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Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice:

Exploring the Experiences of Recent MSW Graduates

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Michelle Pajela Melendres

2016

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice:

Exploring the Experiences of Recent MSW Graduates

by

Michelle Pajela Melendres

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Robert A. Rhoads, Chair

This study examined cultural competence in social work practice. The heart of the social work profession lies in advocacy for the enhanced quality of life for all individuals, groups, and communities, regardless of their cultural background. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) mandate that social workers recognize their ethical responsibility for cultural competence. However, because of social work's comprehensive clientele, combined with humanity's extensive list of intersecting backgrounds, the very essence of cultural competence comprises fundamental complications in its overall conceptualization and application of theory to practice.

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which newly employed social workers conceptualized cultural competence, considered their Master in Social Work/Welfare

(MSW) programs as preparing them for cultural competence development, and experienced challenges regarding preparedness in cultural competence practice. The sample comprised of 20 participants. Participants were required to be recent graduates from an accredited CSWE MSW program and newly employed in the field of social welfare. Through qualitative research methods, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews and one focus group. The goal of this study was to better understand the complexities of social workers' conceptualization, experiences, and challenges in cultural competence relative to the knowledge and skills gained through their MSW programs.

The findings for this study emphasized the multifaceted nature of cultural competence and highlighted how its complexities—in its conceptualization, mandate, and expectations— preemptively created barriers in participants' pursuit to empower their clients. The inherent paradoxical nature of cultural competence allowed participants to embrace their approach with an understanding of the role of respect for their clients' diversity. With regard to preparation, the findings suggest the need for beginning social workers to be challenged in their cultural competence and self-awareness development—whether through their MSW curriculum or facilitation of the MSW faculty—as an indicator of success. In consideration of the ways in which clients' and social workers' culture plays a role when providing effective services, my findings demonstrate various complexities, such as the realm of familiarity or the manifestation of prejudice or discrimination in actualized practice.

The dissertation of Michelle Pajela Melendres is approved.

Tyrone C. Howard

Alfreda P. Iglehart

Linda P. Rose

Robert A. Rhoads, Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2016

DEDICATION PAGE

To all the extraordinary social workers,

whose dedication to making this world a better place

is humbling and inspiring.

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VITA

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The heart of the social work profession is to advocate for and on behalf of the enhanced quality of life for all individuals, groups, and communities (Council of Social Work Education [CSWE], 2015a). Consequently, social workers' range of clientele is extensive and includes individuals, families, and groups from all walks of life, of various racial/ethnic make up, religious backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, geographic locations, levels of educational attainment, sexual orientations, immigrant status, and health/mental health disabilities. With respect for human diversity as a core principle, the central frameworks in which social workers operate include an *ecological perspective* and a *strengths perspective,* both of which are rooted in an approach of *starting where the client is* (Berg-Weger, 2013; CSWE, 2015d; Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried, & Larsen, 2012).

The ecological perspective incorporates a person-in-environment approach in which all aspects of the clients' lives—such as their culture, religion, past or current life events, etc.—are acknowledged as instrumental factors in need of integration during the processes of establishing rapport, maintaining a professional relationship, assessing the clients' needs, and providing appropriate services. In addition, the strengths perspective is embedded within the ecological perspective. From this approach, instead of focusing on the clients' problems, issues, or traumas that originally initiated the reasons for seeking social services, social workers elicit the strengths, abilities, and attributes of their clients as the foundation when providing the necessary services for promoting their clients' well-being and self-efficacy (Berg-Weger, 2013; Zastrow, 2013).

These frameworks allow social workers to respond to clients' needs in a reciprocal relationship where they advocate on behalf of their clients by empowering them toward their betterment through their innate strengths. This is all grounded in starting where the client—whether an individual, group, or community—is relative to his or her understanding of his or her situation by understanding the variables that influence these situations or vice versa, and the pace deemed appropriate when striving for change (Hepworth et al., 2012; Marsh, 2002). In preparing the profession for adequate service delivery to this wide range of clientele and in consideration of their backgrounds and social environments, both the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) mandate that all future social workers recognize their ethical responsibility to provide culturally competent services.

The CSWE Mandate and NASW Standards Associated with Cultural Competence

The mandate of cultural competence in social work education and social work practice is relevant and important to the social work profession as discussed consistently by the CSWE (CSWE, 2008, 2015c, 2015d) and the NASW (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2001, 2008; 2015b). According to the NASW (2008) *Code of Ethics*, section 1.05 Cultural Competence and Social Diversity describes the ethical responsibility social workers have to their clients:

> (a) social workers should understand culture and its function in human behavior and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures

(b) social workers should have a knowledge base of their clients' cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients' cultures and to differences among people and cultural groups

(c) social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical disability. (paras. 1-3)

Thus, central to the purpose of the CSWE as the sole accrediting agency for social work education in the United States is establishing thresholds for professional competence through the establishment of its core competencies, such as in the development of cultural competence. As required for accreditation, social work programs must construct a learning environment, well beyond the classroom, in which respect for all persons and an understanding of their diversities is practiced. This learning environment is detailed in the CSWE's (2015d) *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* and includes the following:

Institutional setting; Selection of field education settings and their clientele; Composition of program advisory or field committees; Education and social resources; Resource allocation; Program leadership; Speaker series; Seminars; Special programs; Support groups; Research and other initiatives; Demographic make-up of its faculty, staff, and student body. (p. 14)

Furthermore, this mandate includes not only a requirement for proficient understanding of the conceptual aspects of cultural competence, but also the mandate for social work education students to gain sufficient self-awareness and skills as a means to incorporate their clients' diverse backgrounds in providing effective services. Although cultural competence is

intended to be applicable across all social service practices by all social workers, regardless of their own backgrounds, when providing service to clients of various backgrounds, it should be noted that cultural competence for social work practice is predominantly practiced in micro or mezzo services: in other words, in work provided in direct practice to individuals or in small groups. This is not to say that cultural competence is not practiced in macro settings in cases such as community advocacy or policy implementation. However, it should be noted that teaching and practicing cultural competence is generally applied more to cases of direct services between the social worker and individual clients or small groups, rather than cases of social workers advocating in larger community settings or in implementing policy change.

Problem Statement

Because of social work's all-encompassing pool of clientele, combined with humanity's extensive list of differences, the very essence of cultural competence comprises fundamental complications. Whereas social work education and the social work profession identify the necessity for social workers to demonstrate their ability to provide services that are sensitive to and respectful of their clients' vast differences to individuals, groups, and communities, the reality is that there are fundamental contradictions in the underlying conceptualization of cultural competence (Fellin, 2000; Furlong & Wright, 2011; Johnson & Munch, 2009; Yan & Wong, 2005) and complications with the notion of applying cultural competence theory to practice (Furlong & Wright, 2011; Johnson & Munch, 2009). Despite the profession's ethical obligations and its educational accrediting body's mandate that social workers continue their educational and professional endeavors by increasing their

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professional knowledge and skills in cultural competence, herein lie paradoxes surrounding its overall conceptualization and application of theory to practice.

In light of the preceding concerns, which will be further detailed subsequently, my goal for this research study was to gather data on the experiences of recently graduated, newly employed social workers regarding their conceptualization and application of cultural competence practice. I first explored the ways in which social workers conceptualized and embraced cultural competence relative to their work. Next, I examined the extent in which these social workers considered their Master in Social Work/Welfare (MSW) programs as preparing them for cultural competence. Lastly, I investigated social workers' significant challenges regarding their preparedness in cultural competence, considering factors that included, but were not limited to, various populations to which social workers have been exposed and in which they have been prepared to work (or ill prepared to work), the sources of their exposure and preparedness, and the methods and understandings of cultural competence that they brought to their practice. In conducting this research, my hope was to understand the unique and extensive experiences social workers encountered in applying theories to practice as a means to uncover social work education implications regarding the educational reformation for the increased preparation of cultural competence in social work practice.

Problems with Conceptualization

An inherent problem with cultural competence is the elusiveness of *culture*, an open-ended term with numerous interchangeable definitions (Johnson & Munch, 2009). Roberts and Smith (2002) argued that the illusion of inclusion, in which the very definition of

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diversity is wholly inclusive of all groups, risks meaning nothing at all, as it avoids the more

rooted intricacies and difficulties of specific groups or social justice issues, such as the ways

in which groups have historically been oppressed or marginalized. One such flawed definition

for practice in the field of social work describes culture to encompass "all aspects of the way

of life associated with a group of people" (Healey, 2012, p. 46).

Historically, cultural competence in social work practice was once defined exclusively

within the parameters of ethnicity and race. Today, it has since expanded and embraced the

complexities of human diversity and identity with all groups of people (NASW, 2015b).

However, although social work's largest worldwide professional organization, the NASW,

does indeed have a standing definition that defines cultural competence in social work

practice to be inclusive of all groups beyond ethnicity or race (akin to the definition of culture

used previously), the literature reflects a common misunderstanding of cultural competence in

social work practice to exclusively denote practice with or give precedence to ethnicity or

race (Fellin, 2000; Johnson & Munch, 2009; Reisch, 2008; Yan & Wong, 2005). In doing so,

social workers run the risk of stereotyping cultures, pigeonholing their clients, or overlooking

their clients' other forms of diversities. Moreover, although the NASW has modernized

cultural competence to include all forms of diversity, what cultural competence ultimately

fails to address is the intersecting matrix of peoples' infinite combinations of identities

(Fellin, 2000; Johnson & Munch, 2009). Because we are not only defined within the confines

of any singular category (e.g., age, sexual orientation, or religion), a problem social workers

encounter is in recognizing the endless list of intersecting categories that can manifest varying

results. For example, there may be various ways to provide services to individuals who

identify as Asian-American, many more ways to provide services that cater to Asian-

American women, and perhaps additional intersecting and differing means for providing services to Asian-American women of low socioeconomic status. The heavy responsibility social workers have of discerning best practices based on the intersections of our diverse identities, let alone any singular identity, can be arduous.

In further dissecting cultural competence, in addition to the confusion found within culture, the *competence* element also comprises a flaw. There is a massive, arguably unrealistic, expectation of social workers to have sufficient knowledge about their clients' backgrounds: moreover, negating the process of obtaining education about various groups versus starting where the client is. Social workers are pushed and pulled in opposing directions with ethical responsibilities to both gain knowledge about their clients beforehand, as well as honor their clients' uniqueness through their life histories and narratives. Studies suggest that simply learning information and histories about groups of people, especially big categorical groups of people such as large classifications of race or age, may not be an effective way to truly know who these people are, where they come from, or where they are going (Johnson & Munch, 2009; Yan & Wong, 2005). Rather, research suggests that this process can produce contrasting results, leading to and even perpetuating blanketed ideals and stereotypes about groups of people that can hinder clients' progress in a social worker's application of theory to practice.

Problems with Applying Theory to Practice

One such difficulty with the application of cultural competence is mediating individual rights of clients versus the general rights or norms of the group. Although the NASW (2008) *Code of Ethics* indicates the ethical responsibility social workers have in providing micro and

macro services, the limitation is in determining, if conceivable, the hierarchy of justices to uphold. When individual rights conflict and disagree with the rights of the group, or even with basic human rights, how does the profession decipher best practices?

In collaboration with representatives from differing cultural backgrounds from around the world, the United Nations General Assembly (1948) created the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*, a document outlining a set of standards our global community should strive to aspire to regarding humanity's inherently inalienable and indivisible basic human rights. Nevertheless, societies and groups still indeed have embedded social justice prejudices and even work to perpetuate the subjugation or discrimination within its subgroups: for example, in widespread cases for women, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) population, or the elderly, among many others. Although the profession of social work is not shy in its responsibilities to influence local, state, or federal laws through its policy and lobbying initiatives, where does the profession draw the line with regard to individual social justice issues and basic human rights? Johnson and Munch (2009) argued the inconceivable nature of justifying the rights of the groups when there is a denial of individual inherent worth. Much of social work education and practice literature, curriculum design, and pedagogical methods on cultural competency fail to address the ways this problem can be reconciled.

The curriculum design of social work programs is often dependent on the geographic location of the program, the general population served in the community and field education agencies, and/or the influence of any changing demographics or social movements that determine the range of diversity content (Anastas, 2010; Reisch, 2008). Although diversity content in social work programs is both generically infused across various courses as well as

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offered through specifically designed courses, the problem in curriculum design is that social work education struggles to strike a balance in providing adequate coverage of its diversity content integration (Abrams & Gibson, 2007; Anastas, 2010; Boucshel, 2000; Reisch, 2008; Roberts & Smith, 2002). Diversity content is lacking with regard to breadth and scope among various groups and even within any singular group. Furthermore, with a closer look into course offerings, a problem with social work pedagogy is the focus primarily on the dissemination of information regarding a diverse range of clientele, including an understanding of clients' norms, an understanding of the need to tolerate such differences, and an understanding of the best means of communicating effectively despite such differences (Goldberg, 2000; Lee & Greene, 2004), rather than best practices for the development of cultural competence, such as the necessity for social workers to develop self-awareness, which is at the core of effective cultural competence in social work practice (Armour, Bain, & Rubio, 2004; Carter-Black, 2007; Colvin-Burque, Zugazaga, & Davis-Maye, 2007; Lee & Greene, 2004; Yan, 2008).

At an introductory level, self-awareness, as associated with cultural competence, emphasizes the importance of social workers developing an understanding and acknowledgment of how their own personal and cultural values and beliefs as well as how their biases, fears, ignorance, and prejudices shape their attitudes and beliefs and, thus, influence and inform the practice they do with their clients. At a more advanced level of development, social workers move from mere self-awareness to cultural awareness and then eventually to cultural sensitivity and cultural humility (NASW, 2015b). Research conducted by Holden, Meenaghan, Anastas, and Metrey (2002) on the outcomes of social work education regarding various professional competencies found that students have and may

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continue to enter their MSW programs naively believing that they are already culturally competent and have the skills and means to work with clients of diverse backgrounds. Literature on the development of cultural competence with specific emphasis on self-awareness has accentuated the need for social work programs to increase the capacity and depth of students' self-awareness (Armour et al., 2004) as well as the necessity for social work educators to effectively integrate students' personal backgrounds for a more in-depth understanding and a reduction of possible cultural tensions (Carter-Black, 2007; Colvin-Burque et al., 2007; Lee & Greene, 2004; Yan, 2008). It is by understanding the commitment to the ongoing lifelong process of developing cultural competence that social work education can reevaluate the ways in which cultural competence is addressed (Berg-Weger, 2013; Gray & Allegritti, 2003). In this way, the problem of teaching future social workers to be culturally competent can be supplemented by allowing future social workers to develop their self-awareness and cultural competence. However, because social work is a multidisciplinary field that borrows from a knowledge base spanning various fields in behavioral and social sciences, its lack of a unified method of teaching cultural competence reflects a lack of a unified metric for assessing cultural competence.

Basis for the Rationale of the Research Study

The following section provides information on the basis for rationale of this research study. In this section, I address four critical issues supporting the necessity to reevaluate and address cultural competence in social work education: (a) the impact of a changing demographics, (b) demands from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, (c)

education as a human right, and (d) my ethical responsibility in the profession and as an educator.

The Impact of Changing Demographics

The increasingly diverse population of the United States is a central rationale for the social work profession's need to reevaluate the ways in which it prepares for the development of culturally competent practice. Based on demographic population projections from the U.S. Census Bureau, our country's minority makeup is expected to increase vastly in the years to come, constructing an even more racially diverse nation. In this report, Colby and Ortman (2015) summarized the nation's race population projections from 2014 to 2060 to include the following race representations:

- The Hispanic population from 17.4% to 28.6%,

- The Black or African American population from 14.3% to 17.9%,

- The Asian population from 6.3% to 11.7%, and

- The American Indian and Alaska Native population from 2% to 2.4%. (p. 9)

Likewise, with regard to age, due to an increasingly steady decline in fertility, increased life expectancy, decreased mortality, and our Baby Boomer population reaching retirement age, our country's overall population age is expected to shift from a youth dependency ratio, or "the ratio of individuals under the age of 18 relative to the population aged 18 to 64" (p. 7), to an old-age dependency ratio, or the ratio of individuals 65 and above to the greater population. Those under the age of 18 are expected to decrease from 23% in 2014 to 20% in 2060, whereas the growth for those 65 years and over is expected to increase from 15% in 2014 to 24% in 2060. These projections highlight just how our country's changing

demographics can impact the type of educational content social work students receive and the quality of work social workers deliver. More so, these projections paired with the mandate of cultural competence, does not reflect the necessity for the field to work with other such types of diversities such as gender, sexual orientation, health status, or country of origin.

Demands from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Although the demands of the social work profession are increasing, it is also important to keep in mind that simply supplying new social workers will not suffice. One of the basic tenets of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS; 2015a)—the department under which the social work profession typically operates—is "protecting the health of all Americans and providing essential human services, especially for those who are least able to help themselves" (para. 1). In doing so, every 4 years the HHS updates its strategic plan as a means to address and work toward the improvement of the health and human services issues of Americans in the context of perpetually changing times. For the 2014-2018 HHS Strategic Plan, these goals include the following:

- Strategic Goal 1: Strengthen Health Care.
- Strategic Goal 2: Advance Scientific Knowledge and Innovation.
- Strategic Goal 3: Advance the Health, Safety, and Well-Being of the American People.
- Strategic Goal 4: Ensure Efficiency, Transparency, Accountability, and Effectiveness of HHS Programs.

Further imbedded in these strategic goals are objectives and explanations of the means by which the HHS will measure and address these goals. Each strategic goal indicates the

significance of addressing the unique needs of increasingly diverse United States demographics, including the need to diminish health and mental health disparities. But more specifically, an objective for Strategic Goal 1 includes the necessity to "ensure access to quality, culturally competent care, including long-term services and supports, for vulnerable populations" (HHS, 2015b, para. 1).

With career trajectories of the social work profession on the rise at an expected growth of 19% from 2012 to 2022 in comparison to the average rate of all other occupations at 11% (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014) and the HHS strategic plan currently striving toward enhancing the well-being of and for an increasingly diverse American people, the research for this dissertation provided an opportunity to explore the ways in which the broader profession can respond to its ethical responsibility to provide effective services with cultural competence, despite the profession's embedded shortcomings. By addressing these concerns in the early phases of social work education, we can better prepare future social workers for a richer understanding and acceptance of cultural competence.

Education as a Human Right

In social work practice, cultural competence is an approach to working with diverse clientele taught to practitioners for comprehending the ways in which they offer individualized services based on their clients' specific needs and the ways their identities influence their needs. Future social workers are taught about a range of varying populations and social issues from a pedagogical approach to enhance their tools and skills in guiding their practice methodologies. However, teaching cultural competence for social work practice

is not merely a mandate for the betterment of social workers' practice and the well-being of their clientele, but rather should be understood as a basic tenet for teaching individuals to be global citizens.

According to the UDHR (United Nations General Assembly, 1948) "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups" (Article 26.2). In educating future social workers, not only is it a mandate of the NASW and CSWE that cultural competence education be incorporated as a means to provide adequate services for people of diversity and in recognition of their diversities, but also we must recognize education as a way to promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among others as a fundamental basic human right. All individuals shall have a right to an education, and in that education, we must teach our scholars the importance of respecting and understanding the differences of the cultural identities that define us and our very essence.

My Ethical Responsibility in the Profession and as an Educator

On a personal level and as a graduate with an MSW degree myself, I am reminded that I am not exempt from my ethical responsibilities to the field of social work. The NASW (2008) *Code of Ethics* includes ethical standards that concern social workers' ethical responsibilities: (a) to clients, (b) to colleagues, (c) in practice settings, (d) as professionals, (e) to the social work profession, and (f) to the broader society. Although I no longer practice social work in its traditional definition in a field directly related to social services, I highly

value and regularly utilize the knowledge and skills I obtained in becoming a social worker through the work I currently do as an educator.

Currently, I am employed at a small, private liberal arts higher educational institution in Southern California. Like the social work profession, the mission of my university is rooted in service and a mission to serve. With regard to our student population, currently 87% of our student body is of minority status. Mirrored in the founding and the mission of my university are the values of the social work profession, which is rooted in service and in the work for vulnerable populations. In my experience, there are many similarities between the work I do as an educator and the work social workers do, especially in relation to cultural competence. As I prepare my students for their advanced degrees in the field of social welfare, it is indeed my ethical responsibility to uphold the NASW (2008) *Code of Ethics* standards. Therefore, conducting this dissertation allowed me to contribute my knowledge to advancing social work education and social work research, as well as potentially inform broader society in its needs to better promote and enhance our general welfare.

Additionally, within my university, a large number of our sociology department graduates further their educational journey and obtain their MSWs before starting their careers. Because of this, in recent years, the university has encouraged our department to investigate the preliminary steps in the CSWE accreditation process for the establishment of an accredited Bachelor in Social Work (BSW) degree or an accredited MSW degree. This dissertation research allowed me to learn about novice social workers' conceptualization of cultural competence, their preparation in applying cultural competence relative to the education obtained from their MSW program, and their challenges regarding cultural competence practice relative to their work experience. It is my intention that upon the

finalization of my study, I will present recommendations to my university to establish the necessary curriculum development in cultural competence, informing next steps toward accreditation for the establishment of an in-house BSW degree or MSW degree.

Research Questions

This study focused on the following research questions:

1. What assumptions and understandings about cultural competence in social work practice do newly employed social workers embrace?

2. To what degree do social workers consider their MSW programs as preparing them for cultural competence in social work practice?

3. What, if any, are the challenges newly employed social workers face with regard to their preparedness in terms of cultural competent practice?

Research Design

For this dissertation I utilized a qualitative research method approach and collected data in a twofold process. First, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 social workers. Then, I conducted a single focus group with a select group of seven social workers from the original pool of participants, where I presented preliminary findings and we further discussed cultural competence for social work practice. By conducting this research and collecting these data, my goal was to better understand the complexities of social workers' conceptualization of and experiences in cultural competence, specifically in consideration of their application of theory to practice relative to the knowledge and training gained through their MSW programs.

Throughout history, the social work profession has made strides concerning cultural competence as a way to be relevant to society's changing times and needs. Consequently, social workers are charged with an ethical responsibility of its continuous efforts in enhancing the welfare of humanity. It is important to do so with respect to human diversity through cultural competence in social work practice. My goal for this dissertation was to influence and advocate for positive change in the field of social work education, social work practice, and social welfare by providing curriculum and pedagogical recommendations for the improvement of cultural competence in MSW programs.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Problems with the conceptualization and the application of theory to practice have been discussed as the rationale for reforming MSW programs toward the enhancement of cultural competence development in social work practice. These problems create barriers for future social work professionals to be as effective as the CSWE mandate expects of them. Despite such problems, the NASW, our communities, and the social work profession expect recent social work graduates to enter the field prepared to provide culturally competent services with respect for all clients' human diversities.

First, I will begin this literature review with a section that describes the historical context of cultural competence in social welfare and social work education, specifically through its transformation and integration within the NASW and then into the CSWE. The expectations for cultural competence has not always been an expectation of the profession as it slowly developed to mirror the demands of society's demographic changes and welfare needs. Next, I will provide general information about the nature and characteristics of accredited MSW programs, providing an understanding of the logistics involved with the CSWE's expectations with a focus on curriculum design and assessment. Additionally, I will discuss updates from NASW publications related to cultural competence. Then, I will provide a context of the social work profession through a description of prevalent and growing subfields of practice and future job trajectories. Subsequently, I will discuss recommendations for increased cultural competence through MSW education and social work professional development recommendations. Lastly, this literature review will conclude with a summary of the research landscape as it stands currently.

Historical Context of the Development of Cultural Competence in Social Welfare

Although the social work profession has historically been rooted in serving the underserved and oppressed, it was not until 1909, just over a decade after the establishment of the nation's first school of social work in 1898 (the New York School of Philanthropy, now Columbia School of Social Work), when a social worker named Helen Tucker proposed the inclusion of content related to ethnic minorities in social work education curriculum (Fox, as cited in Guy-Walls, 2007). At the time of this social work education reform recommendation, racial tension in the United States was widespread and thus this proposal was aimed specifically at including the experiences of Black individuals in hopes of providing future professionals with the knowledge and foundation for addressing coping mechanisms in racism. However, it was not until 1919 that the Saint Louis School of Economics addressed minority issues in social work education through the inclusion of lectures addressing race curriculum. The need for *cultural sensitivity* or *multicultural* education, which it had been referred to previously, resurfaced in social work education many years later. Anti-racism policies for non-discriminatory practice were first established by the CSWE in 1954 (Fox, as cited in Guy-Walls, 2007).

During the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, social workers of both White and diverse racial backgrounds spearheaded the further inclusion of race and racism content into social work education curriculum with the goal of increasing the visibility of diversity content among individuals of various racial backgrounds and the ways to provide services with respect to such differences. Their activism resulted in the adoption of the CSWE's initial set of standards, which first mandated that social work education programs' curriculums include course content related to race and racism (Spencer, Lewis, & Gutierrez,

2000). Embedded in this mandate was the expectation that future social workers would learn about race and racism and then graduate from their programs equipped with the skills necessary to work with racially diverse individuals.

However, the 1970s and the 1980s brought about changes and broadened the understanding and scope of the oppressed. Slowly, society was being exposed to and made aware of other marginalized and discriminated communities. For example, in the early editions of the American Psychological Association's (APA) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-I in 1952 and the DSM-II in 1968), homosexuality was classified as a psychological disorder (Cummings & Galambos, 2004). The social work profession was once guilty of classifying individuals who were gay or lesbian as homosexual according to the DSM, thus subjecting them to seek treatment in an attempt to reverse this disorder (Butler, 2004). The 1969 Stonewall Riots at Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village in New York, New York, sparked activism in the Gay Rights Movement, and in 1973, the APA officially removed homosexuality from the DSM. This change challenged social welfare's core values in cultural sensitivity and multicultural education, and in 1977, the NASW issued an apology and adopted a statement that reversed their original stance on the LGBTQ community and practice regarding individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. Additionally, these changes encouraged both the NASW and the CSWE to expand their definition of the oppressed beyond race and ethnicity to include multiple forms of oppression and various forms of diversity, including individuals' sexual orientation, age, and ability (Abrams & Moio, 2009).

Infusion into Social Work Education

The CSWE *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (EPAS; 2008, 2015d) include four general features necessary for cultural competence integration within any program's curriculum design: (a) program mission and goals, (b) explicit curriculum, (c) implicit curriculum, and (d) assessment. In the previous publication of the EPAS in 2008, the explicit curriculum recommendations included expectations regarding various core competencies, an approach that was adopted to showcase the profession through a competency-based approach. Aspects of cultural competence in social work practice among diverse clients representing a wide range of factors such as ethnicity, race, age, sexual orientation, etc., have been infused into all of the following standards:

- Educational Policy 2.1.1—Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly.

- Educational Policy 2.1.2—Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice.

- Educational Policy 2.1.3—Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments

- Educational Policy 2.1.4—Engage diversity and difference in practice.

- Educational Policy 2.1.5—Advance human rights and social and economic justice.

- Educational Policy 2.1.6—Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research.

- Educational Policy 2.1.7—Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment.

- Educational Policy 2.1.8—Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services.

- Educational Policy 2.1.9—Respond to contexts that shape practice.

- Educational Policy 2.1.10—Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. (pp. 3-7)

Currently in the updated CSWE (2015d) EPAS, the competency-based model is elaborated and refined further, encouraging accredited MSW programs in an outcomes-based orientation to their curriculum design, assuring that the collection of data regarding student learning outcomes drive MSW programs' approach in assessment, evaluation, and reform. The CSWE require that MSW programs collect evidence in assessing students' demonstration of such competencies. "Using a curriculum design that begins with the outcomes, expressed as the expected competencies, programs develop the substantive content, pedagogical approach, and educational activities that provide learning opportunities for students to demonstrate the competencies" (p. 6). Likewise, the identification and incorporation of cultural competence is incorporated into all core competencies:

- Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior.

- Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice.

- Competency 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice.

- Competency 4: Engage in Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice.

- Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice.

- Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities.

- Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities.

- Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities.

- Competency 9: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities. (pp. 7-9)

The generalist practice, which is expected with the Bachelor in Social Work (BSW), requires professionals to acquire knowledge and incorporate practice skills with human diversity in advocating for the advancement of human rights and social and economic justice. Building upon this, at an advanced practice level attained through an MSW, graduates are expected to have a much more refined and sophisticated understanding of the intersection of human diversity and social and economic justice, with the ability to advance the quality of social work practice through assessment, intervention, and evaluation. According to the CSWE (2015d) EPAS, MSW graduates gain abilities augmented by knowledge and practice for the promotion of their clients' well-being, specific to their clients' individualized needs. Specifically, the mandate requires that social workers "understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and recognize the extent to which a culture's structure and values, including social, economic, political, and cultural exclusions, may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power" (p. 7). Therefore, this mandate and core Competency 2, Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice, require social workers to:

- Apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels;

- Present themselves as learners and engage clients and constituencies as experts of their own experiences; and

- Apply self-awareness and self-regulation to manage the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse clients and constituencies. (p. 7)

Updates to the NASW Publication Relevant to Cultural Competence

Coinciding with the updates in the CSWE (2015d) EPAS, from 2001 to 2015 the NASW (2015b) updated its core publication explaining the essence of cultural competence, their *Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice*. As noted in Chapter One, the previous document received much criticism due to its lack of guidance on many contradictory issues such as the elusiveness of culture and the tremendous and unrealistic expectation of competence. Since the modernization of the NASW *Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence*, the organization has revised its standards to introduce new concepts and stress the importance of social workers being lifelong learners. Although the concept of culture includes of all forms human diversity and identity and the concept of competence refers to attitudes, knowledge, and skills related to personal and group diversity remain similar to those of the previous publication, the following new concepts have been introduced for adoption:

- "[The concepts of] 'cultural humility' as a guiding stance vis-à-vis cultural differences, and 'intersectionality,' as a way of understanding the complexity of the experiences of those at the margins of our society" (pp. 7-8).

- "[The introduction of] language and communication to address a range of communication issues including limited English proficiency, low literacy, and disabilities" (p. 8).

- "[The introduction of] the way the social work profession engages in leadership to advance cultural competence within the profession, human services, and society at large and to challenge structural and institutional oppression" (p. 8).

These new concepts, responding to earlier research and findings from previous literature, have been introduced as a means to better support social work professionals and social work educators in their ethical responsibilities to adopt an approach of cultural competence that is fruitful in its accomplishments. Moreover, whereas new concepts have been introduced and publications have been updated, the ultimate goal of the profession is not merely to present such recognition and statements. Rather, the goal of the profession is in the actual implication of such practices and standards.

General Information about CSWE Accredited MSW Programs

According to the CSWE (2015c) *Annual Report 2014-2015*, as of June 2015, there were a total of 744 CSWE-accredited social work programs in the United States. Of these programs, 238 were accredited MSW programs and 17 MSW programs were reported as in accreditation candidacy across various higher education institutions in the United States. The majority of the faculty, both full-time (89%) and part-time/contract (89.1%), at accredited

CSWE MSW programs held an MSW degree, with more than two-thirds of full-time faculty having a doctoral degree, most of which were in social work/welfare (CSWE, 2014).

The rise of full-time enrollment of social work students in MSW programs has increased over the span of 2010-2014 by 25.9%. In Fall 2014, of the 222 programs that reported data to the CSWE (2014) *2014 Statistics on Social Work Education in the United States*, there were 37,771 full-time students, 36.9% (13,925) of which were from historically underrepresented groups, a term updated from *minority,* according to the CSWE. The term *historically underrepresented groups* has been recently preferred rather than *minority* by the CSWE Center for Diversity and Social & Economic Justice (2013) as they believe the term *minority* "does not accurately represent or effectively reflect . . . such things such as the history of oppression, discrimination, [or] power and privilege inequalities . . . of aggrieved groups" (para. 1). Reports from the *2014 Statistics on Social Work Education in the United States* found that of the demographic characteristics of students in part-time and full-time MSW programs, 84.2% of part-time students were female and 84.1% of full-time students were female, 47.9% of part-time and 41.6% of full-time students were the highest reported age group of 25-34 years old, and 39.8% of part-time students as well as 32% its full-time students were of historically underrepresented racial/ethnic identification.

Although these programs have social work values and principles at their core, infused with the requirements as outlined by the CSWE (2015d) EPAS, they vary immensely in areas such as their missions, areas of concentrations, research, co-curricular opportunities, and extracurricular offerings. For example, some MSW programs are rooted in their universities' religious values and incorporate such religious principles into social work practice. Additionally, other programs provide areas of concentration or courses based on their

communities' unique demographic make-up, such as in the case for a concentration in immigration or a concentration in military social work. Nonetheless, all MSW programs are obligated to adopt a universal curriculum design that includes foundation courses related to human behavior and the social environment, social policy, research methods, and field education (Berg-Weger, 2013; CSWE, 2008; Zastrow, 2013). Aside from the requirements of foundation courses and field education, MSW programs do indeed have opportunities to customize courses and areas of concentrations.

Curriculum Design

With regard to concentration or specialization, the CSWE (2014) *2014 Statistics on Social Work Education in the United States* found the following top five prevalent fields with regard to how many MSW programs nationwide offered such a concentration or specialization relative to the amount of students enrolled:

1. Clinical: 14,025 students enrolled overall, 61 programs offering this concentration overall, 31.8% of its overall population.

2. Advanced Generalist: 5,703 students enrolled overall, 50 programs offering this concentration overall, 26% of its overall population.

3. Mental Health: 2,899 students enrolled overall, 35 programs offering this concentration overall, 18.2% of its overall population.

4. Children or Youth: 2,367 students enrolled overall, 37 programs offering this concentration overall, 19.3% of its overall population.

5. Families: 1,788 students enrolled overall, 25 programs offering this concentration overall, 13% of its overall population. (p. 31)

The CSWE (2015d) EPAS do not require that MSW programs offer specific courses devoted to cultural competence, understandably so, since cultural competence as an area of inquiry is extensive. Instead, the mandate of cultural competence within the CSWE EPAS core competencies is such that diversity content and theories related to cultural competence is infused explicitly into the program's curriculum. MSW programs may choose to design courses related to diversity, social justice, cultural awareness, or cultural competence as they see fit, as so long as they are preparing their students to work with a diverse range of clientele in accordance with the CSWE's educational policies. In reviewing the curriculum design of the top five ranked social work graduate programs according to the U.S. News & World Report's (2012) best grad schools, this has been the case with regard to course instruction. According to the content and information available through the following MSW programs' websites for prospective and newly admitted students, tied for first place are University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and Washington University in St. Louis, tied for third place are University of Chicago and University of Washington, and Columbia University, tied for fifth place, have all designed their curriculum with an infusion of cultural competence paired, with specific courses related to various aspects of cultural competence. This is also the case for the top three ranked schools in California, tied for seventh place, University of California, Berkeley, and two programs that are offered in Los Angeles, tied for 11th place University of Southern California and tied for 16th place University of California, Los Angeles.

Additionally, the nature of social work education curriculum is rooted in a parallel process of social work students engaged in learning about various clientele or social issues and theories or practice skills while simultaneously applying this knowledge directly in the field at an off-site agency where social workers are employed regularly. According to the

CSWE (2015d) EPAS, the "classroom and field are of equal importance within the curriculum, and each contributes to the development of the requisite competencies of professional practice" (p. 12); therefore, MSW program candidates are required to complete a minimum of 900 hours of field education. During field education, students receive direct supervision from on-site MSW supervisors who evaluate their learning and practice as it relates to the agency's mission. Hendricks (2003) cites this collaborative learning process of supervision in field education as a critical component of students' understanding and development of cultural competence.

Assessment

Essential to education is the establishment of an assessment plan to measure and evaluate student learning outcomes. With regard to the assessment of core competencies of MSW programs, the CSWE (2008, 2015d) EPAS give programs the autonomy regarding the attainment of each core competency. In 2008, the expectations were that assessment plans were comprehensive and had to have specified, "procedures, multiple measures of each practice behavior, and benchmarks employed" (p. 16). The updated CSWE (2015d) EPAS expanded this expectation to include specific expectations and procedures for its metrics. In summary, this revised expectation requires: first, a thorough description of the assessment procedures; next, at least two measures—one being a demonstration of the competency in a real or simulated practice situation—to assess each competency; then, an explanation of each assessment plan to its metrics. Following this, it requires benchmarks, rationales, and descriptions for each competency. Lastly, it requires an explanation of the determinants for percentage of achieving benchmarks.

Knowledge of values and ethics can be measured through education's traditional means, such as exams, written communication, or oral communication. However, when it comes to cultural competence in social work practice, what makes assessment challenging is in the measurement of skills or behaviors. Anastas (2010) explained that assessing the application of knowledge with the evaluation of practice calls for a much more elaborate and sophisticated assessment plan, making it an area of great concern for social work education and practice.

Various modalities have been found to be effective in the teaching strategies related to cultural competence. For example, Krentzman and Townsend (2008) found four measurement scales promising for the future of cultural competent development among students. These scales include the *Multicultural Counseling Inventory* (MCI), the *Multicultural Counseling Knowledge and Awareness Scale* (MCKAS), the *Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale* (M-GUDS), and the *Ethnic-Competence-Skill Model in Psychological Interventions with Minority Ethnic Children.* Through their study's evaluation criteria, these scales were found to be best suited for social work education. Likewise, a study by Janeiro, Fabre, and de la Parra (2014) found the Intercultural Competency Certificate, which is based on the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), to be effective in assessing necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes in intercultural competence.

Given that the profession lacks a universal measure of cultural competence for use in social work education and the profession in general, the Intercultural Competency Certificate was found applicable to the field of social work. What all these scales have in common are clear outlines for the construct, content, evaluation, and assessment of cultural competence. The Intercultural Competency Certificate not only allows social work education programs to

look at the ways in which students approach clients, but also encourages the reflective portion of students searching within themselves, a self-awareness component. Borrowing from various fields including health, social sciences, and behavioral sciences, these measurement scales encompass validity, particularly with diverse respondents; reliability; relevance to social justice; item clarity; definitions of diversity; coherence; social desirability; and appropriateness for social work. Through their study, Janeiro et al. (2014) found that these components combined lead to increased levels of cultural competence.

Prevalent Social Work Fields of Practice and Future Job Trajectories

According to a study conducted by the NASW Center for Workforce Studies (2006) through a random sample of 10,000 social workers drawn from 48 states and the District of Columbia on the general nature of the social work profession, it was found that the most frequent practice areas for social workers included mental health (37%), child welfare/family (13%), health (13%), and aging (9%). This study further confirmed the descriptions of the social work profession to include practice and employment in a wide range of settings, concluding that social workers can be found in various types of organizations and institutions including public, private, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations. Lastly, a final prominent finding of this study indicated that almost all social workers (99%) provide some services to clients who are racially and ethnically diverse, with 41% of survey respondents providing services to a caseload of more than half of their clients identifying as non-White. The majority of social workers' caseloads include Black/African American (85%) and Hispanic/Latino clients (77%), followed by Asian/Pacific Islander (49%) and Native American/Alaskan Native (39%) clients.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), the outlook for the overarching social work profession is promising and growing faster than the 11% average for all occupations, with a growth of 19% from 2012 to 2022. Because the field of social work is comprehensive in the numerous populations it serves and the numerous settings in which services are provided, growth in specific areas of concentration may differ. As noted previously and found by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the prevalent subfields in which most social workers are employed include child, family, and school social workers; healthcare social workers; and mental health and substance abuse social workers. For all other subfields of social work, the overall employment projection for 2012-2022 is at 9%. However, the aforementioned subfields constitute the highest anticipated employment projections, with: 15% growth from 2012-2022 for child, family, and school social workers as a result of ongoing needs to strengthen families as well as increase student enrollment across the education sector; 27% growth from 2012-2022 for healthcare social workers as a result of medical advancements contributing to increased longevity, especially in relation to Baby Boomers reaching their elderly years and experiencing chronic illnesses; and 23% growth from 2012-2022 for mental health and substance abuse social workers as a result of increasing societal acceptance for seeking mental health services as well as increasing trends in mandates for substance abuse offenders to seek rehabilitative services.

Recommendations for Increased Cultural Competence

A fundamental problem embedded in cultural competence is the conceptualization of both culture and competence. For example, it is impossible for social workers, let alone anyone, to become experts on every group or population (Lee & Greene, 1999). Additionally,

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what this complexity reveals is social workers' ability to achieve high levels of self-awareness by looking within themselves for sources of prejudice and bias. For cultural competence to be effective, it is necessary to reflect upon such prejudices and biases toward a path of adaptability into cultural sensitivity services applicable to their clients. Where does or can a social worker draw the line between the immeasurable aspects of culture and achieving competence? According to Goldberg (2000), conflicting principles in multicultural social work include:

> 1) respecting the contents of all cultures versus supporting basic human rights,
>
> 2) inability to understand the needs and views of people from different cultural backgrounds versus mission to practice social work, and
>
> 3) social workers' own right to ethnic preference versus social workers' obligation to eliminate personal cultural bias and prejudice. (p. 12)

Goldberg noted that people's differences are vast, and thus the context of any given professional-client situation—whether cultural, historical, or even environmental—could concurrently provide explanations that help people to understand differences as well as help dissect the layered intersecting contradictions within one's identity or to greater society to providing effective services in spite of such differences. What becomes problematic is bridging the ethical responsibility of respecting clients for their diversity with doing what may seem to be inherently right for their well-being. For example, when an aspect of a client's own diversity, such as his/her religion, condemns his/her sexual orientation (which may occur such as in the case of the LGBTQ community), how do the profession and social work education programs preserve the profession's obligations toward cultural sensitivity while limiting potential conflicts that affect adequate practice and services? Several studies and

theories related to human diversity provide various frameworks and techniques that have been deemed effective in enhancing students' cultural competence as a means to better approach the various ways in which the MSW programs can better prepare future social workers.

Transformative Learning

The underlying doctrines of cultural competence can be summarized to include cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and applicable skills (Lee & Greene, 1999). Lee and Greene (2004) suggested the adoption of a Transformative Learning framework toward effective pedagogy as a means of developing effective practice guidelines. By definition, a Transformative Learning approach suggests that one's learning is achieved through the critical examination of one's development of knowledge as interpreted through one's own perspective based on one's individualized life experiences. Like the profession's expectation of approaching the ways in which one provides services to clients by recognizing their individuality and uniqueness, as discussed in Chapter One, this approach, too, allows for the reflective incorporation of students' individuality and uniqueness to allow for their professional development.

From a Transformative Learning framework, the goal is to build upon students' individual learning experiences by fostering meaningful learning experiences through the corresponding of such experiences to students' individuality. Lee and Greene (2004) noted that this model requires students to assess their own journey of cross-cultural learning regularly and continuously by freely and candidly reflecting upon, engaging in, and critically assessing their own discourse as it may or may not apply to their clients' discourse. Key to this framework is the reflection portion, and within this reflection includes, once again,

facilitation by an effective teacher. In order for this pedagogical approach to be effective, teaching strategies point to the need for teachers to encourage students to reflect upon their individual experiences as they apply theory to practice.

Contact Theory

The fundamental tenet of Contact Theory states that prejudice and discrimination can be reduced with increased contact among individuals of different backgrounds. For the application of Contact Theory to be most effective, Allport (1954) postulated that the following four conditions must be achieved: status equality among groups in any given situation, intergroup cooperation, commonality in goals, and authoritative support. Various studies have resulted in supporting this theory by providing situations in which various individuals are put together for evaluation (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Seaman, Beightol, Shirilla, & Crawford, 2010). From a sociological perspective, this phenomenon is explained and understood through the introduction of equality, cooperation, and commonality of goals. However, when introducing nearly the opposite—ethnocentrism, competition, and differential in power—otherwise known as the Noel Hypothesis, theorists suggest that it could result in the development of minority status, conflict, oppression, and prejudice or discrimination. When groups of people enter contact situations in ethnocentrism, or judging others based on their own values, competition for scarce resources, and a differential in power of the masses or a differential in power by virtue of privilege or access to resources, then it is understandably expected that prejudice and discrimination may develop (Healey, 2015).

Today, current research regarding the application of Contact Theory expands upon the initial four conditions to include other group contact aspects in the reduction of prejudice and

discrimination. Harwood (2010) accounted for the variations of forms of contact to include, but not be limited to, quality of face-to-face contact and one's involvement with contact. Additionally, research by Pettigrew, Wagner, Christ, and Stellmacher (2007) found that indirect intergroup contact such as information from or knowledge of mutual friends was comparable to direct contact with individuals. Thus, it is in the relationship of the contact situation, as explained earlier through the discussion of the Noel Hypothesis, where Contact Theory could be effective in social work pedagogy. By frequent exposure and increasing positive contact situations of social work students intertwined with Experiential Learning or reflective learning such as Transformative Learning, students could gain more hands-on experiences in cultural competence.

Experiential Learning

According to Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning, learning involves adaptation to the world as well as transactions between the person and the environment. Rather than the traditional educational model of textbooks in a classroom accompanied by didactic teaching, Kolb argued that learning encompasses the stretching of the human capacity by incorporating the shaping of experiences from our environments.

Regarding social work education, much criticism revolves around the vagueness of the CSWE to simply mandate programs to teach cultural competence, though it does not regulate or assess the ways in which programs are or are not effective. With varying teaching styles across the nation's numerous accredited CSWE social work programs, how can the CSWE, if at all possible, assure student learning outcomes from a core set of social work principles?

Integrating experiential learning into educational curriculum has resulted in four major outcomes: (a) enhanced comprehension and retention of material, (b) ability to view settings from within, (c) positive changes in stereotypes about other cultures, and (d) an improved attitude toward learning with more self-direction (Forster & Prinz, 1988). In the 1960s, learning and teaching approaches generally focused on theoretical knowledge and information. As education was transformed, various studies attempted to measure experiential learning and found it had benefits for student learning in and out of the classroom.

Experiential learning techniques such as the use of the cultural genogram have been found to be useful in teaching cultural competence to social work students. The cultural genogram is a training tool that enables individuals to thoroughly explore their own unique cultural identities and the guiding principles thereof that shape their beliefs, behaviors, and preconceived notions. In doing so, individuals have an opportunity to step outside of their comfort zones to examine and assess their own biases and prejudices within their identities to develop cultural awareness and sensitivity. When facilitated appropriately and effectively in an atmosphere that feels safe, welcoming, and nonthreatening to students, Warde (2012) has found that the training tool generates initial uncertainty and discomfort due to the sensitivity of sharing personal information, but that it further allows for a voyage of discovery and a chance for sharing, growing, and changing that is most beneficial for current and future clientele.

Field Education

Because social work education believes in applied practice, it is no surprise that the fieldwork component plays a crucial role in the learning process of one's professional

development. Research conducted by Armour et al. (2004) based on an initial end-of-the-year

survey of 52 field instructors (Bain & Garcia, as cited in Armour et al., 2004) attempted to

target field instructor behaviors in the following three domains—relationship with self,

relationship with supervisees, and relationship with the agency—as they relate to enhancing

cultural competence. The results of this initial end-of-the-year survey showed the difficulty of

confronting supervisees and supervisors' cultural concerns; therefore, this study was created

with the goal of training field instructors with the necessary tools in cultural competence

interventions and practices. Similarly, research by Hendricks (2003) on field education

teaching models for field supervisors found a lack of integration of a cultural component.

Since the creation of Reynolds' model in 1942 (as cited in Hendricks, 2003), multiple

versions have been developed through the decades, all attempting to tackle various modalities,

though none approached a design attempt to deal with cultural competence between

supervisors and workers. Therefore, building upon this original model that allowed for a

natural fit, Hendricks (2003) updated this concept to apply the cultural competence mandate

in social work education today. Similarly, the research by Armour et al. stresses the need for

such a development in field education.

In teaching cultural competence, the teaching and learning processes go hand in hand

and ought to include a five-stage process that is not necessarily cyclical but rather is recycled

to and from stages (Hendricks, 2003). These five stages include

- Stage I – The stage of acute consciousness of self.
- Stage II – The sink or swim adaptation.
- Stage III – The stage of understanding the situation without power to control one's
  own activity in it.

- Stage IV – The stage of relative mastery, in which one cab both understand and
  control one's own activity in the art which is learned.

- Stage V – The art of learning to teach what one has mastered (Reynolds, as cited in
  Hendricks, 2003).

This updated model suggests that the stages do not progress in a linear fashion, and mastery requires one to go to and from each stage over a relatively lengthy period of time. However, for students to achieve mastery, Hendricks (2003) noted the important role of a field instructor's or supervisor's own cultural awareness development as a way to effectively teach the application of cultural competence. Thus, the study by Armour et al. (2004) bridges Hendricks' implications with their findings of the necessity of the relationship with self and normalizing one's discomfort, the relationship with supervisees and the need to be direct and personally engaging, the relationship with one's field agency site, and having confidence in challenging disempowerment. Since field education is a fundamental element of social work education, it becomes a challenge if and when a field instructor or supervisor is lacking in suitable facilitation.

Furthermore, in a study conducted by Teasley (2005) to examine the "linkages among social work education programs, professional development, and school social workers' perceived level of cultural competence in urban public school systems that have a majority African American student enrollment" (p. 85), it was found that social work education programs alone did not contribute to professionals' higher self-reported scores of cultural competence. Rather, social work education programs facilitated early exposure to understanding the importance of cultural competence. Exposure in their social work education programs combined with years of experience in the field, post graduate professional

development, and number of cultural competence workshops attended were all positively

associated with respondents' perceived levels of cultural competence. Given these results,

Teasley argued that future social workers be more adequately prepared in cultural

competence, suggesting the necessity for the CSWE to mandate that social work programs

have curriculum content and evaluative training in field education. Additionally, this study

suggests the need to have clearer metrics in place that will monitor evaluation methods on

cultural competence through the application of theory to practice.

Social Work Professional Development Recommendations

In the early 1990s, a content analysis of social work literature showed that the

profession had generally not provided adequate information regarding services or

interventions for minority clients (McMahon & Allen-Meares, 1992). Into the 21st century,

social work education curriculum and social work education policies have been concentrated

around mainstream White America, focusing not on the changing demographics to include

diversity but rather focusing on organization and leadership of the White majority (Reisch,

2008). Today, many studies on various diversities such as age groups or ethnic groups as well

as various social work settings such as hospitals or schools provide a wide range of

approaches and social work education implications for the enhancement of cultural

competence in social work practice. For example, studies on providing services to clients of

various ethnic backgrounds—such as in the case for multiracial people (Jackson & Samuels,

2011), Native Americans (Hodge & Limb, 2010), or the Latino community (Cordero, 2008)—

all confirmed the importance of professional development, including increasing social

workers' knowledge and exposure as a means to enhance their awareness and familiarity to others of various backgrounds.

The ethical obligation social workers have to their clients as outlined by the NASW (2008) *Code of Ethics* explain the need for social workers to, prior to engaging in services with their clients, understand the nature of their clients' backgrounds as a means to demonstrate services sensitive and show respect for their human diversities. This expectation postulates that before engaging with clients, social workers must work extensively to educating themselves about various groups of people, understanding not only their norms, attitudes, and behaviors, but also best practices in their professional positions as change agents.

In other instances, when working with Asian clients, Ino and Glicken (2014) suggested that professionals take a collectivist approach into consideration. Cultural heritage as well as familial ranking can be taken into consideration in the social workers' decision-making processes. Although this may be a generic rule of thumb, one cannot discount many other situations in which this general rule may not apply. However, although there is information supporting the need to provide services applicable to each individual client, minority clients and those who are generally disadvantaged have historically received differential treatment as a result of their minority or disadvantaged status (Olson, 2014; Prospero & Kim, 2009; Stehno, 1982). In contrast, in the case with working with Hmong-Americans, a subsection of the umbrella Asian race, a study by Southwick, Durán, and Schultz (2013) suggested the importance of learning comprehensively about various cultures, but also found the necessity for agencies to adopt a pragmatic approach rooted in a universal strategy for understanding the differences within the Hmong community. In this approach, it

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is suggested that agencies implement policies and procedures that have a universal appeal across various cultures. For example, agencies may find it beneficial to not approach clients specifically from their diversities, but rather, know their individualized needs. In this way, social workers can approach clients' needs without pigeonholing them into lists of best practices but instead tailor services and practices to meet the personalized needs of their consumers.

Likewise, with the Baby Boomer population continuously approaching retirement, U.S. elderly population demographics on the rise, and the lack of interest in working with such a population (Hyooyman & Kiyak, 2011), research in addressing culturally competent practice with the elderly shows the necessity for individualized service practice in an increasingly dynamic population. As individuals age and life expectancy is annually on the rise (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2015), in order for social workers to provide effective services, Min (2005) found that an approach that incorporates a conceptual framework of diverse elderly and a multidisciplinary community-oriented and neighborhood-based approaches is most effective with this particular population. In reviewing the literature, cultural competence is emphasized in an individual's or group's needs. There is no cookie-cutter, one-way approach in providing culturally competent social work practice. Rather, social workers should strive to provide services that are culturally competent based on the unique needs of their clients.

Summary

Historically, cultural competence has not always been a part of social work education, let alone social welfare. It is apparent that throughout the years, social work education and

research have made strides in the advancement of cultural competence in social work practice. Given the nation's changing demographics, the NASW and the CSWE have pioneered efforts to enact and update policies and provide standards for professional competencies and conduct. In spite of these strides, however, problems remain with the conceptualization and application of theory to practice.

This literature review first described the transformation of the historical context of cultural competence in social welfare and social work education and then linked these details to the expectations of the CSWE (2008, 2015d) EPAS to MSW programs relative to their curriculum design and assessment. Then, it discussed prevalent fields of practice and future job trajectories for the social work profession. Lastly, this literature review examined various recommendations for increased cultural competence through MSW education and social work professional development. By discussing the intersection of literature on cultural competence from its historical transformation, its mandate for social work education, its application in social work practice, and recommendations for best practices, this literature review outlined the pertinent research in preparation for this dissertation's goals of studying social workers' conceptualization, preparedness, experiences, practices, and challenges related to cultural competence.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Study's Goals

The purpose of this study was to first learn about the ways in which newly employed social workers conceptualized cultural competence at the start of their practice. Next, this research aimed to understand the extent to which these social workers considered that their MSW programs prepared them for cultural competence in social work practice. Lastly, this research sought to discover the challenges social workers experienced regarding their exposure to and preparedness in cultural competence practice. Because this research was qualitative in nature as it sought to explore the experiences and practices of social workers through their narratives and reflections, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and one focus group.

The goal for my dissertation was to gather data from newly employed social workers on their conceptualization of, experiences with, preparedness for, and challenges related to providing culturally competent social work practice. By conducting this research and learning about applied and actualized cultural competent practice, I hoped to be able to provide pedagogical and curricular recommendations for the enhancement of social work education programs in the preparation of future professionals' cultural competent practice.

Research Questions

This study focused on the following research questions:

1. What assumptions and understandings about cultural competence in social work practice do newly employed social workers embrace?

2. To what degree do social workers consider their MSW programs as preparing

   them for cultural competence in social work practice?

3. What, if any, are the challenges newly employed social workers face with regard

   to their preparedness in terms of cultural competent practice?

Overview of Research Design

For my dissertation I utilized a qualitative research method approach and collected data in a twofold process. Qualitative research methods attempt to understand the "meaning, concepts, definitions, [and] characteristics" (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 3) of data relative to social or human problems, allowing the researcher to interpret the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2014). To gather rich data about the conceptualization of, preparedness for, practice of, and challenges related to cultural competence in social work practice, it was necessary to conduct qualitative research methods as a means to understand the understanding and experiences of newly employed social workers. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research allows researchers to "seek to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants" (p. 19). Because cultural competence may be limitless and include countless variations in meanings and interpretations, a qualitative approach allowed for extensive narratives and reflections.

Naturally, my participants for this research consisted of 20 newly employed social workers that have recently graduated from a CSWE-accredited MSW program. Because this dissertation was not an evaluation of any specific MSW program, my participants graduated from various MSW programs. During the first stage of my data collection, I conducted 20 individual in-depth, semi-structured interviews. For this process, participants were asked a

series of questions, allowing them to explore their individualized conceptualization of cultural competence, their levels of preparedness in cultural competence related to their MSW programs, and their experiences and challenges in practicing cultural competence in their current work. Semi-structured interviews were selected over structured interviews, as semi-structured interviews allowed me to probe in a less structured way based on participants' responses. In doing so, I was able to assess responses for thoroughness and clarity, since cultural competence may be difficult to explain and interpret based on the lens or framework in which participants interpret the world. Additionally, given that the field of social service and social welfare are vastly extensive in the populations they serve and the organizations in which social workers are found, a semi-structured approach allowed me, when necessary, to create questions related to each participant's work. As noted by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), semi-structured interviews that allow for open-ended responses, such as in the case for this dissertation, "could be followed up with probes, and perhaps a list of some areas, topics, and issues that you want to know more about but do not have enough information about at the outset of your study" (p. 125). As stated previously, because experiences regarding cultural competence may be limitless, qualitative research methods allowed my participants the opportunity to thoroughly reflect and then still enabled to follow up in case further clarification or discussion was necessary.

Through these interviews, I first explored the ways in which these social workers conceptualized cultural competence relative to their work in the field. Next, I investigated the extent of these social workers' preparedness in culturally competent practice or lack thereof related to their MSW program experiences. Lastly, I examined these social workers' significant challenges regarding their exposure to and preparedness in cultural competent

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practice, considering aspects including but not limited to working with different populations, utilizing various methods, considering life experiences, etc.

During the second stage of my data collection, I conducted one focus group with seven participants who were recruited from the first stage and represented a combined various MSW programs and fields of social work practice. An advantage of utilizing a focus group for my dissertation, especially after already collecting data from the first stage, was the ability to then generate greater insight, further elaboration, and deeper understanding of how, as a group of newly employed and recently graduated social workers, participants arrived at their conclusions through an interactive process (Berg & Lune, 2012). The original data collected in the first stage were first transcribed and coded to extract preliminary findings. During the focus group, my findings were presented as the basis for additional in-depth discussions on cultural competence.

For the focus group, I presented my study's preliminary findings that emerged from the first stage. My preliminary findings were categorized into sections designated for each major finding and during the focus group, I provided an overview and explanation with detailed descriptions, examples, and quotes before allowing participants an opportunity to discuss these findings in detail. Focus group participants were given the opportunity to discuss with one another and me their understanding of these findings, often providing elaborations or clarifications for my own improved understanding and scope.

Research Methods

Recruitment Strategies

Geographic location. A city like Los Angeles in Southern California, whose

population is robust in its range and intersections of diversity, provided an ideal geographic

setting for conducting this research. Social workers in Los Angeles have an increased

likelihood to be engaged with clientele from a wide range of differences. By collecting data

from social workers practicing cultural competence in Los Angeles, I sought to not only

gather rich data from social workers who serve a diverse clientele, but also interview social

workers of diverse backgrounds. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2013), the population

for the city of Los Angeles was 3,884,307 in 2013. The following estimated demographics for

Los Angeles between 2009-2013 highlight some of the city's diversity:

- Ethnic/Racial Demographics:
    - Hispanic or Latino, 48.6%
    - White, 28.6%
    - Asian, 11.2%
    - Black or African America, 9%
    - American Indian or Native Alaskan, 0.2%
    - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 0.2%
    - Some other race alone, 0.3%
    - Two or more races, 2%
    - 38.8% of individuals who are foreign born residents
    - 60.2% of individuals who speak a language other than English at home
- Income and Poverty:
    - Median family income, $54,024,
    - Percentage of families in poverty, 17.8%

○ Percentage of all people in poverty, 22%

Although in conceptualizing the methods and recruitment strategies for this study, it was an original goal to recruit 20 participants from diverse backgrounds, allowing for representation from various ethnicities/races, gender identities, areas of concentration at their workplaces, delivery services to various types of populations at an assortment of settings, and various MSW programs attended. That was later modified, as cultural competence is a mandate for all social work programs and all social workers regardless of their backgrounds. Additionally, it was important to note that the purpose of this study was not to (a) identify or classify challenging populations, (b) identify or classify diversity characteristics of clients or social workers, or (c) evaluate any particular MSW program. Therefore, this study did not include an eligibility screening process for participants who (a) worked with specific social welfare subfields such as homelessness or mental health; (b) served specific diversity characteristics such as gender, age, religion; (c) were themselves of specific diversity characteristics; or (d) have attended specific MSW programs. By recruiting participants in a city like Los Angeles and utilizing the NASW as an initial source, I was able to at least increase my probability in recruiting participants of diverse backgrounds, who served various populations, and who have graduated from various MSW programs.

The NASW. With over 132,000 members, the NASW (2015a), established in 1955, is the largest global professional membership organization for social workers. Its purpose includes "promoting the professional development of its members, establishing and maintaining professional standards of practice, advancing sound social policies, and providing services that protect its members and enhance their professional status" (para. 2). Although membership is not required to practice social work, the NASW is a prominent resource for the

profession and its professional conduct, making it an appropriate fit for the initial participant recruitment for this study.

Although no specific site selection was used for this dissertation, the NASW California Chapters—specifically their geographical regional locations of Region H: West and Central Los Angeles, and Region I: Pasadena, East, Central, South Los Angeles, Long Beach—was used as an organizational vehicle for recruiting my sample from the Los Angeles area. As a member of the NASW myself, I am familiar with the resources available to NASW members. After reviewing the policies of the NASW and both geographical regional locations of the California Chapters through their online website, I first learned of the possibilities of advertising for the recruitment of possible study participants (NASW California Chapter, n.d.).

Recruitment procedures. According to the UCLA Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines, because my study presented no more than minimal risk of harm to participants, I was qualified to request a waiver of documentation for a signed informed consent. Instead, upon confirming voluntary participation, I was able to request that participants provide their consent to participate via email response. As part of my recruitment methods and in lieu of a signed informed consent, I gave all potential study participants an initial study information sheet (See Appendix A) outlining the following details of the study: participant eligibility criteria, a brief overview, extent of participation, the study's risks and benefits, means to maintain confidentiality, participants' rights, and contact information. Once eligibility was confirmed and potential study participants voluntarily consented, I then moved forward with scheduling interviews to commence, giving them a wide range of available times and inquiring about their respective schedules.

The initial recruitment process was executed through convenience sampling by advertising on the NASW California Chapters' Region H's and Region I's sole social media outlets: their public Facebook group pages. After sporadically reviewing both Facebook group pages (which are in the public domain) from August 2015 to November 2015, I learned that Facebook was a prominent location for advertisements of these regions' social work related information, such as professional development events including conferences or continuing education credit workshops, networking events, employment opportunities, current news and research articles, and recruitment for participation in research studies, including doctoral dissertation studies. To advertise, I first needed to have a personal Facebook account. Next, I was required to join both Facebook groups, which were open to the public, and easily accessible through self-administration. After the administrators of both Facebook groups approved my request to join, I then needed to screen and provide my desired information, as I deemed appropriate, as there was no advertised parameters or review or screening process involved in posting information. One Facebook group allowed for the immediate posting of information on their group page, whereas the other Facebook page required an administrator's approval for posting, which was approved within 24 hours.

So as not to overwhelm members who belonged to these groups since postings are made sporadically throughout the week or month, sometimes multiple posts occurring in a single day, I started by providing a brief explanation of my study, the extent of participation, participant eligibility criteria, incentives, and contact information to learn more about the study (See Appendix B). A single advertisement post was made per each Facebook group, and further recruitment did not commence until the 1 week mark. Within the first week of recruitment, I received inquiries from prospective participants who were provided my study

information sheet and asked to provide their eligibility criteria information as so I could confirm their eligibility. Once approved for eligibility, I requested an email response back with his/her consent to participate. Once consent was received, I then moved forward with scheduling interviews.

Recruiting through the NASW Facebook groups did not generate a total of 20 participants; therefore, snowball sampling recruitment methods were implemented. After 1 week of waiting for the NASW Facebook groups to generate participant interest, I simultaneously reposted my advertisement on both pages and inquired with my colleagues in my professional network of social workers and social work educators through an initial referral email (See Appendix C) explaining my study and asking for their assistance with soliciting volunteers. Forwarded with this referral email to my colleagues was a message directed to potential study participants with more detailed information about the study and eligibility, including an attachment of the study information sheet. My colleagues were asked to forward this email to any potential study participants or additional referrals themselves. As stated in all these correspondences, all potential study participants were requested to contact me directly with any questions or concerns or to express their willingness to participate. This process of soliciting volunteers through referrals combined with NASW advertisements occurred continuously weekly until my targeted number of participants was reached. Once my targeted amount of 20 participants was reached, then my Facebook advertisements were removed.

For the first stage of data collection (interviews), all interested potential study participants were given 1 week upon their initial inquiry or correspondence with me to decide whether they wished to participate. Once email confirmation was received, I then moved

forward with scheduling their interviews by providing them a wide range of available times and inquiring about their preferences for a date, time, and interview location. Upon scheduling my 20 interviews, additional participants were scheduled in the event of cancellations. All participants whose interviews were scheduled eventually participated in my study.

Upon completing all interviews, I then organized my study's preliminary findings and additional focus group protocol as presented to my Dissertation Chair in preparation for the execution of stage two, the focus group. Once finalized, I created a new focus group study information sheet and submitted an amendment to my initial UCLA IRB application before any focus group recruitment occurred. Upon receiving approval for all protocols, focus group participants were contacted via email for their participation and then had 1 week to decide whether they wished to participate in this stage of my study and provide their given availability.

Incentives. As a means to help secure participants for the duration of their participation in this study and as a small token of appreciation, an incentive of a $25 gift card to Target was advertised and provided for participation in both the interview stage as well as the focus group stage. Gift cards were provided immediately after the completion of the interview or focus group. By integrating this incentive, my hope was to generate greater interest in participation.

Participants

Eligibility criteria and basis for the rationale for selecting particular sample.
Participants in this study needed to meet the following criteria. First, they had to have an

MSW degree from an accredited CSWE university and could not have graduated from their MSW program more than 4 years prior to participating in the study. Second, they had to be social workers employed in fields directly related to social services or social welfare. Third, they had to be in their current place of employment between 6 months and 4 years.

The justification for requiring participants to have attained an MSW degree from an accredited CSWE university includes the following reasons. First, the CSWE has a partnership with and is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation as the only accrediting body for social work education in the United States (CSWE, 2015a). Second, the requirement of an MSW degree rather than a BSW degree was because the CSWE mandates that an MSW program curriculum, while identical to its description of BSW programs, differentiates itself through preparation for students in specialized practice. The CSWE (2015d) stipulates that MSW programs "identify the specialized knowledge, values, skills, cognitive and affective processes, and behaviors that extend and enhance the nine Social Work Competencies and prepare students for practice in the area of specialization" (p. 12), whereas the BSW degree is simply mandated to prepare students for generalist practice and makes no such requirements for specializations. Third, the MSW represents an overwhelming majority of the highest degree attained for practicing social workers. The NASW Center for Workforce Studies (2006) conducted research on the general nature of the social work profession through a random sample of 10,000 social workers drawn from 48 states and the District of Columbia. This study found that the predominant social work degree was the MSW at 79%, compared to BSWs at 12%. The post-MSW graduation and newly employed social work practice requirement timeframe was designed to allow for a sufficient amount of time for these social workers to develop, reflect upon, and become accustomed to

their own application of culturally competent practice (6 months to 4 years), but to prevent

them from having too much time apart from their MSW education, as this study required

participants to reflect on their educational journeys in retrospect. Lastly, the requirement for

my participants to work directly in fields of social services or social welfare was to assure the

application of culturally competent practice in fields related to the degree. According to the

NASW (2015a),

> Social work practice consists of the professional application of social work values,
>
> principles, and techniques to one or more of the following ends: helping people obtain
>
> tangible services; counseling and psychotherapy with individuals, families, and
>
> groups; helping communities or groups provide or improve social and health services;
>
> and participating in legislative processes. (para. 1)

While one might assume that graduates with an MSW pursue careers in social work, MSW

degrees are recognized to be flexible, and some individuals with MSWs pursue other career

trajectories outside the realm of social work, such as educators, lawyers, researchers, and

grant writers. Thus, participants were expected to be providing direct practice to ensure the

direct utilization of culturally competent practice.

Participants' demographics. This study consisted of 20 total female participants of

various ethnic backgrounds represented as noted below. As part of the interview process,

participants were given the opportunity to choose the cultural identities they wanted to share.

As a result, I gathered a thorough representation of information on my participants' age and

ethnic backgrounds, while other cultural identities that were shared by participants were done

so by personal choice. Regarding participants' age ranges, the youngest participant was 24-

years-old and the oldest participant was 31-years-old. With regard to ethnic demographics,

Table 3.1 presents a breakdown of the participants' ethnic demographics.

Table 3.1 – *Participants' Ethnic Demographics*

Ethnicity Group	Number
Mexican Americans	5
Filipino Americans	4
El Salvadorian Americans	2
Half Mexican/Half White American	2
Taiwanese Americans	2
African American	1
Columbian American	1
Ecuadorian American	1
Guatemalan American	1
Half Mexican/Half El Salvadorian American	1

With regard to MSW programs, Table 3.2 presents a breakdown of each school represented.

Table 3.2 – *Participants' MSW Programs*

School	Number
University of Southern California	11
University of California, Los Angeles	3
California State University, Long Beach	3
Columbia University	2
Boston College	1

With regard to MSW program year of graduation, Table 3.3 presents a breakdown of each

year of graduation.

Table 3.3 – *Participants' MSW Year of Graduation*

Year of Graduation	Number
2015	6
2014	8
2013	4
2012	2

Participants had the opportunity to freely choose the cultural identifications they wished to share. Other cultural identities shared, though not collected from each individual participant, included the following:

- 20 participants shared aspects of their early upbringing, including family socioeconomic status, family structure, relationships with family and friends, geographic location of their upbringing, or secondary education.

- 16 participants shared a religious affiliation; nine identified as Catholic, four identified as Christian, and three identified as Buddhist.

- 16 participants shared their bilingual language abilities, describing their confidence in language fluency or confidence in conversational skills. The bilingual languages shared included Spanish, Tagalog, and Mandarin.

- Nine participants shared that they were of first generation status.

- Three participants shared that they identified as bisexual.

- Three participants shared a health or mental health diagnosis.

Data Collection

First stage: Semi-structured interviews. From January 2016 to February 2016, I recruited, scheduled, and conducted 20 interviews as data collection for this study. All inquiries made regarding participation for my study were verified for acceptability based on the potential participants' criteria. To confirm participation, participants were asked to first provide the following information: name and address of current place of employment, length of employment reported as months/years to the nearest month, name and address of MSW program, and year of graduation. Upon verification of eligibility status, an email exchange

commenced requiring their email consent to participate voluntarily before being invited to participate. Once invited to participate, participants were given a wide range of my available dates and times—each participant receiving at least a 2 week range of dates with dates offering multiple timeframes—for the scheduling of interviews to commence at a location at their convenience, or if preferred, in a location that I would provide and that would ensure their privacy.

The initial interview protocol (See Appendix D) for the in-depth semi-structured interviews was created based on the NASW (2008) *Code of Ethics*, NASW (2001) *Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice*, NASW (2015b) *Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice*, and CSWE (2008, 2015d) EPAS as they related to cultural competence as well as on literature on cultural competence in social work education and practice. Categorical questions regarding the conceptualization, extent of preparedness, current practice, and challenges were asked as a means to learn in-depth information from these social workers' actual experiences.

Prior to the interview and during the inquiry and eligibility confirmation process, participants were informed about my study and all ethical considerations through details provided in the study information sheet. All interviews were audio recorded with at least two audio recording devices (my personal smartphone and laptop computer) for the creation of verbatim transcriptions. Participants were assured that if they had questions or concerns during or after the interview they could contact me at any given time during the study. At the conclusion of each interview, all participants were reminded about the transcription review process and potential participation in the second stage of the study. The 20 interviews ranged in length between 37 minutes and 80 minutes and averaged at approximately 55 minutes.

Second stage: Focus group. The nature of the focus group was to allow my participants, in a collective setting, to learn and discuss the preliminary findings discovered in stage one regarding culturally competent conceptualization, preparedness, practice, experiences, and challenges. By gathering a purposeful selected group of original participants for stage two, my goal was to further discuss the preliminary findings, continuing an in-depth discussion regarding aspects of cultural competence that may not have emerged during stage one.

After determining my preliminary findings and reviewing the demographic make up of the pool of participants from the first stage, I consulted with my Dissertation Chair regarding the next steps in the second stage of my data collection. After determining the focus group selection criteria based on the recruitment of a diverse range of participants from various MSW programs and of various backgrounds as well as the structure for the focus group, I created a study information sheet for the focus group (See Appendix E), recruitment follow-up emails regarding focus group involvement (See Appendix F), and the focus group protocol (See Appendix G) and submitted an amendment to my initial UCLA IRB application. Upon receiving UCLA IRB approval, I commenced with the recruitment of focus group participants.

Upon approval and selection, an initial group of nine participants was contacted via email and provided a new study information sheet outlining details related to the focus group. These participants were invited to partake in the second stage of data collection. Once their voluntary participation consent was provided, a private and anonymous Doodle link—an online scheduling tool—was sent with a wide range of varying dates and times over the course of 2 weeks during the end of February 2016 to the beginning of March 2016 for a

focus group to commence at a conference room that would ensure their privacy. I requested that participants provided all their availability as a means to assure the selection of a final date that would satisfy a diverse group of individuals in accordance with their cultural backgrounds and MSW programs. Seven individuals representing all MSW programs participating in this study and at least six different ethnic demographic backgrounds represented in this entire study endorsed the final date and eventually participated in the focus group at the end of February 2016. The focus group was audio recorded with at least two audio recording devices (my personal smartphone and laptop computer) for the creation of a verbatim transcription, and this transcription was solicited for review. The total length of time of the focus group was 97 minutes.

Advisory board. Prior to IRB approval and before each stage of data collection, I organized an advisory board of four different professional social workers or social work educators, all of whom had either attained an MSW from an accredited CSWE program, had been working in the field of social welfare for at least 10 years, or had been teaching social work education in the field for at least 10 years, and who came from different cultural backgrounds. These individuals were called upon to provide a critical eye and suggest feedback and insight regarding the content and structure of all my recruitment materials (Appendices A-G). Before this process, I spoke with each advisory board member individually, explaining the purpose of my study and the extent of their participation. Luckily, each advisory board member agreed to provide his/her support. Once an agreed upon best means of communication was finalized, I emailed all documents (Appendices A-G) and a brief summary of my study to each member. I collected their feedback and, when necessary, met with them in person or communicated with them via email or phone before implementing

changes. By utilizing their experiences and expertise, I believe I was able to include information or questions that may otherwise have been overlooked and, to the best of my ability, eliminate any imbedded assumptions and biases, allowing for a much more comprehensive breadth of knowledge and inquiry on cultural competence for social work practice.

Data Management and Analysis

Data security. All interviews and the focus group were audio recorded on two separate audio recording devices. All audio recordings were initially saved on both my personal smartphone and my laptop computer until I could confirm the conversion into an audio file. Both audio recording devices were password protected and were always either in my direct possession or were in a secured or locked location with limited access, such as my office or my home. Once each audio recording was converted into an audio file, the files were password protected and saved on my personal computer and personal cloud storage Google Drive, which were also private and password protected, before being permanently deleted from my personal smartphone. To maintain the confidentiality of my data, I used participants' initials for coding and did not use identifiable information on electronic audio files or transcriptions. A master code key linking participants' names to their coded initials was password protected and saved in my personal cloud storage Google Drive for my exclusive access. Upon the completion of this study, all audio files and any data collected or identification keys will be destroyed.

Transcriptions. Within 1 hour of each interview and the focus group, each audio file was sent to Rev via www.rev.com—a transcription service—to transcribe interviews and the

focus group discussion. In using Rev, all information was coded with participants' initials and did not contain their names. With a 99% accuracy rate, "Rev is the largest provider of certified translation in the US" (Rev, n.d., para 1). Rev securely stores and encrypts their files and all their transcribers sign confidentiality agreements. As stated by Rev, upon the completion of their services, Rev destroyed all files.

Upon receiving all transcriptions from Rev, usually within 24 hours, I reviewed each transcription while simultaneously listening to the respective audio recording file at least once per interview to crosscheck for accuracy one final time prior to dissemination and coding. Once the transcription was verified and within 1 week of each interview, each participant was sent via email a follow-up thank you note with information regarding his/her respective interview transcript for review, changes, or addendums. During this optional verification process, participants had 1 week to provide any edits such as clarifications or elaborations on the contents of our interview, as they saw fit. Participants were informed that if they chose not to respond or did not have further clarifications or elaborations within a week, then their transcriptions would be accepted as verified and coded as data for the study.

Data analysis. Upon receiving acceptance of all transcriptions, each file was printed and coded for analysis. The findings for this study were generated through an analysis of the interviews and focus group audio recordings and verbatim transcripts. After carefully reviewing the audio recordings for each interview at least once after the interview and then the actual transcriptions of the interviews and focus group, I used an inductive coding approach to first find the various subthemes that emerged and then categorized these subthemes into their respective major findings sections used for Chapter Four. To support each finding, I cataloged direct quotes and/or frequency or depth of information. In reviewing

the coded data, I used a triangulation approach to cross verify themes and patterns that emerged. Various NASW and CSWE documents, including the NASW (2008) *Code of Ethics*, NASW (2015b) *Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice*, and the CSWE (2008, 2015d) EPAS were used.

Credibility. In utilizing a qualitative approach, a possible threat to the research was in its credibility of internal validity. Internal validity, or the extent to which the data closely reflect reality, is vital to qualitative research because it includes the examination of peoples' experiences and social realities. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that whereas quantitative research is objective and fixed, qualitative research is multidimensional and ever-changing. Although assessing the credibility in qualitative research can never fully capture an objective reality, Merriam and Tisdell suggested the following approaches that were applied to my study.

Triangulation is an important strategy when addressing credibility of a qualitative study. Because one social worker's experience may not necessarily be extrapolated to those of other social workers, let alone other social workers working with various clientele or in various geographic locations, I addressed and increased credibility by recruiting and learning of the conceptualizations and experiences of 20 different participants. By doing this, I sought to solidify an attempt to address credibility and learn of the experiences of social workers with a wide range of professionals of varying demographic, educational, and professional backgrounds.

Another strategy for credibility was the usage of member checks, or the process I took in confirming and reconfirming transcriptions for each interview and through the presentation of my preliminary findings during the focus group. By allowing my participants to review

their transcriptions upon the completion of their interviews for clarification or elaboration, I assured accuracy of the information provided. Doing this increased the likelihood of achieving credibility by further confirming participants' narratives and experiences. In this process, three participants provided addendums to their transcripts. These three participants provided greater clarity to their responses, elaborating on their conversation or narratives and providing additional narratives that they overlooked.

Ethical Considerations

   Positionality and role management. As an individual who has attained an MSW, a number of beneficial factors allowed me to bring my own educational and professional experiences to this study. First of all, I have attained an MSW and learned knowledge and theories related to cultural competence. Secondly, since the completion of my MSW, I have attended a handful of social work related professional development or continuing education courses, though not necessarily directly related to cultural competence. I also teach a number of the core courses in my university's social work program, including theories related to cultural competence. Additionally, I am my department's graduate school coordinator and work directly with a handful of MSW Offices of Admissions. Finally, I have been asked to consult with my MSW alma mater regarding improving and revising its overall programing. These experiences have allowed me to reflect on and provide insight into social work curriculum and social work education as a whole. This background has given me an opportunity to explore aspects of a degree and educational program with which I am familiar, possibly generating questions and probes that an outsider might not necessarily consider.

The pitfall, however, may have been the inherently biased or perceived assumptions in perhaps having too much experience and familiarity with the study's subject matter. As a professional and social worker through training, my ultimate hope is for students and future social workers is to be able to learn and grasp cultural competence in order to be able to work diligently and effectively with people of various diverse backgrounds. However, in conducting this study, I did not want a potentially narrowed vision to hinder me from looking at the big picture or prevent me from trying innovative means based on any past experience. As a means to prevent or approach these limitations, I enlisted an advisory board of other social work professionals and social work educators in checking and rechecking my recruitment materials and interview and focus group protocols. By soliciting guidance, comments, and suggestions from various opinions and perspectives, I was able to comprehensively reflect on this entire study and my methodology. As a result, I believe I was able to collect rich data rather than experience preemptive roadblocks.

Social work practice. Fundamental to the social work profession is the application of practice through a strengths-based perspective. To achieve this, social workers continuously practice self-awareness among many other values, principles, and techniques, as a means to delve into the lives of their clientele for adequate service delivery. This can take a great deal of investment and time simply in establishing rapport, which can be both a rewarding and exhausting process. This process—which can take countless hours, days, weeks, or even months to achieve—could have included many intricate levels or cycles of service delivery and could have included many variables of roadblocks. Because of the complexity of the work involved in social work, trying to actualize the ways to articulate one's understanding or practice with cultural competence can be challenging or sensitive in nature. This could have

possibly led to discomfort due to recollecting such experiences or frustration with an inability to articulate experiences via narratives.

As a means to address these issues, relevant information was included in my study information sheets explaining that participation in this research and reflecting on cultural competence might help in the development or enhancement of participants' own self-awareness. Additionally, prior to the interview process, I reminded participants of their choice to refrain from answering any question at any time, and provided any clarifications or elaborations during the transcription review process, when desired or necessary. By doing this, I allowed my participants to better understand that their responses need not be forced or mandatory and rather, their participation and any level of engagement was greatly appreciated.

Confusion with research goals. This research explored the topic of cultural competence, which required participants to include self-assessments of their practice as it related to diverse clientele. I understood that this may have led to a misunderstanding of the nature and goals of this research, as participants may have misconstrued this study's purpose to involve a quest to decipher, which populations were more difficult to work with in comparison to others or what diversity classifications may be most desirable to identify with as a social worker. As a means to avoid or address these misunderstandings, I clearly communicated the true goals of this research. Participants were assured that the purpose of this study was not to identify challenging populations or diversity characteristics of clients or social workers, but rather, to gain an understanding of the conceptualization, experiences, and challenges social workers have in cultural competence related to their MSW experience and in their practice.

Next, participants could have misconstrued this study's purpose as an evaluative process of various MSW programs since the extent of this study included a recollection and explanation of their preparedness for culturally competent social work practice. Likewise, to avoid or address this, I clearly communicated that the purpose of this research was not to evaluate any particular MSW program, nor did I target any particular MSW program in recruiting my participants.

Social desirability. The topic of cultural competence did include a discussion of race, class, religion, sexual orientation, etc., and was sensitive in nature, rendering it potentially difficult to discuss. The drawback with a topic that can bring about varying emotions or fears of political correctness mixed with a professional self-assessment was the susceptibility to socially desirable responses, or the tendency of participants to provide responses that may not necessarily be true but instead be socially acceptable. To avoid and address this, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested several ways to optimize the interview process and data obtained by maintaining a firmly neutral stance, being careful with the wording and language choice, and avoiding banter or verbal/body communication cues (such as verbally agreeing or facial reactions) that may imply my own personal biases. These suggestions were integrated in my interview style so as to allow for a level of trust and understanding on part of the participants and to mitigate social desirability.

Because I have a background in social work, there could have been an increased threat of social desirability given that participants may have perceived my familiarity in the profession as a way to draw out specific responses, perspectives, or positions. In addressing this, during the recruitment and interview processes, participants were not informed of my educational and professional experiences related to social work or social welfare, in hopes of

strengthening my neutral stance and allowing for their candid explanations of their varying experiences. Rather, in my communication and during each interview and focus group, I presented myself as a UCLA graduate student interested in conducting a study on cultural competence and refrained from sharing my experiences as a former MSW student or current social work educator.

Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. Lastly, an ethical issue that was of concern was regarding participants' places of employment or their clients' privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. To ensure my participants' privacy, interviews were conducted in a private room away from other people or potential interruptions. Although participants had a chance to suggest an interview location of their choice, it was explained in the scheduling process that the interview location must be done in a place of privacy, such as a private office or conference room. When participants did not have access to a private location, I secured a private location for their convenience.

There was the possibility of participants feeling uncomfortable or less inclined to share their experiences due to their ethical responsibilities to protect their own organizations' or clients' privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. In addressing this, I thoroughly informed my participants prior to their participation and at the start of each interview of all the procedures I took through the UCLA IRB process, the procedures I would continue to take regarding data management and security, and the procedures I would continue to take to ensure their, their organizations', and their clients' privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. Additionally, participants were encouraged to do the same and were asked to not provide the names of their clients or colleagues as they discussed their clients to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. In maintaining my neutral stance, during the interviews I assured participants

that my role was that of a doctoral candidate researcher with a goal to gather data on the experiences of social workers and cultural competence, and I avoided sharing my own educational and professional experiences with social work education. During the interview process, although participants were given the opportunity to pass on any question they felt uncomfortable or less inclined to address, my hope was to address privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity preemptively to increase the probability and ease of responses.

During the focus group, there were potential risks regarding privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. Although I requested and shared the reasons why it was important that all information shared be kept private, confidential, and anonymous, what my participants shared upon leaving the focus group was unfortunately out of my hands. Nonetheless, as the facilitator of the focus group, I assured my participants of my ethical responsibilities concerning the protection of their information and conveyed my confidence that they, too, would respect their fellow colleagues. Even if my participants did not necessarily know each other, there was a potential risk for participants feeling socially and professionally rejected based on revealing their personal, educational, and professional narratives, such as in the case of sharing their challenges as practitioners. In sharing these challenges, participants may have felt as though they were acknowledging a lack of understanding of cultural competence or acknowledging inadequacies of professional social work practice. To address and minimize such risks, I communicated with the focus group my understanding of appropriate focus group norms and communication techniques, with which they may already have been familiar and comfortable given their careers in social work.

One such technique I employed included a focus group participation approach from an empowerment and advocacy model. In preparing social workers for the field, an

empowerment and advocacy approach teaches social workers to advocate not just for their clients, but also with their clients, increasing and teaching clients' skills in their eventual self empowerment and self-advocacy (Berg-Weger, 2013). With this approach, I reiterated the goals of my research and allowed participants to feel empowered in their contributions to the improvement and possible reformation of social work education, social work research, and increased cultural competence in social work practice. By comfortably having their voices, their thoughts, and their experiences heard, I wanted to lead to a sense of belonging and inclusion. As the facilitator of the focus group, I also monitored and mediated conversations, keeping track of time, allowing for inclusion of responses and chances for disagreement, and following up with each participant individually at the end of the focus group.

Pseudonyms. For the purpose of this study and to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants and their places of employment, all names have been changed and only select identifying information linking each participant to their experiences, clients, or places of employment was included or made broad and ambiguous. For those participants who also contributed to the focus group, if identifying information could be linked to other participants from the focus group or to the interviews, that information was also excluded. In the event that a specific organization, MSW program, or MSW faculty was mentioned by name, that information was given a pseudonym or made broad and ambiguous as well. One master code key identifying each participant to his/her pseudonym was saved on my laptop computer and personal cloud storage Google Drive and was passport protected for the entire duration of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview of Findings

The findings for this chapter are presented in four sections, with each section including descriptions as categorized in subthemes, followed by a section including unanticipated findings unconnected to the goals of this study, and then closing with a conclusion summarizing the findings and highlighting the overall significance and meaning of the findings. The overall goal of this study was to ascertain the ways in which social workers practiced cultural competence relative to the knowledge and skills they gained from their MSW programs, in hopes to learn of their challenges, if any, in practice and extent of preparedness, and to provide MSW programs with the information in education reform.

Section I describes cultural competence as multifaceted, exploring the philosophy of how participants embrace cultural competence practice. Section II describes the ways in which participants believe in the necessity to be challenged to develop cultural competence. This section primarily explores participants' experiences in their MSW programs with curriculum, pedagogy, and faculty, but also explores other supplemental experiences that participants reported as beneficial relative to their preparedness in cultural competence development. Section III and Section IV both highlight specific challenges participants endured as newly employed social workers in the field. Section III specifically delves into the systemic barriers in the field of social welfare, examining participants' comfort, inadequacies, and fundamental organizational barriers interfering with cultural competence delivery. In contrast, Section IV focuses particularly on the manifestation of prejudice and discrimination.

This section specifically explores conflicting values and general experiences with prejudice from their clients during participants' practice in cultural competence.

Section I: The Philosophy of Cultural Competence as Multifaceted

In addressing the multifaceted nature of the philosophy of cultural competence I highlight two critical issues: (a) the inherent paradoxical quality of defining cultural competence, and (b) the role respect plays in defining cultural competence practice.

Inherently Paradoxical

When asked to describe their challenges, if any, in providing culturally competent services, although all participants did indicate challenges in their practice or service delivery, which will be later described in this chapter, 20 of my 20 participants and again reinforced by seven of my seven focus group participants recognized the fundamental challenges embedded in its assumption, expectation, or ambiguity. The terminology itself and what it demands intrinsically poses a challenge to social workers, as practicing cultural competence implies a high level of expertise in identifying characteristics of their clients' cultures that are abundant and ever changing, addressing concerns with culture and competence. Because of this, it is understandable that participants feel a sense of frustration and inadequacy, given that the role of the social worker is one of a client advocate, discerning the needs of his/her clients tailored to the specificities of their identity and experiences. The weight of this task is substantial, putting in the hands of the social worker a tremendous obligation that can be emotionally taxing. Though when done sufficiently, it can potentially yield incomparable rewards. Nonetheless, "I think it's difficult for a [social worker] to be competent in every culture,"

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shared Sande, a 25-year-old participant who continued her explanation of this difficulty because culture is already complex, leaving her and her fellow participants feeling overwhelmed with options for services they provide. These feelings of frustration with the difficulty of reaching a level of competence were echoed with similar statements from 14 of 20 participants, describing challenges in the conceptualization and practice of cultural competence, which then consequently correlated to challenges in their practice and approach. "This is where it gets hard for me," shared Amanda, a 24-year-old Mexican-American participant, as she continued her explanation of what people think culture generally means and what culture can actually entail. Amanda continued by stating that, "With culture, we generally talk about ethnicity, but I also feel that there's something to be said about the culture of groups . . . the culture of poverty . . . the culture of unexplainable trauma or experiences" that may get overlooked and minimized or even marginalized.

The NASW (2008) *Code of Ethics*, defines cultural competence in the following way:

(a) Social workers should understand culture and its function in human behavior and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures

(b) Social workers should have a knowledge base of their clients' cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients' cultures and to differences among people and cultural groups

(c) Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical disability. (paras 1-3)

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In this definition is the very expectation that all 20 of my participants described as inherently paradoxical. Social workers should understand culture, social workers should have a knowledge base of their clients' cultures, and social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand culture; these expectations highlight an enormous, albeit virtually impossible, ethical responsibility for practice in the profession. Natalie, a 25-year-old half Mexican-American, half White participant, stated boldly, "I don't like the fact cultural competence includes the implication of competence, when no one can ever truly be competent in such a variety of diversities." Angie, a 25-year-old Filipino-American participant, went as far as stating, "There is no such thing as actually being culturally competent," saying these statements with conviction and using it to guide her approach in her work, knowing that as social workers, they can never necessarily arrive at a level of pure expertise on any given client's culture. Because cultural competence implies a suggestion of arrogance or superiority, which they express as detrimental to social work practice, my participants believed that as social workers, they are instead in the place and process of learning. Rather than social workers entering the work they do with their clients as experts or all knowing, the role reversal between client and social worker ought to occur where clients then becomes the experts about themselves. Riley, a 27-year-old Mexican-American advised, "You can't talk to [your clients] like you know everything. [Social workers] are not the experts. [Clients] are the experts."

All 20 participants embraced cultural competence as an integral part of their practice and building rapport with their clients, noting the importance of "being aware that your definition and understanding [of cultures] is always going to change," which is why the process of providing culturally competent services inevitably means being flexible and

adaptable. Marielle, a 25-year-old Filipino-American participant, eloquently summarized a perspective for approaching and understanding cultural competence through a sentiment that was repeated regularly throughout the interviews and accepted by my collective participants through the focus group: "I think at this point I've learned that being culturally competent means being able to adapt and be flexible." In sharing her description of what this meant, Marielle shared the following example,

> All of my clients, each person, even though they are in the similar area, or similar schools, or same school district, all have so many different things that they're dealing with. I can go from one client in first grade that is dealing with poverty and homelessness to another client in first grade that is dealing with being in a foster home. Being flexible to have the same sort of clientele but being able to adapt to each specific needs.

This belief was met with some resistance, pushing and pulling my participants in ways that consistently challenged what they learned during their graduate programs and what they knew about providing effective social work practice. Their endurance in coming to terms with this irony and drive to do the best possible work can be described as the necessity of appreciating, as expressed by Jeanette, a Taiwanese-American participant, "that you'll never and that nobody can ever be completely culturally competent . . . I think one of the main takeaways is the ability to be okay with not knowing." The expressed comfort and discomfort participants shared with their general work alongside their approach with their clients in the "not knowing" highlighted the many layers involved in cultural competence as an ongoing process. Natalie spoke to this by stating,

To be culturally competent is a joke in itself because you're generalizing a whole

population of people. To me cultural competence means to be culturally competent to

your client and your client alone, no matter if race or anything is a part of their identity.

Sonia added,

I believe that you are always in a process. I don't think there's a point of arrival of

being fully competent or in the know of what a specific culture is. It is a process of

involving self-reflection, self-awareness, assessment, and constantly looking at the

intersectionalities of multiple cultures.

Likewise, problematic to this expectation of cultural competence is not just its

definition of culture or its expectation of competence, but its lack of addressing these

intersections of any given client's multiple identities. Sonia stated, "[Like my clients], I am

not just one culture. I am part of multiple cultures." People are not simply defined in terms of

one entity or one culture. We have many sides to our stories, many facets, and many

dimensions. We are not simply Asian, or women, or from the United States of America, or

survivors of abuse. Rather, it is belonging to an endless array of intersecting identities and the

layering of these identities that truly makes us unique. Ten participants shared this struggle as

an area of cultural competence rarely to never addressed during their MSW programs. Rather

than highlighting the intersectionalities of the matrix of domination—where our identities,

especially belonging to that of multiple minority classifications, can layer oppression—

participants expressed having learned about populations of social work practice in isolation.

In describing her challenges when working with clients, Sande stated, "Sometimes, I don't

even know where to start." As a result, the work my participants described includes a constant

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restarting and an acceptance that there is "no universal approach" for cultural competence. Jeanette expressed the importance of accepting that,

> It's doing the best to have somewhat of a knowledge of all these various identities but knowing that even amongst each of these various groups of identities, there is so much diversity and so much difference between them, just based on experiences or time, or even what time period you are in.

Nonetheless, my participants struggle with where to start and deciphering whether or not a client's particular culture, if any, takes precedence over other parts of his/her identity. This was particularly the case such as in instances of a culture clash among healthcare, medicine, and religion, or the clash between eastern and western diagnoses of mental health: all examples of the actualized struggles my participants have experienced. Regarding this, participants shared the following thoughts. Sande, a 25-year-old participant stated,

> The many layers of the intersectionality of [clients'] identities makes it difficult to even know where to start providing services. In cases like that, I was not prepared in graduate school. But I think those are the things that sometimes tend to be difficult to be prepared for, because we don't know what's going to come in the door. We can't pick or choose our clients, so I don't know what's going to be coming in the door, and who, in which I'm going to do the intake.

Diane, a 27-year-old Mexican-American participant, expressed,

> There is a challenge with not just a lack of understanding their experiences for such instances like [in the case of] don't ask don't tell, but also with regards to the intersectionality of various dimensions of diversities we belong to, such as being in the

military layered with identifying as LGBTQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or

Queer].

These quotes provide a snapshot into the divergence of cultures and the conflicting nature of

providing services in the actualized lived experiences of my participants. When the client or

the situation the client is experiencing presents as conflicted or contradictory within the

client's own identities, then social workers, as highlighted through my participants'

experiences, struggle with where to begin.

The Role of Respect

Even when my participants expressed struggles with the inherent paradoxical nature of

the conceptualization of cultural competence, this is not to say that its execution was lacking.

From a practice approach, when asked, to describe how they practice cultural competence in

their own words, the notion of having or giving "respect" was a topic of discussion so

frequent that the word itself was used by all 20 participants a total of 86 times to define,

describe, clarify, or provide examples of cultural competence. Additionally, when the word

itself was not in use, synonyms or other general definitions of respect were indicated, such as

in cases of having an understanding of human worth, having openness and tolerance of

people's differences, or understanding that clients' backgrounds and experiences will be

different than the social workers'. Thus, in this research I found that the foundation of respect

was fundamental to the philosophy and approach of cultural competence.

Respect can mean many different things to so many different people and can be

practiced in many different ways. In probing my participants to explain further what giving or

having respect meant, the process was certainly complex, as all 20 of my participants

described a multifaceted progression that must initially mature within the mentality and core of the social worker: in other words, in the continuous development of their self-awareness. Jeanette shared, "I think one of the biggest aspects of cultural competence and having respect is your own self-awareness, developing your own self-awareness of who you are and then in relation understanding more about everyone around you." She elaborated that the ways in which her MSW program, through its curriculum and pedagogy, emphasized and allowed them to cultivate the importance of deeply extracting from their inner selves the experiences, traumas, upbringing, culture, or values that shaped who they were. In other words, another participant, Sonia, stated that the dimensions of having an approach in cultural competence rooted in respect involves "a process of involving self-reflection, self-awareness, and assessment . . . knowing how you [as the social worker], whether it's your biases, your prejudices, your cultures . . . intersects with other people's cultures." With this, the process of giving or having respect in order to practice cultural competence must first be grounded in the social workers' development of candidly recognizing their own biases and prejudices, whether internalized or externalized. Participants expressed an overall agreement in describing their understanding of respect as the need to "challenge our minds to acknowledge our own biases," as noted by Christine, a 25-year-old Salvadorian-American participant.

This was indeed recounted as no easy task, "cathartic," even. In their individualized quests toward self-awareness, my participants described the process as involving the unearthing of their true identities and extensive life histories, in some instances, stories that were preferably left to be forgotten or identities yet to be revealed. Upon recounting these stories and identities, self-awareness then required a level of assessment of the areas of strength or possibly the areas of weakness in the work social workers do with their clients

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who will also be unearthing their own true identities and extensive life histories. Often described as an emotional process, 15 participants shared how working toward this development has led to a diverse range of outcomes including tears and heartache as well as feelings of sadness, embarrassment, isolation, guilt, remorse, frustration, happiness, renewal, tolerance, and acceptance. The sheer importance of this aspect of cultural competence can be summarized through the work my participants and social workers alike do on a daily basis. They regularly carry on their shoulders the weight of the trauma, crises, experiences, and emotions their clients carry. So when aspects of a social worker's self-awareness or life history are not addressed, this can serve as a trigger to a his/her internalized and disguised hardships, as well as a barrier to providing their clients with effective and adequate services.

Subsequently, the work involved in giving or having respect through cultural competence practice when involved directly with clients must confront social workers to challenge what they know or thought they knew. This is why to embrace respect for their clients, 16 participants expressed similar statements to the need to "never assume anything." While in their MSW programs, all participants shared that they obtained a great deal of knowledge and skills in working effectively with a vast array of populations spanning the subfields, including foster care, homelessness, health or mental health, military, the elderly, etc. However, my participants have experienced the disparity of knowledge or skillsets obtained while in their MSW programs and their actual practice as newly employed social workers in the field. They have accepted the fact that once in the field, due to various variables such as the constant of changing times as well as the fact that no two people or situations are ever alike, whatever they learned in their MSW programs may no longer apply. This disparity produced feelings of inadequacy or lack of preparedness.

As a result, respect was described by eight participants as needing to "interact with their clients in a way that respects who they are and where they're coming from. Basically, starting from where the client is at," as noted by Shina, a 25-year-old Taiwanese-American participant. Starting from where the client is involves a great deal of discipline on the part of the social worker, having to reset and start from scratch for every client and in every situation. With this, the role of the social worker is quite the opposite of one who is expected to be culturally competent and fully knowledgeable. Rather, the social worker must play the role of "being the learner," especially in cases where clients and social workers come from a place of familiarity, such as in the case of having similar ethnic backgrounds or religions to their clients. Having to constantly challenge what you have learned or what you know has been described as demanding, especially in cases where my participants truly thought they were entering a situation that gave them an advantage for reasons of familiarity. "It's hard to not assume that they follow everything I do or they know everything I do," shared Aly, a 26-year-old participant, describing situations when she was paired with clients who came from similar ethnic or religious backgrounds as her own. Aly continued by stating, "I frequently found myself realizing that my assumptions were wrong," which tested my participants' understanding to leave all assumptions at the door. It was undoubtedly acknowledged that while certain populations or experiences may follow the treatment approach of other similar characteristics or outcomes, whether in the case of similar clients or clients with similar backgrounds or experiences with social workers, at the end of the day one's approach to respect for cultural competence was the necessity to have no assumptions and invite the client to tell his/her story and share his/her identities. Regarding this, participants shared the following thoughts.

- I don't assume what people's culture is. . . . I don't impose that culture on them. I allow them to express themselves. –Amanda, a 24-year-old Mexican-American participant

- Not everyone has the same practices, so you have to take that into consideration. What someone would consider wrong in the American culture, it's not necessarily wrong in other cultures. –Riley, a 27-year-old Mexican-American participant

- If you have a client that maybe you're not familiar with, or even if you are familiar with, whether in their background or their struggles or their beliefs or values . . . ask them what it means to them. Sometimes, yeah you have to say, "I don't know what that means, please explain it." –Angela, a 26-year-old participant

- When it comes to working with [my clients], it's important for me to get to know them. It's not just building the trust, it's *really* getting to know who this person is because owe them that respect. –Christine, a 25-year-old Salvadorian-American participant

The findings in Section I call attention to the contradictory nature of the definition and mandate of cultural competence and the method in which it is actually practiced. Participants distinguished how cultural competence clearly defines its expectations, yet fails to provide adequate guidance on how it can, if at all possible, be achieved. Section I demonstrates the eloquence in my participants' articulation of cultural competence through a description of its textbook definition showing preparedness in their ability to recall its meaning and purpose. However, this section mainly demonstrates my participants candidly detailing their frustration regarding the ways in which its definition is inherently paradoxical. Although participants embraced the impossibility of achieving cultural competence, they recognized the need to

develop a strategy that involves their clients' engagement in the services they provide. Guided by respect for the inherent worth of human diversity, in order to practice cultural competence, my participants developed strategies in a role reversal where they play the role of the learner, one who asks questions and never assumes an understanding of who their client is, and their clients play the role of the professional, experts on their lives and experiences who must teach the social worker about themselves.

Section II: The Necessity to be Challenged for Cultural Competence Development

This section of my findings will examine two key issues: (a) a comprehensive MSW curriculum, and (b) the responsibility of the MSW faculty. My findings suggest that these concerns are critical to challenging students as part of their pursuit of the MSW and in their cultural competence development.

A Comprehensive Master in Social Work/Welfare Curriculum

During the interviews, participants were asked to share in detail their MSW experiences related to the knowledge and skills attained in cultural competence for social work practice, and then reflect back on these experiences compared to the current work they do. Participants were given an opportunity to first provide details of their respective MSW programs, allowing me to better understand their overall mission and general structure regarding how each program offered and interconnected its academic courses, fieldwork expectations, extracurricular activities, and co-curricular opportunities. What I learned regarding the structure of my participants' MSW programs mirrored the CSWE (2015d) EPAS for the structure of all accredited MSW programs. Regardless of where they attained

their MSW, all participants described a consistent general backbone for MSW education, with a foundational year of generalized social work practice courses and then continuing their education into a more specialized focus depending on the type of social work they hoped to practice, or the particular population with which they hoped to work, or social issue on behalf of which they hoped to advocate. Exact course names varied from program to program, yet general course content and material covered were represented. Regarding curriculum related to cultural competence, nine participants recalled at least one class during their program solely related to cultural competence, and all participants recalled having aspects of cultural competence development infused into multiple classes and their field education.

Throughout these interviews and reinforced during the focus group, it became evident that all participants overwhelmingly believed that having a comprehensive curriculum was an essential component of cultural competence development. This viewpoint was substantiated not only based on their experiences through their MSW curriculum having learned about cultural competence for social work practice, but also as a result of a lack of a fully comprehensive MSW curriculum as envisioned in retrospect due to the challenges or feelings of inadequacy they endured as newly employed social workers. More specifically, what this comprehensive curriculum ought to entail includes first a careful consideration and significant depth regarding the knowledge conveyed about various cultures, populations of people, social issues, or traumatic experiences. Then, an additional 12 individual participants and the entire focus group expressed that this knowledge must be paired with firsthand applied experiences and exposure, such as in immersion opportunities and fieldwork.

Understanding that cultural competence development takes a great amount of work, time, self-awareness, and humility, participants nonetheless collectively felt that while in their

MSW programs, there was a scarcity in the depth of coverage of any given culture, population of people, social issue, or trauma experience. Although my participants certainly left their programs having learned a great deal, Diane, for example, reflected on her experiences and shared that she felt as though while in her program, the curriculum "Tried to jam" in information, covering only what they could in the allocated timeframe, leaving ample room and responsibility for social workers to do additional learning while in practice or simply on their own. Shina stated, "Each week covered a different topic, which at least some of my [colleagues] and I were like, 'this isn't enough time to talk about these things.'" Natalie noted, "You spend every week going over a different population essentially, which is fine it's just kind of very broad." Similarly, Amanda stated the following regarding the range in cultural competence development, "It felt like a lot of the things [my MSW program] shared was very basic . . . not in-depth . . . I learned general skills and knowledge." Prior to entering the profession, Diane, Shina, Natalie, and Amanda, like many of my other participants, expressed their desire to learn significantly more about prevalent cultures most widely served in the social work profession. They expressed that there is much to learn regarding the norms, values, and principles of any given culture, but they also expressed the necessity to know of the legacy of the inequalities and the historical context of each culture's or population's oppression of their future clients. All participants shared that many, if not all, of their classes discussed cultural competence development and addressed various social work practice approaches with several cultures, populations, social issues, or trauma experiences. But in this process of learning the coverage was lacking a level of sophistication of information and development of skills needed to enter the field equipped and prepared to tackle the issues and crises their clients faced every day. What made a lack of careful consideration and significant

depth regarding the knowledge conveyed about various cultures, populations of people, social issues, or traumatic experiences particularly problematic was how it contributed to participants' feelings of inadequacy and unpreparedness in actualized practice, which will be described further in the next section of this chapter.

This comprehensive curriculum, naturally, must be mindful of the learning curve involved with the intrinsic difficulty and evolving nature of gaining knowledge about others. Shina stated,

> They could come up with this really brilliant culturally competent [MSW] program one year, and then five years later it's going to need an overhaul because these topics keep evolving. My hope is that social work schools adopt that as being part of being in the business. There is obviously going to be more changes to the curriculum and things are going to evolve.

Shina highlighted the nature of social work practice and social work education as continually progressing. Jeanette stated, "I loved going to class and I loved [fieldwork], but I feel like I can't see how you could go straight into working without this background," acknowledging that the pairing of courses to fieldwork is the essence of the effectiveness of the MSW curriculum. Participants recognized this and noted that this is the very reason why cultural competence development must be addressed in combination with the inclusion of an MSW program that also provides effective and engaging opportunities for its students to learn firsthand through immersion opportunities and by applied practice in the field.

As required of all MSW programs, MSW students must enroll concurrently in courses and apply the knowledge and skills gained while in class directly in the field under the supervision of an individual who has already attained his/her MSW degree and has undergone

training as deemed appropriate by the MSW program. This aspect of the MSW degree, the accumulation of a minimum of 900 field education hours, is a requirement governed by the CSWE. In learning about field placement assignment, participants expressed that it is ultimately the duty of the given program to place their students as they see fit. As reported by my participants, during students' first year of field education, some programs choose to place students in a placement in direct contrast to the potential desired population that the student particularly wishes to serve, whereas other programs choose to place students directly in their intended career trajectory. In the final year, students then have an opportunity to provide input regarding their desired field placement, often choosing from a list of placements that relate to students' specialization or future field of practice. In some cases, MSW programs factor in the geographic location of where students live to determine field placements. All rationales have their pros and cons, allowing students to either expand and stretch or refine and polish their expertise and skillsets.

Due to its firsthand immersive experiences and ability to practice and process as a novice social worker, fieldwork was praised as invaluable by my collective 20 participants, a sentiment that was reinforced during the focus group. Riley stated, "You can hear it 20,000 times in a lecture, but until you practice it, I feel like it doesn't click," emphasizing the necessity of having the platform to apply to the field what was learned in the classroom, thus substantiating the importance of the field education quality of MSW programs. What the fieldwork experience provided was "hands on" practice, allowing participants to not just practice their skills and build their confidence in service delivery, but also meet their clients and learn about their communities. "In my mind, I think being exposed to other cultures firsthand and in their communities is important," stated Elyza, a 25-year-old Mexican-

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American participant who attributed a great deal of her growth and learning to field and immersion experiences. Equally, Angie stated, "I think [fieldwork and immersion experiences] were really eye-opening because it really helped to inform our classes better and just get a better understanding of how different systems work and what our clients are actually going through." As for Christine, prior to commencing her field education, her fieldwork supervisor required that she spend adequate time in her clients' neighborhood—the location of the field agency—walking around and spending time on its streets and sidewalks, having fruitful conversations with people in the community, and learning about the resources and entertainment available, or lack thereof. Christine recalls that according to her field supervisor, the purpose of this task was rooted in expanding her understanding of her clients. Additionally, Christine was required to research the community's demographics, violence and crime rates, types of restaurants and grocery stores, number of parks, various social welfare programs, etc. Christine expressed that this immersion requirement, paired with then working with her clients through field education,

> Made working with my clients so much better . . . because I got to learn so much more about what they're going through. . . . They've been living in their [communities] for years, most of their lives. This requirement allowed me to see the importance of immersing into their culture for better understanding who they are and where they come from.

In addition to fieldwork, other experiential opportunities—such as community immersion opportunities, global immersion opportunities, or other modules within the curriculum or pedagogy—have been reported by 10 participants as elements that help increase cultural competence development. Collectively, my participants have accrued an

immeasurable amount of time in immersion experiences spanning over course of their MSW

programs, including experiences across the globe, around the nation, and in their local

communities. Because these experiences were tied to the curriculum, its purpose was more

than exposure, but included guided reflective assignments and discussions that challenged

them, whether that challenge was as a result of working with new populations, being exposed

to new communities, learning the intricacies of social welfare, or receiving mentorship or

guidance through supervision. Participants who discussed immersion experiences particularly

attributed their enhanced cultural competence development to moments like these. These

challenges were not just challenges in the sense that they were difficult in going through the

motions, but challenging in the sense that they contested societal norms, highlighted societal

inequalities, and illustrated the justifications for change, reminding participants of their

reasons for choosing social work as their profession. In these moments of discomfort were

precisely where a total of 14 participants and as reinforced during the focus group expressed

gratitude and growth. "I think being a part of initiatives about things that are unjust or

[concerning] social justice…can give some understanding to cultural competency," stated

Sonia, who, like all of my other participants, thrived as a result of such challenges. Jeanette

stated, "I think that the program really gave me a lot of courage to face a lot of my fears and

these challenges that I never thought I would overcome," referring to the ways in which her

MSW program's curriculum consistently provided opportunities for challenge and growth,

allowing students to normalize their feelings of discomfort as a part of growth and

development.

The Responsibility of the Master in Social Work/Welfare Faculty

In examining the intricacies of their respective MSW programs concerning their cultural competence preparation, participants attributed their preparedness to their participation in class dialogues and assignments, as adequately facilitated by the MSW faculty. Participants noted that these experiences challenged and pushed their boundaries regarding their own personal thinking, permitted an adequate facilitation of the difficult conversations about culture or any given social welfare issue, and allowed for development and reflection of self-awareness. Throughout the interviews and in the focus group, it became evident that my participants strongly believed in the faculty's role and responsibility to be the backbone of their MSW curriculum, so much so that a total of 12 participants discussed this responsibility and it was again later reinforced and discussed during the focus group. Faculty who courageously confronted the challenges of facilitating provocative conversations and administering thought-provoking assignments was cited as a strong foundation in the extent of their cultural competence preparedness. Fourteen participants praised faculty for their ability to create a safe space, enable inclusion, expand students' comfort zones, challenge their preconceived notions, and encourage student participation. Amanda stated, "I feel like the professors were very intentional about the assignments," allowing students to genuinely challenge their minds and abilities in cultural competence. All participants were able to recall and identify at least one meaningful assignment, varying in execution style, general purpose, or depth of analysis. Some assignments revolved around immersion whereas others required uncovering past personal trauma. Some assignments required the disclosure and exploration of deep, dark personal information, whereas others required analysis of hypothetical or actual client cases. Nevertheless, in hearing of the details of these assignments, one common thread was clear. Regardless of the assignment, what participants reported as effective in their

cultural competence development were assignments that challenged their various familiarities and preconceived notions and managed the influence of their personal biases and prejudices. The challenging aspects of their MSW program were seen as successes for their MSW degree and for cultural competence development.

In doing this, effective faculty was commended for making sure that assignments were paired with the processing involved through constant dialogue. Jeanette stated, "Most of the professors were very, very pro people speaking up and people telling their own stories," discussing the ways professors deliberately cultivated self-awareness through these continuous dialogues. Sande stated, "The tough conversations are so important. I cannot stress that enough," emphasizing how her assignments became much more meaningful when students were able to share with their fellow colleagues in an open and honest dialogue. Having these uncomfortable conversations about race, culture, or gender, for example, allowed her and her fellow colleagues to be mindful of their internalized and inherent biases and prejudices. Other participants shared how their experiences with the uncomfortable nature of these dialogues, while challenging, were indeed beneficial. Jackie, a 25-year-old Filipino-American participant, stated

I remember I felt so uncomfortable the first time [we had a tough dialogue] in class . . . I had one African-American colleague saying this and another Latina colleague saying that. I was like . . . "Oh my God, what am I walking into? Is this how the program is?" But, I feel like it's . . . that vulnerability, that uncomfortableness of just understanding that's the way we've got to [learn]. [It then led to] mutual respect.

Christine, a 25-year-old Mexican-American participant, shared,

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It was always a class discussion . . . I think most classes were like that. . . . We speak. That allowed for it to be almost like a debate or just a sharing of ideas, just throwing things out there. That was helpful because when [our professor] felt that we weren't challenging what we were talking about, she'd come in and she would say something [contradictory] about it. She'd say something that might be conflicting with what someone else said or contradictory to what someone else says like playing devil's advocate. . . . It was a really good experience. I liked that a lot.

Jeanette, a Taiwanese-American participant, said,

I was challenged by my professor [regarding our understanding of various cultures] . . . . She was like, "You can't categorize people." She got me to think that, well, she's kind of right. I so much wanted to box everything up and wanted to make everything into these categories because to me, I felt that that's how you get mastery, right? It was a lot of my own insecurities and my own fears of things that I didn't really understand.

Similarly, when faculty failed to provide such an environment, my participants felt cheated in their cultural competence development. The necessity for these challenging conversations correspondingly meant that course instruction must first include information and language that is updated, inclusive, and appropriate, and that faculty must be readily prepared in this information and language. However, although faculty indeed played a central role in my participants' cultural competence development, participants also expressed that faculty can also impede cultural competence development. "It's all based on your professor," stated Briana, a 25-year-old half Mexican-American half White participant.

The flipside to faculty support becomes the very barriers they can also create. This has been reported in instances of the usage of outdated or insensitive information and literature, in their lack of awareness of their own microaggressions, or in their failure to initiate or lack of control with the tough dialogues. Under these circumstances, nine participants expressed feeling frustrated and offended, noting that such experiences had a detrimental affect by confusing and obstructing their and their fellow colleagues' understanding of cultural competence. Angie expressed how a particular professor "Would say certain things that were completely not culturally competent or sensitive, and it would upset a lot of people in the class," such as blanketed and somewhat offensive statements about Asian-Americans. On multiple occasions, Angie recalled the ways in which this professor offered anecdotes that stereotyped various cultures. When being called on it and challenged by students in the course, Angie expressed that her professor got flustered, "Shutting down that conversation instead of keeping it open. . . . He didn't facilitate that conversation. Instead, it was very awkward, and it made the class feel more disconnected with him and . . . feeling not valued in our [MSW] education." Likewise, Shina recalled an occasion during classroom dialogue where seven or eight women walked out crying during a lecture as a result of their professor's inability to use appropriate language regarding minorities and to recognize the assumptions being made about the social work profession and various minority groups. In similar situations, other participants shared how their professors' lack of control over the dialogue or perpetuation of inequalities hindered their preparedness in cultural competence and instead gave the impression of hopelessness, shame, and deterrence. Marielle stated,

It would get to the point where nobody could have an adult conversation about [the tough conversations] because everyone was trying to talk on top of each other. If the

professor maybe, since they are the teacher and they're supposed to facilitate the classroom discussion, if they went into the class session with the intent of having a conversation like that, then it could have probably gone smoother, if you will, if there was more preparation on the professor's part in this.

Aly described the dialogue that she and her fellow colleagues attempted to initiate with their professor regarding the then-recent shooting of an unarmed Black teenager by a White police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. This event sparked widespread media coverage, attention, and discussion nationwide, raising many issues regarding race, class, power, and privilege. Yet Aly recalled the tension and lack of attention around the struggled dialogue in her classrooms:

> A lot of minority students were definitely put off in that way. I'm not saying only the minority students because there were some of the majority students that did join in the conversation but a lot didn't. I don't know what they felt but maybe they didn't want to discuss. They didn't want to continue. It was just definitely hard. I feel like the professors were in that awkward position. They didn't really know how to handle it. They didn't know what to do. They didn't know how to continue discussing the topic and it was just weird.

It is widely accepted that faculty members play a crucial role in students' understanding of the course content, leaving a lasting impression, as illustrated through my participants' narratives. Careful consideration in faculty preparation, training, and knowledge base for all education is vital. According to the CSWE (2015d) EPAS, MSW programs must "demonstrate that faculty is qualified to teach the courses to which they are assigned" (p. 15),

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stressing the suggestion of participants' expectations of the role of the MSW faculty in sculpting culturally competent social workers.

Having been exposed to the generic characterization of cultural competence while in their MSW programs, the findings in Section II point to necessity to be challenged while developing cultural competence for social work practice. In their recollection of their MSW programs, participants praised the profundities of educationally stimulating environments, assignments, conversations, and faculty that broadened their perspectives and tested their preconceived notions of others' culture, as well as their own. Through facilitated learning about others' cultures and consequently acknowledging their own biases and prejudices, participants reported developing heightened self-awareness, which assisted in their cultural competence development.

A curriculum that only provided superficial characterizations of cultures was considered hurried and insensitive, overlooking the depth with which social workers are required to explore their clients' cultures and backgrounds, in addition to the rich dialogue and experiences that MSW students could contribute. Rather, participants expressed a desire to learn about the complexities that come with culture, including not just information about the cultures' norms, but also the historical context of the cultures' experiences with oppression. My findings highlight the gratitude my participants expressed in identifying how learning about these complexities allowed for opportunities to break down the barriers created by their own values, beliefs, biases, and prejudices. Essential to accomplishing this or working toward this development were the faculty members, who were thoughtful, albeit provocative, in their careful facilitation of assignments and conversations, akin to playing

devil's advocate and drawing out dialogue that may not necessarily have taken place if not

generated through their ability to brave opposing viewpoints and values.

Section III: Actualized Practice in the Field of Social Welfare

In this section, I will explore three key matters regarding actualized practice of

cultural competence in the field of social work: (a) comfort within the realm of familiarity, (b)

areas for growth in feelings of inadequacy, and (c) frustration with fundamental

organizational barriers. My findings suggest these elements as aspects of the intricacies of the

work committed within cultural competence practice.

Comfort within the Realm of Familiarity

In regard to their actualized practice, my participants depicted a seemingly endless

number of circumstances in which they practice cultural competence in their areas of

employment, such as during intake assessments, while providing therapeutic services, in

running groups, and in managing programs. As described previously, all my participants

perceive cultural competence to be multifaceted, starting where the client is and then

understanding the importance of exercising flexibility and upholding standards of respect. In

their work with cultural competence, they have found the constant restarting and an

acceptance of "no universal approach" demanding. As the predictability of handling situations

and crises varies regardless of any parallels, my participants made clear that there are

methods, when executed carefully, that can lead to establishing rapport and thus are effective

practice. They described one key aspect of their approach that has allowed them to find

comfort and confidence in the changes of their day-to-day work. Sande stated, "I find myself

confident in providing cultural competence with populations I'm familiar with or pre-exposed to." In providing culturally competent services, not only do my participants find comfort within the realm of familiarity, as reported by 18 of 20 participants whether that is in the familiarity of the cultures of their clients to themselves or in similar situations or experiences in working with their clients, but also their clients expressed comfort in the same. The reasoning behind this is in the increased likelihood of an immediate step toward building rapport.

Establishing rapport is fundamental in social work practice, as it provides the building blocks of a trusting and engaging relationship between social worker and client. The work my participants described in their practice and for the social work profession in general, while necessary, can be perceived as invasive and intrusive. By default, the social work profession is tasked with advocating on behalf of the underserved and underprivileged in hopes of alleviating hardships and improving overall welfare. In doing this, social workers, to some extent, expect a level of tolerance from their clients in their vulnerability and being asked to open up about their life histories and past traumas, all to the social worker who they in all likelihood just met. Thus, it is understandable that sharing similarities can lead to a sense of comfort, rapport, and trust. Most closely related to this is when participants share a direct connection, having similar backgrounds, mostly in the case of having the same ethnic origin, religious affiliation, language fluency, or geographic location of upbringing. For example, in similar anecdotes, when providing services to clients whose native tongues and primary language spoken at home was comparable to a language in which my participants were also fluent or conversational, this led to confidence in their practice and became catalysts in

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building rapport with their clients, which can often lead toward effective practice. Jeanette recalled,

> I had a [client] and . . . she was Taiwanese and she was Mandarin-speaking. I speak
> Mandarin as well. . . . She had just got notified that she had to get a surgery and she
> was very, very panicked. I walked in and then immediately I could feel her mood
> change. . . . You could see what language was their preferred language and I asked,
> "Do you speak another language?" She said, "Mandarin." I said, "Oh, I speak it too."
> . . . It definitely brings a sense of confidence to your work in that it's like a different
> type of connection with a [client]. In practice, there are so many little nuances. . . . A
> lot of it is just comfort and feeling confident.

Riley shared,

> [A client once] shared that she . . . struggled to get services because she comes from
> another country. She's not able to speak the language like everyone else. . . . She was
> very thankful that I talked to her in Spanish. We shared some of the similarities, her
> culture, and she shared that she came from Mexico. . . . We kind of related on that
> level, culturally. . . . I encouraged her to ask as many questions as she wanted, because
> that's what I was there for. She was very thankful. Having some kind of similarity can
> be really helpful in providing culturally competent service. In this particular case, this
> woman said that she was very thankful because I was sensitive to her. She said that
> she's had other experiences where she said that she would ask a lot of questions and
> some people were very short with her and wouldn't provide more details. She [said to
> me], "I'm thankful that you answer my questions in a form that doesn't make me feel
> like I'm dumb."

Expanding from language similarities, my participants also shared other instances in which their familiarity enhanced their culturally competent practice, including situations such as knowing and reciting bible passages, growing up in similar neighborhoods and knowing the demographic and structural makeup of such neighborhoods, having families from the same hometown, or even in sharing similar hobbies or interests, such as favorite sporting teams or television shows. All such situations led to a breakthrough of silence and increased depth of clients sharing their stories, which again were catalysts toward establishing and building rapport. Six of my participants shared anecdotes of familiarity with the LGBTQ community; the participants having either identified as bisexual or had exposure to and knowledge of the community through family, friends, or previous clients. In these situations, these six participants individually shared their initial work with their clients who identified as LGBTQ, specifically with clients who identified as transgender. These clients expressed to my participants the ways in which their compassionate and inclusive approach rooted in a heightened knowledge base of the LGBTQ community was essential to the trust they had in sharing their stories. "I felt very, very blessed that I understood a lot of these concepts and was able to speak to [my client] about her gender identity issues and replacement therapy" shared one participant, who was praised by her client for using appropriate pronouns and asking appropriate questions. Collectively, the depth of their relationships, as reported by my participants, emerged because of their familiarity. Using the proper pronouns and terminology made the difference for these clients, who in their past experiences with other professionals were not able to build that level of rapport.

Aside from sharing similar backgrounds with their clients, six participants described comfort in the realm of familiarity related to their frequent exposure to and substantial

experience with clients who were also different from them. Participants asserted that this was as a result of the time, commitment, and effort spent in ultimately reaching a threshold where they could say that a given population had become their niche. "I am confident as a clinician with the therapy I do with my homeless veteran clients," stated Diane, who, prior to entering her MSW program, had little experience with, exposure to, or knowledge of military culture. Instead, in her MSW program, she learned a great deal about her future clients through classes and field education, and as a result has spent over 3 years working with homeless veterans post graduation. Throughout this time, Diane has done a great deal of learning, which has strengthened her confidence and service delivery in her approach and assessment style.

Not having familiarity may require extra research on their part, but my collective 20 participants described the very essence of cultural competence for social work practice as being that of the "learner" and working toward a sense of familiarity. "I would also do a little bit of more research on my side," stated one participant, explaining that the level of comfort she has with the population of clients she serves, the elderly, is directly connected to her many years of exposure to this population, even prior to her MSW program, which included constant researching of their needs and circumstances. Additionally, many other participants shared their level of confidence in providing culturally competent services as a result of the depth of understanding their clients' differing backgrounds or situations, which takes time and comes with practice. Participants shared that just because they did not have similar backgrounds to their clients, it did not mean they could not establish rapport, provide adequate services, or be comfortable in their approach. Having experience working with children, military veterans, the elderly, or clients of various cultural or religious backgrounds became a place of comfort after months or even years of exposure. Although participants still

stressed that no two situations are ever alike, this comfort aids in their attitude and demeanor, which sets the stage for how services can be delivered and received.

Areas for Growth in Feelings of Inadequacy

Regardless of whether or not participants felt comfort within the realm of familiarity and the necessity to continue their learning to work toward familiarity, 14 participants expressed feelings of inadequacy due to a lack of familiarity or a lack of experience during their actual practice. They described these feelings of inadequacy as a hindrance to providing adequate culturally competent services. Angie stated, "I always feel inadequate. I go in [with my clients] very nervous. I always just feel nervous because . . . I feel like I have a lot of responsibility in holding whatever it is I'm asking. A lot of these conversations are very tough," explaining the role social workers have in examining the lives and traumas of their clients. In Section I, I described the definition of cultural competence for social work practice and explained the ways in which my participants feel that cultural competence is inherently paradoxical. In practice, there is an expectation for social workers to be competent in their clients' varying backgrounds and needs as well as in the services they provide prior to their entry into the field; however, as described earlier, my participants grapple with this expectation because, in actuality, not only are there many things they have yet to learn, many definitions of cultures, and many ways in dealing with crises, but also the work they do is ever changing. They are regularly faced with situations in which their expertise is challenged to the extent of producing feelings of inadequacy.

This lack of knowledge paired with the lack of experience leads to feelings of inadequacy, which my participants have addressed as an area for improvement in the

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instruction provided in their MSW programs. For example, Jeanette described a particular time in which one of her clients called her out on her level of knowledge and understanding regarding his struggle with substance abuse. During her client's intake assessment when she had to explore her client's history with substance abuse, her client frankly asked her during an assessment, "What do you know about it? What can you tell me about it?" The "it" referred to various substances and how it affects the human body and psyche. In this moment, Jeanette expressed not only struggling with her level of knowledge on various substances having only learned about it through lecture, textbooks, and literature, but also grappling with the way she should respond to the situation at hand. In that moment, she described the internal self-talk that consumed her, debating with herself if her response would sound stereotypical or if it would make her look incompetent as the professional. Likewise, in another situation, Angela expressed how her early experiences with military veterans and families led to feelings of inadequacy not only for not truly understanding experiences of warfare, but also in not fully understanding the structure, culture, and politics of the military. She, like all my other participants, felt comfortable with knowing the "basics," but coming straight from their MSW programs, they felt as though they had so much more to learn. "You can't tell my story!" was a statement made by one of Angela's clients after his exploration of her expertise, challenging her knowledge of the military and thus leaving Angela feeling as though there was just so much more she could and should have learned.

My participants described many situations in which their clients challenged their ability to provide services. While this will be addressed more adequately in the next section of this chapter, some of these challenges are rooted in clients' prejudice, projection, or transference. Participants shared that they have been interrogated regarding their age, gender,

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culture, sexual orientation, religion, etc., all of which led to their internalized, externalized, and actualized feelings of incompetence and inadequacy. This finding stresses the importance of the role of a social worker as flexible and as a "learner," one who is consistently working toward his/her development and growth and never accepts himself/herself as a professional who has reached the height of his/her expertise. Philosophically, this embracing of cultural competence has been described as having flexibility and leading without assumptions. For example, the following participants first described their feelings of inadequacies as a powerful reminder. Marielle stated:

> Some of my clients who look the same on paper are very different. I go into every session or every home visit as much as possible not trying to expect a certain thing . . . and just being ready to adapt to whatever issue they have that day because the next day I can come see them and it's completely different, or it's a different problem, or it's a different thing that they need me to help them with. It means to be really flexible and adapting to the clients' needs.

Angela asserted,

> In order to be culturally competent, if you have a client that maybe you're not familiar with either their background or their struggles or their beliefs or their values, do some research . . . and also ask them what it means to them. Sometimes, you have to say "I don't know what that means, please explain it."

In practice, although participants expressed feelings of inadequacy as an area of growth and improvement in their cultural competence for social work practice, what has been central in facilitating this post MSW degree is in their humility regarding processing and in their continuous consultation with their colleagues and supervisors. My participants have

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consistently expressed the roles their colleagues and supervisors play in facilitating their improved practice, all essentially for the benefit of the services they provide to their clients. According to the NASW (2008) *Code of Ethics*, there are five main overarching ethical standards detailing social workers' ethical responsibilities: (a) social workers' ethical responsibilities to their clients, (b) social workers' ethical responsibilities to their colleagues, (c) social workers' ethical responsibilities in practice settings, (d) social workers' ethical responsibilities as professionals, and (e) social workers' ethical responsibilities to the social work profession. Each ethical standard outlines social workers' ethical responsibility in consultation, such as in the case of Ethical Standard 2, Section 2.05, Consultation. This section states that, "Social workers should seek the advice and counsel of colleagues whenever such consultation is in the best interests of clients." Social work's largest governing body, the NASW, guides professionals in the importance of regular consultation, all rooted in their clients' best interest. This has surely been the case, and has been a valuable aspect of my participants' work toward improving their cultural competence delivery and overall confidence. The following examples exemplify the various ways that 16 of my 20 participants have utilized and benefited from consultation, using the constructive feedback from their colleagues or supervisors and turning their negative feelings or lack of confidence in their own abilities into areas for improvement and future competencies:

- In the case of child welfare services, specifically in foster care and legal adoption. Jackie sought consultation regarding the increasingly heated cultural clash between the foster parent and the biological parent.

- In the case of alleged child abuse and neglect and a lack of healthcare services. Pam sought consultation regarding growing concerns of child abuse and neglect, which resulted in abuse not being present.

- In the case of evolving laws and policies regarding mental health. Angie regularly seeks consultation as to keep up to date with changes.

- In the case of refining effective communication skills. Jeanette sought consultation regarding the appropriate ways to speak to her clients about their various health and mental health diagnoses.

- In the case of the clash between staff's religious doctrines and organizational policies. Robin sought consultation regarding the improvement of organizational policies to be inclusive of staff's religious doctrines.

- In the case of terminating legal guardianship with an irate and potentially dangerous client. Marielle sought consultation regarding the necessity of deescalating the crisis and in her team's communication approach with the client.

- In the case of language barriers. Briana sought consultation regarding her client's refusal to speak in her documented primary language.

- In the case of projection, transference, and countertransference in mental health therapy. Diane sought consultation on her client's projection and transference of emotions and suggestions during therapy.

Frustration with Fundamental Organizational Barriers

The labor involved in developing cultural competence is far from that of just social worker and client. Rather, the effort goes beyond the relationship with the client and

continues in all aspects of the social workers' service that trickles down to the very core of

social work practice, within the social welfare system. One of the most frustrating factors for

my participants regarding their execution of cultural competence for social work practice

includes those properties of their work that are basically out of their control primarily as a

result of the fundamental organizational barriers and red tape burdened by the very essence of

bureaucracies. Sonia stated, "I struggle with that. I struggle with being in an environment at

work" that creates these barriers for their clients due to rules and regulations or even lack of

diversity and understanding of their clients. Fifteen participants reported that no matter how

effective their services can be, at the end of the day, when the paperwork that needs to be

done or the services that need to be paid takes precedence over the core goal of the

profession—to improve the overall welfare and quality of life for their clients—it is as though

the countless hours of work with their clients is "left at the door." Furthermore, participants

expressed that social workers can be trained in effective culturally competent practice, yet not

all professionals in their interdisciplinary organizations, such as other healthcare providers

and even other social workers, are adequately or sufficiently trained in or see the value in

culturally competent practice.

This was a source of frustration for my participants during the interviews. When

discussed during the focus group, it became an even more fruitful dialogue that expanded on

the necessity for MSW programs to further prepare future social workers in the possibility of

these fundamental organizational barriers. During the focus group, one participant shared,

> You are taught [in your MSW programs] that you are going to go out there and you
>
> are going to make a difference. And you get there on your first day and you can't get

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this [client] "this" because there is no funding left in this month's budget or their

Medi-Cal doesn't pay for that any more.

This sentiment garnered a consensus agreement and further discussion of this exhausting

aspect of actual practice. All focus group participants shared that during their MSW program,

there was little to no preparation on dealing with such fundamental organizational barriers.

Rather, participants described learning and mastering skills in specific service delivery such

as assessments, intakes, therapy, groups, management, etc., and did not practice skills in their

approach or in dealing with such barriers that ultimately trumped their services. Somehow

integrating this as part of the MSW curriculum was deemed necessary. Factors deemed most

critical to address included funding barriers and staff training.

In exploring specific fundamental organizational barriers, eight participants discussed

the disgust they felt especially with regard to a lack of funding or as a result of the funding

source. The funding source—whether a client's ability to pay out of pocket, accepting their

health insurance, having a medical diagnosis so that insurance can fund social services, etc.—

plays a pivotal role as to whether or not services are rendered or terminated. "There's a whole

bunch of other things we have to consider such as funding. We have to adapt to that as well as

based off of adapting to the higher-ups' directions," explained Marielle, who, like so many of

my participants, struggles internally with her passion for the work she does and not being able

to perform her duties because of money: whether due to a lack of funding, overdue payment,

or termination of billing. In other situations, supervisors have asked my participants to not

accept clients or to terminate services due to a lack of funding; systemically, this was not only

an issue out of participants' control, but oftentimes out of their clients' control as well.

Funding as a fundamental organizational barrier posed an ethical dilemma, one that was

overwhelming my participants, who felt guilty regarding the system's perceived greed and upholding their duty in service to their clients. For example, when government policies put a strain on any given population's ability to receive services, such as in the case of veterans receiving mental health services prior to the Veterans' Mental Health and Other Care Improvements Act of 2008, then social workers cannot carry out their work effectively. Diane explained that prior to 2008, even before she entered her MSW program, let alone the field, many veterans were falling through the cracks with regard to seeking mental health services. Because of these feelings of guilt and the push and pull factors of advocating on behalf of their clients versus policies within their organization, Diane, like many of the participants, explained that the world of social welfare has to get creative so that the much needed work that needs to be done can get done. According to my participants, this creativity and innovation has included petitioning with their supervisors, searching and applying for outside scholarships and grants, reapplying for welfare or government assistance through applications with their clients, organizing pro bono work, and lobbying the government for systematic change.

In addition to funding barriers, participants expressed frustration with a lack of cultural competence training or practice on behalf of their fellow colleagues, since social work usually treats clients using an interdisciplinary approach. Nine participants reported working with other professionals in their organizations—social workers and non-social workers alike—whose language about, descriptions of, or assumptions of their clients have been perceived as damaging and offensive. Briana recalled multiple situations in which her fellow colleagues made inappropriate remarks and assumptions about their teenage clients' sexual orientation and or cultural upbringing. When confronting the situation and her

colleagues, Briana was left disturbed and discouraged as a result of her colleagues'

explanation of their remarks being akin to humor and jokes. Briana stated,

> That was violating. [Imagine] if there was [a client] in that room hearing those
> remarks. They would probably think "Well they work here and they're against people
> who are gay, so now I'm never gonna open up. Now I'm never gonna feel comfortable
> to tell them."

Likewise, Sonia recalled how a colleague's comment toward her was inherently a

microaggression that equated certain struggles to certain populations, in this case, to their

clients in poverty or of low socioeconomic status. "He had no ill intent. It was in my mind,

where I realized, 'You have no idea if this is really my struggle right now.'" Although the

approach of my participants' fellow colleagues and staff have in how they execute their

services or in the ways they communicate is out of their control, continued professional

development centered on cultural competence practice training has been suggested as

necessary as to break down the barriers to delivering effective services.

The findings in Section III illustrate the ways in which cultural competence is

essentially practiced, exploring participants' comfort and discomfort through their

individualized practice and feelings of frustration with organizational barriers that are beyond

their control. When integrating cultural competence in their work, participants viewed

familiarity with a culture or experience as areas of strength and instances of lacking in

knowledge or awareness as areas in need of improvement. Oftentimes, this familiarity was

rooted in participants' own personal backgrounds, having similar ethnic origins or cultural

norms as their clients. This familiarity, or lack thereof, heavily guided participants' practice

and approach. This either laid the foundation for participants connecting with their clients in

ways that they were similar or shifting participants' mentalities as professionals to that of learners gaining knowledge, prompting a questioning process to gather more information. Consequently, cultural competence development can ensue well before and beyond the MSW program, flourishing through social workers' socialization into their own cultures, experiences, and identities. These findings suggest that social workers' own cultures, experiences, and identities have the potential to change the dynamics of the relationships they develop with their clients, paving the way for success in accomplishing the goals their clients sought to achieve.

Nonetheless, regardless of feelings of comfort or discomfort, external barriers such as funding conflicts or a lack of cultural competence among fellow staff may exist, sometimes impeding and negating the process and undertaking within cultural competence. In their early work as novice social workers, my participants were already experiencing the difficulties of applying theories to practice, especially in instances when what they had been taught and learned no longer applied to actualized practice. This taught my participants the importance of patience, suggesting time as an effective remedy for increased adequacy in cultural competence for social work practice.

Section IV: The Manifestation of Prejudice and Discrimination

In further exploring the challenges newly employed social workers face with regard to cultural competence, the findings in this section demonstrate challenges in matters related to the manifestation of prejudice and discrimination: (a) conflicting values, and (b) prejudice from their clients. My findings disclose my participants' struggles with their internalized biases and prejudices as well as their experiences with their clients' biases and prejudices.

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Conflicting Values

Culture has a profound influence on the way we think and behave and social work education need not confirm this widely accepted truth. Culture, in its simplest definition, is "all aspects of the way of life associated with a group of people" (Healey, 2012, p. 46). "Obviously somebody's culture and their traditions have a lot to do with the way they act and the way that they address certain things," stated Robin in her description of her approach to understanding how clients' backgrounds influence their choices and in turn how her own background may do the same, even in social work practice. Because there is an abundance of cultures and an endless amount of cultural intersectionalities, it is common that conflicting values may arise among social workers and their clients, as well as within social workers and within clients themselves.

Pam stated, "You don't judge, you just follow along," in trying to find a resolution to her approach with conflicting values. Whether in the way they were taught to practice social work through their MSW programs or in their actual practice in the field, 14 participants expressed challenges in potentially or actually executing cultural competence with regard to conflicting values, whether in their own personal values as a social worker opposing that of their clients, the clash in their clients' intersecting values, or in their understanding of basic human rights. It is "Black and white and lots and lots of gray," stated Angie, in describing her "real world" practice with clients of conflicting values within cultural competence. Angie, like all of my other participants, has accepted that this gray area of ambiguity, uncertainty, and ill definition is the heart of their working zone. Swimming in this gray area means threading through tough waters because an inherently difficult aspect of cultural competence is mediating the individual rights of their clients, especially when their goals conflict with my

participants' beliefs, the principles of their cultural groups, or basic human rights. Sonia stated that "Knowing how you yourself [as the social worker], whether it's your biases, your prejudices, your culture as well, how that intersects with other [clients'] cultures" provides the basis for acknowledging the true difficulties of providing culturally competent services. Because cultural competence is a principle in how to approach social work practice rather than a style of intervention itself, it leaves a considerable amount of room for interpretation—the gray area—on the part of the social worker.

During their time in their MSW programs, nine participants described these specific instances of conflicting values as being problematic, such as in the case if their MSW faculty could not facilitate a safe discussion in the classroom. Sonia elaborated,

Classrooms are supposed to do that. I don't think [my MSW program] really had enough of that where you can truly bring to the table things that bothered you [and conflicting values], things that you really want to discuss and talk about.

Likewise, another participant recalled a time in which she feared her own cultural and religious identities would interfere with her ability to provide effective services to her future clients. Jeannette stated:

I identify as Christian and a few other fellow Christian individuals and I weren't really able to speak up a lot in some classes. My non-Christian colleagues would make comments that were demeaning about Christians or about Christian values and I would think, "Did that really happen?" I know that it's not meant to be offensive . . . but [my colleagues and I] would have talks about how comfortable do we feel disclosing that we may not agree with a certain choice for an intervention because of our Christian faiths.

Jeanette, along with ten other participants, candidly expressed their battles with feelings of prejudice or discrimination related to their beliefs and thus in how they choose or wish to choose to provide culturally competent services.

Many of my participants' narratives described the changing variables involved with conflicting values related to cultural competence. Shina stated, "I sometimes struggle with working with my clients to achieve their goals in a way that communicates respect and also affirms their intersecting cultural differences." Shina additionally stressed the importance and struggle of recognizing systemic inequalities imbedded within society and conflicts within one's intersecting cultures in the work she does as a social worker. In an anecdote offered by Shina, she mistakenly made an assumption about a client due to her client's and her differences in cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. In this particular situation, she was mortified in realizing she negatively labeled her client stereotypically and was humbled at his willingness to use that moment as a teaching moment rather than punishing or shaming her. In other actualized practice, Robin reported working with a client who was born biologically male but identifies as female. Robin's client was born and raised Catholic and this client's members of her family are devout practitioners with strong conviction toward their conservative values opposing liberal beliefs about the LGBTQ community. "They are just so against it," shared Robin while speaking about her client's family. While Robin herself identifies as Catholic and while she believes she has been able to distinguish and isolate her own values from her client's, never allowing her own personal beliefs to interfere with she provides services, Robin nonetheless struggles to help her client find peace with her self-identity and her family's disapproval and hostility.

In another situation, Sande described how the organization for which she works micromanages her delivery of services. Because the organization's approach is explicitly more secular, it creates a large barrier to her services, especially when many of her clients not only come from various religions, but also utilize their religious faiths as catalysts for their coping mechanisms. Sande shared:

> Some personal traumas or crises [I learn from my clients] for example, I have to pause or I tell myself, "What am I going to do next?" I have clients who are Baptist, Jehovah Witnesses, Jewish, and Catholics and their religion plays a huge role in their lives. They are all different and we have conflicts within our organization and the Department of Mental Health with using religion in our interventions, but that's [our clients'] coping skills.

The lens through which my participants provide services can be described as the lens through which they view the world. Amanda stated, "I identify as a non-Protestant Christian, so a lot of the work that I do, I kind of view it through my Christian lens, my perspective," highlighting how Amanda's approach through her non-Protestant Christian lens is an example of others' lens that could help as well as occasionally clouds my participants' approach in the services they provide. Beyond religious affiliation, all participants described the ways in which growing up in South Central Los Angeles, being a practicing Buddhist, living in poverty, identifying as bisexual, or being a first-generation college graduate have molded their identities, and thus, help shaped their lens through which they practice and interpret cultural competence. Nonetheless, participants understand and accept the importance of, though struggle with, "Not allowing your ideas or your beliefs interfere with treatment." Rather, as Diane articulated, it is important to:

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Be open to the idea that you don't know who you're going to be working with, or

where that person comes from, or how their experiences shape them, and what they

do, or how they do things, or why they're there to see you for treatment.

Prejudice from their Clients

Self-determination, referring to a client's right to make his/her own decisions, also

includes a client's right to the identification and clarity of the service goals or treatment plans.

The social work profession revolves around an empowerment and advocacy approach that

teaches social workers to not just advocate for their clients, but also *with* their clients,

increasing and teaching clients skills in their eventual self-empowerment and self-advocacy.

As part of the NASW (2008) *Code of Ethics*, clients have a right in their self-determination,

within reason, which also incorporates their right to withdraw services at any time, unless

they are under the requirements of an official mandate.

However, too often my participants shared about situations in which their clients made

judgments about them as their social workers, calling in question their ability to provide

effective services based almost entirely on their first impressions, sometimes even before

provided the chance to utter one word to each other. While these may simply be issues of

projection or transference and can be mended if the client accepts the challenge to be proven

otherwise, it in no way is how my participants want to start their work with their clients and

surely interferes with their confidence in building and establishing rapport. One participant

shared the following statement, which eloquently summarizes my participants' collective

experiences with their clients in this regard. Riley, a 27-year-old Mexican-American

participant, stated:

I've noticed that clients or potential clients make a lot of assumptions about you as the social worker or potential social worker based on everything from your name, how you look, your presumed age, whatever. This can be a challenge because as much as we as social workers work hard to respect our clients and not make assumptions about them, we cannot control what our clients think or say about us.

Collectively, all my participants have been explicitly stereotyped, judged, and sometimes discriminated against by their clients starting with the most frequently and prevalently described bases for such judgments: age, gender, ethnicity, race, language ability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religion, ability, disability, parental status, relationship status, etc. With regard to the aforementioned, my participants' clients have questioned almost everything, ranging from participants' abilities to provide services as a result of their perceived range of identities, the depth of understanding of their own culture, the degree to which they practice their own cultural norms, or the extent of their proficiency in multilingual skills. Inquiries into participants' age, language skills, or ethnic backgrounds have been explored by clients, sometimes flipping the session into a question and answer from the client, rather than the other way around. Given that my participants' ages ranged from 24-31-years-old and that most of my participants described their appearance as "young" or "youthful," "How old are you?" was a question they received frequently, often followed by remarks about their competence or ability to work in the complexities of social welfare, then closing with a defense on the part of my participant.

By having to put up a guard, participants have expressed how prejudice from their clients has cultivated apprehensions with their self-awareness and knowledge of their cultural make up. Angie shared, "Instead of talking about their problems, they want to ask about me,"

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describing her work with families who come from the same ethnic background as her. In connecting with clients in this way, Angie, like 11 other participants and reinforced during the focus group, understands both the pros and cons. While Angie has been able to initially build a trusting environment where her clients feel comfortable to share their stories and situations, Angie has also struggled with feelings of prejudice when being questioned about her level of knowledge regarding aspects of her own identity. She stated, "I should know my own culture. I should feel comfortable with my own culture, my own background, but I don't because it's just too much," describing how her clients sometimes come to learn that she is much more assimilated than they previously assumed. Ironically, these dimensions of diversity that were grounds for prejudgment are also sources of comfort within the realm of familiarity, suggesting that clients, like my participants, have their own feelings of comfort and areas for growth in feelings of inadequacy or perceived inadequacies of their social workers.

In multiple situations, seven participants who did not share similar ethnic backgrounds as their clients who once had previous social workers with similar ethnic backgrounds were regularly criticized, with clients attributing my participants' incompetence or unwillingness due to differing ethnic backgrounds. For example, Jackie, who is Filipino-American, received a client that was transferred to her caseload as a result of the previous social worker resigning from the organization. This new client, whose previous social worker was of the same ethnic background, described numerous situations in which the previous social worker was deemed effective and competent, sometimes highlighting situations in which she went above and beyond her call of duty. According to Jackie, the client would often say, "Well, she's [of the same ethnic background]. She understands why I'm doing this and I'm doing that." Throughout her work with this client, Jackie regularly received negative remarks and snippy

comments regarding the client's perception of Jackie's inability to be as effective as the previous social worker, due to their differences in ethnic backgrounds. Jackie's client would repeatedly request, "Why do we have Jackie, can't we have [our previous social worker] back?" via emails, copying Jackie in these correspondences. Jackie recalled that from the start, this client put up a wall and was adamant that their differing ethnic backgrounds was a factor in why she was unable to receive expedited services.

Regularly, my participants described their familiarity with and consistent exposure to projection and transference from their clients, whether the projection of their clients' behaviors, feelings, or qualities onto my participants, or the transferring of behaviors, feelings, or qualities of another person onto my participants. Mostly these projections or transferences included a prejudice regarding my participants' ability to get the job done effectively and appropriately. Elyza described an ongoing struggle she has with a client who constantly questions her ability to provide adequate services.

> She would express it and say, "You don't know. You're not even my age. You don't understand what I've been through and what my people have been through. Why are you here? What are you doing here telling me?" That's been an ongoing challenge and I still feel to this day—and it's something that I'm working on during supervision as well—that that kind of fractured our rapport since the beginning, and I'm still working on rebuilding it and healing that but it's still something that makes me lack in my confidence in the work that I do with her and I know that in a way, it impacts a way that she interacts with me. To this day it still feels like she's very defensive and we're working on it but it's really difficult.

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In another situation, Diane described therapy with a client who would leave her crying at the end of her workday:

> I was working with a [client] that was just mean. . . . He was trying to find my weaknesses and just point them out, because he was feeling so worthless being homeless and being a drug addict. . . . It was just one of those things where I knew what he was doing, but oh man, I can't work with this man. I would go home crying at times because he would yell at me and I was lacking a lot of confidence to be like, "Hey, this is clinical work so put on your clinical helmet and keep it on." I knew what he was doing but and if I allow it to take control, it really does make me feel less than prepared or confident at work. I'm only human.

My combined 20 participants deal with such issues on a regular basis, having a turnaround rate of clients or a new batch of clients anywhere from weekly to monthly. In doing this work, participants expressed the necessity for social workers to have "thick skins" to receive the kinds of criticisms they receive, sometimes not regarding the quality of their work but by virtue of the color of their skin or any other ascribed status such as gender or age. Regardless of these difficulties, the prejudice from clients has allowed my participants to practice and hone in on other skills necessary for effective social work practice, such as maintaining boundaries and being compassionate yet firm.

The findings in Section IV further emphasize the multifaceted nature of cultural competence and highlight the complexities regarding the ways in which clients' and social workers' culture plays a role when attempting to provide effective services. Cultural competence for social work practice finds its foundation through a social worker's understanding of various cultures as a means to incorporate clients' cultural backgrounds in

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creating a service plan tailored to their unique identities and their needs. Participants expressed that this is best achieved with heightened levels of self-awareness, often facilitated in recognizing their own personal biases and prejudices and in recognizing the conflicts embedded in the dealings and interplay of cultural identities.

However, even if the social worker achieves heightened levels of self-awareness, he/she still can experience prejudice from clients, as was evident in these findings through the explicit and persistent questioning of my participants' abilities, creating barriers in the services provided and toying with participants' psyche and levels of confidence as newly employed professionals. Grappling with processing and making decisions as to whose cultural values takes precedence and enduring judgment about their identities rather than concerning their social work abilities, while accepted as a normal part of the job, is emotionally taxing. Nonetheless, with the attitude of endurance and determination, participants demonstrate their resilience in troubleshooting situations as opposed to feeling defeated.

Conclusion

Although the social work profession is predominantly White and lacks representation of historically underrepresented groups (CSWE, 2014), as noted previously in Chapter Two, the lack of White participants in this study could potentially have yielded varying results, even though White social workers may not necessarily constitute the majority of social work professionals in the state of California. The lack of White participants represented in this study will be discussed further in Chapter Five, but this highlights an interesting consideration. A misguiding school of thought regarding social work professionals suggests a misconception that the need for enhanced cultural competence exists in the practices of

individuals who identify as White and not necessarily for individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds; however, the findings in this study illustrate that even ethnically and culturally diverse social workers struggle to grasp and practice culturally competent social work practice.

Parallel to the evidence presented from the literature, I found that cultural competence—in its conceptualization, mandate, and expectations—preemptively creates barriers to social workers that hope to inspire change and empower their clients toward their better selves. Its very definition with competence and lack of clarity with navigating culture creates and permits challenges because of how the mandate of cultural competence somewhat sets the profession up for failure, complicating and patronizing social workers from executing their best possible work. Nevertheless, my participants gladly accepted the work in social welfare as their calling and, as a result, it was evident that the rewards represented by their clients' successes far outweighed and were worth the obstacles that inevitably came along the way. The need to practice cultural competence has been widely acknowledged as vital to social work practice, especially given our country's changing demographics. With this reality, participants have illustrated their resourcefulness in their execution of cultural competence by embracing respect and never making any assumptions as guiding their approach.

It became apparent that learning about cultural competence for preparedness in social work practice continues to be an extremely difficult feat, which should come as no surprise if its conceptualization is inherently paradoxical. The disparity of what is learned has been reported as far removed from how it is actually practiced, giving a great deal of room for reform in social work education to better equip future professionals in their confidence to execute culturally competent practice. Although cultural competence has been recognized as a

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multifaceted aspect of service delivery, participants reported their professional self-assurance when their MSW programs confronted them with the tasks of tackling their internalized biases and prejudices. Significant to developing best practices in cultural competence has been my participants' development of their heightened knowledge base and self-awareness through the integration of immersion experiences and the facilitation of tough dialogues. Generally, participants have expressed that their confidence, or lack thereof, has been correlated with the depth and meaningfulness of their MSW program experiences.

As recent MSW graduates and newly employed social workers, many participants expressed the ways in which they are still familiarizing themselves in their roles as professionals and getting accustomed to their style and approach with their clients. Certainly, with any line of work comes challenges that may hinder the very advancement rooted in the purpose of the initial pursuit, in this case, the relationship between the social worker and client. As outlined previously in this chapter, these challenges occur on a near-daily basis, and create substantial barriers to culturally competent social work practice. Organizational policies, lack of training or differences among supervisors and staff, prejudice, and discrimination all have been normalized as inevitable and unavoidable properties not just of cultural competence, but also of social work practice in general.

The recent changes made to the NASW (2015b) *Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice* from its previous publication 14 years prior reinforces the definition of culture to be all-inclusive, but expands its expectation of competence to reflect continual learning and growth and introduces concepts of cultural humility and intersectionality "as a way of understanding the complexity of the experiences of those at the margins of our society" (p. 8). In making these revisions, the NASW has recognized the

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challenges the profession has long endured regarding their ethical responsibility in providing culturally competent services, as also evident through findings of this study. One of the many responsibilities of professional organizations such as the NASW is enhancing the professional development of its members and creating guidelines and standards for best practices. I believe this to be one of many first few steps toward the advancement of social work education and social work practice involving cultural competence. However, a revised document is only a document if it is not put into practice.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Summary of Study and Findings

Although the social work profession generally serves those who are underprivileged and underserved, the variety of clientele truly comes from an exhaustive list, which includes an endless possibility of identities and circumstances. The ability for a social worker to have the knowledge and skillset required to provide adequate services with individuals, groups, and communities with such differences, known as cultural competence, is not only an ethical expectation of the profession as outlined by the NASW (2008) *Code of Ethics*, but also a mandate by the profession's sole accrediting agency for social work education, the CSWE (2015d).

Research has shown that this expectation and mandate is problematic for several reasons, largely as a result of its contradictions in its conceptualization (Fellin, 2000; Furlong & Wright, 2011; Johnson & Munch, 2009; Yan & Wong, 2005) and complications with its application of theory to practice (Furlong & Wright, 2011; Johnson & Munch, 2009). The elusiveness of its terminology in and of itself poses the following contradictions. First, any given culture cannot necessarily be defined within the parameters of a singular collective definition. Next, cultural competence neglects the intersectionality and connectedness of cultures within any given individual, group, or community. Additionally, cultural competence poses challenges in a social worker's ability to apply theory to practice, as the expectation of having arrived at competence about others' cultures not only is impossible, but also conflicts with another fundamental concept and approach of the profession: starting where the client is, which places social workers in a learning role, rather than the expert role.

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As a result, the goals of this study were to explore the experiences of newly employed social workers that have recently graduated from accredited MSW programs. By learning about their experiences as novice professionals and recent graduates, it was my hope to better comprehend the intricacies of social workers' conceptualization of and experiences in cultural competence practice, specifically in consideration of their application of theory to practice relative to the knowledge and training gained through their MSW programs. By investigating my participants' approach and their significant challenges regarding their preparedness or lack thereof in cultural competence, I sought to explore the ways in which they embraced cultural competence and aspired to achieve proficiency in working with a diverse range of clientele.

To do so, I collected data in a two-stage process: 20 interviews and one focus group. Eligible participants were recruited from Southern California and had to have attained an MSW from a CSWE-accredited institution within the past 4 years, be currently employed as a social worker in fields directly related to social services or social welfare, and upon the completion of their MSW degrees, have been in their current places of employment between 6 months and 4 years. Throughout my data collection process, I was able to gather rich data, learning in great detail the narratives and stories of my participants' educational experiences and professional experiences as they relate to cultural competence in social work practice. What I found paralleled what has been presented in previous literature.

The innate obstacles that cultural competence presents, simply within its conceptualization, has led my participants on a path of confusion in their social work abilities and frustration with the unexpectedness of the possible outcomes with their clients. The lack of clarity on the definition and the vast ambiguity of actually practicing cultural competence have been reported with cynicism, criticizing the NASW's expectations and the CSWE's

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mandates as participants shared the multifaceted nature of cultural competence as inherently paradoxical, obliging participants to believe that achieving cultural competence, in its very definition, as impossible. Although the feat of learning how to practice cultural competence presented difficulties, participants were practical and resourceful in their approach, appreciating its importance and working on a common ground through the role respect plays in promoting human dignity and worth.

With regard to their professional development, I found that participants valued the ways in which their MSW programs challenged their preconceived notions and allowed them to develop their self-awareness as a means to develop and hone in on their knowledge base and skillsets as well as to recognize their internalized biases and prejudices. It was apparent that participants struggled with a lack of learning about the depths of various cultures, expressing their desire for a comprehensive curriculum that not only supported profound depths of various oppressed groups in society, but also allowed for firsthand experiential learning with faculty who were prepared to challenge and stretch their intellects through the facilitation of difficult conversations or assignments.

My participants' actualized experiences and challenges revolved around familiarizing themselves with their newly established roles as professionals and accepting the challenges that come their way, which were often out of their control. Leading their work with an approach of having no assumptions, my findings showed that participants reset each day and circumstance with every client, never presuming that two situations, let alone two people, are ever alike. During this process and in their experiences, regular challenges included organizational barriers, staff's lack of cultural competence development, and the manifestation of prejudice and discrimination, whether on part of the clients having

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preconceived judgments about my participants' abilities to provide services as a result of their own cultural identities, or on part of the participants themselves, going against the grain and having preconceived judgments to aid in their service plans.

Section I: Implications of Findings for Master in Social Work/Welfare Programs

In this section, I discuss four implications based on my findings for MSW programs. These implications include the need to (a) evaluate curriculum and pedagogy regularly, (b) support faculty in their affirmation of diversity, (c) affirm diversity among students, and (d) collect data from MSW graduates.

Implication #1: Evaluate Curriculum and Pedagogy Regularly

In gathering data about my participants' MSW experiences relative to cultural competence development, it is understandable that my first implication is to challenge MSW programs to evaluate their curriculum and pedagogy regularly to reflect the content knowledge dissemination and skillset development necessary to meet the growing needs of a changing society. In doing so, it is my hope that MSW leadership will embrace the need to have tough conversations about race and culture and lead by example in challenging themselves to revamp their curriculum and pedagogy, when necessary. Because MSW programs usually follow a baseline framework as outlined by the CSWE and then get innovative in tailoring their programs to their community's unique needs, to have one sole and singular assessment plan for all MSW programs would be to negate the complexities embedded within cultural competence. Therefore, it is truly in the hands of each MSW program to do justice to our changing United States demographics. Through the regular and

rigorous evaluation of student learning outcomes with a competency-based approach, MSW programs can better serve society with social work professionals prepared in working among diversity.

During this study and for the first time since 2001, the NASW has updated their publication on cultural competence, modernizing their *Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice* (NASW, 2015b). Although this updated version reflects changes in concerns and implications addressed in the literature and in this study, such as an approach that is cognizant of clients' intersectionalities of their identity and an approach toward cultural humility and sensitivity to peoples' differences, there are differences among an awareness of updated standards, an educational organization's ability to teach such professional competencies, and actual professionals' adaptation of such principles to their actualized practice. Although professional organizations can publish documents outlining standards, principles, and expectations, the goal of these documents is not merely to provide benchmarks but also to aid in the implementation and execution of the utmost best practices in professional competencies. As reflected in the literature, the social work profession lacks a measurement scale of cultural competence development and assessment. However, after conducting this research, I do not think that is necessarily the best next phase in social work education, as my findings point to the vast complexities that are associated with teaching, learning, understanding, and practicing cultural competence.

Nonetheless, updated publications involving cultural competence for social work practice in accordance to today's time is a positive step toward the furthered development of the curriculum and pedagogy, since integrating cultural competence education in social work education has recently hit its milestone centennial anniversary in 2009. For 100 years, cultural

competence curriculum and pedagogy has been evolving, responding to the needs of the profession, the changes in the demographic makeup of our society, and especially the demands of systemic layers of oppression. As a result of the substantial activism during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the CSWE mandated the earliest forms of cultural competence education to be integrated in all accredited social work programs through required course offerings related to race and racism (Spencer et al., 2000). In an increasingly changing demographic makeup and progressive projections in the United States with regard to representations in cultures and identities, paired with my findings regarding a comprehensive curriculum and the role faculty play as key to my participants' cultural competence development, it is justifiably within reason that in all aspects of the social work profession, there needs to be a more streamlined consistency among the NASW, CSWE, and MSW programs of regular and rigorous evaluation of curriculum and pedagogy. The field of social work and social welfare cannot become complacent with a recently revised document, and thus must continue to push the envelope in its curriculum evaluation and development, regularly assessing the ways in which they teach and students practice cultural competence.

According to the CSWE (2015d) EPAS, in 2008 the organization adopted an educational framework that models a competency-based approach, moving "from a model of curriculum design focused on content and structure to one focused on student learning outcomes . . . identifying and assessing what students demonstrate in practice" (p. 6). As a result, the CSWE requires MSW programs to implement assessment protocols to be used specifically to gather data on student learning and student performance, evaluating both students' knowledge base and professional competencies as a means to improve and strengthen effectiveness within their curriculum. In my research, participants expressed at

great lengths the importance of a comprehensive curriculum in their increased self-awareness and enhanced development of cultural competence. Extensively, my participants expressed their desire to go into more detail and depth in learning about varying cultures and groups of people and particularly appreciated discussions, activities, or assignments that stretched their minds in ways that enhanced their tolerance and perspectives. They appreciated those moments in their MSW programs that allowed for immersive experiences and learning, and described these modalities as effective in their learning and practice. As a result of my participants' own self-assessments, my findings highlight the ways in which a curriculum that challenged the traditional means of education that expected them to truly practice their skills through applied and firsthand experiential learning experiences can aid in the continued development of cultural competence.

Implication #2: Support Faculty in their Affirmation of Diversity

The findings in this study emphasized the role faculty members play in the educational and professional development of their students. Participants shared their experiences with the command, or lack thereof, that their faculty had on cultural competence development as subject matter, placing a great deal of responsibility and expectation on their faculty to guide them with their knowledge and pedagogy toward their self-awareness and understanding and practice of cultural competence. Participants appreciated engaging in challenging conversations, particularly the ones that contradicted the status quo or that confronted their already established personal attitudes and beliefs. Participants shared the ways in which faculty members' discussion facilitation techniques and depth of assignments guided their self-awareness, which helped boost their confidence as future professionals. One could

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conclude that their faculty were more than just their teachers, but also their advisors, their mentors, and oftentimes, their role models. Likewise, participants were taken aback in circumstances when faculty members seemed outdated in their understanding of culture or cultural competence for social work practice as well as uninformed about current societal trends or events related to cultural issues. As the demographics of the United States are constantly changing, so too are trends in societal issues related to race and culture. One can thus assume that because cultural competence for social practice is ever changing, faculty must remain up to date in their knowledge base and pedagogical approach. Assuring a modernized comprehension that is relevant to the changing times is essential relative to cultural competence pedagogy, and should be at the core of how MSW programs offer support to their faculty.

In knowing this, while participants believed in the role and responsibility of the MSW faculty to be the backbone of their MSW curriculum, it is a premature expectation to place all this burden and expectation on the faculty themselves. For this implication, I suggest that leadership in MSW programs support adequate, applicable, and meaningful concrete opportunities for their faculty as well as fieldwork supervisors to engage in professional development, research, evaluation, and assessment that promotes effective cultural competence training and pedagogy. According to the CSWE (2015d) EPAS, policies and standards loosely outline a general expectation related to this, stating that, "adequate resources are fundamental to creating, maintaining, and improving an educational environment that supports the development of competent social work practitioners" (p. 17).

MSW programs ought to evaluate exactly how they support their faculty in these endeavors, paying close attention to their allocation and availability of funds, supporting the

mentorship of faculty, and providing release time for training opportunities in professional development and research endeavors. By prioritizing their faculty members' upkeep of skillsets, knowledge, and research regarding cultural competence for social work practice, MSW programs are working on a larger systemic level. For example, if faculty members have the opportunity to conduct research in the field, then they have the chance to reflect and engage directly in ways that promote experiential learning: through firsthand experiences. Furthermore, if given the opportunity, faculty can also create research studies that may lead to evidence-based research and practices, which could ultimately be applied in practice. In doing these types of studies, research can then be accessible to the better instincts of the masses for practitioners rather than only for the world of academia.

This should be the case for junior and senior faculty, providing support in the development or redevelopment of teaching styles of all faculty members. Indeed, years of experience is not sufficient to knowing or mastering the proficiencies of the multifaceted nature of cultural competence. To go on good faith that faculty members are already experts in cultural competence and in teaching cultural competence goes against the very essence of the NASW's (2015b) claim that cultural competence development is a lifelong process.

Implication #3: Affirm Diversity Among Students

As noted in Chapter Two, the demographic makeup of students enrolled in MSW programs in years prior did not comprehensively embody *historically underrepresented groups*. Currently, findings from the *2014 Statistics on Social Work Education in the United States* with regard to the demographic characteristics of students in part-time and full-time MSW programs show that 84.2% of its part-time students were female and 84.1% of its full-

time students were female, 47.9% of its part-time and 41.6% of its full-time students were the highest reported age group of 25-34 years old, and 39.8% of its part-time students as well as 32% of its full-time students were of minority racial/ethnic identification (CSWE, 2014). These statistics show a scarce representation of historically underrepresented groups entering the field of social work. With the U.S. Census Bureau's projection of an increasingly diverse population (Colby & Ortman, 2015), the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics' (2014) projection of a rapidly growing social work profession, combined with the low representation of minorities in the field, this implication first supports affirming diversity among students through MSW programs recruitment and retention efforts. By working to increase diversity, my hope is that MSW programs can better nurture the exposure of their student population to a range of experiences and perspectives. As stated in my findings, my participants expressed the necessity to be challenged by the curriculum and their faculty. When bringing to the classroom individuals from historically underrepresented groups and cultivating their inclusion through the facilitation of a safe and engaging learning environment, future social workers may benefit from hearing from the experiences of individuals they may not necessarily encounter outside of their MSW program.

Contact Theory postulates that one's increased exposure to diverse people and diverse situations can aid in reducing prejudice and discrimination. Living and working in a city like Los Angeles, social workers are fortunate to already have an increased opportunity for experiences with diversity. Statistics reported in Chapter Three regarding the demographic makeup of Los Angeles highlight exactly how diverse this city is. However, according to Allport (1954), movement toward increased tolerance and reduction of prejudice and discrimination depends on four conditions: status equality among groups in any given

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situation, intergroup cooperation, commonality in goals, and authoritative support. Merely having exposure to diverse individuals must be accompanied by meaningful experiences, such as in the case of an educational setting that fosters a safe and engaging environment.

A study conducted by Jayakumar (2008) examined the ways in which three aspects of *structural diversity*—or numerical representation of students of color, *interactional diversity*, or the extent and quality of engagement with people of different racial/ethnic backgrounds, and *campus racial climate*, or formal exposure to diverse peoples and their perspectives through curricular and co-curricular offerings—within postsecondary institutions were related to cross-cultural workforce competencies for White college graduates in their post college years. Through data collected as part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) drawn from three survey instruments administered across a 10-year period from 1994-2004 administered to entering freshmen at predominantly and traditionally White institutions, the author found that all three factors were positively related to the development of cross-cultural workforce competencies for White students, regardless of their pre-college neighborhood diversity exposures.

As noted in Chapter Two, the term *historically underrepresented groups* has been recently preferred rather than *minority* by the CSWE Center for Diversity and Social & Economic Justice (2013) as they believe the term minority "does not accurately represent or effectively reflect . . . such things such as the history of oppression, discrimination, [or] power and privilege inequalities . . . of aggrieved groups" (para. 1). For members of these groups, various barriers can present themselves and prevent their enrollment, making it difficult to complete an MSW degree. In recruiting and retaining students of diverse backgrounds, MSW programs ought to evaluate various factors that may prevent historically underrepresented

groups from enrolling and completing a degree. Such factors to consider include offering

attractive and competitive financial aid packages, assuring that admissions criteria stem from

a holistic approach rather than one that is centered on GRE test scores or cumulative GPA, or

organizing efforts in a curriculum or co-curricular/extracurricular offerings that are appealing

for diverse students. Additionally, by affirming diversity among students, MSW programs are

also affirming diversity as social work professionals, widening the opportunities for the hiring

of diverse staff.

Implication #4: Collect Data from Master in Social Work/Welfare Graduates

Given that times are constantly changing, societal opinions are always shifting, and no

two people or situations are alike, the knowledge and skills my participants gained in their

MSW program often became irrelevant or inapplicable to the ways in which they actually

practiced social work, requiring them to implement a method in practice that was rooted in

respect of the inherent worth of human diversity and that embraced the client as the expert on

himself/herself and his/her culture. Along with general assessment of student learning

outcomes during one's MSW program, findings from my research suggest that it could be

invaluable for MSW programs to collect data from their recent graduates and newly employed

professionals. My participants expressed that what they learned while in their MSW programs

about groups of people or about how to be an effective professional oftentimes no longer

applied to their actual practice, whether as a result of outdated information, insufficient

information, contradictory information, or inapplicable information on parts of their MSW

experiences or places of employment. Nonetheless, in retrospect, as part of the data for this

research my participants were able to provide comments and constructive criticism that they

might not have necessarily have shared if not given the time and opportunity post-MSW degree attainment to apply, practice, process, and then articulate.

Understandably, tracking graduates may be a difficult undertaking to organize and execute, posing challenges due to graduates relocating nationally and internationally, a lack of participant interest and difficulties with recruitment, or social desirability. However, gathering data akin to this study and perhaps even taking it further by identifying metrics for specific courses or assignments or creating small scale research studies on specific immersion experiences all post graduation could potentially provide evaluative insight that can aid with curriculum and pedagogical development as well as assist with various other MSW program endeavors such as mentorship, field education, recruitment, retention, research, and scholarship. If the CSWE insists that social work education and assessment must be competency-based, then assessing professional competency through the collection of data from participants as professionals can provide additional data necessary for each MSW program's design. It could also be the case that MSW programs develop plans in collecting pre and post data of their students while enrolled in their MSW program, as well as additional post data upon the completion of their MSW program. If the NASW and the CSWE could make suggestions or even mandates for MSW programs to gather such data from their graduates in the same fashion and organized structure that it requires accredited social work programs to assess their curriculum, then social work research could continually assess findings and provide implications for educational or professional reform.

Section II: Implications of Findings for Leadership in Social Welfare

Regarding suggestions for leadership in the field of social welfare, I discuss the following three implications based on my findings: (a) implement organizational wide cultural competence professional development opportunities, (b) provide social workers adequate opportunities for supervision, and (c) collect data from clients.

Implication #1: Implement Organization-Wide Cultural Competence Professional Development Opportunities

My findings for this research highlight how organizational barriers such as participants' self-reported lack of preparedness or their fellow staff's lack of cultural humility or cultural sensitivity posed multiple barriers to effectively providing cultural competent services for their clients. My participants expressed frustration and sometimes even embarrassment in witnessing the lack of cultural competence among fellow staff, fearing that negative attitudes, behaviors, or comments that were expressed outwardly may trickle down to clients, leaving a damaging representation of the staff or organization as a whole. Additionally, participants feared that a lack of cultural competency on the part of those who represent the organization could deter their clients from opening up and sharing their true cultural identities, which in turn could potentially hinder clients' development or improved quality of life.

It is quite common that in the field of social welfare, social workers provide services and care for their clients with support from an interdisciplinary team approach consisting of fellow professionals who have expertise in various fields of practice such as medicine, rehabilitation, social welfare, business, or government. For example, in an assisted living or skilled nursing facility, clients may receive services from social workers, nurses, doctors,

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physical therapists, or chaplains. Likewise, for school social workers, they may have to approach their work in collaboration with teachers and school administration. Although social workers are mandated to have knowledge and skills in cultural competence for social work practices, it may not necessarily be the case that novice social workers enter their profession readily equipped to carry out the responsibility that cultural competence brings to the table. Moreover, professionals from interdisciplinary teams, too, may not be trained in the knowledge or skillsets, let alone appreciate the value or see the importance of integrating cultural competence in their practice. The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014) projects growth in the field of social work to 19% between the years 2012 to 2022 compared to the national average for all occupations of 11%. Prevalent subfields contributing to this growth include workplaces ordinarily involving professionals working as interdisciplinary teams, such as schools, healthcare, or mental health settings.

It is my suggestion that social welfare organizations implement sufficient and adequate compulsory organization-wide cultural competence professional development opportunities. The expectation is that staff be trained regularly in cultural competence development through a model that is effective according to the needs of the organization and the clients they serve. In order for this to be effective, however, leadership such as administrators and stakeholders much first understand the complexities of cultural competence and be trained not only in cultural competence, but also in knowing the means and methods to teach and lead activities or discussion. Then, social welfare organizations ought to implement committees or taskforces whose purpose is to develop a professional development design similar to a curriculum design in MSW programs, where professional learning outcomes are explicit and assessment tools are present so they can ensure effective

strategies are being implemented. In creating these committees or taskforces, each social welfare organization can reflect on its specific and unique goals before creating learning communities to engage in cultural competence development best suitable for their organization. Because cultural competence is complex and involves a wide range of cultural identities, these professional development opportunities, like all social workers, must continually update their skillsets and knowledge to ensure relevance and effectiveness. To better understand the needs of their clients, it may be wise to solicit the ideas and suggestions of clients and staff as to the direction these committees or taskforces should take, which could be a valuable start for professional development.

A requirement model that can potentially be replicated is that of California's Board of Behavioral Sciences (State of California Board of Behavioral Sciences [BBS], 2012a). California's BBS is the state's regulatory organization that enforces professional licensing and examination requirements for Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW) and regulates Associate Clinical Social Workers (ASW) under the jurisdiction of the Department of Consumer Affairs. According to the BBS, all licensed LCSWs must "complete 36 hours of continuing education (CE) within the preceding two years of their license renewal date" (State of California BBS, 2012a, para. 1) and are subject to random auditing at any given time in their career to ensure compliance. These requirements, while only compulsory for those with their license (as not all MSWs go on to obtain their LCSW and not all social welfare professions require the license) support a continuance of professional development, though not necessarily in cultural competence, as subject matter varies on CE course offerings and requirements. This format can certainly be modeled and implemented by social welfare organizations for their staff and various disciplinary areas to include coverage on professional

development for cultural competence. Perhaps organizations can provide a certain amount of professional development opportunities and require staff to attend a certain number of hours, giving them the opportunity to do so during work hours. By providing the space for this professional development, not only is the organization offering valuable opportunities for their staff's development, which can yield positive results with clientele, but also it presents a united front and endorses a universal belief in the value and importance of culturally competent practice.

Implication #2: Provide Social Workers Adequate Opportunities for Supervision

Of the nine competencies outlined as requirements for all accredited social work education programs in the CSWE (2015d) EPAS, Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior, discusses the need for social workers to understand and demonstrate ethical judgment, stating that supervision and consultation, among other means, are essential in guiding professional judgment and behavior. While in their MSW program and during field education, students receive direct supervision from an on-site MSW supervisor who evaluates students' learning relative to the goals of the organization and the clientele to which they are assigned. Even upon graduation and employment, as professional social workers, supervision should not cease. As part of a social worker's cultural competence development, the NASW (2008) *Code of Ethics* and the NASW (2015b) *Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice* both specify that self-awareness, which is fundamental to cultural competence development, should be supported by supervision, an integral part of further developing professional competencies. Especially in the case of novice social workers that are still finding their bearings and getting accustomed to their style, supervision allows

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for the direct evaluation of skills and immediate implementation of best practice. Hendricks (2003) suggested that this collaborative learning process of supervision provides a critical component of students' understanding and development of cultural competence.

In receiving supervision and practicing consultation, my findings demonstrate the ways in which participants attributed their positive cultural competence development to the direct guidance they received, appreciating the immediate and regular feedback about their practice, a client's case, the process, or even their internalized biases and prejudice. Supervision and consultation has been a valuable aspect of my participants' work toward improving their approach with cultural competence and developing their overall confidence in their service delivery, especially in moments where they encountered situations where a second opinion was invaluable. As a result, this implication supports adequate opportunities for supervision.

The NASW and the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) collaboratively developed the *Best Practice Standards in Social Work Supervision* (2013), a resource guide that provides standards and a general universal guiding framework related to professional supervision for the social work community. Under the State of California BBS (2012b) requirements, individuals registered as an ASW who are working toward the LCSW licensure requirements are required to accrue a total of 3,200 hours of supervision over the course of at least 104 supervised weeks. Although this formal supervision process is a requirement for licensure in a clinical setting, it is not necessarily a requirement in other social work circumstances. Nevertheless, if it is not already in the hands of all supervising social workers, it is strongly suggested that supervisors access this public document from the NASW website (www.socialworkers.org) and utilize this guide in their approach toward supervision.

According to these standards, the relationship between the supervisor and social worker require:

Responsibility and accountability for the development of competence, demeanor, and ethical practice take place. The supervisor is responsible for providing direction to the supervisee, who applies social work theory, standardized knowledge, skills, competency, and applicable ethical content in the practice setting. The supervisor and the supervisee both share responsibility for carrying out their role in this collaborative process. (NASW & ASWB, 2013, p. 6)

This guideline goes into details regarding the qualifications of a social work supervisor, the means of evaluating and deriving outcomes, information regarding termination, and standards outlining:

- Standard 1. Context in Supervision

- Standard 2. Conduct of Supervision

- Standard 3. Legal and Regulatory Issues

- Standard 4. Ethical Issues

Within these standards and with regard to cultural competence, this document explicitly states that, as supervisors, it is necessary to adhere to the NASW (2015b) *Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice*. Additionally, although it is vital for supervisors to be able to communicate their knowledge about the appropriate techniques necessary to help the populations their organization serves, supervisors must also develop knowledge about their staff members' cultural backgrounds with respect to their practice. To help social work professionals refine and improve their skills, the application of supervision can hold both the supervisor and supervisee accountable for their clients' well being.

Implication #3: Collect Data from Clients

Earlier in Chapter Two, I presented research on social work professional development recommendations regarding approaches to developing cultural competence among various minority groups. Research has come a long way with the collection of data, being sparse in the early 1990s, focusing on mainstream White America in the 21st century, and then finally today including a range of diversities for the implications for the enhancement of cultural competence in social work practice. In accordance with the NASW (2008) *Code of Ethics*, social workers have an ethical obligation to deliver services to their clients that demonstrate an understanding of the nature of their clients' diverse backgrounds. Just as cultural competence development requires an understanding of the lifelong learning process, this implication suggests the importance of collecting data from clients, encouraging academics and practitioners to engage in research directly about their clients, engaging in what works for them in accordance with their vast differing cultural identities.

Like the recommendation of gathering data from recent MSW graduates, social work agencies can work to troubleshoot and problem solve their approach with clients and service plan of clients in collecting data about their clients. Whether formally through research methodologies for academia or informally for organizational statistical data, in collecting data directly from their clients regularly, organizations can better decipher their needs and best practices. In no way is this data collection meant to place blame on staff or target potentially problematic populations; rather, in collecting data from clients, organizations can send the message that their feedback is valuable in how services are provided and in hearing clients' feedback and concerns. Again, because of the lifelong nature of cultural competence

development and of the inevitability of changing times, it is important that leadership in social welfare create systematic timelines and plans for the regular collection of client data.

Section III: Implications of Findings for Social Workers

My first two implications sections encourage larger scale suggestions on a macro setting, looking to leadership in MSW programs and leadership in social welfare organizations. In concluding my implications sections, I make final recommendations to social work professionals. Based on my findings, these implications explore the necessity for social workers to embrace the following: (a) influence change on a macro level, (b) take action in your lifelong development toward self-awareness and cultural competence, and (b) understand the necessity to practice self-care.

Implication #1: Influence Change on a Macro Level

Social workers are professional change agents, and advocacy for and on behalf of the enhanced quality of life for all individuals, groups, and communities is fundamental to the social work profession (CSWE, 2015a). In gathering data for my study, I learned about the many different ways my participants advocated for their clients' rights and well-being, working tirelessly and endlessly to make a difference in the lives of others. As my findings highlighted, advocating for the enhanced social welfare of others is complex, especially when factoring in the many organizational or systemic barriers that may sometimes interfere with and impede such progress. Although the implications discussed previously in Sections I and II emphasize macro perspectives, this first implication encourages individual social work professionals to take action in bringing about organizational, structural, or systemic changes,

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similar to the avenue of macro recommendations, although from a micro perspective. However, because all social workers have a voice, they must know that their voices ought to be heard and that advocating for their clients can transcend far beyond their direct work with their clients to influence the profession on a much larger scale.

On a smaller scale, I encourage social workers to be active in the work involved in bringing about the necessary changes to their agencies for the enhancement of culturally competent social work practice, working on organizational governance and using their professional experiences to act as their clients' voices. As change agents, social workers can gather their own data or feedback either formally or informally and conduct agency-wide needs assessments to evaluate and reevaluate the needs of both their clients and their agencies as a whole. For example, findings in my study indicated how the many barriers within participants' workplaces hindered their abilities to provide culturally competent services. Through this advocacy model, social workers can take a stand to help encourage change on an organizational agency level.

On a larger scale, if social workers are members of the NASW, they have the potential to influence the profession by bringing attention to and voicing needs on behalf of the profession as a whole. The NASW has multiple avenues for social workers to advocate on behalf of larger systemic and professional change. For example, one such way could be through participation in the annual NASW conference. At these conferences, social work professionals have the opportunity to not only learn about new and upcoming developments and practices related to the field, but also present, share, and discuss their own scholarly research or best practices. Another way to influence the profession could include taking legislative action such as contacting senators or representatives to lobby on behalf of laws or

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acts related to the field of social welfare. A much more formalized and organized approach in the state of California includes participation in NASW Legislative Lobby Days in the state capital, Sacramento. During this event, social work students, professors, and professionals in the field can first learn the basics of lobbying and preparing for legislative appointments, next learn about important legislation that impacts social welfare, and then rally and meet with legislators and other key political personnel. Other ways to influence the profession through the NASW could include participating in state or local NASW chapter meetings; presenting scholarly research findings at state or local conferences, to social work educators, or to social welfare agencies; or even writing op-ed pieces for social welfare related publications.

Implication #2: Take Action in Your Lifelong Development toward Self-Awareness and Cultural Competence

Working toward the maturity of one's self-awareness is central to the role of the social work profession and does not come with the attainment of one's MSW degree, nor does it necessarily come even after 10 years of work in the field. According to the NASW (2015b) *Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice*, cultural competence development requires self-awareness on part of the social worker in his/her own awareness of his/her privilege and power, and the impact this has on the work he/she intends to do. In developing one's self-awareness, social workers must accept that this development is a lifelong process. "Cultural competence is never fully realized, achieved, or completed; it is a lifelong process for social workers who will always encounter diverse clients and new situations in their practice" (p. 16). This statement speaks volumes to the reality of cultural competence development, our continuously changing times, and the constant efforts social

workers must make in continuously educating themselves as to do justice to enhancing their clients' well-being. My findings exemplified the importance of understanding the very essence of accepting the role of a lifelong learner, not only in the case of newly employed social workers, but also in the case of veteran social workers who may have become accustomed to their roles, modalities, and techniques of service delivery as professionals.

This next implication for social work professionals highlights the heart of a lifelong learner and encourages social workers to continuously educate themselves about their clients, themselves, and best practices. In doing so, I suggest a holistic approach to lifelong learning, living and breathing cultural competence and taking opportunities in everyday life even outside their professional context as a way to grow and learn about themselves and others. There is much to be learned when exposed to opportunities outside of one's comfort zone, just as my findings suggest and participants expressed, and in allowing social workers to stretch their perspectives and understanding of others. For example, having opportunities for cultural immersion through travel opportunities, learning about the experiences of locals in communities where the representation of its population is different than one's own, or volunteering for other agencies or organizations that serve differing populations than accustomed can all be effective ways in one's lifelong development towards self-awareness. Whereas keeping up to date on the latest current events, juried literature and evidence based practices or attending professional development seminars and conferences ought to be part of the lifelong learning process, so too should other opportunities for increased cultural competence, such as opportunities related to transformative learning, contact theory, and experiential learning.

The literature on these aforementioned theories suggests deep learning in ways that are engaging and reflective: learning that takes place in situations beyond the traditional classroom lecture setting and that is supported and paired with self-reflection in increased contact with others of diverse backgrounds. The findings in this study demonstrated the impact that our physical and personal environments have on our socialization throughout our life course, in turn influencing the ways in which we execute our work. Participants indicated that their upbringing, familial structure, cultural beliefs, educational experiences, and even international travel all helped in their cultural competence development, not just while in their MSW programs, but also long before their MSW education. This comes as no surprise, as the NASW (2008) *Code of Ethics*, NASW (2015b) *Standards and Indicators of Cultural Competence for Social Work Practice*, and the CSWE (2015d) EPAS all make statements encouraging the profession to embrace their commitment to lifelong learning, continually updating their skills and knowledge to ensure relevance and effectiveness.

Implication #3: Understand the Necessity to Practice Self-Care

The findings for this study demonstrated challenges in matters related to the inherent paradoxical nature of cultural competence and the ways in which practicing it can lead to the inherent manifestation of prejudice and discrimination between client and social worker. Participants described many aspects of their profession as out of their control, including who their clients were, what their clients experienced, what their clients assumed, or whether or not their clients received funding, etc. With this, participants grappled with their inability to implement change in situations where change merely could not be implemented and struggled with the questioning of their identities or perceived identities rather than their professional

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abilities. This all in turn was truly a heavy burden to endure. The work my participants described, while humbly rewarding and professionally enriching, could easily be perceived as emotionally taxing and potentially lead to burnout. According to Jackson (2014), "Sometimes the last person social workers nurture is themselves" (p. 14). On a daily basis, social workers problem solve the heavy burdens, dark traumas, hardships, and struggles experienced by their clients, processing the possible best next steps in the situations their clients face, such as child sexual abuse, domestic violence, wartime survivor's guilt, financial instability, or gang membership. Furthermore, it unfortunately became the norm that my participants were exposed to hostile and aggravating environments in working with their clients, being ridiculed for their identities or even yelled or sworn at directly in the presence of others.

In listening to my participants' stories and anecdotes individually and hearing the exchange of conversations during the focus group, I would consider that my final implication for social workers is to understand the necessity to practice self-care for a healthy mind, body, and soul. During the focus group, I witnessed what could only be described as a beautiful exchange of stories that allowed participants to relate to each other, allowing for a support group-like environment that left participants expressing their gratitude for the opportunity to process their experiences with those not involved in their organizations and decrease their feelings of loneliness. Practicing self-care can act as a buffer for the ways in which social workers tend to take home their work, helping them maintain a healthy balance between their clients' hardships and their own. The beauty of practicing self-care is that it can be done in many ways, as there is no one size fits all approach. Practicing self-care can include engaging in exercise, catching up on television, listening to music, or organizing quality time with friends.

Unfortunately, many barriers prevent individuals in practicing self-care, such as a lack of time, a lack of effort, a fear of the unknown, or even a lack of resources; thus, in practicing self-care, it is important is to develop a plan that addresses one's general means of coping, list practices and activities that one can identify as important to one's well-being, and determine the social support network of individuals that can help one on this journey and hold one accountable. When social workers practice self-care, they not only enter a mindset that enables them to provide better services for their clients, but also model self-care to their clients.

Section IV: Limitations of the Study

In this section, I explore various aspects of my study that potentially pose as limitations.

Participants' Demographic Backgrounds

At the beginning of each interview, I gave participants the opportunity to express, as they desired, the ways in which they identified themselves, allowing a great deal of room for their own interpretations. While everyone shared their ages and ethnic backgrounds, only a handful shared their religious affiliations, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, health status, etc. As described Chapter Three, participants represented a diverse racial/ethnic group, but information on other cultural identities was not explored. As a result, a limitation to this study could be the lack of data I gathered on personal backgrounds as well as the fact that there were no males represented, no participants practicing social work from other geographic

regions other than Southern California, no participants over the age of 31-years-old, and no participants identifying as primarily White.

Having participants represent other demographic backgrounds, as a result of varying experiences or values and norms, can potentially yield different results, as we all endure different experiences and perceive each situation based on our own cultural lens and framework. Moreover, while cultural competence is a mandate to all social workers regardless of their own personal demographic backgrounds, this research has limitations in the fact that it lacked the integration of how participants' cultural identities influenced their practice. During the interviews I focused on a broad approach of asking for general examples of conceptualization and challenges rather than specifically delineating and exploring facets of one's identity. In going more in depth with participants' identities and how their identities influence their practice, I could have obtained more precise details on challenges that could be specific to aspects of any given identity.

Participants' MSW Programs Represented

In addition to the limitation of participants' demographic backgrounds, as noted previously, there was also a lack of MSW programs represented, resulting in 11 of my 20 participants having graduated from the University of Southern California, although with varying graduation years. Because my study focused on cultural competence in social work practice relative to participants' knowledge and skills learned and gained while in their MSW programs, having a lack of various MSW programs represented could have skewed my findings in a way that could have potentially underscored other aspects of MSW programs'

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curriculum, pedagogy, or leadership, as well as institutional and group socialization on organizational cultural and cultural norms.

One such consequence of not having a more diverse range of participants representing various MSW programs could result in my findings overlooking aspects of cultural competence education and training not highlighted by other universities. Although the mandate of cultural competence for social work practice is required of all accredited social work programs, the ways in which each MSW program executes this mandate varies immensely across the nation. Curriculum design, field education expectation, field education supervision, and pedagogical approaches with lectures and assignments are all at the discretion of each individual MSW program and faculty.

Another consequence of a lack of MSW programs represented is in the case of participants having and expressing a unified understanding of institutional and organizational culture or cultural norms, such as in the case of if and when groupthink applies, or simply conforming to the masses. It is widely understood that institutions and organizations have embedded cultural norms, and this can certainly be the case of MSW programs, leaving a lasting impression on their students' understanding of cultural competence education and practice. Therefore, having participants from a much more diverse range of MSW programs might have produced differing experiences and yielded different findings.

Self-Reporting and Metrics on Cultural Competence

Another limitation to this study is the fact that I had no clear or universal rubric by which I collected and measured data from participants on their cultural competence conceptualization, challenges, or preparedness relative to their MSW programs. This study

relied solely on the participants' recollections and self-reporting, placing in their hands a large amount of trust in their perception of how their experiences were actualized and executed on their parts as well as on their clients' parts. Many variables, such as any given participant's level of confidence, self-esteem, or self-awareness could influence his/her own internalized perception of the situation. For example, a participant may have felt negatively about the way she provided culturally competent services, but her supervisor or even the clients themselves could have perceived the situation otherwise, potentially in a much more positive light.

Additionally, while I strove to discuss thoroughly with my participants their experiences while in their MSW programs, delineating every possible detail, I could not control for the other ways in which participants gained cultural competence development outside of their MSW programs, such as through professional development at their places of employment, through their knowledge or skills gained during undergraduate experiences, or through the insights they gained while traveling or by virtue of their upbringing. If given an opportunity to have been able to utilize a universal definition of cultural competence or even a universal rubric for metrics on cultural competence conceptualization, preparedness, or development, I may have been able to better identity aspects of this study for improved preparation in cultural competence development.

Recollections of their Master in Social Work/Welfare Programs

A final limitation of this study was the expectation I had of my participants to come into their interviews having remembered specific assignments, lectures, or fieldwork experiences specifically related to cultural competence development while in their MSW programs. While six of my participants graduated less than a year prior to their interview date,

the rest of my 14 participants graduated at least more than a year prior to their interviews, including six that graduated more than 2 years previous. It might have been premature of me to believe that my participants would have been able to recall the specific details of their assignments or lectures. Additionally, it was also a substantial request to ask them about their reflections and feelings during their MSW programs regarding such assignments or lectures. This is surely not to say that my participants were not able to recall such instances, as each participant was able to recall at least one or two pivotal assignments or lectures regarding her cultural competence development, detailing and outlining straight from her memory guidelines and expectations, even painting pictures of the classroom setting or what she was wearing. As the researcher, that showed me the weight and impact these assignments or lectures had my participants' cultural competence and overall education development given that it left such a lasting impression that their recollections were as vivid and descriptive as though it just happened yesterday. Even when participants were given the opportunity to provide additional information post-interviews, recalling tasks, assignments, lectures, and events that occurred more than a year ago, let alone 6 months ago, can be difficult.

Section V: Directions for Future Research

There are many ways for future research to continue exploring cultural competence for social work practice. In this section, I provide overall general insights for future directions of research related to the cultural competence development based on my study's findings and overall research limitations.

Master in Social Work/Welfare Curriculum, Assessment, and Assignment Document

Analysis

A limitation to the study included the possibility of my participants having a difficult time remembering the specificities of their MSW curriculum and its pedagogical approaches. Rather than simply asking participants to recall the former, future research could combine document analysis with participants' feedback. For example, while I found it valuable to hear the details and experiences of my participants' perceived cultural competence preparedness, development, and challenges, it may be wise to conduct future studies that integrate document analysis by undertaking extensive research about MSW programs. In doing so, I suggest exploring materials such as MSW programs' mission statements, student learning outcomes, program goals, assessment documents, assignment descriptions, cultural competence or general professional competency-based rubrics, etc. These materials can provide a much more authentic representation of students' cultural competence development over participants' self-reports.

Expansive Sample to include Master in Social Work/Welfare Leadership

Although this study focused solely on the experiences of recently graduated and newly employed social workers, there are other populations and individuals involved in social work education and social welfare organizations' professional development who participate in the process of social workers' cultural competence development. These individuals, such as faculty and administration in MSW programs or supervisors in social welfare organizations, could provide varying perspectives and insights, allowing for a much more inclusive approach to understanding and practicing cultural competence. In future research, it would be

interesting to hear and learn of the reflections and perhaps rebuttals of participants from an expansive sample. For example, future studies should not negate the possibilities of different qualities and expectations of a course syllabus or curriculum design whose purpose may not be easy to grasp from a student's perspective, but may be better explained and understood from a faculty member's perspective. Additionally, including an expansive sample with MSW or social welfare leadership may allow for data to be gathered directly from experts in the field, which can potentially provide a much more in depth or comprehensive degree of insight or intellect.

Longitudinal Study with Varying Length of Employment of Social Work Participants

With time, I believe future research in cultural competence development could advance in its the ability to track participants and collect data, perhaps during their first year of employment as novice social workers, or even starting in their MSW programs and throughout the first few years of employment. Rather than collecting data in a one time interview and focus group fashion, with time and resources, future research could be much more extensive. Instead, longitudinal studies could include asking participants to reflect and journal regularly on their daily/weekly/monthly practices, following up with a series of individual interviews, and focus group meetings throughout the year to purposely track and determine conceptualization, preparedness, and challenges, and to even understand how the country's demographic changes or societal changing norms influence cultural competence development.

Given that my study focused on newly employed social workers, it could be beneficial to explore the cultural competence experiences of social workers who have been practicing

their craft in the field for over 10 years or so. This, like the previous recommendation, could also be beneficial in assessing how changing times could perhaps influence changing approaches or modalities. By implementing a study of participants consisting of seasoned social workers, researchers could also learn about changes made in MSW programs over time. By conducting studies regarding cultural competence in a longitudinal fashion, researchers could collect much more rich, in-depth data, allowing for follow-up and the identification of diverse variables.

Conclusion

Fundamental to the core of the social work profession is its advocacy for the underprivileged and underserved and for the improved well-being of individuals, groups, and communities, regardless of their background or experiences (CSWE, 2015a). In preparing future social workers for cultural competence in social work practice, it is vital that the NASW, the CSWE, and social work programs alike unite and stay cognizant of issues related to cultural competence as a means to develop up to date curriculum and professional development in best practices. This is truly no easy task, and my findings reflect the complexities and difficulties interconnected in the learning, understanding, and executing of cultural competence education and practice on all levels of the spectrum, suggesting that cultural competence development involves a comprehensive approach in and outside one's MSW program, as well as in-depth reflections on the part of the individual social worker himself/herself. The responsibility truly falls in the hands of the entire system.

A reason that sincerely motivated me to conduct this study was my own personal upbringing and personal development, having been born and raised in a diverse state such as

Hawaii, and then having relocated and lived in equally diverse, yet vastly different cities, including Los Angeles and New York. Having these exposures to people with vibrant stories and backgrounds and situations outside of my own familiarity and comfort zone allowed me to increasingly view and perceive the world around me with a much more tolerant, humble, and wholehearted approach. In my continued quest surrounding my own personal cultural competence development, through the years I have been deeply amazed at the depth and range of self-awareness I gained as a result of the complexities and differences of humanity. Having had many growth opportunities in my own path of self-awareness, now as an educator, a primary goal of mine is to provide my students with opportunities for their own increased self-awareness and cultural competence development.

In recruiting participants for this study, I was humbled at the immediate response and interest to a study that could potentially highlight participants' perceived weaknesses and flaws, both professionally and personally. During the interviews and focus group, my participants were generously candid and detailed in their responses, showing me how they trusted the process of sharing as their guiding principle to provide me with such thorough and elaborate data. For me as the researcher, I was collecting data, learning about their experiences as graduates and as newly employed social workers. But for them, I could truly sense their heartfelt investment in the field of social welfare and how this was another stepping stone and opportunity in their lifelong learning and development of self-awareness. For them, they were contributing to the betterment and reform of social work education and practice. In my perspective, this was extremely admirable on their parts.

As this study concludes, I reflect on this journey and am inspired to share this research to professional conferences and MSW programs in the hope that my findings can shed some

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light on what cultural competence means to recently graduated and newly employed social workers. I am confident in the approach we can take in the betterment of social work education and social work practice for the sake of our clients and social welfare in general. There is surely space and time to improve research methodologies surrounding cultural competence development, and I trust that, with our country's ever changing demographics and increasing minority representation, we can envision positive change and work toward this improvement in the years to come.

Study Information Sheet for the Interviews

Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice:
Exploring the Experiences of Recent MSW Graduates

Principal Investigator: Michelle Melendres from the Educational Leadership Program at
the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), is conducting a research study.
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Rhoads, Professor, *Department of Education, UCLA*

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You were selected as a possible
participant because of this study's following eligibility criteria:

- You have attained your Master in Social Work/Social Welfare (MSW) degree from an
accredited Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) university and have graduated
within the past four years.
- You are currently employed as a social worker in a field directly related to social services
or social welfare.
- Upon the completion of your MSW degree, you have been in you current place of
employment between about six months to four years.

Why is this study being done?
The heart of the social work profession is to advocate for and on behalf of the enhanced
quality of life for all individuals, groups, and communities. Consequently, social workers'
range of clientele is extensive and includes all walks of life of various racial/ethnic make up,
religious backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, geographic locations, etc. With a respect for
human diversity, both the CSWE (the sole accrediting body of social work education) and the
National Association of Social Workers (NASW – the profession's largest worldwide
professional organization) mandate that all future social workers recognize their ethical
responsibility to provide culturally competent services. Throughout the years, social work
education and research has made strides in its advancement for cultural competence in social
work practice due in large part to the USA's changing demographics. Given the U.S. Census
Bureau's various demographic projections reflecting many changes such as increases with
racial diversity among all racial classifications or increases with life expectancy and an old-
age dependency ratio, or individuals living 65-years and up, my goal for this study is to better
understand the complexities of social workers' conceptualization and experiences in cultural
competence, specifically in consideration of their application of theory to practice relative to
the knowledge and training gained through their MSW programs. Ultimately, this study is
being done to truly inform and help reform social work education programs in the ways in
which they can better educate their students for enhanced cultural competence in social work
practice. Accordingly, your participation in this study could better prepare social work
students and thus, social workers could then better serve their clients and provide appropriate
and adequate services sensitive to their clients' vast differences and diversities.

What will happen if I take part in this research study, and how long will I be in the research study?

The data collection process of this research is twofold. If you agree to participate in this study, your participation would be required for the first stage and is contingent for the second stage.

- *First Stage* – *Interview with the following guidelines:*
  - *Time Frame:* One one-on-one interview for an estimataed 45-60 minutes.
  - *Location:* I can provide a location for the interview that will ensure your privacy. This may be preferable for you as it may better ensure privacy and confidentiality regarding the work you do with your clients and within your organization. Additionally, it may prevent any potential interruptions. However, if you can provide a private location such as an office or conference room without potential interuptions for the entire duration of our agreed upon date/time as well as an extra hour for flexibility (not to occur during your normal work/business hours), I can come to a location at your convenience.
  - *Interview Questions and Prompts:* Questions will revolve around your overall conceptualization, experiences, reflections, and challeneges regarding cultural competence. Questions will center around your current practice of cultural competence, specifically relative to your MSW program preparation.
  - *Audio Recordings:* All interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim for your review and then ultimately for data analysis. Within one week after the completion of your interview, I will email you a verbatim interview transcript. During this time and within one week, you will be allowed, if you wish, to review, edit, elaborate, or clarify any information discussed during our initial interview.
- *Second Stage* – *Focus Group with the following guidelines:*
  - *Focus Group Participants:* Upon the completion of all interviews, 4-6 participants will be selected to participate in one Focus Group dependent on any combination of the preliminary findings, possible contribution to the meeting, and or experiences related to the study of original participants. All original interview participants will be contacted regarding their eligibility through a notification of the completion of their participation or to request to schedule participation for Focus Group.
  - *Study Information Sheet:* An updated study information sheet relavent to the Focus Group will be provided during the Focus Group recruitment process.
  - *Time Frame:* One Focus Group for an estimataed 60-90 minutes.
  - *Location:* A private office or conference room that will ensure your privacy, without interuptions, will be provided.
  - *Focus Group Questions and Prompts:* Currently, I postulate that Focus Group questions and discussion will center on the preliminary findings from the first stage. During this time, we may discuss elaborations on questions related to the interview process on cultural competence and further discuss possible implications and recommendations for social work education regarding enhanced preparedness in cultural competence.
  - *Audio Recordings:* This Focus Group will be audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim for data analysis. A transcript review process will not be necessary for this stage.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?
There are minimal anticipated risks or discomforts associated with this research. Participants may experience discomfort with sharing their experiences, practice, or understanding of cultural competent practice or with sharing their experiences, practice, or understanding of cultural competence relative to their MSW program. Additionally, participants may experience discomfort with sharing information about their work, organization, or clients. With this, it is important to know that:

- all information shared with be kept confidential and data will not include identifiable information. Additionally, at the completion of this study all data and identifiable information will be destroyed.
- participants who may wish to share anecdotes regarding their clients or organizations are asked not use clients' or colleagues' names to maintain privacy.
- if it is beneficial or preferred to maintain participants' privacy or confidentiality, participants are encouraged to not hesitate to request that the researcher secure an interview location offsite and away from participants' organization or clients.
- the purpose of this study is not to identify or classify challenging populations, nor is it to identify or classify diversity characteristics of clients or social workers. Recruiting participants who work with specific social welfare subfields such as homelessness or mental health, or serving specific diversity characteristics such as gender, age, religion, are not part of the eligibility criteria for this research. Additionally, recruiting participants of specific diversity characteristics are not part of the eligibility criteria for this research.
- the purpose of this research is not to evaluate any particular MSW program, nor does it target any particular MSW program. Recruiting participants who have graduated from specific MSW programs is not part of the eligibility criteria for this research.

Regarding the Focus Group, all Focus Group participants are required to keep information discussed confidential. Furthermore, at the start of the meeting, I will facilitate a discussion on expectations regarding communication and engagement and allow participants to share any concerns with the rest of the group.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate whether directly or to society?
By participating in this research and exploring cultural competence in-depth, participants may be able to
(as it relates to the first stage interviews):

- reflect on their practice, and by doing so, this could possibly aid in social workers' own development of self-awareness. When social workers develop and achieve high levels of self-awareness by looking within themselves for any potential sources of prejudice or bias, this can potentially lead towards a path of adaptability into cultural sensitivity services applicable for their clients (Lee & Greene, 1999).
- share their experiences, and by doing so, this could contribute towards literature on the enhancement of cultural competence in social work practice and education and could improve outcomes with potential clients or social welfare organizations.
- aid in the process or development of social work education reform, redesign, or assignment revisions related to the enhancement of cultural competence.

(as it relates to the second stage Focus Group meeting):

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- aid in the process or development of social work education reform, redesign, or assignment revisions related to the enhancement of cultural competence.
- build and develop a sense of community, belonging, or inclusion in possibly discussing or sharing similar experiences or hardships relative to cultural competent practice with other study participants and social work professionals.
- learn about best practices in cultural competence through Focus Group meeting participation.

Will I be paid for participating?
- At the completion of each one-on-one interview, all participants will receive a $25 gift card to Target.
- At the completion of the Focus Group meeting, all participants will receive an additional $25 gift card to Target.

Will information about my participation and me be kept confidential?
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. Information will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by using participants' initials on all electronic files, keeping the master key code identifying participants in a password protected electronic file, and saving all electronic files in a password protected cloud storage such as Google Drive for my exclusive access. In an attempt to provide high degrees of anonymity, identifying information, such as your place of employment or personal identifying characteristics will be inexplicit or omitted. Regarding the Focus Group, all Focus Group participants are required to keep information discussed confidential. Furthermore, at the start of the Focus Group, I will facilitate a discussion on expectations regarding communication and engagement and allow participants to share any concerns with the rest of the group.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?
- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Kindly understand that choosing not to participate in the interview or Focus Group or withdrawing your participation from the study will forfeit the receipt of the $25 gift card to Target.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study, and there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?
If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can directly address the researcher at *(email and phone number removed)*. You may also contact my Faculty Sponsor, Dr. Rhoads at *(email and phone number removed)*.

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the Researcher about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

UNIVERSITY OF **C**ALIFORNIA, **L**OS **A**NGELES
Recruitment NASW Social Media Advertisement

Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice:
Exploring the Experiences of Recent MSW Graduates

Dear Colleagues,

Participate in a study and receive a $25 gift card to Target!

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). I am currently conducting a study on cultural competence in social work practice relative to social work education and am looking to recruit study participants. If eligible and selected, the extent of your participation would include one individual one-on-one interview for an estimated duration of 45-60 minutes, the review of your interview transcript, and possible participation in one focus group consisting of 4-6 total participants for an estimated duration of 60-90 minutes.

I am recruiting social workers practicing in the Los Angeles area who meet the following eligibility criteria:
- Participants must have attained their Master in Social Work/Social Welfare (MSW) degree from an accredited Council of Social Work Education university and have not graduated from their MSW program for more than four years.
- Participants must be currently employed as a social worker in fields directly related to social services or social welfare.
- Upon the completion of their MSW degrees, participants have been in their current places of employment between about six months to four years.

At the completion of your one-on-one interview, as a thank you, all participants will receive a $25 gift card to Target. If selected for the focus group, at the completion of the focus group, as a thank you, all participants will receive an additional $25 gift card to Target.

If you are interested in learning more to participate or have any questions or concerns, please contact me at *(email and phone number removed)*.

Thank you in advance for your kind consideration.

Best,
Michelle Melendres
UCLA, Doctor of Education *candidate*
(email and phone number removed)

Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice:
Exploring the Experiences of Recent MSW Graduates

Dear [insert referral colleague's name],

I hope this email finds you well. As you know, I am a current doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). I am currently conducting a study on cultural competence in social work practice relative to social work education and could use your kind assistance with soliciting volunteers to participate in my study.

Feel free to review the email below and study information sheet attached for more information on the study, including my study participants' eligibility. If you know of any potential participants who meet the following eligibility criteria or know of any additional referrals who may know of potential participants, could you kindly forward them this message to assist me in recruiting volunteers? Should anyone elect to participate in my study, they should contact me directly.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. Your support and assistance is greatly appreciated.

Best,
Michelle Melendres
(email and phone number removed)

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Dear Potential Study Participant,

I hope this email finds you well. As a current doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), I am currently conducting a research study to understand the experiences of recently graduated and newly employed social workers regarding cultural competence.

I am recruiting social workers practicing in the Los Angeles area who meet the following eligibility criteria:
- Participants must have attained their Master in Social Work/Social Welfare (MSW) degree from an accredited Council of Social Work Education university and have not graduated from their MSW program for more than four years.

- Participants must be currently employed as a social worker in fields directly related to social services or social welfare.
- Upon the completion of their MSW degrees, participants have been in their current places of employment between about six months to four years.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Please know that you may choose not to participate or to withdraw from this study at any time.

The extent of your participation would include one individual one-on-one interview for an estimated duration of 45-60 minutes, the review of your interview transcript, and possible participation in one focus group consisting of 4-6 total participants for an estimated duration of 60-90 minutes. If you choose to participate, the one-on-one interview will be required; however, the focus group participant eligibility will be determined upon the completion of all interviews and culmination of preliminary findings. If you participate in the one-on-one interview, you will later be informed whether or not you will be requested to move forward in the focus group.

At the completion of your one-on-one interview, as a thank you, all participants will receive a $25 gift card to Target. If selected, at the completion of the focus group, as a thank you, all participants will receive an additional $25 gift card to Target.

Attached to this email is my study information sheet with detailed information addressing the following questions:
- Why is this study being done?
- What will happen if I take part in this research study and how long will I be in the research study?
- Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?
- Are there any potential benefits if I participate?
- Will I be paid for participating?
- Will information about my participation and me be kept confidential?
- What are my rights if I take part in this study?
- Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

Whether or not you wish to participate, if you know of any additional potential participants who meet the following eligibility criteria, could you kindly forward them this message to assist me in recruiting volunteers? Should anyone elect to participate in my study, they should contact me directly. Thank you in advance for your kind consideration and referral.

If you are eligible and willing to volunteer to participate, kindly let me know by [deadline will be 2 weeks from date of email sent to colleague]. To first confirm your eligibility, could you kindly provide me the following information:

- Place of Employment (Name and Address):
- Job Title & Brief Description of Duties/Responsibilities:
- Length of Employment (described in years/months):

- Name of MSW Program Attended (University name & any areas of concentration):
- MSW Year of Graduation:

Once I receive your information, I will respond within 48 hours to confirm your eligibility. Once confirmed, you will have one week to provide your consent to participate and any additional questions you may have before we move forward with scheduling your interview to commence. I am looking to secure a total of 20 participants on a first come, first serve basis.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your participation or your rights as a research participant, please do not hesitate to let me know and contact me at *(email and phone number removed)*. You may also direct any questions or concerns to the Office of the Human Research Protection Program at (310) 825-7122 or write to the Office of the Human Research Protection Program, UCLA, 11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 102, Box 951694, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

Thank you in advance for your kind consideration and referral.

Best,
Michelle Melendres
UCLA, Doctor of Education *candidate*
(email and phone number removed)

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES
Interview Protocol

Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice:
Exploring the Experiences of Recent MSW Graduates

Audio Recording Devises: iPhone 5s (Voice Memo); MacBook Air (QuickTime Player)

I. **Researcher Introductions:**
   a. Open by expressing gratitude for his/her time and participation.
   b. Review the overview of the study: purpose of my study, design of my study, informed consent, ethical considerations, confidentiality/anonymity, audio recordings, follow up procedures (transcriptions), possible focus group participation, etc.
   c. Reminders: turn off cell phones, it's best to be anecdotal, do verbal responses, complete/descriptive.
   d. Questions/Concerns?

II. **Participant Introductions & Demographic Information:**
   a. Personal Background – dimensions of diversity worth noting?

III. **Interview Questions/Prompts:**
   a. *Conceptualization of Cultural Competence – this section will revolve around participants' understanding of cultural competence, what it means to them and their practice, how they came to this understanding, etc.*
      i. In your opinion and from your perspective, as a social worker what does it mean to be culturally competent?
         1. PROBES:
            a. As it relates to the work you do…
            b. As it relates to the general field of social work…
            c. To practice cultural competence…
      ii. What contributed to your overall understanding of cultural competence?
         1. PROBES:
            a. Education
            b. Upbringing
            c. Background/Diversity
            d. Experiences
      iii. In what ways do you practice cultural competence?
         1. PROBES:
            a. How do you embrace this?
            b. How regularly is this part of your work?

b. *MSW Education – this section will ask participants to reflect on their MSW experiences relative to learning about cultural competence, with questions regarding classes, assignments, lectures, fieldwork, etc.*
  i. Please characterize your MSW program to the best of your ability.
     1. Mission
     2. Curriculum
     3. Course/Specialization Offering
     4. Co-curricular/Extra-curricular Offerings
     5. PROBES:
        a. Whether explicit or implicit, how was these characteristics conveyed? Fostered?
  ii. In what specific ways, if any, did your MSW program provide you knowledge about cultural competence for social work practice?
     1. PROBES:
        a. Specific assignments?
        b. Specific lectures/lessons?
        c. Specific courses?
        d. Specific faculty/staff/administration?
        e. Fieldwork?
        f. Extra curricular/Professional development?
  iii. In what specific ways, if any, did your MSW program provide you professional skills to execute cultural competence for social work practice?
     1. PROBES:
        a. Specific assignments?
        b. Specific lectures/lessons?
        c. Specific courses?
        d. Specific faculty/staff/administration?
        e. Fieldwork?
        f. Extra curricular/Professional development?
  iv. In what specific ways, if any, did your MSW program convey ethical responsibilities towards cultural competence for social work practice?

c. *Current Work – this section will ask participants to reflect on their current work, look at experiences and challenges in actual application of theory to practice, and will ask participants to tie in the work they do relative to their MSW experiences.*
  i. Let's start with your organization. Can you share with me, in your own words, what you believe the mission or purpose of your organization is?
     1. PROBES:
        a. What kinds of services does your organization provide? Clients served?
        b. How is this conveyed?
        c. How is this fostered?
  ii. Let's talk specifically about the work you do. Can you explain the details of your role as a social worker at [organization]?
     1. PROBES:

        a. Services provided

        b. Caseload

        c. Typical day/week

iii. Professional development

    1. What types of professional development does your organization offer?

        a. PROBES:

            i. What types? In-services? Meetings? Supervision?

            ii. How often?

iv. In what ways, if any, do you integrate cultural competence practice into the work you do?

    1. PROBES:

        a. What specific anecdotes do you have regarding this integration?

        b. Tell me about the clients you work with/for and how cultural competence plays a role in the services you provide?

        c. Integration outside of work with clients.

v. Tell me about a time, if any, in which you felt confident in providing culturally competent services?

    1. PROBE:

        a. Elaborate on how or why you were particularly successful.

vi. Tell me about a time, if any, in which you felt you were lacking in adequate cultural competence.

    1. PROBE:

        a. Elaborate on how or why you could have used improvement.

vii. What challenges, if any, do you face with regards to integrating cultural competence practice into the work you do?

viii. Relative to your MSW experiences, comment on how you were prepared or not prepared in now providing cultural competence services in the current work you do.

    1. PROBES:

        a. As it relates to specific clientele.

        b. As it relates to organizational norms/expectations.

        c. As it relates to changing demographics or societal trends.

ix. In retrospect as a professional, what MSW program suggestions, do you have regarding preparations towards cultural competence prior to entering the field as a professional?

        a. PROBE: Whether something missing or something already required.

d. *Other non-MSW Factors (to avoid imbedded assumptions or researcher bias, do not offer factors/experiences) – this section will explore other possible sources of cultural competence knowledge, skills, or experiences outside their MSW program that participants report as instrumental in their understanding or development of cultural competence.*

  i. Aside from your MSW education whether prior to post MSW, are there other contributing factors or experiences that are worth noting regarding your understanding of cultural competence?

ii. Aside from your MSW education whether prior to post MSW, are there other contributing factors or experiences that are worth noting regarding your effective cultural competence practice?

e. *Closing Remarks:*
   i. In closing, are there any final thoughts, comments, suggestions you would like to share or address prior to us closing?

IV. **Wrap-Up & Thank You**
   a. Close by expressing gratitude for his/her time and effort – don't forget to give $25 Target gift card.
   b. Inform them of the verbatim transcription for review: non-mandatory and for clarification/elaboration if necessary. One-week review period and no response means automatic acceptance.
   c. Inform them about possible participation in the focus group meeting – confirmation and information TBA. All participants will be notified regarding focus group procedures.
   d. Questions?

Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice:
Exploring the Experiences of Recent MSW Graduates

Principal Investigator: Michelle Melendres from the Educational Leadership Program at
the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), is conducting a research study.
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Rhoads, Professor, *Department of Education, UCLA*

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. For the First Stage of data
collection (interviews), you were originally selected as a participant because of this study's
following eligibility criteria:

- You have attained your Master in Social Work/Social Welfare (MSW) degree from an
  accredited Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) university and have graduated
  within the past four years.
- You are currently employed as a social worker in a field directly related to social services
  or social welfare.
- Upon the completion of your MSW degree, you have been in you current place of
  employment between about six months to four years.

For the Second Stage of data collection (focus group), you have been selected as a participant
because of the following selection criteria:

- You were a participant for the First Stage – Interviews.
- As a collective 4-6 participants for the Focus Group, you reflect a diverse group of
  individuals having attended varying MSW Programs and having experiences/expertise in
  varying social work or social welfare fields of study.

Why is this study being done?
The heart of the social work profession is to advocate for and on behalf of the enhanced
quality of life for all individuals, groups, and communities. Consequently, social workers'
range of clientele is extensive and includes all walks of life of various racial/ethnic make up,
religious backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, geographic locations, etc. With a respect for
human diversity, both the CSWE (the sole accrediting body of social work education) and the
National Association of Social Workers (NASW – the profession's largest worldwide
professional organization) mandate that all future social workers recognize their ethical
responsibility to provide culturally competent services. Throughout the years, social work
education and research has made strides in its advancement for cultural competence in social
work practice due in large part to the USA's changing demographics. Given the U.S. Census
Bureau's various demographic projections reflecting many changes such as increases with
racial diversity among all racial classifications or increases with life expectancy and an old-
age dependency ratio, or individuals living 65-years and up, my goal for this study is to better
understand the complexities of social workers' conceptualization and experiences in cultural

competence, specifically in consideration of their application of theory to practice relative to the knowledge and training gained through their MSW programs. Ultimately, this study is being done to truly inform and help reform social work education programs in the ways in which they can better educate their students for enhanced cultural competence in social work practice. Accordingly, your participation in this study could better prepare social work students and thus, social workers could then better serve their clients and provide appropriate and adequate services sensitive to their clients' vast differences and diversities.

What will happen if I take part in this research study, and how long will I be in the research study?
As you are aware, the data collection process of this research is twofold. Thank you for your participation in the First Stage of data collection. This study information sheet supplements the first study information sheet and elaborates on your possible participation for the focus group. For information regarding the First Stage, please kindly refer back to your original study information sheet. If you volunteer to participate in the focus group, the extent of your participation includes the following:

- *Second Stage* – *Focus Group with the following guidelines:*
  o *Time Frame:* One Focus Group for an estimataed 60-90 minutes.
  o *Location:* A private conference room that will ensure your privacy, without interuptions, will be provided.
  o *Focus Group Questions and Prompts:* During the Focus Group*,* I will be presenting preliminary findings from the First Stage and open the floor for further elaborations, clarificiations, and discussions related to the interview process on cultural competence. Furthermore, we may discuss possible implications and recommendations for social work education regarding enhanced preparedness in cultural competence.
  o *Audio Recordings:* This Focus Group will be audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim for data analysis. During this time and within one week, you will be allowed, if you wish, to review, edit, elaborate, or clarify any information discussed during our initial interview.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?
There are minimal anticipated risks or discomforts associated with this research. Participants may experience discomfort with sharing their experiences, practice, or understanding of cultural competent practice or with sharing their experiences, practice, or understanding of cultural competence relative to their MSW program. Additionally, participants may experience discomfort with sharing information about their work, organization, or clients. With this, it is important to know that:

- all information shared with be kept confidential and data will not include identifiable information. Additionally, at the completion of this study all data and identifiable information will be destroyed.
- participants who may wish to share anecdotes regarding their clients or organizations are asked not use clients' or colleagues' names to maintain privacy.
- the purpose of this study is not to identify or classify challenging populations, nor is it to identify or classify diversity characteristics of clients or social workers. Recruiting

participants who work with specific social welfare subfields such as homelessness or mental health, or serving specific diversity characteristics such as gender, age, religion, are not part of the eligibility criteria for this research. Additionally, recruiting participants of specific diversity characteristics are not part of the eligibility criteria for this research.

- the purpose of this research is not to evaluate any particular MSW program, nor does it target any particular MSW program. Recruiting participants who have graduated from specific MSW programs is not part of the eligibility criteria for this research.
- ***Regarding the Focus Group***, kindly know that participating in the Focus Group may compromise your anonymity or confidentiality by virtue of participation and with other participants hearing your stories or experiences as well as knowing that you have indeed participated in the First Stage (interviews) of data collection. While this may be the case and is a risk involving your particiation, please know that I kindly ask that all participants keep information discussed confidential. Furthermore, at the start of the meeting, I will facilitate a discussion on expectations regarding communication and engagement and allow you as a potential participant to share any concerns regarding anonymity or confidentiality with the rest of the group.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate whether directly or to society?
By participating in this research and exploring cultural competence in-depth, participants may be able to:
- share their experiences, and by doing so, this could contribute towards literature on the enhancement of cultural competence in social work practice and education and could improve outcomes with potential clients or social welfare organizations.
- aid in the process or development of social work education reform, redesign, or assignment revisions related to the enhancement of cultural competence.
- build and develop a sense of community, belonging, or inclusion in possibly discussing or sharing similar experiences or hardships relative to cultural competent practice with other study participants and social work professionals.
- learn about best practices in cultural competence through Focus Group meeting participation.

Will I be paid for participating?
- At the completion of the Focus Group, all participants will receive an additional $25 gift card to Target.

Will information about my participation and me be kept confidential?
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. Information will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by using participants' initials on all electronic files, keeping the master key code identifying participants in a password protected electronic file, and saving all electronic files in a password protected cloud storage such as Google Drive for my exclusive access. In an attempt to provide high degrees of anonymity, identifying information, such as your place of employment or personal identifying characteristics will be inexplicit or omitted. Regarding the Focus Group, all Focus Group participants are required to keep information discussed confidential. Furthermore, at the start of the Focus Group, I will

facilitate a discussion on expectations regarding communication and engagement and allow participants to share any concerns with the rest of the group.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?
- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Kindly understand that choosing not to participate in the Focus Group or withdrawing your participation from the study will forfeit the receipt of the $25 gift card to Target.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study, and there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?
If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can directly address the researcher at *(email and phone number removed)*. You may also contact my Faculty Sponsor, Dr. Rhoads at *(email and phone number removed)*.

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):
If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the Researcher about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

     UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
     11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
     Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice:
Exploring the Experiences of Recent MSW Graduates

TO THOSE WHO <u>HAVE NOT</u> BEEN SELECTED:
Hello,

I hope this email finds you well. This email is a follow-up regarding your participation in the Second Stage – Focus Group, of my research study.

I kindly thank you again for your participation in my research and want to let you know that the extent of your participation has concluded. At this time, I will not need your participation for the Second Stage of my data collection.

If you have any additional information or clarification you would like to send my way, please don't hesitate to email them to me as they could be helpful data for my study.

Good luck on all your future endeavors in the field of social welfare. Thank you for your efforts and commitment to the field.

Best,
Michelle Melendres
UCLA, Doctor of Education candidate
(email and phone number removed)

TO THOSE WHO <u>HAVE BEEN</u> SELECTED:
Hello,

I hope this email finds you well. Thank you again for your participation in my research. This email is a follow-up regarding your possible continued participation.

I would like to extend an invitation to you to continue your involvement in my study through your participation in one Focus Group that will occur at the end of February or in early March.

Extent & Eligibility. The estimated length of the Focus Group is 60-90 minutes. You have been selected as you reflect a diverse group of individuals having attended varying MSW Programs and having experiences/expertise in varying social work or social welfare fields of study. Attached to this email is an updated study information sheet.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Please know that you may choose not to participate in the Focus Group. Additionally, you may choose to withdraw from this study at any time.

Incentive. At the completion of the Focus Group, as a thank you, all participants will receive a $25 gift card to Target. Additionally, during the Focus Group, I will provide light refreshments/snacks.

Inquiry for Participation. If you are willing to participate in this Focus Group, kindly choose all your available dates/times by accessing the Doodle link below by [insert date]. If you have preferences in dates/times or timeframes, please email them to me separately.

[Insert Doodle Link]

Focus Group Date/Time Options. The doodle link has a wide range (32 options!) of available dates and times as to be accommodating to various schedules. Know that I will accept your participation in the Doodle poll as your consent and willingness to participate in the study. Your timely response to this poll is greatly appreciated as so I can contact other participants if necessary, such as in an instance that I cannot generate 4-6 participants to choose a single date/time.

The Final Date/Time & the Final 4-6 Participants. The selected Focus Group date/time and Focus Group participants will be dependent upon the majority vote, representation of various MSW Programs or fields of study, along with the researcher's schedule. Kindly understand that it may be likely that your preferred date/time may not be selected or you may no longer be required to participate. For example, if there is a majority vote for [Insert Sample Date/Time] but all participants come from one university, then this date may very likely not be selected. Upon confirming the selected date/time, a confirmation email will be sent to you by the end of next week. In this email, I will ask to confirm your participation and include further logistical instructions and information.

I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your kind consideration. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. Your support and assistance is greatly appreciated.

Best,
Michelle Melendres
UCLA, Doctor of Education candidate
(email and phone number removed)

APPENDIX G

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES
Focus Group Protocol

Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice:
Exploring the Experiences of Recent MSW Graduates

Audio Recording Devises: iPhone 5s (Voice Memo); MacBook Air (QuickTime Player)

V. Researcher Introductions:
a. Open by expressing gratitude for his/her time and participation.
b. Review the overview of the study: purpose of my study, design of my study, informed consent, ethical considerations, confidentiality/anonymity, audio recordings, follow up procedures (transcriptions), possible focus group participation, etc.
c. Reminders: turn off cell phones, it's best to be anecdotal, do verbal responses, complete/descriptive.
d. Questions/Concerns?

VI. Focus Group Norms:
a. Privacy and Confidentiality.
b. Participants – Who you are…
c. Discussion Content.
d. Timeframe.
e. Discussion Engagement. Regarding participation, please be mindful of the following:
   i. Let us all engage in constructive, detailed, and productive dialogue…
   ii. Let us all engage in one discussion and conversation - please allow others to share their thoughts or opinions and kindly take turns in talking. Additionally, do not talk over others and do not have sidebar or separate conversations during the main dialogue.
   iii. Let us be inclusive of others and create a safe speaking environment. Please be mindful of how our words/body language can sometimes be exclusive or demeaning, so let us create a welcoming environment so that everyone can indeed feel safe and comfortable to share.
   iv. Please feel comfortable to share, whether you agree or disagree with me as the researcher or your fellow participants. In times of disagreement, differences, or the right to challenge, let us all do so respectfully and openly. Even if you are the only one who feels a certain way, your differing opinion is valuable.
f. Audio Recording.

VII. Preliminary Findings:
a. Overview of Findings
b. Section I: The Philosophy of Cultural Competence as Multifaceted

      i. Inherently Paradoxical

      ii. The Role of Respect

  c. Section II: The Necessity to be Challenged for Cultural Competence Development

      i. A Comprehensive Master in Social Work/Welfare Curriculum

      ii. The Responsibility of the Master in Social Work/Welfare Faculty

  d. Section III: Actualized Practice in the Field of Social Welfare

      i. Comfort within the Realm of Familiarity

      ii. Areas for Growth in Feelings of Inadequacy

      iii. Frustration with Fundamental Organizational Barriers

  e. Section IV: The Manifestation of Prejudice and Discrimination

      i. Conflicting Values

      ii. Prejudice from the Clients

VIII. Wrap-Up & Thank You

  a. Close by expressing gratitude for his/her time and effort – don't forget to give $25 Target gift card.

  b. Inform them of the verbatim transcription for review: non-mandatory and for clarification/elaboration if necessary. One-week review period and no response means automatic acceptance.

  c. Questions?

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