and to act in ways aligned with White cultural standards. Although Henfield et al.'s (2013) phenomenological study of 11 Black doctoral students found a desire for mentoring from faculty members, the students shared similar conclusions regarding their isolation and disconnection from the faculty in their programs. This appeared to mirror the experiences reported by Black faculty. Holcomb-McCoy and Addison-Bradley (2005) found Black counselor educators did not feel included as valuable assets by their White colleagues. Finally, a study of 11 Black doctoral counseling students by Henfield, Owens, and Witherspoon (2011) revealed that

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despite feeling marginalized, their participants used relational resources, such as peer support, race-based organizations, and personal and professional advisors, to promote their success. Together, these studies expose a pernicious incongruence between what the counseling profession champions and what Black students and faculty are experiencing. One promising means of ameliorating these concerns could be culturally responsive cross-racial mentoring, which may assist in bridging this gap (Alvarez, Blume, Cervantes, & Thomas, 2009). In particular, cross-racial mentoring has been viewed as an avenue to enhance the recruitment and retention of counselor education faculty of color (Borders et al., 2011; Butler, Evans, Brooks, Williams, & Bailey, 2013).

Cross-Racial Mentoring

Blackwell (1989) defined mentoring as “a process by which persons of superior rank, special achievements, and prestige instruct, counsel, guide, and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development of persons identified as protégés” (p. 9). Positive mentoring can be an asset and also an antidote to the bigotry and marginalization often experienced by students of color (Luedke, 2017; D. L. McCoy, Winkle-Wagner, & Luedke, 2015). Effective mentoring also can enhance students’ likelihood of academic and career success and professional growth, along with increasing self-efficacy, mental health, and social and cultural capital (Chadiha, Aranda, Biegel, & Chang, 2014; Chan, Yeh, & Krumboltz, 2015; Gaddis, 2012; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2014).

Although students of color often desire mentoring from ethnic minority faculty, there is a need for cross-racial mentoring because of the lack of faculty of color (Brooks & Steen, 2010; Ortiz-Walters & Gibson, 2005; Patton, 2009). Yet, some scholars (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004) note that cultural mistrust may hinder the forming of these beneficial interracial relationships, thus denying many Black graduate students the professional and psychological benefits associated with mentoring.

Cross-Racial Trust and Mistrust

For successful mentoring, a trusting relationship appears to be vital (Chan et al., 2015; Chun, Litzky, Sosik, Bechtold, & Godshalk, 2010; Eller, Lev, & Feurer, 2014; Gaddis, 2012; D. L. McCoy et al., 2015; Merriweather & Morgan, 2013; Rademaker, Duffy, Wetzler, & Zaikina-Montgomery, 2016). Yet, in the United States, the largest gap in cross-racial trust is between Black and White people (S. S. Smith, 2010).

As a result of both the long history and current experiences of racism in America, cultural mistrust, or the mistrust of White people by ethnic minorities, may serve a psychologically adaptive function in affording self-protection (Bell & Tracey, 2006; Terrell & Terrell, 1981; Whaley, 2012). Black people rate highest in cultural mistrust of all major ethnic minority groups, which may be a result of the particular history of slavery and the oppressive practices that continue to this day. Although cultural mistrust can serve as a protective factor, Bell and Tracey (2006) found that Black patients with higher levels of cultural mistrust suffered psychologically. Another effect of high levels of mistrust may be a lack of desire for Black people to build alliances with White professionals of goodwill who can assist with their professional development (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). Although additional studies examining racism and its impact on the professional development of students of color are needed, the more conspicuous gap in the literature is with regard to cross-racial trust and positive cross-racial relationships.

With the disproportionate underrepresentation of Black faculty in counselor education, it is likely that some Black graduate students will need to connect with White mentors (Brooks & Steen, 2010; Haizlip, 2012). Although multiple studies have examined the challenges experienced by Black students in counselor education programs (Baker & Moore, 2015; Haskins et al., 2013; Henfield et al., 2013), there is a dearth of explorations of trust in the counseling literature, especially cross-racial

trust. Our phenomenological study addresses this omission by investigating successful Black–White trusting mentoring relationships in counselor education.

The goal of our study was to examine Black doctoral counselor education students' experiences of cross-racial trust with White mentors in the counseling profession. The results of this study may encourage Black students to consider seeking mentoring relationships with White individuals, given the relative shortage of racial minorities within the profession, and also help White people of goodwill to mentor and aid Black students in achieving their academic and professional goals.

Methodology

In order to explore and represent the lived experiences of Black students' successful cross-racial mentoring relationships in the counseling profession, the first author conducted a qualitative study in the tradition of transcendental phenomenology with Black doctoral counseling students who had trusting relationships with White mentors in the profession (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research focuses on the lived experiences of people, amplifying their voices as it seeks to ascertain the meanings they give to their experiences (Adams & van Manen, 2008). Through this lens, we examined the experiences of 10 Black doctoral counseling students who participated in at least one trusting cross-racial relationship with a White mentor.

Our study was guided by the following research question: What are the lived experiences of Black doctoral students who have participated in or are currently in trusting relationships with White mentors within the counseling profession?

Researcher Bias

Researcher bias may threaten the validity of qualitative research conclusions. All research team members bracketed their assumptions through recording their expectations before the interviews and via ongoing conversation throughout data analysis (Gearing, 2008). The primary researcher was a Black middle-class male doctoral counselor education student who conducted this study for his dissertation. His ethnicity and student status qualified him as an insider in relation to the participants (Tinker & Armstrong, 2008). His *a priori* assumption was that participants would be more inclined to trust White people who acknowledged present-day racial injustices. The research team included two doctoral counselor education students, a White female and a White male, who had each completed at least one doctoral-level qualitative research course. Both research team members believed Black students would trust White people who showed unconditional positive regard. A White male counselor educator with a record of published qualitative research served as the independent external auditor. The research team also utilized reflective journaling and consensus coding to manage and reduce researcher bias.

Participants

The purposive sample of participants was recruited from the lead researcher's informal network of doctoral counselor education students and faculty (who recommended possible participants). Selection criteria included being a Black doctoral counselor education student who had one or more trusted White mentors within the counseling profession. Each participant was given the definition of mentoring used by the primary researcher (Blackwell, 1989). A total of 10 doctoral students in counselor education expressed interest, met the criteria, and were interviewed for our study. This falls within the range of three to 10 participants recommended by Creswell (2014).

Five participants identified both a White professor(s) and a clinical supervisor(s) they trusted. Three identified at least one professor, and two identified at least one supervisor. See Table 1 for demographic information regarding the participants and the role of their mentor.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Gender	Age Range	Ethnic Undergrad	Research Level PhD Program	Area/ Location Raised	Socio-Economic Status	Parents' Education	How Many Mentors	Position of Mentor
Male	20s	HBCU	2	Urban/ Northeast	Working Class	FGG	One for 3 years	Professor
Male	20s	PWI	1	City/ Southeast	Working Class	FGG	Five between 1–5 years	Professors/ Supervisors
Male	20s	PWI	3	Urban/ Midwest	Working Class	CGG	Two for 2 years	Professor/ Supervisor
Male	20s	PWI	1	Urban/ Midwest	Working Class	CGG	Two for 3–4 years	Professor/ Supervisor
Female	50s	HBCU	2	Suburban/ Mid-Atlantic	Middle Class	FGG	Two for 3 years One for 10+ years	Supervisors
Female	20s	PWI	2	Urban/ Mid-Atlantic	Middle Class	FGG	Three for 2–3 years	Supervisors
Female	30s	PWI	1	Suburban/ Southeast	Working Class	FGG	One for 8 years	Professor
Female	20s	PWI	2	Suburban/ Mid-Atlantic	Working Class	CGG	Three for 1–2 years	Supervisor/ Professor
Female	20s	PWI	2	Appalachian/ Midwest	Poor	FGG	One for 1 year	Professor
Female	30s	MSI	2	Suburban/ Southeast	Working Class	FGG	One for 10 years One for 1 year	Supervisor/ Professor

Note. CGG = Continuing Generation College Graduates
FGG = First Generation College Graduates
HBCU = Historically Black College/University

MSI = Minority-Serving Institution
PWI = Predominately White Institution

Procedure

Subsequent to receiving IRB exempt approval from the authors' college review board, the primary researcher sent an introduction letter explaining the study via email to counselor education faculty and doctoral students with whom he was familiar through professional networking. Once consent was obtained, the lead researcher sent the demographic questionnaire and the interview questions to participants 48 hours before their interviews in order to provide time to reflect about their experiences (James, 2014). The protocol was constructed by the authors based on pertinent literature related to trust and ethnic minority experiences and reviewed by a team of three counselor educators. The primary researcher then conducted semi-structured interviews focused on the participants' experiences of cross-racial trust. Interview questions included: (a) Can you please describe experiences in your past that enabled you to trust a White person as a mentor? (b) What did you experience within this cross-racial relationship(s) that enabled you to trust this White mentor? and (c) Can you share the differences between the Whites you chose to trust and those that you trusted less? Initial interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes and were conducted by the primary researcher either face-to-face or via a secure connection on Adobe.

A professional transcriptionist confidentially transcribed each interview. Each participant received a copy of the transcript for member checking (Creswell, 2014). The lead researcher also conducted a follow-up interview to allow participants to add or revise anything that was said in the initial inquiry. Eight of the 10 doctoral students participated in follow-up interviews, which lasted between 10 and 20 minutes. The two participants who declined stated they had nothing further to add.

Data Analysis

The research team employed Moustakas' (1994) data analysis process for each transcript, beginning with horizontalization, which included noting individual meaning units and holding them with equal importance. The team then engaged in reduction and elimination of meaning units based on redundancy, and also whether they were "necessary . . . for understanding the phenomena" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 120). The team members individually categorized remaining meaning units related to the phenomena and identified clusters and themes from the data. After independently analyzing transcripts, the research team met after the first two interviews to ensure fidelity in the coding process, and again after the eighth and 10th set of interview transcripts were coded. They came to a consensus regarding whether each code had sufficient support based on textural descriptions; then they created a final code book (Hays & Singh, 2012). The research team also engaged in a deviant case analysis to honor the diverse phenomena represented amongst participants. Next, the team utilized textural-structural descriptions from the transcripts to illustrate codes and themes identified in the data.

Trustworthiness refers to the accurate reflection of the participants' voices and perspectives (Given & Saumure, 2008). In this study, trustworthiness attributes included credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In an effort to secure trustworthiness, the research team utilized Moustakas' (1994) process of analysis, reflective journals, consensus coding, member checking, follow-up interviews, use of an external auditor, and providing thick descriptions of the research process and participants.

Results

The research team identified three superordinate themes from the data: reasons for trust, reasons for mistrust, and benefits of cross-racial mentoring.

Superordinate Theme One: Reasons for Trust

All 10 of the participants identified factors that fostered their willingness to engage in a cross-racial trusting relationship with White mentors, which provided the basis for this superordinate theme. We identified four themes from the participants' data: past experiences, trusting by proxy, personal attributes, and the necessity of White people.

Past experiences. Data from nine participants supported this theme and its two subthemes: experiencing positive relations with White people and experiencing rejection from Black people.

Experiencing positive relations with White people. Half of the participants shared experiences illustrating how White people had proven themselves to be trustworthy. For example, participants spoke of experiencing White people who married into the family or who were part of their experience being raised in a multiracial church, and of having White coaches and teachers who invested in them personally during key developmental stages in their life. The investment of time and emotional resources from these White people established a sense of safety and trust during their younger years. These relationships helped to provide the experiential and emotional base for the risk of cross-racial trust.

Experiencing rejection from Black people. Four participants shared negative past experiences with Black people, involving peers, professors, supervisors, or former employers, which led them to be hesitant to trust Black people—opening the door to choosing White people as possible mentors. One female participant shared that she had not felt welcomed by some Black women in the profession. A male participant spoke of being mocked in childhood for not being “Black enough” and his subsequent struggles: “It was actually heart-wrenching for me to recognize that I’m not comfortable being in a room full of Black people. . . . I was always worried about being, even in a professional setting, being outed as, ‘Oh well, he’s Black, but he’s not really.’” All four participants exhibited reticence about sharing these experiences and the accompanying feelings of frustration, shame, and isolation.

Trusting by proxy. Half of the participants shared that they would consult with Black colleagues when discerning whether a White person may be trustworthy. These students trusted their Black peers, seeking their opinions concerning which White professors and clinical supervisors could be trusted. One shared the importance of having friends indicate, “You can trust this person...they get it.”

Personal attributes. This refers to personal attributes or qualities of the participants themselves that enabled trust in White people. The two subthemes identified were being generally trusting and being courageous.

Being generally trusting. Five participants shared that they were generally trusting and therefore willing to give all people a chance. These students believed their generally trusting nature helped them be open to the possibility of a cross-racial trusting relationship.

Yet, not all participants described themselves as generally trusting. One doctoral student shared his cautious and guarded nature toward people regardless of race. He indicated that he chooses to observe people over time in order to discern whether they are trustworthy.

Being courageous. Two participants noted that courage is needed to engage in cross-racial trust. They were cognizant of the vulnerability that interracial trust entails for the protégé and spoke to the emotional resilience needed for a Black person to pursue and then persist in a Black–White mentoring relationship. All 10 participants spoke of the reality of racism in their lives and in their counselor

education programs. Therefore, Black students who attempt to develop a cross-racial trusting relationship are exposing themselves to the possibility of further injury and experiences of bigotry and marginalization.

Necessity of White people. Four participants shared their understanding from a young age that Black people would likely need relationships with White people if they were to succeed academically or professionally. White mentors can help serve as a guide to navigating predominately White systems. Therefore, achieving success as a Black person necessitated placing oneself in a precarious position. These students believed that one must have positive relationships with White people even though most White people are not trustworthy.

Superordinate Theme Two: Reasons for Mistrust

All 10 participants spoke about reasons they had for mistrusting White people. Four themes describe the various causes for Black mistrust of White people: receiving family messages, experiencing overt racism, experiencing tokenism, and experiencing dissonance.

Receiving family messages. Participants spoke of learning cross-racial mistrust through observation and receiving direct messages from family members. There were two subthemes under family messages: overt messages and White voice.

Overt messages. Half of participants shared that they heard messages since childhood from family members that White people are untrustworthy. One interviewee's parents told him he could not have White friends; other participants were explicitly told by family members that White people were not to be trusted. Yet, this was not true for all participants. One student recalled "I was constantly told 'you can have people around you, but just don't trust the White people that are around you' . . . [but] some Whites are trustworthy." Yet, as he grew older, his parents began to discuss the realities of racism and navigating life as a Black male.

White voice. Two participants shared implicit messages they witnessed while growing up, such as noticing that Black people would change their diction and mannerisms when interacting with White people. One participant shared that "we used to just call it the White voice . . . around professional people who they weren't super comfortable with." As children, these participants observed their families codeswitching and understood implicitly that Black individuals cannot be themselves around White professionals.

Experiencing overt racism. Five participants described past racist experiences with neighbors, educators, and police that hindered their willingness to engage in cross-racial trust. Some students shared stories from childhood; others noted more recent occurrences. One male interviewee reported that he had been pulled over several times by White police officers as a teenager but only received one ticket, which he believed showed the lack of justification White police had for pulling him over. He also told the story of a police officer pulling a gun on him and his friends while he was in his car. All such experiences confirmed the explicit and implicit messages they received from their families concerning White people being untrustworthy.

Experiencing tokenism. Five participants stated that they were suspicious of White counseling professionals' motives for desiring a relationship. One female student stated she wonders if White people are trying to make up for a racial injustice they committed in their past, stating, "I definitely am a little hesitant to see what's your true motive."

Other participants questioned the motives of White people who want to build a professional relationship with Black people. One interviewee said he felt “commodified” by White counseling professionals. He reported feeling put in a box as “the Black male counselor” who works with trauma. Another participant felt used by a White professor who she believed wanted her participation to give validity to a presentation on a multicultural topic at a conference.

Experiencing dissonance. Several participants spoke about internal conflicts that stemmed from their experience in the predominately White field of counseling. Four subthemes emerged from this data: internalizing racism, feeling isolated, questioning one’s perception, and considering White trust.

Internalizing racism. Two male participants shared distressing thoughts about their place in the counseling program, which stemmed from internalized racism. One participant shared that at times he did not feel equal to his White peers although objective measures demonstrated they were not superior to him intellectually or clinically. Although both Black male participants who shared these insecurities seemed poised and self-confident, they experienced self-doubts they attributed to internalized oppression.

Feeling isolated. Three participants shared that they felt isolated, either in their master’s or doctoral programs. One participant noted, “I’m that one student who brings up race, and who brings up people of color, and anybody who’s not White, and our issues in counseling, and none of my cohort does that.” These participants expressed frustration with fellow students, including people of color, who were unwilling to share their experience in class.

Questioning one’s perception. Two participants discussed periodically questioning their perceptions of racism, whether it actually occurred or if it was their own issue that they were imposing on White faculty and students in their department. One participant shared this process of questioning with two Black alumni from his program and was reassured “It’s not just you. It’s not in your head. You’re not wiling out.” He believed that this reflexive process of questioning one’s perception is a burden that Black people often carry in White settings.

Considering White trust. Two participants believed it was important for trust to be mutual. One participant questioned whether White people would trust her as a Black person. These participants recognized that they could not trust White people who would not trust them.

Superordinate Theme Three: Benefits of Cross-Racial Mentoring

The final superordinate theme was voiced by nine participants and contained two themes: benefiting from networks of privilege and disconfirming over-generalizations of White individuals.

Benefiting from networks of privilege. Five participants noted that White mentors had helped them make professional connections or hoped that they would do so. They believed that White mentors have access to social networks that some Black faculty and supervisors do not and believed their White mentors could use their privilege and cultural capital on their behalf.

Disconfirming over-generalizations of White individuals. Finally, four participants shared that trusting their White mentor helped them to trust other White people. One participant shared, “It helps me as a Black woman not to make these gross over-generalizations about White people, about White men in academia, about White counselor educators.” A few participants indicated the cross-

racial trust emboldened them to branch out into new areas professionally and personally as a result of being more willing to build relationships with White people of good will.

Discussion

To help diversify the counseling profession, scholars have noted the importance of mentoring students from underrepresented groups (Fleig-Palmer & Schoorman, 2011; Leck & Orser, 2013). Considering the disproportionately low representation of counselor educators and supervisors of color and the numerous benefits of mentoring (Chadiha et al., 2014; Chan et al., 2015; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2014), interracial mentoring provides a viable pathway to increasing access to this valuable resource and enhancing inclusion and diversity (Brooks & Steen, 2010; Patton, 2009). One significant hindrance to interracial mentoring relationships is cultural mistrust, which is a result of historical and present experiences of racism and marginalization (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). This study addressed a gap in the literature regarding cross-racial trust by examining the experiences of Black doctoral counseling students who were successful in establishing trusting relationships with White mentors, providing a complementary perspective to the literature that details reasons for and costs of the mistrust of White people by Black people in counselor education.

Our results shed light on the perilous nature of interracial trust for these Black participants. Trust by its very nature entails vulnerability (Eller et al., 2014; Merriweather & Morgan, 2013). Furthermore, the misuse of power intrinsic in White racism makes interracial trust risky for Black students desiring mentors in predominately White institutions (D. L. McCoy et al., 2015). For example, despite the success that led them to their doctoral student status, the themes of internalizing racism and questioning one's perception speak to the added vulnerability involved in interracial trust. In Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez's (2011) article, "Am I Going Crazy?!", the authors found that questioning one's perception of racism may be characteristic of the experience of many doctoral students from underrepresented ethnic groups. Given documented experiences of racism within counselor education (e.g., Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2013), the questioning of one's experience of marginalization is compounded within counseling programs, despite the profession's claims to have a multicultural and social justice emphasis. Unless we are ready to actively examine privilege and bias in our programs and enact effective, substantive, and systemic actions to address and remediate the embedded inequities, our profession's aspirational language will be revealed to be hollow and hypocritical.

Despite experiencing racism in their counseling programs, these participants did co-create successful and beneficial cross-racial relationships. Participants shared factors that encouraged them to engage in trusting relationships with White mentors. Having a generally trusting nature, and also prior positive experiences with White people, may be intuitive findings, but experiencing rejection from Black people as an impetus for interracial trust appears to be unique to this study. Participants also discussed White allies being needed for success, with systemic issues of racism hindering Black people from relying solely on resources from their own community both in counselor education and outside the profession.

Our findings also highlight the collectivist sensibilities that influenced participants' decisions to trust White people. Participants confirmed S. S. Smith's (2010) description of cultural mistrust being taught to Black children by their parents as a protective factor to equip these students to deal with the racism experienced both within counselor education and in society. Despite experiencing the veracity of these familial warnings, some students engaged in trust by proxy, itself a collectivist practice, in order to lessen the risk of interracial trust.

Scholars have proposed the need for cross-racial mentoring because of the lack of faculty of color (Brooks & Steen, 2010; Haizlip, 2012; Ortiz-Walters & Gibson, 2005). Yet, even when faculty and supervisors of color are present, some Black students may desire to connect with White faculty or supervisors. Although Patton (2009) found that Black women preferred faculty mentors who shared their race and gender, four participants of the current study, two males and two females, experienced rejection from Black people, which opened the possibility of a White mentor. Though some doctoral students and faculty can view this as a form of internalized racism, the narratives shared spoke more to a fear of being rejected by one's racial group. Although discouraging encounters with other Black people occurred in their past, participants spoke of negative experiences with Black supervisors or faculty within their counseling programs and clinical settings. Therefore, one should not assume that Black faculty or supervisors will be inevitably preferred as mentors by Black doctoral students and supervisees.

The themes of the necessity of White people and benefiting from networks of privilege captured participants' beliefs that cross-racial mentoring helps Black students advance academically and professionally. Borders et al. (2011) suggested that women and people of color may need several mentors to help them meet the unique challenges of their professional and psychosocial development in a context that is often White- and male-dominated. This study's participants were cognizant of the numerous benefits of mentoring (Bynum, 2015; Gaddis, 2012) and, more specifically, the particular benefits of having a White mentor (Ortiz-Walters & Gibson, 2005).

Implications for Counseling Training Programs

Racism continues to inform exploitive institutional and systemic norms, values, and policies ensuring that the privileged preserve their advantages (DiAngelo, 2018). While there has been a recent resurgence of more flagrant forms of racist expression in these tumultuous times, the insidious effects of less egregious forms of racial bias, such as blindness to or avoidance of the topic, are still prevalent (Oluo, 2018). In the academy, and in counselor education specifically, despite our aspirations to embody and enact cultural responsiveness and social justice, Black doctoral students continue to be subject to oppressive individual and institutional bias in terms of treatment, climate, and policies (ACA, 2014; Baker & Moore, 2015; CACREP, 2015; Henfield et al., 2013; S. Z. McCoy, 2018; Ratts et al., 2015).

One example or result of racism in graduate education is students of color having less access to the mentoring and social connections that positively impact educational and career opportunities (Rudolph, Castillo, Garcia, Martinez, & Navarro, 2015). An additional pernicious contributor to this inequity is the prevailing deficit narratives White faculty often hold about the abilities of students from non-dominant statuses (D. L. McCoy et al., 2015; S. Z. McCoy, 2018). Given the benefits of positive, trustworthy mentoring experiences and the disproportionately large representation of White counselor educators, cross-racial relationships hold promise if trust can be established (Baker & Moore, 2015; Cartwright et al., 2018; D. L. McCoy et al., 2015).

To generate conditions for more equitable and trusting mentoring relationships, our profession needs to vigorously promote the cultivation of cultural humility, signified by actions and attitudes reflecting respect, openness, genuineness, and curiosity (Davis et al., 2016; Hook, Davis, Owen, Worthington, & Utsey, 2013). This should be reflected in our standards for accreditation of training programs and licensure as counselors and supervisors. Specifically, White counselor educators and supervisors need to continuously examine and actively address their own, often implicit, racial biases (S. Z. McCoy, 2018). In addition, the existing oppressive climate in our profession, our preparation programs, and the society at large needs to be met with active social justice advocacy for, by, and with our students, protégés, and clients. These efforts will include addressing racism and microaggressions promulgated by people

and policies (ACA, 2014; Davis et al., 2016; Ratts et al., 2015). As has been noted, if we are not actively advocating for solutions, we are promoting the inequitable status quo.

In addition, we need to seek, invite, and include extraordinary strengths, wisdom, and capital possessed by students and clients of color in our programs and counseling and supervision sessions. Appreciation and incorporation of these assets would invite more reciprocal and culturally responsive relationships (Butler et al., 2013; Chadiha et al., 2014; Rudolph et al., 2015). Finally, specifically with mentoring relationships, being open to a more holistic relationship including important personal (e.g., experiences of oppression) and professional concerns is supported in the literature (e.g., Chan et al., 2015; Henfield et al., 2011). White mentors are invited to be proactive in seeking and cultivating relationships in which mutual learning is expected and discussion about racism and oppression is safe and welcome (Luedke, 2017; D. L. McCoy et al., 2015).

Transformational efforts should include encouraging and expecting culturally relevant pedagogy that fosters critical thinking and reflexivity, integrates cultural strengths as valued resources, and promotes proficiency for effecting social change (Gay, 2018; Motulsky, Gere, Saleem, & Trantham, 2014; Spanierman & Smith, 2017). For example, recognizing oppression at a structural level is associated with enhanced social justice commitment and less blaming of oppressed individuals and groups (L. A. Goodman, Wilson, Helms, Greenstein, & Medzhitova, 2018; L. Smith & Lau, 2013; Swartz, Limberg, & Gold, 2018). Also important is the creation of a program-wide *safe space* to foster frequent conversations regarding biases, microaggressions, positionality, benefits accrued from dominant statuses, and responsibilities to use privilege for community enhancement (in a culturally humble fashion), both at the individual and program levels (Davis et al., 2016; D. J. Goodman, 2011). Finally, service provided to the community in a collaborative fashion by both students and faculty has been shown to help build cultural responsiveness and advocacy skills (L. A. Goodman et al., 2018; Midgett & Doumas, 2016; Toporek & Worthington, 2014). The desired effect of the examples shared above is not only to increase cultural and social justice competence of individuals, but also to build a culturally responsive learning community in which reasons for mistrust are diminished, experiences of trust increase, and accessing beneficial mentoring can flourish.

Limitations

Despite efforts to conduct a rigorous study, the research team acknowledges our limitations within this phenomenological study. Researcher bias had the potential to influence our study at several stages. In an attempt to ameliorate bias, we followed several practices associated with enhancing trustworthiness such as keeping a reflective journal, using consensus coding, member checking, providing thick descriptions, and having an external auditor.

Social desirability was a potential limitation, as participants' answers to questions could have been influenced by what they felt would be more acceptable in either Black academic circles or the counseling profession. To address this, the primary researcher withheld probing questions when participants told narratives that were emotionally powerful and salient. That some of the participants informally knew the primary researcher (e.g., from conversations at professional conferences) might also have influenced what was shared.

Future Research

This study highlights several possibilities for further research on trust within the counseling profession. As noted, the counseling literature lacks empirical studies on trust, despite its importance for both the supervisory and therapeutic relationship. There is a dearth of instruments measuring

interpersonal trust in counseling. Creating such an instrument may be beneficial for a profession that is essentially relational.

Further inquiries into cross-racial mentoring may prove beneficial for our understanding of its benefits and perils, such as the effects of cross-racial mentoring on the racial identity development of both the mentee and the mentor. Future studies might also examine the perspectives of the White mentors involved in cross-racial relationships with students or supervisees. In addition, researchers could examine cross-racial mentoring relationships in which the mentor is Black and the mentee is White, examining the benefits and challenges experienced in these dyads. Investigations of interpersonal trust between dyads or groups comprised of marginalized and privileged people will be beneficial to the profession and those we serve. Finally, research is needed on the boundaries within the counseling profession. Most of the participants of this study believed that their relationship with their mentor needed to be more informal and less rigid (see Alvarez et al., 2009; Luedke, 2017). It may be beneficial to examine how much of one's perspective of professional boundaries is culturally conditioned.

Summary and Conclusion

In our study, 10 Black doctoral counseling students shared a range of experiences related to cross-racial trust with White mentors, along with their perspectives about succeeding in a profession that is predominately White. Their lived experiences entailed both racial stress and cross-racial support, cultural isolation within their departments, and empathic encouragement from their mentors. The research team identified three superordinate themes related to cross-racial trust in mentoring relationships: reasons for trust, reasons for mistrust, and benefits of cross-racial mentoring. We also identified several themes and subthemes that delineated the interpersonal and intrapersonal factors that helped generate cross-racial trust, despite participants' ubiquitous experiences of racism.

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