ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STEREOTYPE THREAT IN MULTICULTURAL COUNSELING COURSES

by

Alcia Armentris Freeman

Adviser: Todd Leibert, Ph.D.

Although this was not always the case, most counselor training programs require their students to complete a course in multicultural counseling. Multicultural counseling courses typically cover topics like on race, religion, privilege, sexual identity, ability, and social inequity. Discussing the subjective and delicate nature of topics that are intimately linked to identity, in an evaluative setting, can evoke a variety of emotions for students. Particularly, students with stigmatized identities may fear being judged through the lens of negative stereotypes that have been attached to certain aspects of their identity. The threat of confirming a negative stereotype as self-characteristic is called stereotype threat. There is a gap in the literature surrounding counseling students’ experiences of stereotype threat in their multicultural counseling course. The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to fill that gap by exploring the lived experiences of stereotype threat in multicultural counseling courses. Fourteen participants gave a descriptive account of their experience of stereotype threat in their multicultural counseling course.

Subsequently, the phenomenological psychological constituents found in the overall structure of their experience were: (1) Identity Salience, (2) Stigma Consciousness, (3) Difficult Dialogue, (4) Contextual Inferences, (5) Assessing Identity Safety, (6) Belonging, (7) Embedded

In their experience of stereotype threat, students in multicultural/sociocultural counseling courses are aware of their identity and the stigma attached to it. During difficult dialogue students use impactful contextual inferences to assess identity safety and the degree to which they belong in the environment. The embedded emotions and cognitive dissonance led to ramifications of the experience and highlighted the importance of empathy. Implications for counselor educators and future research are provided.