

# Mitigating the “Powder Keg”: The Experiences of Faculty of Color Teaching Multicultural Competence

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## Abstract

Teaching multicultural competence is a unique experience. Little is known, however, about the experiences of faculty of color teaching multicultural competence. In this phenomenological study, semistructured interviews were conducted with 12 faculty of color to explore their experiences teaching multicultural competence in counseling graduate programs and in the context of their universities. Five themes emerged including (1) dual threads of multicultural competence, (2) the most marginalized teach about diversity, (3) faculty of color go above and beyond (content) instruction, (4) challenges and benefits of teaching diversity courses, and (5) the impact of systems is powerful. These findings suggest that faculty of color experience teaching multicultural competence differently than their White counterparts and that these experiences have personal (e.g., burnout) and professional implications (e.g., tenure and promotion).

## Keywords

multicultural competence, faculty of color, diversity, administration, teaching

“All individuals exist in social, political, historical, and economic contexts, and psychologists are increasingly called upon to understand the influence of these contexts on individuals’ behavior” (American Psychological Association (APA), 2002, p. 1). Using a tripartite model, multicultural competence has been defined as the ability to be aware of one’s beliefs and values about human functioning, to be knowledgeable of the worldview of culturally diverse individuals and groups, and to engage in utilization of culturally appropriate intervention skills and strategies (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). The psychology profession has made strong efforts toward advancement of multicultural training and competence, moving it toward the core (see APA, 2017; DeAngelis, 2015). Although multicultural and diversity courses can be offered in any area of psychology, our focus is on clinical and counseling graduate programs where they are required (i.e., these courses are not usually required in other graduate programs or undergraduate programs).

Teaching multicultural competence is a unique experience (Larke & Larke, 2009), one that is often undertaken by faculty of color. Scholars have noted that the experiences of faculty of color are starkly different than their White counterparts (Knight, 2010; Sue et al., 2011). For example, faculty of color are often subjected to an inequitable environment that has personal and professional consequences (Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009). The experience of being a

psychology faculty member of color teaching multicultural competence remains relatively unexplored.

Little is known about the experiences of faculty of color teaching multicultural competence. Studying these experiences can promote insight into the culture of academia and inform institutional policies and norms that currently inundate both faculty of color and multicultural education. Regarding faculty of color, Antonio (2002) stated “. . . it is also their somewhat unique combination of values and philosophies from which higher education can benefit” (p. 598), bolstering the need for further research to promote equity and retention of faculty of color. In this article, we highlight the importance of multicultural competence within psychology graduate education and training. Next, we discuss the experiences of faculty of color within the power structure of the academic system, as well as within the classroom. We provide an overview of the methodology used for this phenomenological study, share themes that emerged, and discuss implications for graduate education and training in psychology.

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## Multicultural Competence Training in Graduate Programs

The importance of multicultural competence has been highlighted throughout research in recent decades. Researchers have illuminated the importance of honoring cultural differences, as well as how our identities influence our worldview and lived experiences (see Comas-Diaz & Jacobsen, 1991; Helms, 1995; Sue et al., 1992; Vereen, Hill, & McNeal, 2008). According to APA (2002), psychologists have the responsibility to develop their multicultural competence because it allows them to understand the complex needs of their clients within larger historical, economic, and sociopolitical forces.

In 2002, APA developed the Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists (Multicultural Guidelines). The Guidelines highlight the importance of psychologists' development of self-awareness, knowledge of other cultures, and application of skills across multiple settings, including education, research, and practice. The 2017 revision, entitled "Multicultural Guidelines: A Reconsideration and Applications," is currently under review, following the expiration of the former Guidelines and task force recommendations (APA, 2017). Furthermore, the multicultural guidelines are reflective of the goals of multicultural education for psychologists, as well as what psychologists aim to model in multicultural instruction.

Although psychology emphasizes diversity and multicultural competence as a priority in graduate education and training (Piercy et al., 2005), two notable challenges exist toward the attainment of multicultural competence. These challenges include the lack of diversity within the faculty body (Moradi & Neimeyer, 2005) and a multiculturally integrated program (Abreu, Gim Chung, & Atkinson, 2000). Numerous authors have noted that these challenges maintain existing Eurocentric counseling practices and teaching methodologies within graduate programs (Highlen, 1994; Robinson & Morris, 2000) and deny students the opportunity to experience an inclusive environment (Moradi & Neimeyer, 2005) that promotes multiculturalism. Most graduate programs (89%) only require one multicultural course (Abreu et al., 2000) despite the emphasis to infuse multiculturalism into curricula (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001). As Robinson and Morris (2000) stated, "given the survey nature of many graduate courses, as well as the complexities involved in multicultural issues, it seems unrealistic to expect a single course to produce professionals who are multiculturally competent" (p. 245).

## Faculty of Color

Academia is predominantly culturally and numerically White. Even as diversity within the student body increases, diversity among faculty remains relatively stagnant (Fujimoto, 2012). Among faculty ranks and administration,

people of color are consistently underrepresented within higher education institutions (Flowers & Moore, 2008). Tierney and Bensimon (1996) stated that limited representation can lead to cultural taxation. That is, faculty of color are burdened with additional stressors and responsibilities when compared to the more universal expectations of faculty. Specifically, they are asked to represent their specific cultural group(s) through research, mentoring, and institutional service. Faculty of color can feel highly (or even overly) visible within predominantly White environments, fostering feelings of being othered or tokenized (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Brooks & Steen, 2010). Thompson (2008) noted that institutions have difficulty retaining faculty of color due to unsupportive environments and lack of visible commitment to diversity.

Work environment can play a critical role for faculty of color. Specific departmental cultures can either foster or discourage faculty progress and success (Campbell & O'Meara, 2014). In predominantly White academic settings, faculty of color may develop strategies to foster their successful navigation. James (2012) discussed faculty choosing one of the three approaches in academic environments: conformity, pragmatically, or critically. That is, faculty of color may conform to institutional norms regardless of their true beliefs, accept the situation as it exists, or challenge and push against the system. The manner in which faculty of color fit and exist within their institution and department can affect their perceptions of the workplace, tenure process, work-life balance, and collegiality (Campbell & O'Meara, 2014).

Broadly, faculty of color also hold lower rank, are less likely to be tenured, and earn less than White faculty (Flowers & Moore, 2008; Levin, Haberler, Walker, & Jackson-Boothby, 2014). These factors may be a result of the environmental factors discussed herein, in addition to discriminatory treatment. Knight (2010) reported that faculty of color have felt academia to be more competitive than collaborative, to deprioritize research on minority groups, and to have discriminatory environments that can discourage and stifle career progress. Additionally, faculty of color may either be assigned or feel compelled to take on tasks with fewer rank-related benefits, such as mentorship, committees, and service (Levin et al., 2014). Further, faculty of color and minority faculty are more likely to choose or be assigned courses about diversity, which can bring about unique challenges within academia (Pellett & Nelson, 1997).

## Faculty of Color and Teaching

Teaching is an important aspect of faculty duty and is assessed as part of the tenure and promotion processes. Faculty of color often teach diversity coursework (Pellett & Nelson, 1997) and, in general, are more likely to include diversity in their courses to greater extents compared to White faculty (Laird, 2011).

Teaching diversity work often includes challenging students on deeply held beliefs about culture, race, ethnicity, and gender, as well as asking them to examine their individual

worldviews (Crittler & Maddox, 2017; Larke & Larke, 2009). Evoking and leading these types of discussions can often result in student resistance, anger, and frustration, which can also disproportionately and negatively affect faculty of color evaluations. For example, faculty of color have discussed receiving microaggressions from students during racial dialogues, as well as strong, difficult-to-manage emotions related to the discussions (Sue et al., 2011).

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of faculty of color teaching multicultural competence individually and systemically. More specifically, we aim to contribute to the existing literature on multicultural pedagogical practices in the training of psychologists through understanding the experiences of faculty of color.

## Method

The nature of qualitative research allows researchers to understand how people make meaning of their experiences within their world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, we used phenomenology to try to capture the essence of our participants' lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Specifically, our goal was to capture the ways in which faculty of color make meaning of their experiences teaching multicultural competence. This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical guidelines, and appropriate institutional review board approval was obtained from the first author's institution.

## Researcher Stance

All coauthors were either a faculty member or doctoral students at the same institution during the time the research was conducted. The first author is an Indian American female counseling psychologist and associate professor in a counseling program at a midsize research university. The program could best be described as having gone through a transition from "culture-blind" (i.e., ethnocentric) to one whose core is "multicultural-focused." The second author is a Latina first-generation doctoral candidate in Counselor Education and is working full time as a graduate program coordinator for a Higher Education Leadership program. The third author is a Latina assistant professor in counselor education (was a doctoral student during the writing of this article) and has a private practice. The fourth author is a biracial (Black and White) male doctoral candidate in Counseling, a part-time faculty member in a graduate counseling program, and has a private practice.

We believe that the role of faculty of color in teaching multicultural competence is an important one. University administration often lacks knowledge of the ways in which faculty of color who are teaching diversity courses are hurt by doing so (e.g., tokenism, worse teaching evaluations, more grievances).

## Participant Recruitment

Purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 1996) was used to recruit the 12 individuals who participated in this study. The participants were tenure-track or tenured faculty of color who teach or have taught multicultural competence in graduate counseling and psychology programs. We posted invitations to participate in the study on various national ethnic minority mental health association listservs and additionally used word of mouth (i.e., participants telling other participants) to find participants. In total, 28 faculty were contacted, 16 did not participate because they did not fit the criteria ( $n = 8$ ), did not have the time to complete the interview ( $n = 1$ ), were on sabbatical ( $n = 1$ ), or did not respond to the request ( $n = 6$ ). The remaining 12 met the criteria and participated in the study.

The participants were from public and private colleges and universities in urban, suburban, and rural regions throughout the United States. Participants included females ( $n = 8$ ) and males ( $n = 4$ ). Participants identified as Black ( $n = 5$ , of which two identified as Caribbean), Asian American ( $n = 2$ ), Latino/a ( $n = 4$ ), and Native American ( $n = 1$ ). The age range of the participants was 31–68 years and the mean age was 40.1 years. Participants held doctoral degrees in the following fields: counseling psychology ( $n = 8$ ), clinical psychology ( $n = 2$ ), education ( $n = 1$ ), and social psychology ( $n = 1$ ).

Participants included one full professor, six associate professors, and five assistant professors teaching in counseling psychology programs ( $n = 8$ ); a combined clinical, counseling, school psychology program ( $n = 1$ ); a clinical psychology program ( $n = 1$ ); a mental health psychology program ( $n = 1$ ); and a counseling and education program ( $n = 1$ ) at the undergraduate, graduate, and/or doctoral level. Two individuals held other administrative roles in addition to their appointment as faculty. The average time teaching was 12 years and the range was 4–36 years.

## Data Collection

The research team developed a semistructured interview protocol (Maxwell, 1996) that included 10 general demographic questions (e.g., participants' gender, age, race/ethnicity, and level of education) and 10 topic questions to gain an understanding of teaching multicultural competence, how it is addressed in the program, what diversity courses are taught, who teaches these courses, the role of faculty of color, experiences related to teaching, and the role of the administration. Before the interview, each participant was sent an informed consent form which was faxed or mailed back to the research team. Participants were given the option to be interviewed in person, by telephone, or by e-mail. Five interviews were conducted via e-mail and seven engaged in audiotaped interviews over the phone lasting from 30 to 90 min. For the participants who completed the interviews via e-mail, all follow-up questions were also communicated via e-mail. At the end of the interviews, the participants had the opportunity to state any

additional comments, suggestions, or questions they may have had about the process or consent form.

The recorded interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber. These interviews were then reviewed for accuracy by the research team. The transcripts were converted to word documents, with line numbers to allow for efficient cross-referencing as the coding process progressed. All identifying information about the participants' interviews was kept confidential, and all electronic documents were saved in a password-protected shared folder.

### Data Analysis

The interviews were analyzed after all the data were collected and audiotaped interviews were transcribed. The coding process was completed by two members of the research team using an excel worksheet. Coding was done on three transcripts jointly until acceptable interrater reliability was reached. At that point, the remainder of the transcripts were coded independently. Coding was used to "fracture" the data and rearrange it into categories (Saldana, 2009; Strauss, 1986, p. 29) that facilitated the comparison of data within and between these categories. Since the coding process was recursive (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Saldana, 2009), the coders referred back to the codebook constantly to ensure that all newly coded quotes aligned with the previous codes (and sub-codes) in that category and vice versa. When discrepancies occurred, the coders and the first author discussed them and revised the codebook accordingly; when there was a disagreement about codes, the first author made the final decision. The coding process continued in this manner until all transcripts were coded. After coding the data, the research team informed the participants of the findings of the study if they previously requested that they be notified.

As a reflective practice, the coders maintained joint analytic memos. Memos capture analytic thinking about the data, facilitate such thinking, and stimulate analytic insights, as well as serve as a reflection on methods, theory, or purposes (Maxwell, 1996, p. 78). These memos included information about questions raised, resolutions reached, and future directions relevant to the code and categories. In this way, a collaborative approach to the coding process ensued and multiplicities of thinking enhanced the data analysis. After the final codebook and analytic memos were completed and reviewed, the members of the research team discussed what themes emerged. The themes that are presented in the results of the study are not direct equivalent of codes, but rather are an outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection (Saldana, 2009).

### Authenticity and Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, we seek to ensure trustworthiness, rigor, and credibility (Morrow, 2005). In addition, we seek authenticity that requires attention toward honoring, enhancing, and understanding different and diverse constructions (Morrow, 2005). Having multiple individuals on a diverse research team

also helped us to minimize the impact of our biases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Keeping memos as part of the data analysis process also assisted in ensuring authenticity and trustworthiness in our research.

## Results

Five themes emerged from data that speak to the experiences around teaching multicultural competence. These themes include dual threads of multicultural competence, the most marginalized teach about diversity, faculty of color go above and beyond (content) instruction, challenges and benefits of teaching diversity courses, and the impact of systems is powerful.

### Theme 1: Dual Threads of Multicultural Competence

Participants described complexity in defining multicultural competence. Two subthemes arose when the participants defined multicultural competence: (1) awareness, knowledge, and skills; and (2) continual journey.

*Awareness, knowledge, and skills.* For all of the participants in this study, the definition of multicultural competence included awareness, knowledge, and skills. Participants described awareness and knowledge of self and others (e.g., biases); knowledge of individuals as situated in families, cultural communities, and larger society; understanding of people's socio-political histories; and skills to work with individuals from diverse backgrounds, including concrete skills (e.g., language skills) and therapeutic skills (e.g., building rapport and engaging clients). These faculty must also attend to individuals' intersecting identities, as well as systemic issues of power, privilege, oppression, and internalized oppression. One participant explains:

Multicultural competence involves developing an awareness and knowledge of the impact of systems and systemic functioning (e.g., at institutional, societal, and global levels), as they/it relates to the complexity of human behavior, human development, and clinical assessment and practice.

Another participant further unpacked the nuances of awareness, knowledge, and skills and how to use it to understand the individual nested in their culture.

I'm very interested and concerned about people . . . developing the skills to address the needs of a particular individual from a particular cultural concern. To know when silence is reflection and not resistance. To know when not getting eye contact is respect and not avoidance. To know sometimes language skills, to facilitate a dialogue, sometimes people need to become bilingual, bi-literate.

*Continual journey.* For 6 of the 12 participants, multicultural competency in teaching, research, and counseling was described as a process that cannot be fully developed or completed, but rather a "journey with no final destination." It is

more than a checklist of awareness, knowledge, and skills, but rather as something to be continually sought.

So I really feel like developing cultural competence is not something that anyone ever develops, per se. It's . . . a process that people go through and continue to move through and so I think that it entails a lot of different skills, a lot of different knowledge, a lot of different awareness.

### *Theme 2: The Most Marginalized Teach About Diversity*

Nine of the 12 participants in this study shared that untenured faculty of color or adjuncts are designated to teach diversity and multicultural courses which are undervalued and not seen as areas of scholarly expertise. As two participants described, the multicultural counseling course is not perceived to have value to their program, and yet junior faculty of color were always expected to teach them.

When I first graduated, my first job interview, they asked me what courses I would teach. I said I'd teach this course on multicultural issues and counseling. I'd like to teach an African American psych course. And the response then was, "Well yeah, of course you're going to teach those courses, that's a given, but how would you contribute to the department?" . . . I think there's this assumption that you'll teach these courses but it's not really a significant contribution.

Participants suggested that if all faculty were equally trained, then the course would be seen as mainstream and equivalent in value to a core content (e.g., theory) course.

I believe that faculty of color have more expectations placed upon them (e.g., by the department and the students) to teach multicultural competence than white faculty. Being a professor of color and having expectations placed upon me by the department and the students to teach multicultural competence can be difficult to cope with.

Some participants in this study thought faculty of color had more credibility than White faculty to teach the course. Others thought it was the responsibility of dominant faculty (or minimally, the responsibility of all faculty) to teach these courses. Yet, in their experiences, White faculty were rarely trained and when faculty of color were nonexistent in a program or unavailable (e.g., sabbatical), members from other marginalized communities were sought to teach diversity and specialty courses (e.g., gay faculty teach courses related to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities).

Four of the 12 participants spoke about the need to develop their White colleagues' multicultural competence via training. They stated that White faculty members often did not have the knowledge and/or interest about diversity, and when they have the interest, they were unsure how to develop their knowledge base. Participants suggested that if White faculty teach about multicultural competence, it can have a powerful impact on White students (e.g., it is no longer a person of color issue).

### *Theme 3: Faculty of Color Go Above and Beyond (Content) Instruction*

The faculty of color in this study discussed how they perceive their job as instructors to include more than their White faculty counterparts. The participants stated that who they are (e.g., identities, culture) shapes how they teach and what they strive to accomplish in terms of helping students achieve some level of multicultural competence. The four subthemes included classroom facilitation style, mixed type of assignments, use of self-disclosure to model, and awareness first.

*Classroom facilitation style.* When participants discussed nurturing multicultural competence in their students, they described their teaching to equally consider process and content. Eleven of the 12 participants spoke about the facilitation style they used in the classroom and what they thought was necessary to help students become more multiculturally competent. The participants spoke about the necessity of going beyond lecturing and infusing experiential activities into their facilitation methods to get students to discuss these topics. One participant described it this way:

I use a didactic approach blended with a Socratic style. I tend to teach multicultural stuff within a historical context . . . in my courses it's highly experiential and generally within the class there's a lot of interaction with students, there's a lot of interactions with me, it's not a lecture class and one of the things that is—you know people say "well why is it so experiential?" And I think one of the reasons I do that is because I don't think that in "polite culture" unless you're with your closest friends and family and even then it may not happen, you don't really talk about this stuff.

They also stated they were not trained in their graduate programs to be prepared for students' reactions to class content so they learned by doing. One participant stated, "You're learning the awkwardness of talking about race." Another participant further stated that they are asking their students "to risk seeing people (including themselves) in ways other than what has felt safe so far." Participants spoke about how they have to "take care of the students" and make information palatable for students to listen. They also noted that the professor of color has to be constantly aware of their identity as they consider how to teach. One participant gives an example from when she was a newly minted professor.

And so . . . this might be a mistake, but I thought it was okay to show "Color of Fear" one time. And so people are like, "Oh my god." They were all freaked out. So I was like, "Oh really . . ." I just didn't think that that would freak students out. So that was my first time teaching—I was like, "Oh shit." . . . So I had to like realize . . . even though I say things very nicely and couch things, be as friendly as I can possible, it still gets interpreted as being too direct and threatening. So I feel like I have to do a lot to compromise who I am in some ways. Because who I am in being direct and kind of honest and forthright is threatening to white folks.

**Mixed type of assignments.** Eight of the 12 participants spoke about the types of assignments they use for the course. Participants stated they used classroom dialogue/discussions, experiential activities, writing activities, mainstream (e.g., *Crash*) and educational (e.g., *Color of Fear*) films, texts (e.g., Tatum's, 2003, *Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, hooks', 1991, *Theory As Liberatory Practice*, and hooks', 1994, *Teaching to Transgress*), reflective activities, case presentations, cultural genogram, and small and large group work—all used to facilitate process and learning.

I always have my classes write a professional competence paper, and in that professional competence paper, I have them write about what are the challenges, what are the limitations in the field, in this program, in what you're learning, etc. that makes it difficult for one to become a culturally competent provider? And so they talk about the one—sort of the Eurocentric training—model that a lot of students are trained in, the theories that people are trained in, the systems, the institutional barriers, the social barriers, etc.

Some assignments are made to dismantle what students have already learned (i.e., White Eurocentric model as norm) and promote social justice.

I try to incorporate social actions piece. And this is to get people to acknowledge the voice that they have, either as psychologists and/or as individuals to try to help transform society, to change the conditions. . . . I had them do a social action project and they could. . . work with an agency on campus or in the community. And build a relationship with that agency, and do a project, a joint project that would be beneficial for that agency. . . .

**Use of self-disclosure to model.** Four of the 12 participants in the study expressed their mixed feelings about using personal self-disclosure to model diversity when teaching. One of the participants felt that the use of personal self-disclosure enriches diversity courses because it allows the professor to use their own history of “traversing between mainstream and marginalized existence” to model diversity. Another participant felt oppressed by the experience of having to “prove” their reality by being emotionally vulnerable in front of White students.

I don't like teaching a bunch of white students about race and ethnicity. I just don't find that enjoyable, because I think the assumption is then, “well you need to divulge and tell us all about yourself and what you've gone through. . . you're asking us to do this self-exploration, you need to model this.” And I feel like I shouldn't have to model for white folks. And I try to be very nice and encouraging and validating in many ways, but I'm not going to sit there in a group, predominately white people, and say this is my own part of my identity, and doesn't that make you feel so comfortable. . . it was like I don't want “to sit and babysit people's racism.”

**Awareness first.** Seven of the 12 participants spoke to the importance of challenging students to not only acknowledge their

cultural background but also be aware of how their cultural background impacts the work that they do. The participants shared that it was critical for students to work through difficult issues before going into the field to ensure that no further harm was done to their clients. In order to prepare students, the participants felt a personal investment and strong responsibility to spend a considerable amount of time training the students to focus on the self. It was important for students to increase their awareness of their own cultural backgrounds, as well as awareness of structural and systemic barriers that impact clients. One participant shared:

One of the things I do is tell my students that the only thing I'm expecting from them is to become more aware of what they bring to a relationship. And that's kind of vital—is just that awareness. When you're talking about, I think specifically, White students, because they don't believe that they have a culture or ethnicity. . . they have to understand what they bring to a relationship. . . .

#### **Theme 4: Challenges and Benefits of Teaching Diversity Courses**

All the participants in the study discussed the numerous challenges they experienced in teaching diversity courses and the personal toll it takes to teach them. As soon as they are hired at an institution, there is an assumption from students and faculty alike that they are “an affirmative action hire” who are there only because of their race (not their merit). Some participants shared that students often delegitimize the professor (e.g., “full of crap”) and the content discussed in the course (e.g., racism isn't a problem). There were four subthemes including “staying open in the face of hate,” emotional and physical toll, personal and professional benefits, and impact of student evaluations.

**“Staying open in the face of hate.”** In the classroom, faculty juggle group dynamics, learning, and projections—focusing simultaneously on the individual student, the class as a whole, and on learning process. All of the participants shared that they are oftentimes met with negative student reactions, especially from students who do not want to look at White privilege and their own biases. In the participants' experience, students prefer to learn techniques to counsel diverse populations instead of deepening an understanding of their biases.

At times it is extremely difficult to manage students' strong, negative reactions, lack of openness and defensiveness that often gets projected onto me. . . . Faculty who teach these classes have to remain constantly open to hateful beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors from students who are growing (and from those who are not). I had students try to delegitimize my experiences and the experiences of their peers who are people of color by insisting that racism is the thing of the past. I had a student ask me why slaves “decided to go to the slave ships, were they stupid or something?!” One reported me to the department chair and then the dean for focusing too much on race.

*Emotional and physical toll.* As a result of facing resistance from students, as well as having to navigate students' responses, 9 of the 12 participants spoke about the toll it takes to teach this course. The participants stated that it becomes emotionally, physically, and spiritually exhausting and draining. For some of the participants, taking a break was needed, while others stated they became so burnt out that they did not want to teach the course anymore. One participant spoke about her inability to do research simultaneously because, "these courses tend to be writing intensive, so we spend more time reading material that is often emotionally draining." This balancing act often left the participants in this study feeling a range of emotions including a mixture of excitement and dread, frustration, anxiety, anger, sadness, lack of energy, and exhaustion as a result of managing their own emotions.

I don't have the energy (which tells you something about my experiences). I find that the semester that I teach multicultural psychology I am a bit grumpier, on edge, frustrated, than "usual." To walk with students on that journey towards self-awareness around issues of race/ethnicity/culture/privilege is EXHAUSTING. It seems that they have to go through a process and my job is to support and guide them, but it takes an emotional toll. And I think that there's an under appreciation of sometimes how difficult these courses are because of the emotions that are involved.

*Personal and professional benefits.* Eight of the 12 participants discussed benefits of teaching diversity courses. Participants stated that teaching these courses kept them on the cutting edge of what is in the field and immersed in the multicultural literature. They also said that teaching these courses was fulfilling and they felt a sense of satisfaction and pride in the work they do with students.

There is a sense of hopefulness that I experience in these classes when I know that students have begun the transformative process of thinking about how human dynamics are richly informed by identity, history, and a host of sociological realities (e.g., wealth, poverty, public policy, distribution of resources). I care that my students become the kind of thinkers who are able to critically integrate complex information and apply them to complicated problems. My survival . . . and theirs . . . depends on it!

*Impact of student evaluations.* Seven of the 12 participants spoke about the impact of teaching multicultural competence on their student evaluations. This class was described as a "powder keg . . . because you're never quite sure of what you're going to get in there." One participant summed up what many of the participants experienced, "Your course evaluations tend to be poorer because students don't like being challenged." Another explained, "students will certainly have more negative issues with a course instructor if that instructor has forced the student to face biased aspects of himself or herself." Another participant described the variable nature of the course that is determined by who the faculty and students are (e.g., racially, gendered), and where they are developmentally. Further, they shared how the negative professional ramifications of these

evaluations are greater on junior faculty who are not yet tenured.

If you're a junior faculty member who's not tenured and yet you really love teaching that [multicultural] class and you go ahead and teach that class before you get tenure, you're teaching a class that could really ruin or really kind of lower your teaching evaluations overall or at least how you're perceived to be effective. So, I would discourage a person . . . teaching a course like that their first, maybe, 4 years, 5 years.

### *Theme 5: The Impact of Systems Is Powerful*

The impact of systems was profound in these participants' lives. Three subthemes emerged: inconsistent level of program infusion, support and accountability needed, and cultural tax.

*Inconsistent level of program infusion.* All of the participants spoke about great variance in whether and how multicultural competence was taught throughout their programs. Although two participants described diversity as infused into most of their coursework, the other participants explained there was, at most, one course per degree—one at the master's level and sometimes one at the doctoral level that addressed multicultural competence. These participants indicated that other courses are expected to "infuse" diversity issues into the course material, yet the degree to which that "infusion" occurs is not monitored nor are those expected to do the "infusion" always multiculturally competent themselves.

Several participants spoke about the challenges of infusion, both in terms of the logistical challenges and because faculty have unexplored biases that impact how they work. Infusion was inconsistent, at best.

But the faculty members tend to be racist themselves and they are not likely to advocate, in a way, for students of color because they are uncomfortable with their own racism. They have to get past that stuff first, so they're not going to incorporate . . . multicultural issues in their courses. That's what I think. They are only paying lip service. I don't think they're really, really integrating it into their courses.

*Support and accountability needed.* All 12 participants spoke of ways in which either a multicultural environment is fostered or needs to be created at their universities. The majority of support came from departments and programs due to mandates from accrediting bodies, ethical codes, or by obtaining external funding for initiatives. The larger colleges' and universities' commitment came in the form of written support (e.g., mission statement, website information), the hiring of faculty of color, the recruitment of students of color, and administrators demonstrating their commitment by visible support and presence. One participant spoke about how faculty can support each other by sharing strategies to facilitate multicultural competence in the classroom. For some of the participants, having a student group such as a Latino Student Psychological Association or an office dedicated to Multicultural Affairs provided an additional outlet

for faculty and students to engage in their multicultural development. There was a variety of support methods described by participants ranging from endorsement from the Board of Trustees to departmental chairs and deans attending meetings and classroom lectures.

My administration has been very supportive of my efforts to develop multicultural initiatives. They have also made a point of asking me if they can observe the class to make sure that their observations balance any low evaluations I receive. They have encouraged me to include information about the nature of this course in my tenure/review files so others can understand why evals may be lower than in my other courses.

**Cultural tax.** Even with the attempts at providing support, 7 of the 12 participants specifically spoke about how their administration is either unaware or uninterested in the challenges faced by faculty of color. They described the emotional, physical, and professional toll that faculty of color experience when doing diversity work. Participants shared their experience of macroaggressions (e.g., lack of pay equity when compared to White faculty) and microaggressions (e.g., repeatedly hear racist and sexist statements directed at them or other faculty or students of color) in (Crittle & Maddox, 2017) and out of the classroom. They noted that they are sometimes the only or one of the few faculty of color in the department and are often delegated all work related to multicultural competence. Participants also stated that they are repeatedly “pulled into activities that need faculty of color” and are engaged disproportionately in more service than their White counterparts due to their small numbers. As a result, this overburdening of faculty of color absolves the department of responsibility. Their reality of cultural taxation is routinely denied by many of their White colleagues and administrators, and oftentimes the participants did not have anyone to consult with when they were designated to do this work. In addition, participants indicated that faculty teaching these courses are not often supported by administration when facing difficult students for fear of litigation.

I really was culturally taxed. I complained about it to my Dean, and she says, “well, you’re a competent Hispanic woman. Everybody wants you on a committee . . .” I’m not having enough time to do my work, my research, things that I’m gonna get evaluated on when it comes time for promotional tenure. I’m being culturally taxed because everybody wants a competent Hispanic woman on their committee, and I cannot be that one for everyone.

## Discussion

The experiences of faculty of color teaching multicultural competence are multifaceted. Faculty of color are often the ones to engage in and embed diversity education into curriculum (Laird, 2011; Pellett & Nelson, 1997), and they face particular challenges in this endeavor. For the participants in this study, developing multicultural competence includes a continual

journey of building awareness, knowledge, and skills. As faculty of color, it was clear to them that in universities, the most marginalized faculty (i.e., having minority identities) are expected to teach about and do work related to diversity. Teaching multicultural competence effectively required that they go above and beyond sharing their content knowledge. They used varied classroom facilitation style, gave different types of assignments to facilitate learning, and modeled by using self-disclosure to enrich the course and validate the content. Participants discussed their interest and enjoyment in teaching diversity courses, but they also spoke of the personal and professional toll. For example, several participants were recipients of a lot of anger when challenging students in the classes. In addition, they reported that negative student evaluations were routine, which has particular professional ramifications for junior faculty in terms of tenure and promotion.

It is clear there are systemic variables that impact people of color in higher education. The participants shared that the depth and attention toward multicultural competence varied within their programs, often with only one course being required. Some programs had more courses, and participants stated they infuse the content into their courses. This infusion, however, was often in name only. When it was present, it was uneven and unmonitored. The participants discussed a variety of support structures in place, such as receiving external funding, sharing best practices with one another, and having a dedicated diversity office on campus. However, for most, they described a need for additional support for faculty who taught these courses. In particular, the participants were culturally taxed as a result of teaching diversity courses, often leading to burnout and fatigue.

The findings of this study are consistent with the literature. Although the Guidelines (APA, 2002) suggest multicultural competence is considered essential in psychology, the institutional, faculty, and student resistance to do the work often doesn’t match the values of the profession (Knight, 2010; Larke & Larke, 2009). If a program has junior faculty of color, they are most often the ones who are assigned to teach multicultural or diversity classes (Pellett & Nelson, 1997). Most faculty of color in this study wanted to teach multiculturally focused courses but even if they didn’t, they were assigned the courses because of White faculty’s expectations.

Faculty of color experience academia differently than their White counterparts and these experiences have personal (e.g., burnout) and professional implications (e.g., tenure and promotion; Diggs et al., 2009; Knight, 2010; Sue et al., 2011). For many of the participants in our study, their experiences with cultural taxation were real and went unnoticed and unaddressed. As stated previously, Tierney and Bensimon (1996) argue that, because of their identities as racial and ethnic minorities, faculty of color experience cultural taxation as a result of service work that is expected of them. For example, as the only, or one of the few, faculty of color in their departments, the participants in this study reported being asked to engage in more multicultural service work (i.e., sitting on diversity committee) than their White colleagues. As a result, faculty of color report feeling stretched thin or tokenized to



meet a university's diversity agenda and were more likely than other faculty to experience psychological consequences such as burnout and fatigue.

Larke and Larke (2009) suggested that student evaluations for faculty who teach multicultural competence could be impacted by students' resistance to course content. For faculty of color, in addition to their teaching competency being questioned, their scholarship expertise is also questioned (Sue et al., 2011; Vereen et al., 2008). Illustrating this point, participants in this study discussed receiving negative evaluations from students who did not see value in the content, assumed that the faculty member had a personal agenda, or that the faculty lacked credibility to teach the material. The participants stated they experienced these negative professional consequences which impacted advancement in tenure and promotion ranks.

There are several limitations to this study. Our study included only 12 participants with a greater number of women than men. This number, however, is appropriate for phenomenology, which seeks to gain depth over breadth in this meaning-making endeavor. In terms of diversity of sample, our process using listservs and word of mouth to recruit participants is less likely that we would have participation from individuals who may be more marginalized in the profession. In other words, the sample may represent faculty who are professionally connected. There may also be a small difference in responses based on the method of collecting data (i.e., phone interview or e-mail). For those participants who completed the interview via phone call, there was an opportunity for the researchers to ask the participants to clarify or expand on their story. Although we offered the same opportunity to the participants who completed the interview through e-mail, we were unable to capture more nuanced responses or engage in immediate follow-ups. Although this allowed us to gather data for participants across a wide geography, the variance in interview protocol may have influenced the data in ways unknown to the researchers. When comparing the phone and e-mail results, there were not any meaningful differences between these groups. Although we sometimes were given a greater number of examples of emergent themes, the findings were similar.

Finally, because we chose to focus on participants' experiences of being faculty of color rather than the complexity presented by intersectional and multidimensional identities, it is possible that the study may have missed important aspects of their identities and experiences.

## Implications for Psychology

This study has implications for the profession of psychology and, more generally, for higher education. This study extends findings from previous research confirming that faculty of color who teach multicultural competence in psychology programs experience additional layers of work and stress. It is important for institutions of higher education to be cognizant of the added "tax" that faculty of color pay on top of the normal workloads that faculty of color engage in. It is evident that continued progress toward just treatment is required within academia.

It may behoove higher education institutions to continue and build on existing efforts toward promoting equity in academia. It is important for department chairs to understand the implications of assigning their faculty of color the responsibility to teach multicultural competency courses. In particular, they should recognize both the psychological factors such as fatigue and burnout and the professional ramifications that may hinder faculty members' progression through the tenure process. Equally important, junior faculty members must be made aware of the potential challenges they may face teaching a diversity or multicultural course in their first years in academia.

In addition to supporting faculty of color, graduate training programs in psychology need to consider ways in which they manifest multicultural competence principles and communicate the importance of multicultural competence to all incoming students. This should be reflected in all recruitment materials and interactions with potential students. These values should continue in websites, program names, courses, curriculum, and orientation. To reflect these values, it is necessary to achieve agreement among all faculty about the integral nature of diversity awareness, knowledge and skills, and a commitment to multicultural competence as an essential foundation.

It is important for psychology programs and the profession of psychology to consider the discrepancy between the stated value of diversity and multicultural competence and how much it is really valued. In addition, it is important to acknowledge how we undervalue contributions of the individuals who contribute to this diversity (e.g., faculty of color) and move to create more equitable systems that make multicultural competence a shared responsibility.

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