Research Article

Black Female Counseling Students' Experiences of Racial Microaggressions at a Southern University

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This phenomenological study examined Black female counseling graduate students' experiences of racial microaggressions at a Southern university. Themes revealed the impact of racial microaggressions on the individual participants, as well as illuminated the greater impact of racial microaggressions upon campus climate. Findings suggest implications for clinical counselors, training opportunities for counselor education students and counselor educators, and mentor programs for students and faculty that would improve campus experiences for Black female graduate counseling students.

Black Female Counseling Students' Experiences of Racial Microaggressions

Microaggressions are defined as interpersonal slights and insults directed towards a minoritized individual, whether intentional or unintentional[1]. Researchers have found that microaggressions can cause psychological distress, frustration, avoidance, confusion, resentment, hopelessness, and fear[2][3][4][5][6]. These incidents can occur in academic and social settings, can happen outside of conscious awareness, and their frequency can be easily dismissed[1]. The subtle nature of microaggressions can prevent the perpetrator from recognizing their participation in creating psychological dilemmas for minoritized individuals, as well as disparities in education, healthcare, and employment[1][4].

According to Sue[1], there are three distinct types of microaggressions: *microinsults, microinvalidations, and microassaults.* A microinsult is characterized by rudeness and insensitivity and demeans a person's racial heritage or identity[1]. Microinsults represent subtle snubs, frequently unknown to the perpetrator, but convey an insulting message to the recipient of color while microinvalidations are communications that exclude, negate, or dehumanize the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color[7][1]. A microassault is an explicit racial action characterized by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions.

Racial Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions are common, create distress, and impact mental health in persons of color[8][3]. Students who experience racial microaggressions reported higher levels of stress and greater risk for depression and anxiety than others[4][5][6], highlighting mental health burdens[2] and major challenges to student retention[9]. Previous studies from Southern universities have addressed the

adjustment experiences of Black women in graduate programs, obstacles faced by Black women in higher education, strategies to overcome those obstacles, and factors associated with Black student motivation and achievement[10][11][12][13][7][14]. Discrimination and racism were factors identified in those studies; however, there is little research on Black women in counseling graduate programs experiencing racial microaggressions.

Racial microaggressions fit under several themes: *invisibility, criminality, undesirability, sexualization, foreigner, environmental invalidations* [15][16]. *Invisibility* involves people of color being treated as if they have lower status, are not visible or seen as a real person, and are dismissed or devalued[7][16]. Invisibility can include being delegitimized or ignored and may be applicable across **racial** groups. Social isolation is another variety of invisibility for people of color that can significantly impact the experience of discrimination[17].

The *criminality* theme involves being treated as if one is aggressive, dangerous, or a criminal[16]. This theme was reported by both men and women, but male respondents and African Americans reported experiencing this more frequently[18][16][19]. This finding is consistent with previous findings that African American men are stereotyped as being aggressive or criminal[20][19], and that African American females are antagonistic[21].

Undesirability involves being treated as if people from one's **racial** background are all the same, incompetent, incapable, low achieving, and dysfunctional[22][16]. Successful individuals from that race would be viewed as having received special treatment. According to Torres-Harding et al.,[16], African Americans reported higher levels of this microaggression type when compared with the other racial groups.

The *sexualization* theme involves being treated in an overly sexual way and being subject to sexual stereotypes[16]. Sue et al.[1] indicated that this a microaggression often reported by Asian American women. Other studies suggest that this is true for many women of color, and women reported being sexualized more frequently than men[14][23][16].

The *foreigner* theme involves one being made to feel they are not a true American, or do not belong due to their racial background[16]. Latinos and Asian Americans reported more occurrences of this microaggression when compared with African Americans and multiracial individuals[16]. A recent example of this theme in action is the social isolation and increase in hate crimes directed towards Asian Americans, along with increased discrimination experienced by Black adults compared to White adults during the COVID-19 pandemic[17].

Environmental invalidations involve negative perceptions that come from recognizing that people from one's **racial** background are absent from work, school, or community settings or from positions of power[16]. There are different ways to experience each of these themes, and they can have a negative impact on a person's identity and self-worth.

Campus Climate

Students of color on college campuses have reported a sense of hostility and lack of belonging far beyond feeling disconnected from their peers on campus[9][2]. Students reported not only experiencing microaggressions in classrooms, but that they experienced microaggressions when seeking counseling services or other university assistance[10]. When reporting negative, racially motivated incidents on campus, students felt their concerns were quickly dismissed or ignored, and that peers continued making racist jokes and comments despite being told they were offensive[24][18]. Other students who attempted to discuss race and racism in courses were shut down by peers or faculty[25][7]. Findings revealed themes of segregation, lack of representation, campus response to criminality, cultural bias in courses, tokenism, and pressure to conform[18]. The experiences of Black students on college campuses can be problematic personally as well as academically.

Perceptions of a hostile racial climate have been associated with lowered academic motivation, and reduced sense of belonging[9]. These instances of invalidation send the message that the experiences of students of color are not important and have no place in academia. Furthermore, students of color also experience microaggressions in settings that may be unexpected. Mental Health Counseling programs follow standards that include teaching students about the effects of stereotypes, various forms of discrimination, and racism according to the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs[26]. Yet, retention of Black counseling students is low and Black women report experiencing either no support or not enough support

from counseling faculty and peers[27]. Black women counseling students in one study described feeling isolated, discriminated against, and treated differently than their White peers[27].

Universities often have a mission statement spouting cultivation of a diverse and inclusive campus, but the reality is that campuses often mirror the greater social climate[28][29]. However, students of color reported microaggressions made them feel unwanted, invisible, or ignored in academic and social settings, discouraging them from accessing student services. Experiencing microaggressions has been associated with increased symptoms of depression and thoughts of suicide[3][30]. Studies also suggest exposure to subtle prejudice and stereotyping hampers students' cognitive processing and academic success[31][32].

The recent Supreme Court decision to strike down affirmative action policies[33] in higher education will impact future generations of students. There is a likelihood that student experiences of microaggressions, as well as overt discrimination, will increase across campuses with fewer policies of support in place. Furthermore, some universities are dissolving their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs due to pressure from state governments[34], similarly impacting minoritized students negatively. There is a need to raise awareness regarding how microaggressions operate, manifest in society, and impact people of color to create the educational strategies needed to eliminate them[1]. For the current study, individual interviews with Black women in a counselor education program were utilized to explore their student experiences of racial microaggressions.

Methodology

This study used transcendental phenomenology, as this qualitative method focuses on the lived experiences of the participants, considering the participant the primary source of knowledge[35]. The topic of racial microaggressions can be vulnerable, and the research team wanted to prevent biases and preconceptions based on stereotypes from influencing data analysis to the extent humanly possible. Through transcendental phenomenology, the researchers sought to maintain data purity, enabling participants to share their lived experiences in their own voices individually, as a group, and in their own writing.

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of Black female graduate students in a counselor education program who have been the target of microaggressions at a Southern university?
   a. How do Black female counseling graduate students at a Southern university describe the ways in which they have been impacted by microaggressions?
   b. How do Black female counseling graduate students at a Southern university describe their perception of the impact of microaggressions on campus climate?

Participants

Participants were identified through purposive[36] and chain sampling[36]. Participants identified as Black women of various ages who were attending graduate school in the counseling program at a Southern, public university and had experienced racial microaggressions at some point while enrolled at the university. Participant names were changed to pseudonyms. A demographic form was utilized to gather background information and ensure eligibility. Informed consent was collected prior to participation.

Procedures

Semi-structured interviews, journal entries, and a focus group were used to gather data and explore the phenomenon[37]. Initial interviews were audio recorded and transcribed prior to follow-up interviews. During the follow-up interviews, emerging themes were discussed with participants, and they were able to make any necessary corrections to their statements or share more of their experiences. Following transcription, the research team began analyzing and coding the data. Participants completed journal entries between initial and follow-up interviews.

Focus groups allow participants to comment in relation to others' experiences which can create the potential for new topics and themes to emerge[38]. The focus group took approximately two hours, was audio recorded, and was conducted following the completion of all individual interviews. The focus group occurred approximately two months after all interviews were completed and confirmed themes found from the individual interviews.

Research Team

The primary researcher, who served as the interviewer and focus group facilitator, was enrolled in the counseling graduate program where the study was conducted at the time of data collection. This researcher identifies as a Black woman and, therefore, fits the requirements for participation in this study. Due to this overlap in experiences between the researcher and the participants, care was taken to avoid influencing or directing participant experiences. Memo writing and journaling were completed regarding researcher preconceptions, and these notes were discussed during data collection and analysis with the external auditor and peer debriefer.

The second researcher served as an external auditor. This researcher was a doctoral student in Counselor Education at the time of data collection. While they are a neurodivergent, transgender individual, this researcher identifies as White and acknowledged the unique experiences of Black female graduate students due to intersectionality. A professor of Counselor Education served as a peer debriefer. The third researcher identifies as a White woman and recognized their experiences were vastly different than those of the participants. Moustakas[35] described the significance of researcher reflexivity when conducting phenomenological inquiry. All researchers made efforts to bracket biases or assumptions to let the data speak for itself.

Trustworthiness

In seeking methodological rigor, this study utilized triangulation, dialogic engagement, and thick description to provide credibility. Triangulation was achieved via interviews, journals, member checks, a focus group, researcher journals, and peer debriefing[39]. Seeking saturation via thick description and prolonged engagement assisted in striving for transferability[39]. To demonstrate dependability, the research process has been described in detail, which enables other researchers to repeat the study[39]. Confirmability was sought using an external auditor to verify data analysis while considering research reflexivity.

Results

All five participants identified as Black females (ages 23-46) enrolled in a graduate counseling program who had experienced racial microaggressions on campus. Two of the participants were master's students and three of the participants were doctoral students. Four of the participants identified more specifically as African American while the fifth participant identified as Afro-Caribbean.

Six themes emerged from the individual interviews and focus group about Black female graduate students' experiences of racial microaggressions: devaluing messages, anger, awareness, loneliness, fear/safety, and advocacy. Similar themes emerged from the journal entries: devaluing messages, fear/safety, and advocacy.

Theme	Participant	Statement
Anger	Danielle	"I feel like I take on the anger...of every other Black person in that moment"
	Samantha	"yes, I'm like perpetually pissed off and nobody understands why"
	Tasha	"it did bother me that this person viewed this group that I belong to this way"
Awareness	Danielle	"either they're racist and they know it or they're racist and they don't know it"
	Jessica	"I think deep down the intentions are the best here, so I rest on that"
	Tasha	"aren't concerned to educate themselves about stuff"
Loneliness	Danielle	"be a Black person in a field where no other Black people are"
	Jessica	"It's this weird balance between being invisible and hypersexualized"
	Samantha	"they'll ask the White person what they want even if they came behind me"
	Sarah	"When you get to the level of pursuing your doctorate, there's not a lot of Black females"
Advocacy	Danielle	"I'll probably respond by choosing to educate that person, which is what I strive to do"
	Jessica	"it's just nice to be acknowledged, like I think that would help a ton and maybe just check in"
	Samantha	"just feels good for her to like get some of it"
	Sarah	"I've had some professors here that have really helped me and motivated me"
	Tasha	"I just feel like Black people need to be seen as people first"
Devaluing Messages	Danielle	"I just don't want to be the angry Black woman...that stereotype is an inconvenience"
	Jessica	"They refused to look at me...they would talk to everyone except for me"
	Samantha	"I had a guy literally tell me, I can't take you home to grandpa"
	Sarah	"You'll get those students that want to question you simply because you're Black"
	Tasha	"this person went on and on saying really horrible things about Immigrants"
Fear/Safety	Danielle	"I don't even have a man or kids and whenever I do, I'm already afraid for their safety and they don't even exist"
	Jessica	"just a bunch of people that look the same and it kinda can be frightening if you don't look like them"
	Samantha	"I don't know why, I don't want to make a stink"
	Sarah	"I'm hesitant to share more in classes because I'm not always sure how it's gonna be received"
	Tasha	"I didn't want to bring attention to my accent"

Table 1. *Individual Interview Themes*

Theme	Participant	Statement
Devaluing Messages	Danielle	"She looked at me and said, 'Your skin is so beautiful' and took her hand and caressed my face"
	Jessica	"She was the personification of hate"
	Tasha	"As a person who oftentimes internalizes instances of microaggressions, it was helpful to talk about some of these issues"
Fear/Safety	Danielle	"I normally do it (code switch) when I just don't feel like being different from everyone that day"
	Jessica	"I hate that I can't escape this situation"
	Tasha	"I also felt like I had stronger reactions listening to peers' experiences…That probably can be attributed to my protective instincts"
Advocacy	Danielle	"I got defensive over White people insulting a Black man"
	Jessica	"My professor ensured me of her support"
	Tasha	"helpful to talk about some of these issues with people who could relate and empathize"

Table 2. *Journal Entry Themes*

Theme	Participant	Statement
Anger	Danielle	"...and I got madder and I said something."
	Jessica	"I wanted to pick my chair up and throw it at her"
	Tasha	"...just like holding it together because I wanted to, like you say, go off so badly"
Awareness	Danielle	"Sometimes I feel like we have even more pressure to educate people because we have a degree"
	Jessica	"I can't accept the ignorance"
	Tasha	"So, I'm like what do you not understand about the consequences of racism?
Loneliness	Danielle	"...the higher up you go, you always by yourself"
	Jessica	"I didn't know who you were, you changed your hair so much"
	Tasha	"It's a lonely place, though"
Devaluing Messages	Danielle	"You know, it's like this idea that I'm supposed to be a watered-down Black woman"
	Jessica	"I guess I'm not on the full Black spectrum that they want me to be on"
	Tasha	"Every time I have a meeting at a school, I face so much condescension"
Fear/Safety	Danielle	"People don't realize I have a right to feel uncomfortable around an old White person because those are the same old White people that oppressed my grandparents..."
	Jessica	"...but just being around White people with guns...I was like there's only a matter of time before I'm fired. I just always felt that way"
	Tasha	"You're gonna put me in a position to feed into stereotypes that you already have about me"
Advocacy	Danielle	"My degree isn't in breaking injustice"
	Jessica	"I just have to learn how to stand up for myself every single time I go to the hospital 'cause I know someone is going to try me"
	Tasha	"...because I choose to advocate for him, and I will advocate for him in ways that I probably never would have..."

Table 3. *Focus Group Themes*

Devaluing Messages

All participants expressed a range of experiences that fall within this theme, and the ways in which campus climate was impacted. Four of the five participants described experiences where they thought another person was trying to compliment them, but that they ended up feeling offended by the interaction. The women described being told that they were pretty for Black girls, or that they were very articulate. They would leave the interactions feeling that the implication was Black women are not pretty or intelligent when compared to others. Participants also described receiving much more explicit messages of undesirability, including messages relating to colorism, sexualization, and xenophobia. These interactions left the women feeling unwelcome and unwanted in class, on campus, and at work.

Anger

Feelings of anger were expressed in three of the five participants' individual interviews, and throughout the focus group. Participants described feeling a range of emotions, from irritation to rage, while interacting with peers, professors, and co-workers. Participants expressed this by recalling that they felt mad, angry,

pissed off, or frustrated in response to someone or something that occurred. Participants described feeling this emotion when others would say harmful things, or they saw upsetting things on the news like an unarmed Black man being shot by police. The participants also tied this theme to others by expressing the fear of being reduced to the stereotype of the angry Black woman if they expressed themselves.

Awareness

Three of the five participants discuss how campus was impacted by experiences related to awareness. These experiences ranged from a general lack of awareness, or ignorance, to what seems a lack of desire from others to educate themselves. They described encountering peers in classes where the other simply did not know any better and was truly ignorant. They also described people attempting to argue with the women in different scenarios when the women were much more knowledgeable on the topic. The individuals choosing to argue, they felt, could have easily taken the time to educate themselves on the topic instead of arguing, but chose not to. Participants also described feeling like they were being used to answer questions by those who knew little about a subject but did not want to take the time to do their own research.

Loneliness

Each of the participants described feelings of loneliness, which ranged from feeling invisible to feeling hyper-visible. The women described often feeling, or being, the only woman of color in class or at work. They also described feeling invisible or underrepresented in their chosen profession, or hyper-visible and singled out for being the lone woman of color. This would then lead to the women feeling they had to be the spokesperson for their race.

Fear/Safety

All five of the participants articulated feeling afraid or unsafe during interactions with peers, co-workers, or faculty. They described wondering whether they can trust certain people, feeling apprehension, or feeling the need to respond in ways that may keep them safe. The participants often resorted to silence or avoidance to feel safer, and sometimes felt the need to disconnect from the person or situation.

Advocacy

Each of the participants described experiences related to advocacy. They expressed the need to advocate for themselves and others by educating peers or co-workers, but they also expressed wanting to avoid educating others. The women described feeling exhausted from educating others and the need to pick and choose when to advocate. The participants each described different things they felt faculty and university leaders could do to better advocate for them and other people of color. Those included checking in with students, understanding and using appropriate language, or using more inclusive signage across campus. Another part of this theme included ways in which the women felt validated and supported. Some participants described having a mentor and how validating that has been to their experiences on campus, while others expressed gratitude for professors who advocated for them by offering their support.

Discussion

This study contributed to knowledge of racial microaggressions in several ways. Firstly, Black women's experiences of racial microaggressions in the South have not been thoroughly explored. There is also little research that exists on Black women's experiences in graduate school at predominately White universities. Several clusters of meaning identified in this study corroborate racial microaggression themes identified by Torres-Harding et al.[16]. The data also supports the identification of negative stereotypes held about Black women[21].

The experiences described in this study support those described by students of color on other university campuses, including feeling unwanted, silenced, or invisible[3]. Participants shared feeling viewed by others as dishonest, overly aggressive or the angry Black woman stereotype, and overly promiscuous or as incapable of being raped.

While the women in this study described feeling hostility from peers or co-workers, they did not express a desire to withdraw from the university. However, one participant described feeling as though it would not make sense for her to continue taking classes if she had to take courses with one peer who singled her out. Another described taking a day off from classes as a way of coping with a negative experience during the previous class, and all expressed they felt they could not or should not

participate in class at times. When these women received negative messages of worth and value or are being told (subtly or explicitly) that they do not belong, their response was to disconnect, avoid, and be silent.

The results of the current study highlight the pervasive nature of racial microaggressions. This is especially important for counselor education programs because some may assume these types of experiences could not or would be less likely to happen in a counseling program. These participants were relied upon to educate others in their graduate program regarding race but were dismissed when they brought concerns to faculty members. Despite CACREP[26] standards and the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014) emphasizing multicultural competence as an important part of being a professional counselor, there exists a large gap in between proposed best-practices and the knowledge and skills necessary for addressing the experiences and unique needs of racially diverse students in higher education.

Limitations

Limitations to this study include: the voluntary nature of the study, the limited number of available participants who met the criteria for participation, and the sensitive nature of the topic being discussed. Participants all attended the same university and were part of the same department on their campus. Some of the stories were uncomfortable to share, and some participants were concerned about being identified by their experiences.

Implications for Counselors and Counselor Educators

The competencies outlined by the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) suggest that counselors have knowledge of the ways in which race, racism, stereotyping, and powerlessness impact self-concept and self-esteem[8], as well as worldview and help-seeking behavior[40]. Data from the current study suggests individual students are impacted by microaggressions, as well as the overall climate or environment. Counselor education programs need to continually seek student feedback and take proactive steps to adequately support students of any intersectionality. If students are frequently experiencing microaggressions with peers and faculty, counselor educators need to understand the impact on motivation, health, stress, and help-seeking behaviors.

Mentoring. Results from other research studies have found that mentor relationships are a critical part of the experiences for Black women at predominantly White universities[41]. Participants in the current study expressed gratitude for individuals they identified as mentors, and all suggested that beginning a mentoring program on campus would be beneficial to Black students. Specifically, the participants in the current study all expressed a need and appreciation for mentors who can relate to their experiences. A more diverse and representative faculty and administration would help with this and allow students to be connected to a mentor when they enroll in graduate school. Participants also suggested that simply checking in with them and asking what their experience has been like is very meaningful to them. This helps them to feel seen and validates their campus experiences as Black women.

Education and Awareness. There needs to be an emphasis on awareness and understanding of multiculturalism that begins with institutional leadership to transform the existing climate of a campus[29]. As previously stated, microaggressions impact physical and mental health, as well as academic and social involvement, and an understanding of the impact should be a requirement. The participants in the current study agreed that awareness and education are vital and begin with campus leadership. The participants suggested trainings and multicultural education for those in leadership positions so that they are more aware of the experiences of Black women on their campus and can be advocates for them, as well.

Within counselor education, multicultural competency is an ethical priority (ACA, 2014) and the AMCD[40] has provided a list of competencies for culturally responsive counselors. The AMCD also states that skilled counselors should have knowledge of discriminatory practices at the social and community levels that affect the population they are serving so they can provide appropriate interventions[40]. Given the atrocities against Black people that have been highlighted in across media platforms such as the murder of George Floyd[42], it is even more crucial. How can counselor educators train counseling students in multicultural competence if educators do not have the skills themselves?

The participants in the current study also encouraged safe spaces around campus and several ways of

signaling inclusivity. Multi-language signs, lactation rooms, pride flags, gender-neutral bathrooms, and spaces that allow for safe cultural expression are all ways of signaling inclusivity, and they were identified by participants as helpful. Other things specific to Black women, like a space to get their hair done or having products that are for Black women, were also identified. For students of color, support groups could be offered through the campus counseling center to assist in combatting the impacts of internalized racism, such as low self-concept[8]. This study's participants expressed gratitude for the focus group as it gave them an opportunity to share with and relate to other Black women in graduate school.

Recommendations for Future Research

Two participants did not attend the focus group or complete journal entries. One of these women reported receiving the highest number of devaluing messages (105). The feelings they experienced during the interview process may have led to their avoidance of the focus group and journals. Further research into recruitment and retention strategies for Black women in graduate programs is needed to gain more understanding of their experiences and is suggested in the literature, as well[41][29].

Another development was the incredulity expressed by participants. Further research could explore the use of incredulity as a protective factor for microaggressions or other negative experiences. Finally, Black men were discussed on a few occasions, but not explored with any depth. The participants in the current study described complicated relationships with Black men, feeling protective of them and desiring to advocate for them, but also disappointed that they did not often feel that was reciprocated. Future studies could further explore those relationships.

Conclusion

Prior to this study, Black women's experiences of racial microaggressions in the South have not been thoroughly explored and only limited research currently exists regarding Black women's experiences in graduate school at predominately White universities. This study revealed themes that corroborate the racial microaggression themes identified by Torres-Harding et al.[16]. Participants in this study reported experiencing devaluing messages, anger, awareness, loneliness, fear/safety, and advocacy. Furthermore, this study also supported the identification of negative stereotypes held about Black women by Jacobs[21].

Findings from this study suggest that Black students are impacted by racial microaggressions, as well as the overall campus climate or environment. It is crucial that counselor educators to understand the ways in which Black women experience daily life. Counselor education programs need to continually seek student feedback and take proactive steps to adequately support students of any intersectionality through faculty mentoring, provision of safe campus environments, and increased education and awareness of institutional leadership.

Appendix A. Interview Protocol

Experiences on Campus

Name of Interviewee: _____
Date: _____
Preliminary Script: "This is [interviewer's name]. Today is [day and date]. It is _____ o'clock, and I am here in [location] with [name of interviewee], the [title] of [institution or system]. We will be discussing [topic of interview]."

1. Tell me about your experiences of microaggressions on campus.
2. What is the best part of your program? The most difficult?
   1. How is this different from your previous school/program?
   2. What has made your experiences here positive?
3. How do you feel about the environment on campus? Has it changed since you started here?
   1. Have there been any major events surrounding these changes?
   2. What has been beneficial to your experiences on campus?
4. Describe your experiences as a woman of color on this campus.
5. Describe the impact microaggressions have had on you.
   1. What would you do differently, if anything, to make things better if you were in charge?
   2. Is there anything you wish others knew, or were doing, that might make your experience better?
6. Is there anything you would like to talk about that we have not touched on yet?

Appendix B. Journal Prompt

Describe any thoughts, feelings, or experiences you have had since the initial interview concerning racial microaggressions.

Appendix C. Focus Group Interview Protocol

1. Review themes found: Loneliness, anger, advocacy, fear, invalidations
   1. Do these sound right?
   2. Any I missed?
2. How do you feel your identity development has been impacted by these experiences?
3. What other experiences, if any, would you like to share?

Author contribution section

Kendra Shoge is the primary author and researcher. She developed the idea and the research design, conducted the interviews, and facilitated the focus group. Additionally, she expanded the research sections with details for transferability for this manuscript and added detailed reflexivity statements.

Cameron Houin served as a peer debriefer for the original research and added current supporting literature and summaries. They also added transcription and analysis details to the methodology section and completed all APA edits, editing the original 65-page document to the current manuscript.

Kristi Perryman aided in the development of the research design, data collection, and analysis. She assisted with literature updates and summaries throughout the manuscript and added clarifying language to the research methodology. She also rewrote the conclusion section.

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Declarations