REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: EXPLORING COUNSELING INTERNS’ REFLECTION IN NONPROFIT COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SETTING

A thesis presented
by
Vanessa V. Villavicencio
to
The School of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

Dr. Chris Unger
Advisor

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts

June 2019
Abstract
This qualitative study provides insight into the preparation of future counselors as they interned in a community mental health agency, and explores the awareness of interns’ beliefs and attitudes, and their impact on those they serve. The problem identified is interns’ ability to be critically self aware as they work with diverse populations, with diverse presenting problems. Interviews were utilized to better understand the five interns’ experiences during their internships. Results of the semi-structured interviews were viewed through the lenses of reflective practice, such as Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle, and transformative learning theory as these theories highlight learning through reflection. Key findings included the following overall themes: Interns seemed to have learned much during their internships through supervision, consultation and through reflection; and interns did not feel fully prepared from their master’s programs to work with diversity. There is a need to explore definitions and descriptions of reflective practice in order to facilitate implementation, and measure its outcomes. It would be beneficial to further study the necessity of counseling master’s programs and internship sites’ curriculums to include additional preparation in the areas of multicultural counseling and the development of reflective practitioners as a significant part in counselor preparation. This includes the need to explore faculty and supervision training as well as evaluation processes to adequately prepare professionals to teach and guide students.

Keywords: counseling interns, supervision, consultation, reflection, reflective practice, Transformative Learning Theory, nonprofit community mental health agency, diversity, critical reflection, critical consciousness, collaboration, self-awareness
Acknowledgements

I am grateful I was able to pursue this educational path and hope that the learning will allow me to become a better leader in my many roles. I wish to acknowledge those who have supported me through this journey. I was privileged to work with Dr. Chris Unger as my advisor. He showed kindness, understanding for the process and was a key motivator in helping me finish this dissertation.

My second and third readers, Dr. Nancy Young and Dr. Doug Shirley, respectively, were positive influences throughout my process. I appreciate their feedback, their time and their collaboration on my behalf. Doug Shirley was very helpful to me as we processed together the findings of this study. I am very grateful for his time and care on my behalf. I am also thankful for my friend Becky Milstead who took time out of her busy reality to read through this dissertation to give me feedback.

I am grateful to the counseling interns who participated in this study. Without their generosity I wouldn’t have been able to share their stories. I am thankful to the Center for Human Services and their leadership for supporting me through this study and allowing time and space to carry this out.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my family. Often I found myself working on this dissertation behind the scenes to not disrupt the needs of the family. I know my family has the capacity to support my needs, and given that I was quite tired of holding so much, I wished I had let them support me more often. When the opportunities to support me were expressed, my husband and my three kids were accommodating, and made sure I had what I needed. I am grateful for Kevin, Tyler, Logan and Jacob Suter. They are the reasons for striving and hoping for more professionally, vocationally, but more importantly, relationally, as we engage life well.
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Chapter I: Introduction

This study will explore the development of critical consciousness in counseling interns through the lens of reflective practice using Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988) as a model to guide the study. As educator, Paulo Freire (1972), proposed in his writing, developing critical consciousness gives us the ability to perceive social, political and economic oppression that could compel us to take action against these. The purpose of exploring the development of critical consciousness is not only to enhance personal and professional development of master’s level counseling interns, but it is also to encourage interns to develop awareness about their positionality as they work in a nonprofit community mental health agency. There is socioeconomic diversity within this agency that includes a mix of clients from different income levels, social backgrounds, and in some cases, from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Counselors need to navigate socioeconomic diversity and the impact of social, political and economic oppression may have on clients. As Collins, Arthur, & Wong-Wylie (2010) write, “Counselors work in an increasingly complex cultural milieu where every encounter with a client must be considered multicultural in nature” (p. 340). Not only are there many articles on the need for multicultural counseling, there is also an ethical consideration that counselors must work toward becoming competent multicultural counselors (American Psychological Association [APA], 2002). Again according to Collins, et al. (2010), reflective practice “is a central component of professional competence and necessarily involves attention to culture” (p. 340). Self-awareness of values, assumptions and biases is the basis for counselors to enhance competence especially within multicultural practice (Collins et al., 2010).

Mental health counseling internships at the Center for Human Services (CHS) in Washington State is the context for the current problem of practice. The problem identified is
mental health interns’ ability to become self-aware as they work with underserved populations in a nonprofit community mental health agency. This exploration of developing critical consciousness may have implications for procedures at CHS, and may have implications that impact the training of interns and clinical staff to ensure better internship outcomes making this research significant for students and the agency. In addition to the procedural implications for training and educating clinical staff, research on this topic provides opportunities to explore implications for practitioners at the local level, as the internship experience is meant to be a tool to train clinicians. Exploration of the interns’ development of critical consciousness skills and the impact of that development in their counseling relationships shape the purpose of this research, possibly attaining some insight regarding the effective teaching and training of reflective practice in an attempt to recommend actions and considerations to improve internship experiences in practical and realistic ways for the sake of better trained graduates.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the research related to counseling interns and reflective practice, which provide context and background to the study. The rationale and significance of the study is discussed next, explaining possible benefits of reflective practice and this study. Following the problem statement, purpose statement, and research question are presented. Finally, Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988) and Mezirow’s Transformational Learning Theory are presented as the theoretical frameworks, which helped guide the study.

Context and Background

Internships at the Center for Human Services (CHS) provide the setting for master’s degree counseling students to begin practicing. The interns go through an application process that includes an application packet, interviews and finally an invitation to a 9-month internship that typically begins in September and ends in June. Most interns graduate upon completion of
the internship. At CHS interns participate in a monthly interns’ meeting, in weekly one-on-one supervision, and weekly consults. They are also offered the opportunity to observe counseling sessions, and mental health assessments, as they prepare to build their own caseloads.

CHS is a community-based nonprofit youth and family services agency offering services to children, youth, adults and families since 1970. CHS offers mental health counseling that provides client-centered mental health services to individuals and families from birth to adults. Mental health counseling happens individually, and/or in family and community settings. CHS mental health counselors and/or therapists provide mental health treatment to children, youth, and families who are experiencing difficulties in their lives. Typically, clients seek out services when they are experiencing such issues as depression, anxiety, trauma, grief and loss, ADD/ADHD, divorce and separations as well as other family disruptions and transitions. Typically counselors collaborate with important people in clients’ lives such as family members, teachers, caseworkers, and doctors, in order to strengthen support that “wraps around” the client and fosters long term success (www.CHS-nw.org). Though CHS also offers other services through other programs such as their Family Support Center and Substance Use Disorders Program, this study will focus on interns in the Mental Health Counseling Program.

As a nonprofit committed to serve the community, CHS is committed to providing affordable counseling services to children, youth and their families by accepting several different forms of payment that include Medicaid (Provider One or Medical Coupons), some forms of private insurance, and low-cost services based on income and household size. Primarily most clients use Medicaid or grants to receive mental health services. Funding for the services also come from counties (King and Snohomish), the cities around the area (Shoreline, Lake Forest Park, Kirkland, Kenmore), Verdant Health Commission and private donors (www.CHS-nw.org).
CHS describes the following as their core values in their website www.CHS-nw.org:

- We respect and honor the diversity of our community and are committed to weaving that diversity into our programs, actions, and results.
- We provide services that are easy to find, use, and understand.
- We foster collaborative relationships that promote creativity, innovation, and teamwork.
- We assess and coordinate our programs and systems to assure that we meet high standards of service and care.
- We value the strengths and assets of our clients, community members, and co-workers and are honest, respectful, and ethical in our interactions.
- We are passionate about the work we do and use humor to promote a positive work environment” (www.CHS-nw.org, 2017).

According to their website, CHS is committed to understanding, respecting, and honoring cultural differences, and practice commitment to cultural competency. The literature points to the importance of diversity and advocacy in counselor education, and social and cultural diversity “ranked as the third most beneficial core standard perceived by educators, practitioners, and students” (Troutman & Parker-Williams, 2014, p. 5). Worthington, Soth-McNett, and Moreno (2007) presented that therapists who were competent in multicultural counseling worked better across racial and ethnic differences, and were perceived to be “more attractive, trustworthy, and expert” (Troutman & Parker-Williams, 2014, p. 5).

**Problem of Practice, Rationale and Significance**

Expanding the research on developing critical awareness through the use of reflective practice has implications on the professional development of counseling interns, on the
internship site, teaching and learning, and has much significance in the domains of policy, practice and research. The problem identified is interns’ ability to being critically self-aware as they work with potentially underserved and diverse populations in a nonprofit community mental health agency. This exploration of developing critical consciousness has implications for procedures at CHS, and has implications that impact the training of interns and clinical staff to ensure better internship outcomes making this research significant for students and the agency. In addition to the procedure implications for training and educating clinical staff, research on this topic provides opportunities to explore implications for practitioners at the local level, as internships are an experiential tool to train clinicians. The exploration of the interns’ development of critical consciousness skills and their impact shape the purpose of this research as one to gain insight about effective teaching and training through the adoption of reflective practice in an attempt to recommend actions and considerations to improve internship experiences in practical and realistic ways for the sake of better prepared graduates.

One of the many definitions of reflective practice is the “active, ongoing examination of the theories, beliefs, and assumptions that contribute to counselors’ understanding of client issues and guide their choices for clinical interventions” (Griffith & Frieden, 2000, p. 82). Counselor competence includes the characteristics of self-understanding, awareness, and the clinicians ability to understand complex problems; it seems fitting that learning and developing reflective thinking must be part of counselor education programs (Griffith & Frieden, 2000); and Peterson (1995) stated that educating reflective practitioners could be a significant part in counselor preparation given that empirical studies failed to describe advantages of traditional clinical training. Dewey (1933) in his seminal writings stated that reflection “involves active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds
that support it and the further consequences to which it leads” (p. 9). Also, in his seminal writings, Schon (1983, 1987) addressed the need for counselors to link the gap between theory and practice. Counselors need to actively attend to the client’s information; must apply theoretical knowledge to the specific scenario, and then choose beneficial interventions to meet objectives (Hanna, Giordano & Bemak, 1996). Given that learning specific responses to specific scenarios will not adequately prepare a counselor for the diversity of issues encountered in therapy, reflection then “is needed to help students train for uncertainty. Reflection is the practice through which counselors continually examine the therapeutic process in increasing levels of complex understanding and evaluation” (Griffith & Frieden, 2000, p. 83).

The preparation of future counselors should include awareness of their beliefs and attitudes and their impact on those they will serve. Troutman and Parker-Williams (2014) stated, “while counselors may make focused efforts to prevent the imposition of values, the internalization of societal biases can affect therapeutic efficacy in ways that are unknown to counselor” (p. 6). Being unaware about blind spots, and being unaware about being unaware is a barrier to reflective practice, and to overcome blindness, therapists should understand their thinking; they should become critical thinkers (Irving & Williams, 1995). Critical thinking must include a practice to analyze the therapist’s practice to question, reflect on and consider changing assumptions, within willingness to dealing openly with challenging and conflicting views with vulnerability (Irving & Williams, 1995). Thus, professional development, supervision, and best practices will be explored in the context of adopting reflective practice.

By exploring practices that can help develop critical awareness enhance learning opportunities, qualitative research can provide practical directions for training interns and evaluating learning outcomes within CHS internship opportunities. Ratts (2009) wrote about
social justice counseling offering a paradigm to understand how oppression impacts client’s mental health, which required the counselor to adopt an identity of advocate and active agent of change. “Social justice counselors are expected to disrupt the status quo in society and dismantle systems that keep their clients oppressed and thus negatively influence psychological well-being (Troutman & Parker-Williams, 2014, p. 5). The task of reflective practitioners is to be aware of assumptions brought to, and their theories-in-use utilized in the therapeutic relationship with clients, and to be “fully alert to their own behavior and the ideas that underlie and control their actions and interventions.” (Irving & Williams, 1995, p. 108).

It seems that reflective practice not only serves clinicians and supervisors individually, and as they work or supervise other clinicians and interns, but it seems that reflective practice serves any human relationship, thus the implications are both local and global. It is important to note that gaps exist between acknowledgment of the importance of reflective practice in the professional counseling literature and research and the theory about how to become a reflective counseling practitioner (Wong-Wylie, 2006). It is suspected that a more robust body of literature and or studies to draw upon would provide more evidence necessary to better serve the individual needs of interns as they develop critical self-awareness/consciousness, improving their overall experiences and engagement with their work with clients.

**Research Problem and Research Question**

A qualitative study will be conducted to explore counseling interns’ experiences and perceptions, as reported by them, as they work with underserved populations in a nonprofit community mental health agency. As mentioned before, there exists socioeconomic diversity within the Center of Human Services (CHS) that includes a mix of clients from different income levels, social backgrounds, and in some cases, from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.
Counselors need to navigate socioeconomic diversity and the impact that social, political and economic oppression may have on clients. Focus will be given to how a counseling intern’s experiences, as they work with clients, may have been enhanced by using reflective practice.

The literature suggests that critical thinking must include a practice to analyze the therapist’s practice to question, reflect on and consider changing assumptions, within a willingness to dealing openly with challenging and conflicting views with vulnerability (Irving & Williams, 1995). Within the research question and this study, professional development, supervision, and best practices will be explored in the context of adopting reflective practice. The question about the use and/or need for reflective practice will allow the study and participants to reflect on their experiences. Thus, this qualitative study which will be based on in-depth interviews with mental health counseling internship students, is guided by the following overarching questions:

1. How does counseling intern's experience working with clients that may have significantly diverse life experiences, context and socio-economic histories impact their perspectives of their client, and their critical consciousness?

2. How does the internship experience working with clients with significantly diverse life experiences, context and socio-economic histories impact the way they perceive and think about their role and practice as a counselor?

3. Are there any practices or experiences that have assisted and helped counseling interns think about their work, their beliefs and values, and how they can best assist and support their clients?
Positionality Statement

The problem identified is interns’ ability to being critically self-aware as they work with underserved populations in a nonprofit community mental health agency. This exploration of developing critical consciousness has implications for procedures at CHS, and has implications that impact the training of interns and clinical staff to ensure better internship outcomes, making this research significant for students and the agency. I work as the Mental Health Associate Director at CHS, and one of my responsibilities is managing the internship program where I am in charge of organizing the application, interview and selection process of counseling interns. I supervise mental health managers, who supervise interns, and I supervise the Internship Coordinator who runs the weekly intern group; I do not supervise counseling interns directly.

As I attempt to research the internship program at CHS, specifically the experience of counseling interns as they work with clients that may have significantly different life experiences and come from significantly different socio-economic histories and context, and how those experiences impact their perspectives of their clients and their critical consciousness development, I must first turn my attention to my positionality. I must be aware of and describe my lens and consider my beliefs and biases about my role, position and organization and this particular problem. I also need to acknowledge the role of my race, class, gender, culture, education and my own position in society that may influence my perception and understanding of the world (Carlton Parsons, 2008; Briscoe, 2005).

I have been a Licensed Mental Health Counselor since 2001, and I am an Approved Supervisor, which means I can supervise new therapists to get their licensure hours. Since graduating my master’s program, I have worked in many non-profit community mental health agencies, psychiatric hospitals, and have had a private practice. Also, I have worked as
Instructional Staff and Practicum Leader at The Seattle School where I work with master’s level counseling students in practicum groups. The Seattle School practicum experience for the students can be described as a relational one. Within group, students begin to listen to others' stories and they also experience the telling of their own stories. Students begin to notice their responses to these stories given their own culture and experiences, and receive feedback on their impact on others. Some of the students from this particular master’s program apply for counseling internships at CHS. And I must be aware that I have experience and knowledge about their practicum experiences. I am not personally aware of the practicum experiences of other local counseling master’s programs.

I have benefited personally and professional by leading practicum groups at The Seattle School. Within practicum a leader must have awareness of their own stories and experiences, and how these impact their style of relating and leading as they embark on their roles as supervisor and educator. As leaders, locating ourselves in our own narratives given who we are and what we bring to group is a big part of a practicum leader's task. This self-awareness, and the ability to use this awareness well in-group, creates containment, trust and thus safety for students to bring their own narratives and experiences. This is similar to the awareness the researcher must identify about themselves before they embark on their project. Though difficult, it is imperative that researchers prepare for the “personal and professional consequences of turning ones' gaze within” (Fennell, 2008, p. 533). I need to be aware that not only as a researcher of internship experiences, but also as Mental Health Associate Director at CHS and current Practicum Leader at The Seattle School, I have a duty to be aware that misinterpretations may occur because I will always bring my history, my experiences and my own categories to any given situation. (Briscoe, 2005).
I am aware that I bring high expectations to my roles, which impacts my level of expectations about how others work. My high expectations come from knowing that I paid my dues in the counseling field before working as a leader at The Seattle School, or working in nonprofit as an associate director. I have found myself becoming critical about clinicians with less experience leading practicum groups, getting to teach, or advancing at a faster pace. Like some of the potential CHS interns that come from The Seattle School, I too have experienced the practicum process as a student. After graduating from the program, I left The Seattle School for several years to gain experience as a counselor in the community. I worked in residential facilities; in non-profit and for-profit organizations; had a private practice for several years; and supervised other clinicians in a psychiatric hospital. After many years, I rejoined The Seattle School as a practicum leader. My bias may be triggered when I find out other therapists and/or practicum leaders went on to open a private practice upon graduating with little community experience. I need to be careful as I could question their experience, competence and abilities.

My positionality brings about many themes that can impact my work and create blind spots in my awareness. As a white Hispanic woman, with a complex family of origin story, I must be aware that I bring themes of unfairness, comparisons, privilege and hard work. I often feel that as a woman, wife and mother, I work harder to attain education, jobs or promotions. In many contexts I may perceive these factors as real fears and barriers, and these themes naturally are provoked in some of the contexts I work at, i.e. at The Seattle School, which is an academic institution that operates from a Christian perspective, and at CHS - both contexts have very little diversity. Some of my concerns within my organizations are that I run the risk of expecting others to work as hard; I may dismiss those that seemingly have not; I may continually compare myself with male colleagues and/or male students; and/or I may perceive dismissal from the
organization in spite of my hard work. These reactions can help me create understanding and empathy for others’ experiences, however, if I am not reflecting about my story and its impact, I may dismiss too quickly.

Another important bias that I must consider is that I was part of the first graduating class at The Seattle School. My relationship to that program spans 20 significant years of my life. It is fair to say that I have loyalty to The Seattle School program, to colleagues and to some faculty members. I bear the motivation to keep the program growing. I also wish to offer to students the benefits I gained when I graduated in 1999. As I research the internship program at CHS, I must be open to data that contradicts my perceptions of the benefits CHS brings to interns, and benefits practicum groups at The Seattle School offers to student intern candidates.

Furthermore, in considering my definitions of social justice, I begin doubting my ability to move well around the many complicated topics. I have been aware of and open to explore many of these issues, however during the first years in this doctorate program I have been able to consider more places of oppression and inequality that have been implicit within my own awareness and contexts. During this program, the several assigned tasks of putting in writing my positionality have been helpful in naming my story, and reflect on my own blind spots. I am sure there are more places to explore in term of my positionality. For now, I will end with the hope that as I name the impact these organizations have had on me and vice versa, and continue to explore the themes that have surfaced throughout this paper, that I don't let my fears, opinions, loyalties and strong belief of the programs’ benefits get in the way of objectivity in evaluating counseling internships.
Reflective Practice Theory and Brief Historical Foundations

Many experts have developed reflective practice models to help individuals develop their own reflective practice in more deliberate, proactive, and effective ways. There are many theories or models that attempt to address and define reflective theory and practice, and have helped shape the development of reflective practice from basic reflection, to critical thinking, to critically reflective practice. With the help of expert in reflective practice, Linda Lawrence-Wilkes (2014), and the literature, this section will describe a brief history of reflective practice theory, Gibb’s Reflective Cycle (1988) and criticisms of reflective practice.

First, it is important to describe some of the progress of reflective practice theory in its evolution from simple reflection, into critical reflection, into critical thinking or critical reasoning (Lawrence-Wilkes, 2014). Simple reflection could be considered to be contemplation without having a purpose; critical reflection, possibly the next step, can be considered contemplation with some evaluation; and critical thinking or critical reasoning takes the process a bit further and can be considered to be a balance of reasoning and reflection to assess and develop action. In some writings about reflection it is often described as contemplation that does not include critical thinking; and critical thinking more often is considered to include logical reasoning and enquiry. Following is a brief description of some models of reflective practice that attempt to define its components.

German philosopher Immanuel Kant, considered one of the founders of Western philosophy, wrote the 'Critique of Reason' in 1781, and in his writings he supported the ideas for a scientific logical and rational thinking approach, enabling reasoned thinking, being superior to dogma and other opinions coming from authority. American philosopher and educational reformer, John Dewey, the founder of experiential education, linked reflection and action to
enable new experience and knowledge. In his writings, Dewey (1910) described critical thinking as reflective thought, in which he moved reflection beyond contemplation. He stated that reflective thought is an "Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief, or supposed form of knowledge, in light of grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends..." (Dewey 1910, p. 6). Reflection begins to be seen as deliberate thinking about experiences, beliefs and knowledge to make better choices. Jean Piaget (1969) was a Swiss psychologist, who proposed the theory that thinking matures through different stages of development through experience, reflection and action as the foundations of its development. Reflection seems to be needed for learning and is connected to action, and critically reflective thinking helps individuals reach new understanding and knowledge.

Later on, the seminal work of Schon (1983) on reflective practice where a reflective practitioner is described as one who repeatedly reflects on their experience and is capable of self-reflection has become the basis of many models and theories. In his article he describes the practice of reflecting-in-action, in order to continually learn from experience for the benefit of future actions (Schon, 1983). Some of the theories that have surfaced out of this notion have described their own evolution and steps that, though they may differ, they all seem to include a sense of revision, critical self-reflection and dialogue in order to enhance learning. For example, Pollard and Tann’s (1993) set of six characteristics of reflective practice described the reflective practitioner as one who has “attitudes of open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness, and is enhanced through collaboration and dialogue with colleagues” (p. 9). Rolfe's (2001) framework for reflective practice could be described as asking what? about the situation; asking so what? to build theory and knowledge; and then asking now what? in order to learn how to improve the situation.
The model explored for this study is Gibbs’ (1988) model, which was developed from David Kolb’s (1984) four-stage experiential learning cycle. Gibb’s Reflective Cycle is a theoretical model that describes six stages of reflection, which seem to align with most reflective practices: Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion, and Action Plan. Kolb’s (1984) model can be referred to as an experiential learning model and in contrast, Gibbs’ model can be referred to as learning through repetition, or reflection.

Theoretical Framework

The foundation of this study is learning through reflection, and based upon the problem of practice, counseling interns’ ability to be critically self-aware as they work with potentially underserved and diverse populations in a nonprofit community mental health agency, a reflective theory, *Gibbs' reflective cycle*, has been chosen to better understand and further investigate this problem. And *Transformative Learning Theory* has been chosen as a secondary theory to explore a deeper sense of learning through reflection. Both theories highlight learning through reflection. Gibbs’ reflective cycle is partly inspired by Kolb’s experiential learning cycle, and its process is essentially a cycle that provide useful questions to structure reflection. Transformative learning shines a light on processes adult learners experience that involve questioning and critical reflection.

**Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle.** Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle will be the theoretical framework informing the design and review of data for this study. Professor Graham Gibbs published his Reflective Cycle in his 1988 book “Learning by Doing.” Gibbs' reflective cycle is cited often as a model used in the nursing and other professional education fields to facilitate reflection (Finlay, 2008). Gibbs’ reflective cycle is partly inspired by Kolb’s’ experiential learning cycle, and its process is essentially a cycle that provides useful questions to structure reflection: a “de-
briefing sequence” (Gibbs, 1988, p. 46). This model encourages critical reflection by thinking through all the phases of an experience, in order to convert new learning and knowledge into action and possible change. These experiences can be events in the learning, practical or personal contexts and the reflective cycle could be useful to students or those new to reflecting given that it has defined steps (Gibbs, 1988).

![Gibbs (1988) Reflective Cycle](image)

**Gibbs model is a never ending cycle whereby theory and practice constantly feed from each other**


Gibb’s Reflective Cycle, depicted in Figure 1, is a theoretical model that describes six stages of reflection: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan:

**Description.** The description stage describes events according to what happened and who was there. The following questions could be considered: When and where did this happen?
Why were you there? Who else was there? What happened? What did you do? What did other people do? What was the result of this situation? (Gibbs, 1988; Gaynor, 2013; www.mindtools.com/corporate, 2014).

**Feelings.** The feelings stage includes an exploration of thoughts and feelings at the time of the event. There needs to be clear distinction between thoughts and feelings and how they might have impacted the event. The following questions could be considered: What did you feel before this situation took place? What did you feel while this situation took place? What do you think other people felt during this situation? What did you feel after the situation? What do you think about the situation now? What do you think other people feel about the situation now? (Gibbs, 1988; Gaynor, 2013; www.mindtools.com/corporate, 2014).

**Evaluation.** The evaluation stage includes an assessment of what did and did not go so well in the event. The following questions could be considered: What was positive about this situation? What was negative? What went well? What didn’t go so well? What did you and other people do to contribute to the situation (either positively or negatively)? (Gibbs, 1988; Gaynor, 2013; www.mindtools.com/corporate, 2014).

**Analysis.** The analysis stage consists of reflection about incident, feelings and evaluation of what happened to make sense of the experience. Directions to consider: What could have hindered or helped the situation? Can a literary article or a previous experience be referenced for improvement? Can theory and experience be linked together? (Gibbs, 1988; Gaynor, 2013; www.mindtools.com/corporate, 2014).

**Conclusion.** If a participant has completed all steps/sections effectively and honestly, they should be able to reach a conclusion about how to improve and/or develop in the areas of growth. In this stage, it is encouraged to think about the event again, using the information that
has been gathered, and considering the following questions: How could this have been a more positive experience for everyone involved? If you were faced with the same situation again, what would you do differently? What skills do you need to develop, so that you can handle this type of situation better? (Gibbs, 1988; Gaynor, 2013; www.mindtools.com/corporate, 2014).

**Action Plan.** The participant should have compiled possible actions to take to handle similar situations more effectively in the future. An action plan should be developed to make necessary changes. (Gibbs, 1988; Gaynor, 2013; www.mindtools.com/corporate, 2014).

**Transformative Learning Theory.** Transformative Learning Theory will serve as a supporting theory of this study. Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1978a) describes learning through *disorienting dilemmas*, which challenge individual’s thinking. This challenge promotes the use of critical thinking and questioning to consider if underlying assumptions and beliefs about the world are accurate. The theory describes how people develop and use critical self-reflecting to consider their beliefs and experiences, and over time, change dysfunctional ways of seeing the world (Christie, Carey, Robertson, & Grainger, 2015).

An individual’s worldview, frame of reference or meaning perspective is based on experiences, culture, values, feelings, concepts and habits (Mezirow, 1978b). It can be problematic that individuals may have a strong tendency to reject information that does not fit their preconceptions or their frame of reference; however, transformative learners are able to move “toward a frame of reference that is more inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective, and integrative of experience” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Furthermore, Mezirow describes this transformative learning as learning that could transform problematic frames of reference to make them more open, and emotionally able to change (Mezirow, 2009).
Reflection is an important part of learning, and Mezirow stated that reflection allows individuals to correct distortions in beliefs. Through reflection individuals encounter new meaning perspectives that help them understand their reality, and shifts can impact their engagement to the world (Mezirow, 1990). “By far the most significant learning experience in adulthood involves critical self-reflection - reassessing the way we have posed problems and reassessing our own orientation to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling and acting.” (Mezirow, 1990, pg. 4).

Mezirow (1978a) identified ten phases of transformative learning, and as his theory evolved, his original ten phases have been revised (Mezirow, 2000). What is important to mention for this study is that the first phase was referred to as a disorienting dilemma. An individual experiences a dilemma or situation that no longer fits with their frame of reference or meaning perspective, causing reflection and an openness to other perspectives (Mezirow, 1991). When an individual, in this case a counseling intern, is faced with a disorienting dilemma, such as working with a diversity of clients that may challenge assumptions, they are forced to reconsider their beliefs in a way that will fit their new experiences. Hopefully, this impacts the rest of their worldview in transforming ways. This shift happens through “critical reflection" in the context of dialogue with other people (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). This process seems to match well to the experiences the counseling interns encountered during their internships as they found themselves in dilemmas that did not fit with their assumptions.

**Critics of reflective practice.** The use of a reflective practice in several fields of professional practice and education has increased in the last few decades, and some critics of using reflective practice state that this appeal of the reflection bandwagon is that it rings true (Loughran, 2000). Critics of using reflection as a process of life-long learning question the how,
when, where and why reflection should take place, especially for busy professionals who may be short on time, and if they do engage reflection, would that process be “applied in bland, mechanical, unthinking ways” due to the possible misunderstanding and potential difficulties about how to exactly apply a practice effectively (Finlay, 2008, p. 1). The misunderstandings and difficulties with reflective practice seem to rest in that the term reflective practice carries multiple meanings to many people: from the practice of solitary introspection to having critical dialogue in community; for some it might be embracing the practice occasionally; for some reflective practice might simply refer to their thinking approach about practice; and to others they see reflective practice as “self-indulgent navel gazing” (Finlay, 2008, p. 2). However, some regard reflection as a carefully structured practice about their work. Others have written on the blurring of boundaries in the definitions of reflection and reflexivity and how some writings may use terms interchangeably (Ixer, 2010). Ixer would go further and state that there is “no grand theory of reflection” as the terms cannot be defined and as such, they are difficult to assess (Ixer, 2010, p. 88). There are also risks involved with reflection: not everyone may feel empowered to take on a reflective practice; over stretched professionals may find it taxing; some prefer to rely on preconceived understandings; or it can become a recipe following practice (Finlay, 2008).

There are ethical concerns with reflective practice, as participants need to be aware of the risks especially if high levels of disclosure are coerced from participants. There are some professional concerns with reflective practice when it is done badly, which could rationalize current practices; could help reinforce prejudices that could lead practitioners to collude with the dominant norms; and could focus just on practitioners and diverting the responsibility off of organizations (Boud & Walker, 1998; Quinn, 2000). There are also some pedagogic concerns in the areas of developmental readiness of participants to become self-aware so critical analysis
could be engaged; and also, educators need to be culturally sensitive on who and how they are teaching reflective practice as reflection may not be as flexible to function across social and cultural differences (Finlay, 2008; Gardner, Fook & White, 2006).

As described before, Schon’s work inspired some of the reflective practice models described in the literature, and he introduced the notion of professional artistry, however, there are critics that shed a light on the lack of precision and clarity of his model; that the model might ignore the context of reflection; that it may be unreflective and apolitical; and that the model might downplay the importance of reflection-before-action – to name a few criticisms (Finlay, 2008). Some of these points have been addressed in contemporary writings on reflective practice where they place reflective practice as the synthesis of reflection, self-awareness and critical thinking (Eby, 2000). Eby’s model (Figure 2) shows “the philosophical roots of reflective practice [that] are identified in phenomenology (with its focus on lived experience and personal consciousness) and also in critical theory (which fosters the development of a critical consciousness towards emancipation and resisting oppression)”
The thinking seems to argue toward a concept of critical reflection; a more thorough form of reflection by using critical theory, as it seems that reflection on its own could “remain at the level of relatively undisruptive changes in techniques or superficial thinking” (Fook, White & Gardner, 2006, p. 9). These concepts seem to match well with the exploration of reflection in this study as counseling interns work with a diversity of populations.

Gibb’s (1988) model, which is supposed to be a learning cycle in which theory and practice enrich each other, has become useful in facilitating reflection, however some argue that
Gibb’s model needs to be more critically reflexive and include questions about critically examining values, potential changes in practice, commitment to quality and respect for difference (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). The demand for better reflective practice – thoughtful, reflexive and critical – has provoked many models for such practice, and if practices are used mechanically or unthinkingly, it goes against Schon’s notion of professional artistry (Finlay, 2008). Not certain a fix to a specific model is the answer as it seems different models are needed at different levels for different individuals in different disciplines.

**Application to the study.** Using Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle (1988) as a framework allows practitioners to explore and learn from their experiences by answering a series of ordered questions guiding on to the next stage of the reflective cycle in order to arrive at new knowledge and change. It will be interesting to find if further inquiry beyond a reflective practice such as Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle, is needed that would help facilitate interns to examine values, potential changes in practice, commitment to quality and respect for difference. Mezirow’s Transformational Learning Theory may provide direction on deeper learning processes for interns. Counseling interns who are typically privileged and have not experienced social exclusions are often interning in nonprofit community mental health organizations where they work with marginalized groups in society (Mapp, 2013; Rosen, McCall & Goodkind, 2017). “While some students may have previous personal or professional experiences that prepare them for working with oppressed and marginalized population, many students may only be able to identify intellectually with the concepts of oppression and may have difficulty in their practical application” (Rosen, McCall & Goodkind, 2017, p. 289). This is reflected in the overarching research question of how adopting reflective practice could enhance critical awareness of counseling internship students who work in a nonprofit mental health organization. The
framework’s emphasis of developing a reflective practice to enhance self-awareness made
qualitative method suitable for the study. For data collection in-depth interviews will be
c Conducted in order to gain insight on the phenomenon through interactions with participants
(Creswell, 2013). The voices of participants will provide authentic experiences and examples of
counseling interns experience in a community mental health organization. Overall, this study
Aims not only to deepen understanding of reflective theory and practice, but also seeks to identify
how critical self-reflection may develop and/or used by counseling interns in order to advance
knowledge of theory, practice, teaching and learning in that context.
Chapter II: Literature Review

This study will explore the use and development of critical consciousness through the lens of reflective practice by considering Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988) and Mezirow’s Transformational Learning Theory as models to guide the exploration. As educator Paulo Freire (1972) proposed in his writing, developing critical consciousness gives us the ability to perceive social, political and economic oppression that could compel us to take action against these. The purpose of exploring critical consciousness through reflection is not only to enhance personal and professional development of master’s level counseling interns, but it is also to encourage interns to develop awareness about their positionality as they work in a nonprofit community mental health agency. There is socioeconomic diversity within this agency that includes a mix of clients from different income levels, social backgrounds, and in some cases, from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Counselors need to navigate socioeconomic diversity and the impact of social, political and economic oppression may have on clients. “Counselors work in an increasingly complex cultural milieu where every encounter with a client must be considered multicultural in nature” (Collins, Arthur & Wong-Wylie, 2010, p. 340). Counseling interns who are typically privileged and have not experienced social exclusions are often interning in nonprofit community mental health organizations where they work with marginalized groups in society (Mapp, 2013; Rosen, McCall & Goodkind, 2017). According to Collins, Arthur and Wong-Wylie, reflective practice “is a central component of professional competence and necessarily involves attention to culture” (p. 340). Self-awareness of values, assumptions and biases is the basis for counselors to enhance competence especially within multicultural practice (Collins, Arthur & Wong-Wylie, 2010).
The Center for Human Services (CHS) is a community-based nonprofit youth and family services agency offering mental health counseling to individuals and families from birth to adults. CHS mental health counselors and/or therapists provide mental health treatment to children, youth, and families who are experiencing difficulties in their lives. Typically, clients seek out services when they are experiencing such issues as depression, anxiety, trauma, grief and loss, ADD/ADHD, divorce and separations as well as other family disruptions and transitions. Mental health counseling internships at CHS is the context for the current problem of practice. The problem identified is interns’ ability to being critically self-aware as they work with underserved populations in a nonprofit community mental health agency. This exploration of counseling interns using or developing critical consciousness has implications for procedures at CHS, and has implications that impact the training of interns and clinical staff to ensure better internship outcomes making this research significant for students and the agency. In addition to the procedure implications for training and educating clinical staff, research on this topic provides opportunities to explore implications for practitioners at the local level, as the internship experience is a tool to train clinicians. The exploration of the interns’ use and development of critical consciousness skills and their impact shape the purpose of this research as one to gain insight about effective teaching and training through the adoption of reflective practice in an attempt to recommend actions and considerations to improve internship experiences in practical and realistic ways for the sake of better trained graduates.

This study explores several areas that impact the professional development of counseling interns including the use and development of critical self-awareness in several main sections: mental health counseling and becoming and mental health counselor; social justice, inequity and oppression; supervisory and mentoring skills; and personal and professional development will be
discussed in the context of adopting reflective practice. The study will end with a summation describing the necessity for reflective practice in order to develop critical self-awareness; continue further inquiry in order to define reflective practice and how to measure its outcomes; and expand the knowledge around reflective practice and how it can enhance the learning experience of counseling interns. Reviewing the literature provided an opportunity to participate, even briefly, in a larger dialogue related to exploring reflective practice and improving counseling internship experiences.

**Mental Health Counseling**

Searching the literature did not produce many articles about specifically how individuals become mental health counselors. A few articles offered insight as to why clients would seek out mental health services. In order to describe the need for mental health services and how students become mental health therapists the following section will describe those topics with the goal to describe the process of counseling internships. This study is significant, as it seems that the need for highly trained counselors is increasing. Counseling jobs are expanding to many sectors, i.e. military service members, retirees, and their family members. “The Bureau of Labor Statistics has predicted that jobs for mental health counselors will grow 36% during the 2010 to 2020 decade” (www.counselor-license.com).

The following information was gathered from articles, career and mental health programs websites, associations and the Washington State Department of Health, which is the state where the study will take place. Mental health counselor, therapist and mental health professional are used interchangeably throughout this study.
**Need for Mental Health Counseling**

Individuals seek mental health counseling for many reasons. Typically, difficulties in life such as balancing work and family life, relational conflicts, financial hardships, changing careers and diagnosed disorders are among many reasons to seek out mental health counseling. Stressful times can be difficult, and some situations may even be overwhelming if not dealt with support. Mental health counselors will work with clients who are dealing with everyday stress and also with clients who have a diagnosable mental illness and/or disorder. Some clients may struggle with marital problems or a loss of job, while others may be experiencing disorders such as Depression, Bipolar Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder, Grief, Phobias, Eating Disorders, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Addiction, and Suicidal Impulses, to name a few. Mental health disorders may produce feelings of shame, anxiety, and confusion, and they can be a frustrating experience doing life with these disorders (Careersinpsychology.org; www.counselor-license.com; learn.org). Mental health counseling can help individuals cope with these types of stressors in a healthy and effective way. Mental health professionals in the field can offer counseling, support, and guidance to individuals that are experiencing mental and emotional difficulties. With guidance and skills counselors can help individuals cope with disorders and/or life stressors by working directly with clients and sometimes with family members as well. The therapeutic process typically begins with an assessment to discuss presenting problems, diagnose and prepare a treatment plan (Careersinpsychology.org; www.counselor-license.com; learn.org).

The treatment plan consists of targeting symptoms and behaviors that clients wish to change, and will also include what therapeutic model the therapist will use. According to the code of ethics from the American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA), “Mental
health counselors and their clients work jointly in devising integrated, individual counseling plans that offer reasonable promise of success and are consistent with the abilities and circumstances of the client. Counselors and clients regularly review counseling plans to ensure their continued viability and effectiveness, respecting the client's freedom of choice” (http://www.amhca.org). Some modalities or theoretical orientations include cognitive behavioral therapy, psychodynamic therapy, dialectical behavioral therapy, humanistic, and family systems to name a few. Some therapists would describe themselves as more eclectic and combine different interventions depending on presenting problems. Typically, a therapeutic session consists in allowing the client to process through their experiences and concerns in order to explore their emotions. Therapists facilitate the session by offering presence, active listening, asking questions and offering comments. And also by teaching skills to reduce stress related to symptoms.

Mental health therapists can offer services in a variety of settings such as psychiatric hospitals, community mental health agencies, and private practices. Some may work in schools, detention centers, and some choose to work in departments in governmental and military branches.

**Becoming a Mental Health Counselor**

In order to become a mental health therapist in Washington State, an individual will have to go through many years of schooling which include a bachelor’s degree, and a master’s degree in psychology, counseling and/or behavioral sciences. Though it’s possible to get licensed as a mental health counselor upon completion of a master’s degree, students may choose to go on to a doctorate program. Once an individual earns a graduate behavioral science degree in a field relating to mental health counseling, an official transcript with degree earned has to be sent to the
Washington State Department of Health. The Washington Administrative Code (WAC) states that the transcript “must have a core of study relating to counseling theory and counseling philosophy. It must have either a counseling practicum, or a counseling internship, or both, in the core of study. Exclusive use of an internship or practicum used for qualification must have incorporated supervised direct client contact” (www.doh.wa.gov). The counseling internships are also described as a requirement in The AMHCA Standards for the Practice of Clinical Mental Health Counseling that was revised in 2016. The standards of practice document lists their pre-degree Clinical Mental Health Counseling Field Work Guidelines:

- “Students’ pre-degree clinical experiences meet the minimum training standards of 100 Practicum and 600 Internship hours.
- Students receive an hour of clinical supervision by an independently and approved licensed supervisor for every 20 hours of client direct care.
- This fieldwork supervision is in addition to the practicum and internship requirements for their academic program.
- Students are individually supervised by a supervisor” (http://www.amhca.org).

This study will explore the counseling internship portion of the educational component of counseling interns while they are completing a master’s degree in counseling.

After internship requirements and graduation are completed, the student applies for a Mental Health Counselor Associate License. According to the WAC, “an associate is a pre-licensure candidate who has a graduate degree in a mental health field under RCW 18.225.090 and is gaining the supervision and supervised experience necessary to become a licensed independent clinical social worker, a licensed advanced social worker, a licensed mental health counselor or a licensed marriage and family therapist. Associates may not independently
provide social work, mental health counseling or marriage and family therapy for a fee, monetary or otherwise. Associates must work under the supervision of an approved supervisor” (WAC 246-809-221, www.doh.wa.gov). At this post graduate stage, applicants either work for 36 months as a full-time counselor or accumulate 3,000 hours of postgraduate mental health counseling experience under the supervision of an approved licensed mental health supervisor or equally qualified licensed mental health practitioner in an approved setting. Supervisors verify the supervised hours. If the hours are approved by the Washington State Department of Health, applicants can prepare for the licensing exam, and must pass either National Counselor Exam, or the National Clinical Mental Health Counselor Exam (www.doh.wa.gov). Counselors complete 36 hours of continuing education, six of which is in professional law and ethics when applying for the exam, and every two years upon licensing. According to the Washington Department of Health, “Mental health counselors must renew their license every year on or before their birthday. Every two years mental health counselors must complete 36 hours of continuing education (CE) with six hours in law and ethics (www.doh.wa.gov). After January 1, 2014, mental health counselors also must complete six hours of continuing education in suicide assessment, treatment and management every 6 years (www.doh.wa.gov).

Social Justice, Inequity and Oppression

Mental health counseling interns typically begin their supervised work in non-profit community agencies where they begin work with a diversity of populations. The use of reflective practice is explored in the context of counseling internships at the Center for Human Services (CHS) as interns who might work with clients from different income levels, social backgrounds, and in some cases, from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. The necessity to consider and/or explore reflecting around diversity and privilege themes surfaced out of curiosity
about how counseling interns process issues of diversity, justice and inequity. This desire was provocated by the predominantly white context of students who apply for counseling internships at CHS, and also by the predominantly white staff, supervisors, and colleagues who work at CHS. The literature on these topics demand that individuals work on changing systems on behalf of those who suffer oppression, injustice and inequality. The system in place is inherently unequal, and folks may not be talking about it much (Andrews, 2014). As the new generations come forth to tackle the many problems oppression creates, how are they taught to raise the warranted critical questions? Andrews (2014) reflects on her Ted Talk about the lack of this type of reflection, which creates a low level of critical awareness. Low levels of critical awareness can perpetuate the problems in the systems. Given that counseling provides the space for clients to tell their stories, that space must be one that acknowledges the themes of diversity, justice and inequity. Especially those who have, and will have, the roles of counselors, leaders and teachers, need to learn to recognize “the cumulative impact of racism” (Varma-Joshi, Baker & Tanaka, 2004, p. 203). Failing to educate and train professionals and educators about the impact of racism and oppression could be “an act of violence in itself” (Varma-Joshi, Baker & Tanaka, 2004, p. 203). And counseling internships is one tool used at CHS where this kind of training and education can happen on behalf of the students we serve: future leaders and counselors.

Furthermore, racism and oppression can be institutionalized and can thrive within leadership; implementation of policies; delivery of services without equally diverse staff representation; approaches to hiring and retention; and having executive leadership who have never personally experienced or addressed issues of injustice, inequality or oppression, to name a few. These can create a gap in having staff and faculty with limited understanding to what it means to be facing oppressive barriers, such as breaking free from poverty, and other injustices.
Some of these issues can be operating at CHS and master’s level programs in implicit and explicit ways, though the energy of CHS has been one to address them. The risk of institutionalized oppression to remain is that CHS has a commitment to be aware of these issues, which could create a false belief that individual or collective examination is not urgently required which can consequently perpetuate the oppressive system. Another problem is that as CHS grows in their awareness through equity trainings, organizational trainings, and encouragement for staff to seek out continuing education, there might be an illusion that the dominant cultures at CHS - and master’s programs - no longer perpetuate oppression due to the desire to address the injustices. However, eradicating oppression requires much more than personal and professional awareness; it requires much action and commitment. This can and should affect the white population more as they are taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege (McIntosh, 1998). White privilege is like an “invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks” (McIntosh, 1998). Not all interns within CHS and master’s programs possess such a knapsack, and though, they may still be the minority, it is the organization’s responsibility to be aware of such dynamics.

Interlocking oppressions are both implicit and explicit and those in the dominant group are mainly taught not to notice. For example, most in a particular group may recognize racism as a mean act performed by one individual vs. recognizing the systemic oppression that perpetuates implicitly. However, those oppressed do notice because they are living a life that has been shaped and defined by such unavoidable invisible barriers (McIntosh, 1998). This study is attempting to explore how counseling interns strive to uncover their own biases, and hidden oppressive systems within systems. Are they reflecting about these, and if so, how?
In addition to the previous ways the organization may be resistant – or oblivious - to changes, is the notion that academia is rooted in fundamental assumptions about education and justice within a Euro-Western context, and these are internalized by faculty, students and within the structures, policies and procedures of the organization (Campbell & Baikie, 2013). Meaning, students may come to academia with a “positivist and modernist epistemology” wanting to learn “the true facts” to practice “the right way,” and though they might be eager to learn about and from others who experience oppression or privilege, they might be less inclined to explore their own positionality (Campbell & Baikie, 2013, p. 457). Another resistance to the development of collaborative reflective cultures that attempt to address the important topics of oppression, privilege and justice is the tendency to apply and interpret with an ethic of individualism vs. “recognizing and analyzing the impact and meaning of social group membership” (Campbell & Baikie, 2013, p. 457). Meaning, out of this individual interpretation “struggles and problems are understood to be the result of personal deficits” or “inadequate skill development” rather than using socio-cultural interpretations (Campbell & Baikie, 2013, p. 457). Counseling interns and mental health counselors need to be aware of their biases in that area.

**Reflective Practice**

So what is reflective practice? Reflective practice is the practice in which an individual witnesses his/her own experiences and takes a closer look to deeply explore them, in order to learn from those experiences. (Amulya, 2011). Reflective practice can be either individual or collective, and either format has similar purposes: reflection leads to “greater understandings of the work people are doing alone or together,” and “reflection is essential for improving both the process and outcome” of work (Amulya, 2011, p. 3). According to Drago-Severson (2009), reflective practice provides a positive learning model that centers on shared reflection and
dialogue. “Reflective practice is thought to improve teaching, build leadership and enhance student achievement” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 154). More so, when reflective practice is done collaboratively, it provides the opportunity to dialogue – thinking and looking together – which impacts learning, teaching and leadership process; and allows the growth of capacity to manage complexity by reviewing, and considering alternatives that could provide better ways of thinking and responding (Drago-Severson, 2009). Reflective practice opens “a dialogue between theory and practice,” validates the experience, skills and knowledge used in practice, can be described as participative learning as it is determined jointly, and is one that can challenge and is open minded in its inquiry (Thompson & Pascal, 2012, p. 314). Okech's (2008) study exploring reflective practice and effective co-leadership suggested that practitioners develop a reflective practice paradigm to enhance the co-leadership relationship. The hope is that as issues surface in the co-leading relationship that reflective skills can support the development of the relationship to deal with difficulties and conflicts. Having a ‘reflective self’ allows individuals to discuss internal emotions and hold opposing feelings without being torn by them, and also, they are able to hold and reflect on differing perspectives (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 47), which are skills needed to provide good supervision and training.

Given that human beings hold assumptions that guide thinking and actions, reflective practice can help understand those assumptions by examining them critically cultivating “meaningful personal and professional learning, behavioral change, and improved performance” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 76). Reflective practice provides the context to test assumptions and creates the possibility for revision. The hope is that any assumptions that could impact the work of counseling interns with their clients could be explored through the use of a reflective stance that can allow for honest and meaningful dialogue when concerns arise. Okech (2003) stated that
reflective practice is significantly important within the counseling context, and added that reflective practice helps counselors become reflective practitioners. Reflective practitioners are able to reflect on their personal and professional lives, and develop awareness of how reflective practice enhances their work with clients and co-workers. Reflective practice, according to Okech (2003), helps build insight and awareness, and reflection is seen as a defining characteristic of a ‘good’ leader or teacher (Warwick & Swaffield, 2007). Furthermore, reflective practice, as described by Thompson & Pascal’s (2012), goes beyond the traditional definitions and they describe two critical dimensions to consider in order to have deeper reflection: one dimension looks beneath the surface of a situation, assumptions, thoughts, feelings and values; and the other one, considers broader sociological contexts and factors such as power, discrimination and oppression. Given the impact of those categories on interpersonal relationships, supervision and groups, they must be reflected on to facilitate awareness.

One of the key goals of developing a reflective practice paradigm is to learn skills to manage a wide range of emotional responses. There is a call to develop techniques or strategies for developing reflective practice. A potential limitation to this development of techniques or strategies is that reflective practice can be described in many ways; meaning, reflective practice is understood and it's done in different ways in different professional contexts (Okech, 2003). It might be important to define and describe the particular reflective practice paradigm needed and adopted by counseling interns within their internship context.

**Supervision and Reflective Practice**

Supervision is part of training within counseling field (Worthington & Roehlke, 1979) and is part of the counseling internships at CHS: interns receive individual supervision weekly and also participate in team meetings, in consult groups with other clinicians, and have a
monthly supervision/support group. Worthington and Roehlke (1979) suggest that supervisors be attentive to what behaviors and traits are perceived by supervisees as desirable for good supervision given that supervisees’ perceptions of how good or bad the supervisory relationship is may impact their counseling performance. In their study on supervision, the authors described the contrast between what the supervisors thought was good supervision - *giving feedback about the supervisee's counseling ability* - to what supervisees thought was good supervision – *being directly taught how to counsel within a supportive relationship* (Worthington & Roehlke, 1979). Teaching, in this scenario, includes supervisors sharing about their own counseling experiences, providing readings about counseling, and giving feedback about strengths within a relationship that is somewhat structured and informative, but pleasant and personal (Worthington & Roehlke, 1979). Given the possible discrepancy of assumptions, reflection about these expectations must be considered and discussed within the supervisory relationship. Supervisors should use appropriate self-disclosure, and empathetic responses to model relationship development, which facilitates a safe environment for honest interactions and increased intimacy (Huffman and Fernando, 2011). This creates an ideal setting for reflective practice.

The supervisory relationship seems to have important influence on supervisee learning (Ladany, Mori, & Mehr, 2012). Counseling skills such as empathy and encouragement within the supervisory relationship help create a good foundation for other relational interventions. Effective supervisors work toward a strong working alliance by using counseling skills such as listening, reflection of feelings and empathy, which help bonding; and also balance interpersonal attentiveness, task oriented structures, self-disclosure and the evaluation aspects of supervision. In other words, reflection becomes an important piece in supervision. Ineffectiveness in supervision is possible when the supervisory alliance is not strong enough to survive problematic
behaviors (Ladany, Mori, & Mehr, 2012). Supervisory alliance can be established when supervision empowers the supervisee through autonomy and openness; when supervisors demonstrate clinical knowledge that is disclosed appropriately and is relevant to supervisee's concerns; and when supervisors offer positive and challenging feedback (Ladany, Mori, & Mehr, 2012).

Supervisees value feedback that is high in quantity and quality, insightful, and is provided in a peer rather than in a lofty manner (Linton & Hedstrom, 2006). Also, the literature suggests that supervisees place a higher value on and prefer feedback from peers, though they also placed high value when supervisors provided guidance and specific feedback (Linton & Hedstrom, 2006). When speaking of group supervision or training groups, the literature suggests that leaders train students and supervisees in developing the skill of providing constructive and supportive feedback. Conflict should be managed effectively within the supervisory relationship or it can have negative effects (Linton & Hedstrom, 2006). Process oriented interventions should be used to repair conflict.

According to Ladany, Mori and Mehr (2012), effective or ineffective supervisor behaviors or traits need to be explored, however, the supervisee's openness to learning, the setting and the supervisee's anxiety need to be accounted for as well. Supervision that is considered good might depend on the supervisee's level of professional development (Haugaard & Tanggaard, 2009). For instance, good supervision for a novice therapist might be considered ineffective supervision for an experienced therapist, and vice versa. Also, supervisees should employ self-reflection to be better prepared for supervision because prior analysis of their practice enables supervisors to challenge and get deeper into the content of the supervision (Hay, 2007). Given the number of supervision experiences students, interns and counselors experience
throughout their career, and the number of ineffective supervisory experiences reported, training of and accountability for supervisors should be considered (Ladany, Mori & Mehr, 2012). Supervisor accountability in demonstrating proficiency has not received much research attention.

**Professional and Personal Development**

Professional and personal development will be explored in order to address the personal growth and professional skills needed for individuals, clinicians, and leaders to engage in their learning through their vocational path. According to Bui & Baruch (2010), personal mastery happens by way of individual informal learning, by having a personal vision, by being motivated to work in higher education and by a commitment to life long learning. Individual informal learning happens in many forms: attending conferences, working with students, self-learning, and consultation, to name a few (Bui & Baruch, 2010). The authors also speak of higher education as the place where traditional models prevail, and thus must be challenged: “leaders should pioneer challenging the traditional mental models, replacing the teacher-focused model by the learner-focused one” (Bui & Baruch, 2010, p. 231). Being committed to a life of learning within community also creates spaces for collaborative reflective practice.

When adults reflect on issues and assumptions, they may be able to address, rethink and revise in a safe context when engaged in collaborative reflective practice (Drago-Severson, 2009). Collaboration not only helps build strong and nurturing learning communities, but they also provide a safe context where team members can broaden their perspectives, take risks, engage in reflection, examine assumptions and behaviors, which help with the growth and development of individuals (Drago-Severson, 2009). Creating learning cultures using reflective practice within teams, and perhaps within counseling intern cohorts, requires trust and openness (Drago-Severson, 2009). “It is hard to improve practice alone; we need each other to grow best”
The literature suggests that educators who engage reflective practice improve their practice and thus improve and/or enhance student learning. As Killion (2000) stated, “structuring staff development experiences to encourage teachers to analyze their practices and share what they have learned with colleagues” is essential because it will “increase collaboration” and “commitment to implementing alternative strategies” (p. 3). Collaborative cultures help individuals engage in reflection of their practice offering opportunities for “risk taking, share leadership, learn together and consequently build individual and organizational capacity” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 158).

Professional and personal development also happens through mentoring. According to Drago-Seaverson (2009), mentoring provides the context to provide support and opportunities to grow as individuals make sense of their experiences. Mentoring allows relationship development which aids in creating safe spaces for reflective dialogue; and mentoring provides a context to challenge thoughts and understandings, taking into consideration the individual developmental process of learning – meaning, taking into consideration how each individual learns and grows within their roles. As the relationship builds in the midst of trust, mentoring – and supervision – provides a holding environment for reflective practice and learning, where individuals can engage in meaningful conversations about work, home and anything significant; where support can be offered through affirmation about what is working; and where safe spaces can develop for deeper reflection to be possible (Drago-Severson, 2009).

In his work on perspective transformation, Mezirow (1983) speaks of the significance of meaning and how individuals are held back or are trapped by a framework of meaning that is made up of self limiting understandings about their contexts, situations and their roles. The author sees reflective practice as a tool to help individuals develop new and more empowering
meanings (Mezirow, 1983). Individual therapy, where personal stories can be shared, offers the ability to help people construct a new, empowering narrative, or meaning to replace the self-limiting narratives that were shaped by past experiences (Thompson & Pascal, 2012). In the same way that narrative therapy helps authentic development, writing one’s life story is a reflective practice that helps make sense of life experiences in order to understand and explain them “in a way that gives meaning, purpose, and direction to action” (Polizzi & Frick, 2012, p. 29). Narrative therapy and the exploration of life stories can happen within personal therapy. It has long been recognized that personal therapy for therapists and trainees serve several purposes: professional development during their career, and therapy ensures resilience and psychological well being (Wigg, Cushway & Neal, 2011). Given the pressure on clinical psychology training to produce reflective practitioners, the research seems to indicate that personal therapy is a good way to do this (Wigg, Cushway & Neal, 2011). Through personal therapy supervisors, clinicians and interns may become aware of their own stories, meanings, and transference issues, which then can enhance reflective skills to engage in deeper reflection about their interpersonal work and their learning.

**Summary**

This research will expand the knowledge around reflective practice and how it can enhance the learning experience of counseling interns. The exploration on reflective practice will likely expand the research. Also, it may be helpful to explore interns’ attitudes and motivation towards self-exploration and reflective practice in order to help them choose the reflective learning approach that complements their personality and learning style to maximize learning and reduce the potential for harm (Knight, Sperlinger & Maltby, 2010).
One of the key goals of developing a reflective practice paradigm is to learn skills to manage a wide range of emotional responses that could be provoked while working with clients. The adoption of reflective practice seems to provide a useful paradigm in which interns reflect on their personal and professional lives by becoming open and honest when discussing potentially difficult relational dynamics. The assumption is that interns must mature in their personal and professional development, capacity and ability for reflection, through personal therapy, their own supervision, and by other formal and informal learning. If effective reflective practice is not in place relationship dysfunction will manifest as insecurity and anxiety in the interactions with others, which can potentially affect the therapeutic relationship and outcomes.

There is a call to develop techniques or strategies for developing reflective practice. A potential limitation to this development of techniques or strategies is that reflective practice can be described in many ways; meaning, reflective practice is understood and it's done in different ways in different professional contexts (Okech, 2003). Also, there is a need to explore definitions and descriptions of reflective practice in order to facilitate implementation and measure its outcomes.

In conclusion, this exploration on counseling internships seen through the lens of reflective practice to enhance the quality of service, has informed the goal of helping interns become reflective practitioners in order to establish more reflection about positionality, interpersonal interactions, effectiveness, performance, and practice. Ultimately, the implication of this study is that self-reflection is significant and of much value to individuals who engage in activities intended to contribute to the development of others (Hay, 2007).
Chapter III: Research Design

This study explores how the individual perspectives of mental health counseling interns may have or may not have developed in respect to critical consciousness as they report on their experiences and perceptions, as they work with underserved populations in a nonprofit community mental health agency. As mentioned before, there exists socioeconomic diversity within the Center of Human Services (CHS) that includes a mix of clients from different income levels, social backgrounds, and in some cases, from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Counselors need to navigate socioeconomic diversity and the impact that social, political and economic oppression may have on clients. Focus will be given to how counseling interns’ experiences as they work with clients may have been enhanced by using reflective practice as perceived by them, specifically incorporating reflection, such as Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988). The question about the use and/or need for reflective practice will allow the study and participants to reflect on their experiences. Thus this qualitative study which will be based on in-depth interviews with mental health counseling internship students, is guided by the following overarching questions:

1. How does counseling intern's experience working with clients that may have significantly diverse life experiences, context and socio-economic histories impact their perspectives of their client, and their critical consciousness?

2. How does the internship experience working with clients with significantly diverse life experiences, context and socio-economic histories impact the way they perceive and think about their role and practice as a counselor?
3. Are there any practices or experiences that have assisted and helped counseling interns think about their work, their beliefs and values, and how they can best assist and support their clients?

Qualitative Research Approach

This study utilizes a qualitative approach to investigate how counseling interns’ experiences as they work with clients may have been enhanced by using reflective practice as perceived by them, specifically incorporating reflection, such as Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988). The purpose of “qualitative research is to understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they encounter, engage, and live through situations” (Elliot, Fisher, & Rennie, 1999, p. 216). In a qualitative study a researcher is able to learn more by exploring the topic, and mostly relies on the views and perspectives from participants in order to learn from them, and relies less on a direction that was identified by the literature review (Creswell, 2015). In qualitative research data is collected through several protocols to learn from participants’ experiences and about their context. This study will include an interview protocol to focus on the experiences of counseling interns. The interviews will include open-ended questions and provide the flexibility for more questions to emerge as the study progresses (Creswell, 2015). This process aids the researcher in finding and revealing meaning within people’s lived experiences and makes it possible to find connections to practice and social contexts. (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Qualitative methodology is compatible with this study’s purpose as this study seeks to understand the counseling interns’ experiences as they work with clients (Creswell, 2012). Only the counseling interns will be recruited as they can speak specifically about the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher will not assume that the data collected will be generalizable,
however, the data may aid in gathering insights that could be applicable to the learning experiences of counseling interns, and others in similar contexts. Given that the researcher may play an active role in qualitative methods, the researcher must be aware of biases that could influence interpretation at the same time allowing some co-construction of meaning through the interactions with counseling interns (Pascal, Johnson, Dore, & Trainor, 2010).

This study aims to meet its purpose of exploring how counseling interns make sense of their experiences as they work with a diversity of underserved populations in a nonprofit community mental health agency through the lens of reflective practice as theoretical framework, and using qualitative approach that allow further exploration of this problem. In the following sections the philosophical assumptions, research design, researcher’s potential biases, and credibility measures will be described.

**Philosophical Assumptions**

Research is one of the many factors that contribute to the growth and development of the knowledge base in any field. Research can be defined as “a purposeful, systematic process,” an inquiry, with the result of knowing more than was known before the study (Merriam, p. 43). The researcher's questions and methods used to answer these questions, which are informed by the researcher's worldview, assumptions, presumptions, and blind spots impact the knowledge gained. As researchers begin to identify their perspective for their study, a theoretical framework is chosen - or as Butin suggests, the framework *chooses* the researcher given the research topic and goals (p. 60). This framework helps structure and guides the research. Given this, then different types of knowledge are created depending upon the perspectives chosen by the researcher. This study is aligned with Constructivism-Interpretivism perspective (Ponterotto, 2005).
Constructivism-Interpretivism is a paradigm that can be perceived as a counter response to Positivism/post-positivism. Drawing from cultural anthropology, history, and hermeneutics or interpretation, to name a few, this subjective paradigm assumes that the world is an ongoing story in which meaning is formed by individuals, groups and cultures, and sees the researcher as part of this story as well. Through a dialogue between the researcher and the research participant deeper meanings and interpretations of the context can be reached. This paradigm does not reach the one best answer as the Positivism/post-positivism paradigm, but tries to document the context, perspectives and beliefs of what and who is investigated (Butin, 2012 p. 60). This means that multiple realities may exist due to multiple individuals' perceptions. The focus then is on process and meaning, rather than outcomes or products according to Merriem (p.49). The emphasis and goal of constructivism-interpretivism paradigm is the understanding of the lived experiences of those who live it, in order to construct understanding and meaning. The method to collect this data is by interviews, observations and analysis, and the researcher as one who shared in and experienced the world studied reaches the interpretations. This paradigm serves as a foundation for qualitative research according to Ponterotto (p. 129).

As described before, this study aims to explore the individual experiences of counseling interns as they report on their experiences and perceptions, as they work with underserved populations in a nonprofit community mental health agency. There exists socioeconomic diversity within the Center of Human Services (CHS) that includes a mix of clients from different income levels, social backgrounds, and in some cases, from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Counselors need to navigate socioeconomic diversity and the impact that social, political and economic oppression may have on clients. Focus will be given to how counseling interns’ experiences as they work with clients may have been enhanced by using reflective
practice as perceived by them, specifically incorporating reflection. The constructivism-interpretivism paradigm has the intention to understand the lived experiences of the research participants. Utilizing this paradigm for this problem of practice seems to be a good direction since counseling internships within the context described can be subjective in nature and have many possible variables contributing to the problem. Since this paradigm suggests that the group, context or culture could construct the reality socially, this could be a good vehicle to generate data about the counseling internship experience. As explained before, the actors or research participants bring perceptions, ideas, opinions that could be explored to reach understanding and meaning. In this paradigm, multiple realities and multiple perceptions may exist.

Since the methodologies used in this paradigm are about observation, construction of meaning and interpretations, a researcher could observe and dialogue to collect data. The constructivism-interpretivism paradigm requires the researcher to become part of the story, and through the dialogue with participants; deeper meanings, understandings and interpretations are reached. As an observer the researcher will naturally become part of the experience and thus influence the study. Other methods used in this paradigm are interviews, and analysis of documents. Primarily for this study conducting long interviews with counseling interns will help gather data. In addition, critical theory is a secondary philosophical influence worthy to mention as counseling interns mostly work with marginalized groups of people and critical theory aims to empower the oppressed to disrupt the status quo with the purpose to transform (Parker, 2015).

**Site and Participants**

This study will collect information from a targeted sampling of current counseling interns who are working at the Center for Human Services (CHS). The first step is to inform participants
of the study and administer interviews one-on-one after consent is gathered. CHS administrators, supervisors and counseling programs will be notified of this study. According to Creswell (2012) purposeful sampling is the practice of selecting participants who are able to speak about and inform on the research questions; in qualitative studies this practice aids in gathering in-depth understanding of an issue.

CHS provides the setting for master’s degree counseling students to begin practicing. The interns go through an application process that includes an application packet, interviews and finally an invitation to a 9-month internship that typically begins in September and ends in June. Most interns graduate upon completion of the internship.

CHS is a community-based nonprofit youth and family services agency offering services to children, youth, adults and families since 1970. CHS offers Mental Health Counseling that provides client-centered mental health services to individuals and families from birth to adults. Mental Health counseling happens individually, and/or in family and community settings. CHS mental health counselors and/or therapists provide mental health treatment to children, youth, and families who are experiencing difficulties in their lives.

**Sampling procedures.** The participants will be counseling interns at CHS who have experienced the particular phenomenon that is been explored in this study. Participant recruitment will follow these steps:

1. An initial recruitment email will be sent to all counseling interns at the research site.
   
   This email will briefly describe the study and will ask interns to respond to the researcher directly.

2. The researcher will send a personalized email to all counseling interns that express interest in participating to share more about the study, answer questions, and the
email will include the consent form and the interview protocol. An initial meeting will be arranged to conduct interviews.

3. A follow up email will be sent to participants to set up interview and/or to follow up with those who have not responded.

Data Collection

Data will be collected following approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), given the appropriate requirements to conduct a study. Interviews will be recorded with the permission of each participant and the researcher will use two digital recording devices in case a backup is needed. The researcher will produce an interview protocol that will be both structured and flexible. The interview questions will gather data that is relevant to the study; however, some of the questions will be open-ended as well to allow reflection of participants. The researcher will conduct 60-minute in-depth one-on-one interviews with each participant. The researcher will be an active listener and will elicit more information from participants with follow up questions. The data will be transcribed after each interview.

Data Analysis

In order to add structure to the process of analyzing the data, researchers adopt several procedures, though there seems to be no set guidelines for coding (Creswell, 2015). Creswell (2015) describes six steps that are commonly used for analyzing qualitative data, which include “preparing and organizing the data for analysis, engaging in an initial exploration of the data through the process of coding it, using codes to develop a more general picture of the data (descriptions and themes), representing the findings through narrative and visuals, making an interpretation of the meaning of the results by reflecting personally on the impact of the findings on the literature that might inform the findings, and finally conducting strategies to validate the
accuracy of the findings” (p. 236). MaxQDA software will be used as an additional stage to assist in coding the data from the transcripts. Creswell (2015) describes many steps, and Saldaña (2009) describes two cycles in Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers. Saldaña (2009) writes that codes in “qualitative inquiry [are] most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion” of the data gathered by means of interview transcripts, observations, journals, documents, etc. (p. 3). For this study, interviews and observations will provide most of the data, and data analysis will follow suggestions from several authors.

This process for coding the data will take several steps. The first step, or First Cycle Coding, the researcher will get a sense of the whole data gathered, and will jot down words, phrases, and ideas as they come to mind; these codes can be descriptive or In Vivo (Creswell, 2015; Saldaña, 2009). During this step for this study, the researcher will mostly use in vivo coding strategy to identify significant words or short phrases from the participant’s own voice that are found in the transcribed data (Saldaña, 2009). Saldaña’s Second Cycle of coding encourages the researcher to review the data and identified codes in order to identify themes or categories, and patterns: “as you progress toward Second Cycle coding, there may be some rearrangement and reclassification of coded data into different and even new categories” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 10). There may be more grouping and regrouping of categories with the hope that themes develop (Saldaña, 2009; King & Horrocks, 2010). Then the researcher will summarize findings using the dominant themes as they relate to the research questions.

Trustworthiness

This research study could affect counseling internship experiences and could suggest training improvements to counseling master’s programs and community agencies that offer
internship opportunities. Given these, care will be taken to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. Trustworthiness must be considered in evaluating the worth of a study through several criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Following is a description of the steps taken to maintain the trustworthiness of the study.

Credibility involves developing confidence in the truth of the findings, and to enhance credibility, the researcher used member checking as a strategy (Creswell, 2013). The researcher shared the transcribed interviews with participants to be assessed for accuracy. The goal is to identify and correct any inaccurate accounts or interpretations of the participant’s experience by the researcher. Participants were asked to review only their own transcripts. This gave each intern the opportunity to provide feedback and request revisions to ensure the validity of data (Creswell, 2013).

To address confirmability, it is imperative to state that this study is limited to the counseling interns at CHS, and because I am the mental health associate director at CHS who manages the internship program, and I am also a graduate of a local master’s degree program, this study could suffer some research bias. Given this the researcher will give careful attention to reflect on personal experiences that could hinder the trustworthiness of the study so that the study is neutral and shaped by the data. Merriam (2009) noted that “the validity and reliability of a study depend upon the ethics of the investigator” (p.228), and “it is ultimately up to the individual researcher to proceed in ethically a manner as possible” (p.230).

Protection of Human Subjects

Informed consent was obtained from all study participants. The informed consent provided description about the research topics being addressed, how data will be handled and stored, as well as the confidentiality of data and study findings. No information collected in the
study will be discussed or shared with any third party without written consent of the respective participant. Also, due to the potentially sensitive nature of qualitative studies, it is important for the researcher to provide an opportunity for participants to withdraw at any time (Smith et al., 2009).

Before the study began, an institutional board, in this case, the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the study proposal to ensure that the researcher was conducting all research procedures ethically. The IRB protects the human subjects from any potential harm from the study and ensures that vulnerable populations are also given special safety considerations (Creswell, 2009).

**Potential Research Bias**

The problem identified for this study indicates some bias. This exploration of counseling interns has implications for procedures at CHS, which is where I work as the Mental Health Associate Director. One of my responsibilities is managing the internship program where I am in charge of organizing the application, interview and selection process of counseling interns. I supervise mental health managers, who supervise interns, and I supervise the Internship Coordinator who runs the monthly intern group; I do not supervise counseling interns directly. Another important bias that I must consider is that I was part of the first graduating class at The Seattle School, and I also teach practicum groups in that setting – some of the counseling interns participating in the study are enrolled in that particular program. It is fair to say that I have loyalty to The Seattle School program, to colleagues and to some faculty members. I also wish to offer to students the benefits I gained when I graduated in 1999. As I research the internship program at CHS, I must be open to data that contradicts my perceptions of the benefits CHS brings to interns, and benefits practicum groups at The Seattle School offer to student intern
candidates. I will end with the hope that as I name the impact these organizations have had on me and vice versa, and continue to explore the themes that have surfaced throughout this paper, that I don't let my fears, opinions, loyalties and strong belief of the programs’ benefits get in the way of objectivity in evaluating counseling internships.

Limitations

The study is limited to 8 counseling interns at this particular site, and 5 of them participated in the study. The study may not allow for generalization given the sample size and location of the study. Also, the experiences of these interns may not be transferable to interns at other internship programs.

Another limitation to consider is that the data provided through interviews is second hand information that has been filtered through what they recollect from their experiences during their internship. Given that the interviews provided the context for dialogue with the researcher, the information has also been filtered through a double understanding and interpretation of the experiences shared. Additionally, given that the researcher conducting this study is a novice who has been developing the skills as the study was conducted, can also be a limitation to the quality of the research.
Chapter IV: Research Findings

The purpose of this study is to determine how the individual perspectives of mental health counseling interns may have or may not have developed in respect to critical consciousness as they report on their experiences and perceptions as they work with underserved populations in a nonprofit community mental health agency. Given the goals of the research proposal, the theoretical framework and methodology chosen, the following questions were developed:

1. How does counseling intern's experience working with clients that may have significantly diverse life experiences, context and socio-economic histories impact their perspectives of their client, and their critical consciousness?

2. How does the internship experience working with clients with significantly diverse life experiences, context and socio-economic histories impact the way they perceive and think about their role and practice as a counselor?

3. Are there any practices or experiences that have assisted and helped counseling interns think about their work, their beliefs and values, and how they can best assist and support their clients?

This chapter begins with a description of participants and data collected, and is followed by a presentation of the themes that emerged in relationship to the study questions.

Summary of Study Participants

The participants in this study were counseling interns who are working at the Center for Human Services (CHS). The 9 to 12-month internship cohort began in September 2017 and ended in June or September 2018, depending on length of internship. All 8 interns were invited to participate, however, 5 participants chose to participate in the in-person interviews.
Counseling interns’ pseudonym, age, gender, ethnicity/race and socio-economic status are included in Table 1.

Table 1

Pseudonym, age, gender, ethnicity/race, socioeconomic status and educational level a time of interview of participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity/ Race</th>
<th>Socio-economic status</th>
<th>Educational level (at time of interview)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Master’s in process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kris</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Lower middle class</td>
<td>Master’s in process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Master’s in process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathy</td>
<td>Didn’t report</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Didn’t report</td>
<td>Master’s in process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron</td>
<td>25 – 30</td>
<td>Cis-male</td>
<td>Chinese American</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Master’s in process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Becky.** Interviewed 34 year old Becky during her last month in her counseling internship, and she will be graduating from The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. She described herself as white student who came from a middle-class household. Becky said that being an intern meant that she was getting a “realistic experience” of working with clients. She started her internship with some non-profit experience by working with homeless kids for a few years. She stated that the work and her family of origin made her very attuned to the needs of others. Becky said that her dad died when she was young, and her mother seemed to have difficulty dealing with loss, so Becky had to be attuned to her family and herself during that time. Becky stated that graduate school taught her how to use her attunement in the service of others as she pursued her counseling degree. She described herself as a person who learns by reflecting though she didn’t have an actual reflective practice. She described reflection as not
merely reviewing, but that “it needs to happen after some sort of catalyst,” such as an event or experience that transforms.

**Kris.** Interviewed 24 year old Kris during her last month in her counseling internship, and she will be graduating from The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. She described herself as white student who came from a lower middle-class household. Kris said that being an intern meant learning how she worked with individuals, families and systems; working with a diversity of people; and figuring out what she was good at. She started her internship with some non-profit experience by working with homeless families in a shelter. Kris described herself as a person who learns by reflecting though she didn’t have an actual reflective practice. She stated that her ability to reflect and learn seems to increase when she is impacting someone interpersonally, not merely reading the information in a book, “I don’t feel actually impacted by it until I have a friend whose directly impacted by it.”

**Sue.** Interviewed 28 year old Sue during her last three months in her counseling internship, and she will be graduating from Antioch University. She described herself as white student who came from a middle class household. Sue said that being an intern meant that she was closer to what she wants to do after graduation, which is working with infant mental health with clients ages birth to 3 years old. She stated that her internship at CHS provided more preparation to work with older clients by providing interpersonal therapy and advocacy through systems given the low-income population. She started her internship with non-profit experience by working an infant mental health agency as a case manager for several years where she worked with families and kids with disabilities. Sue described herself as a person who learns by reflecting though she didn’t have an actual reflective practice. She described moments of reflection between sessions, and moments of learning while in consult as she heard others debrief
cases in context. She stated that reflective practice in isolation is not enough and stated that interpersonal reflection with therapists and peers has been helpful.

**Cathy.** Interviewed Cathy during her last month in her counseling internship, and she will be graduating from Bastyr University. She described herself as white student and she didn’t report her age or household income, though she seems to be in the 25 to 30 year old range. Cathy reported that she grew up in Hawaii and that being “white Caucasian is the minority” and that she “was the only white woman” in her entire class. She said that being an intern at CHS meant that she gets to do the work of counselor while still being much a student and a learner while receiving a lot support. She also indicated that the internship has allowed her to trust in her “ability to be a counselor and to really feel like this is what I’m meant to do.” It seems that she started her internship with very little non-profit experience. Cathy described herself as a person who uses reflective practice by keeping a journal about her process after working with clients. She said that ”it helped me to be more intentional and mindful of the ways in which I was guiding the session.” She also said that she learns not merely by reviewing but also by remaining present to the experience.

**Ron.** Interviewed Ron during his last month in his counseling internship, and he will be graduating from The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. He described himself as Chinese American student who came from a middle class household. He reported being in the 25 to 30 year old range. He said that being an intern at CHS meant that he was part of system he otherwise wouldn’t find himself working at, and getting experience to work with a population that nonprofits serve. He also indicated that as an intern he felt like the youngest person on a team of professionals. It seems that he started his internship with very little non-profit experience. Ron described himself as a person who uses reflective practice by meditating every
evening, which helps him stay present to his personal and interpersonal experiences.

**Data Collected**

Data were collected through semi-structured in person interviews. The interview protocol (Appendix D), which was designed to be both structured and flexible, was recorded with the permission of each participant. The interview questions gathered data that is relevant to the study, and were open-ended to allow reflection of participants. The data was transcribed after each interview; participants reviewed the interviews; and after, the researcher began the analysis of the transcripts. The researcher read the transcripts to get a sense of the whole data gathered, and jotted down words, phrases, and ideas as they surfaced. During this step, the researcher used in vivo coding strategy to identify significant words or short phrases from the participant’s own voice that were found in the transcribed data (Saldaña, 2009). During the analysis of the data, the researcher grouped and regrouped categories with the hope that themes would develop throughout the data (Saldaña, 2009; King & Horrocks, 2010). The following is a summary of findings using the dominant themes as they relate to the research questions.

**Research Question 1:** How does counseling intern’s experience working with clients that may have significantly diverse life experiences, context and socio-economic histories impact their perspectives of their client, and their critical consciousness?

Upon a careful analysis of the participants’ transcripts, the following three themes emerged in relationship to research question 1 and are presented in table 2 and discussed below.
**Table 2**

*Themes in Relationship to Research Question 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clients in nonprofit mental health agency seem to have a lot more social capital needs than therapeutic needs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clients in nonprofit mental health agency have more strengths than interns assumed they did, and clients were able to achieve far more than interns expected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interns could build therapeutic relationships with their clients in spite of barriers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Clients in nonprofit mental health agency seem to have a lot more social capital needs than therapeutic needs.** All five counseling interns who participated in this study expressed similar reactions and assumptions to working in a nonprofit agency, especially when they compared their work to colleagues from their own schools that interned in for profit mental health organizations. Some of the interns shared their assumptions that because a client had more income, an established job and were self referred to therapy that they perceived these clients as having more stability. This in contrast to the interns’ assumptions that a client who may be lower income and is referred to mental health services at a nonprofit mental health agency by a system, or another provider, such as court, a teacher, or a doctor, that they may not be as stable or invested in the therapeutic process. As intern Kris expressed,

> Even from case conference, the clients that I brought up were much different than the clients that were coming out of more of a private practice setting.

Sue stated that in case consult class at her school she discussed with her peers the contrast of clients from private practices and nonprofit mental health agencies as well:

> In my case consult class, there’s a private practice agency that takes interns and both of us [students], we cannot imagine working with each other’s clients because the kinds of
clients that can afford private practice are just not the kinds of clients that I’m going to work with [in non profit mental health agency].

All interns had the expectation that they would work with a diversity of clients, usually minorities, from underserved populations most likely from low socioeconomic status. The interns expected to work with populations who possibly didn’t look like them, as the majority of interns identified as white, and most expressed anxiety about working with diversity. Given some of these assumptions related to working with a diverse clientele, whom where often from marginalized groups; the interns believed that clients would be somewhat lower functioning.

Kris stated that she assumed that it would be like people who were lower functioning. I think it just means there are tools I’ve had to teach that I wasn’t expecting, like what sleep hygiene is, what general hygiene is, job skills.

Among the interns interviewed there seemed to be a sense that working in nonprofit mental health agency was difficult work, and to some extent a required piece of their educational process that was essential to graduate. Most didn’t express desire to work in nonprofit beyond internship, though they accepted to a certain degree that they might need to if they aspired to accumulate clinical hours toward licensure expeditiously. Upon getting their license, typically two years after graduation, most expressed that they wouldn’t work in a nonprofit mental health agency, which is one of the reasons employee turnover in nonprofit agencies is so remarkable.

Because of the need to document and justify productivity due to funding, the interns seem to feel pressure to do therapy and document it well, especially when they were still learning what actually works for their clients. A few of the interns expressed frustration at playing games with minor clients in order to establish rapport, however, to the interns playing a game didn’t feel
therapeutic. One particular intern fluctuated between asking too many therapeutic probing questions and experiencing the client’s shut down, to playing a game with the client and feeling she wasn’t doing enough. Becky shared she felt the pressure to do something because she had to document her work in the client’s chart. Documentation was a significant learning curve for the interns during their internship.

Furthermore, some interns also expressed empathy for the fact that most clients receiving services at a nonprofit mental health agency didn’t have a say in who they worked with because given the Medicaid funding, grants or no funding at all, clients within this demographic didn’t get many options; options that would be accessible to people who had resources and/or commercial health insurance. Most interns shared that they worked with families that experienced barriers such as very little income security, homelessness, who are in addiction recovery, those who struggle with chronic mental health issues, and with many other barriers such as discrimination, single parent households, and chronic medical conditions. Sue gave the example of a client that had been evicted because their “landlord didn’t like Latinos.” She also worked with a mother who could not help her kid with homework because she couldn’t read. For this particular young client, the mother didn’t know how to read in any language, however, once the intern would read the information given from school, the parent was able to respond. A particular request was made to send pictures to the school for her kid’s project, and as soon as the translation to Spanish was available, the mother was able to fulfill the request. The intern was able to intervene by helping translate in many occasions, however, she also realized the family struggled with many chronic barriers, including the risk of losing their kids for possible neglect, however, providing the pictures for this homework was no problem in this instance. Most
interns expressed hopelessness toward their ability to help in greater measures. And most interns didn’t have that skill of speaking in a second language.

It seemed that the many barriers the clients experienced could interfere with interns’ assumptions about what therapy should look like. They described their clients as people who seemed to not have the resources to get out from their situations and didn’t seem to have a way to get *there*; *there* meaning whatever mental health, wellness or growth meant to each intern. Sue described the work with a particular client who didn’t have stability in many areas of her life:

> I’m starting to wonder if she’s going to get there in five years. I don’t know because she is so unstable… Their lives are so unstable because of their income. Because of their socio-economic status. They don’t have a way to get there.

And the many barriers could produce feelings of helplessness for both interns and clients:

> I struggled with clients that are really stuck in things like chronic pain, or chronic homelessness, clients that have a lot of things to overcome before they can reach where they want to be. That's been hard because sometimes it does feel really helpless.

As compared to clients that go to private practitioners because they can afford services, in referring to self-regulation as an indication of mental health stability, Sue noticed that

> I think that it looks really different when the clients cannot afford to get a massage every week. They can't afford to take vacations. They can't even afford a babysitter. I think that self-regulation comes at a higher cost, and it can come a lot more slowly.

Most interns had the experience that most of their clients were surviving their circumstances and seemed to not have space in counseling sessions to do *therapy*. Interns shared they expected therapy to look like what they were learning from their schools: talk therapy to
work with family of origin issues and/or trauma utilizing aspects of psychodynamic, narrative and/or existential models carried out within a western psychological lens. Interns were there to support clients in a multiplicity of tasks such as working on a variety of skills, helping them find a job or housing, or learning about hygiene, and that having moments of working with emotions related to trauma or family of origin issues seemed to not be as prevalent, however, not impossible to some degree. Some interns seemed able to reframe their work with clients and categorize as successful any movement or growth they noticed. Movements such as clients learning about what to expect from others, and how to ask for support and advocate for themselves in spite of the many barriers they experienced on a daily basis. Interns beginning to become aware of these successes, big or small, seemed important as the process helped shift the intern’s expectation of what therapeutic success was. One intern was able to categorize as successful the ability of a client able to “get something about themselves” which for this particular intern seemed a powerful moment, and the intern seemed grateful to be able to recognize it as such. Interns realized that due to their socioeconomic status most clients experienced social capital deficits that needed to be addressed, and in that work the interns were able to begin to notice the strengths each client brought to the therapeutic work in spite of those deficits.

Clients in nonprofit mental health agency have more strengths than interns assumed they did, and clients were able to achieve far more than interns expected. Cathy, described her work with a homeless man who struggled with chronic anxiety that transformed her perspective about clients. In her work with this particular client she came to realize through experiencing his character and strength that he could be anything he wanted to, and the intern shared that he had taught her much and helped her shift her perspective about what she saw on
the outside. She learned that a “person’s present circumstance is not all of what makes up a person.” Cathy worked with this client on job and housing searches, and coping skills, and slowly the therapeutic relationship felt safe in order for him to share his emotions and process his feelings about his life, which she believed are the next step into diving into the trauma. She stated that the work was helping them getting there, along with learning specific coping skills to his many barriers.

Sue described her work with a particular Hispanic client that seemed open to engage in conversations about racism and structural oppression, which helped the intern learn how to navigate similar conversations with other clients. She was impressed with the courage some of her clients brought as they engaged with diversity in the counseling session. Similarly, interns worked with clients that in spite of the many barriers they encountered on a daily basis still were able to put words to what they needed in therapy. Kris encountered an Asian woman who stated quite clearly that she didn’t want a therapist who valued the relationship, but who valued what she valued: work and money. This seemed to go in opposition to the intern’s perception of what therapy should be about, and the relationship seemed difficult for some time. The intern stated that in her disagreement about what therapy should be that she explicitly forced her values on the client with the hope to lead the client toward her goals through a relational framework in therapy. This intern said that they argued and missed each other constantly: “I wasn’t listening to her.”

I learned to trust that if I do believe that we are connected and we all want connection, that that’s going to happen regardless… We were going to keep butting heads if I didn’t actually stop and listen to what she was pretty explicitly saying that she wanted, and if I helped her toward her goal [of finding work].
Kris stated that she learned this client knew her goals and what she needed. Other interns seem to express similarly that they needed to offer acceptance in spite of the interns’ perception of what therapy should look like. Kris said she learned that there was value in helping people work toward their goals even if it’s not the intern’s goal for the client. Most interns expressed how their biased expectations were challenged and shifted, especially when their clients desired growth and success, and were able to attain those in different ways. Sue explained further:

I think that it has shifted the way that my expectations of them and what they will achieve or accomplish, or what achievement or accomplishment looks like. Because for me, with my personal background and my school and the lens that school had, I think accomplishment can look really different from what my clients feel like they can realistically achieve. Or maybe their priorities are totally different and not something that I might classify as a priority, but that's their priority.

This intern stated that she thought the difference in priorities might be a result of the difference in their socio-economic status and culture. Other interns expressed similar assumptions. Ron stated that he learned to be present and provide unconditional positive regard to his clients. Though he would challenge his clients in session he learned to be aware of his assumptions about what should happen in session. He also learned to be aware about the limits clients set for the work in session and be ok with that.

That was a huge takeaway to be okay with where someone was at, and begin to sort out like, okay, maybe it's some of my own motivations that are falling into this. Kind of separate that from what they [the clients] need.

Furthermore, Cathy explained that she realized her clients had done good work upon finishing her internship. She shared:
If there is at least one or two aspects that can really shift their [clients] world and they can use that to continue, then that's really powerful.

Interns also expressed being aware of their assumptions and biases that informed their perception of clients’ capacity to grow. Cathy stated that she was aware of her privilege as she worked with marginalized populations and that she had assumptions and biases about her clients’ ability to live empowering lives because of their low socioeconomic status, and their ethnic or racial background.

I'm coming into the room as this privileged counselor, feeling like I have the resources and ways in which I can help. Like more than seeing like, okay this person is bringing in all of these different dynamics and they still have the strength and the ability to take autonomy for their lives in a much more empowering way, I feel. Not to say that we [interns] aren't here to find resources and provide care and provide support. But it's less like; oh you need this from me.

**Interns could build therapeutic relationships with their clients in spite of barriers.**

Interns found that they could build therapeutic relationships with their clients in spite of many barriers. This final theme ties well to the first two themes: interns finding that clients in nonprofit mental health agency seem to have a lot more social capital needs than therapeutic needs, and that clients had more strengths than interns assumed they did. Interns expressed that in the work with clients they typically addressed first the immediate socioeconomic stressors that showed up as homelessness, chronic mental health, chronic pain, addiction, lack of employment, and lack of access to many resources. During the work with clients, which the first two themes expounded on, counseling interns reported that establishing therapeutic rapport and connections with clients were possible in spite of the many barriers clients experienced and in spite of the
Interns shared that the barriers seemed to prevent more traditional in-depth therapeutic work, and especially at the beginning, interns felt pressured to do therapeutic work. This pressure seemed to surface from interns’ own expectations about what the work should look like given what they had learned from their master’s programs. Becky talked about this pressure:

The next time I would try really hard to do therapeutic work. Let me ask you about this.

Let me get to emotions. And my kids would shut down.

Interns began to learn that the ways they were showing up for clients, regardless of their presenting problems, was actually therapeutic in nature. As interns became more experienced, they began to perceive a shift in these self-imposed expectations and noticed that they were being more aware and/or attuned to what was in the room.

During the interviews the interns expressed in varying degrees a sense of surprise about their ability to still create therapeutic rapport with their clients in spite of the many barriers that potentially interrupt therapeutic work. Kris stated,

It just surprises me the way that we can get to know people even through learning how to do mundane things and filling out paperwork, and having conversations about housing, and that it's not as big of a difference as I thought it would be to have a conversation about how you're going to get a job and a conversation about your family system.

She went on to say that she had moments of connection with her clients within sessions, and growth seemed possible with both types of conversations. The intern described that conversations around skills, and searching for jobs and housing, to name a few, were powerful moments, too, and that she wouldn't have anticipated how similar those conversations felt to the more typical therapeutic conversations about trauma, emotional dysregulation and/or family of
origin issues. She was able to recognize that the conversations about finding a job or housing did not feel less important. Another intern, Cathy, shared:

It's been quite a journey. I think this past week I closed with clients, I ended with all of them, and I don't think I even realized how deeply attached one could be. And how, I think the biggest thing I've taken away is I shared experiences with them.

Cathy went on to share about a 32 year old homeless man she worked with during her internship who struggled with a physical disability, debilitating anxiety and trauma history as one client she was able to connect with during their work together. Most of what they worked together was on finding resources, a home and employment. Upon ending the internship she asked him what he gleaned from their time together, and the intern shared:

He has not been ready to dive into the trauma. But what we've been doing and what we've done together is exploring feelings and being able to really stick with and accept all of our feeling space. And so, when I asked him if there's one thing that you've taken away from our time together, he said, "To feel that it's safe to feel. That it's okay to feel."

This intern stated she felt great about her work with this client because he was able to feel safe within his emotions and feelings, and, according to the therapeutic framework she learned at her program, that’s a step closer to dealing with the trauma. Cathy stated that they were getting closer to be ready to discuss trauma but the internship ended before they could engage more in depth therapeutic work.

Ron interned as a school-based therapist offering mental health services to middle and high school students who otherwise would not have the ability to access services given socioeconomic barriers. Ron realized he had made many connections with his clients upon ending his internship. He shared that students who had not been initially warm or ready to
engage in therapy were able to share with him that they will miss their work. Ron was able to recognize progress in the ability to connect in sessions. He said,

I think some of the successes would just be connecting with students who might not have initially been very warm, which makes sense. And being able to see small shifts, even just in the way they think was really cool. All right, we're making progress.

Other interns had similar experiences where they felt they were not doing the work of therapy, but realized at the end of their internship that much had happened in the counseling room. Work was being done in spite of their expectations of what a session should look like. The interns reported that most learning about their role came from peers, supervisors and from their experiences during internship.

And just through supervision [the supervisor] could point out, like ways that I am connecting and building a relationship with someone even though we're working on a really basic functioning.

When speaking of learning or big takeaways, the interns used similar words such as presence, acceptance and/or attunement in describing what was necessary as they worked with their clients. The interns reported that presence, acceptance and/or attunement helped them establish rapport with clients; figure out what to do in sessions; and become aware of what their clients were bringing to and needing from sessions.

Research Question 2: How does the internship experience working with clients with significantly diverse life experiences, context and socio-economic histories impact the way they perceive and think about their role and practice as a counselor?

Upon a careful analysis of the participants’ transcripts, the following two themes emerged in relationship to research question 2 and are presented in table 3 and discussed below.
Table 3

*Themes in Relationship to Research Question 2*

| Counseling interns perceived that it was necessary to first address clients’ needs related to lack of social capital before able to engage in-depth therapeutic needs. |
| Interns learned they needed to set aside what was learned at their schools in order to be present to the needs of their clients. |

Counseling interns perceived that it was necessary to first address clients’ needs related to lack of social capital before able to engage in-depth therapeutic needs. As interns realized at the end of their internship that much had happened in the counseling room in spite of their expectations of what a therapeutic session should be like, they began to put words to the reality of their role and practice in a non-profit mental health agency. The work seemed to encourage interns to develop awareness about their positionality, biases and assumptions as they worked in a nonprofit community mental health agency. The interns all spoke about the socioeconomic diversity within the agency that included a mix of clients from different income levels, social backgrounds, and in some cases, from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. It seems that one of the big takeaways was that they needed to address barriers before or simultaneously with mental health issues. The interns needed to account to the cultural and socioeconomic barriers of their clients as they attempted to do *therapy*. Cathy stated that she had to learn to address mental health differently with different clients,

I did have a client who showed more somatic and physical symptoms over less psychological symptoms. And he comes from a Latino background. And so, I was aware of that being something that is culturally relevant. But at the same time, I wasn't really sure how to address that.
She went on to explain knowing that she needed to be aware that different cultures may not talk about depression or anxiety but that those symptoms can show up somatically. She noticed how clients talked more about the physical symptoms such as having regular headaches or feeling extremely tired, and how she had to translate it to psychological terms. At times she did this to guide her work because she felt inexperienced,

Especially in Eastern cultures, in Asian cultures that's talked more physically. I'm aware of that. I know that, but I still didn't really know how to address that within this context, because I haven't really been trained from that lens.

Sue had a similar experience and expressed needing to do psychoeducation holding the difference in culture with clients in order to be able to do the work of therapy,

It's different expectations, and from my clients who are from different cultures, sometimes there isn't therapy. There isn't therapy in rural Mexico. It doesn't exist. So it is a lot of heavy education in the beginning of this is what this means. This is what this looks like. This is what this looks like with white people, so if I try something and it's weird, let me know and I'll look at it and come back and try again. It's been a lot of failing and trying again.

All five counseling interns expressed similar reactions and assumptions to working in a nonprofit agency, especially when they compared their work to colleagues from their own schools that interned in for profit mental health organizations. They expressed having the expectation that they would work with a diversity of clients, usually minorities, from underserved populations most likely from low socioeconomic status. In one way or another all interns expressed anxiety about working with diversity. Given some of these assumptions related to working with a diverse clientele, whom where often from marginalized groups; the
interns believed that clients would be somewhat lower functioning. Interns had a sense that working in nonprofit mental health agency was difficult work. It seemed that the many barriers the clients experienced could interfere with interns’ assumptions about what therapy should look like. They described their clients as people who seemed to not have the resources to get out from their situations. And the many barriers could produce feelings of helplessness for both interns and clients. Interns compared their clients to clients who have private insurance and go to private practitioners, and can afford a variety of services, in referring to self-regulation as an indication of mental health stability, Sue noticed that the work and progress looks different:

I think that it looks really different when the clients cannot afford to get a massage every week. They can't afford to take vacations. They can't even afford a babysitter. I think that self-regulation comes at a higher cost, and it can come a lot more slowly.

Most interns had the experience that most of their clients were surviving their circumstances and sessions seemed to be used first to deal with these circumstances, not just for therapy. Interns were there to support clients in a multiplicity of tasks such as working on a variety of skills, helping them find a job or housing, or learning about hygiene, and that having moments of working with emotions related to trauma or family of origin issues seemed to not be as prevalent, however, not impossible to some degree. Some interns seemed able to reframe their work with clients and categorize as successful any movement or growth they noticed. Movements such as clients learning about what to expect from others, and how to ask for support and advocate for themselves in spite of the many barriers they experienced on a daily basis. Interns beginning to become aware of these successes, big or small, seemed important as the process helped shift the intern’s expectation of what therapeutic success was. One intern was able to categorize as successful the ability of a client able to “get something about themselves”
which for this particular intern seemed a powerful moment, and the intern seemed grateful to be able to recognize it as such. Interns realized that due to their socioeconomic status most clients experienced social capital deficits that needed to be addressed, and in that work the interns were able to begin to notice the strengths each client brought to the therapeutic work in spite of those social capital deficits.

Interns stated that the internship gave them a better concept of different kinds of barriers that their clients experienced; they learned a lot about homelessness, poverty, immigration and discrimination; and they had to find different ways to explain counseling concepts to a diversity of clients. Interns had to learn how to assist clients from different cultures feel comfortable enough to share their experiences in the counseling setting when their cultures were not accustomed to a more western psychology approach. One intern stated,

I have learned a lot about what it's like to be a marginalized population that right now is facing a particular amount of discrimination that they did not necessarily expect when they came here.

Interns shared how they realized their role was to be more than a therapist to their clients. That their role at this nonprofit agency also incorporated elements of case management, translator, and advocate, to name a few. Interns shared that in the midst of their internship they often felt that they needed more practice in figuring out systems to help their clients; that they needed more training to navigate difference more effectively and responsibly; and that they needed to shift their expectations about what therapy should look like. Becky expressed frustration about what to address or not address:

I finished my entire internship and I didn't address race with these two little boys. And then there's the other part of me, these guys are in the middle of domestic violence. One
kid didn't have a home. Your job was to be there and be a solid person in their life. If they need to address this at 14 or 18 they will have a therapist there that can help them do that, but they clearly weren't bringing it because there were other things that they needed [from her].

Though the work at the nonprofit agency was difficult work, Kris felt the learning curve was helpful to her development as a therapist because she had to function as a case manager for a diversity of people. She expressed that this kind of work, and learning from that work, would’ve not happened in a more private practice setting. It was challenging work but to her it seemed necessary and significant to learn.

**Interns learned they needed to set aside what was learned at their schools in order to be present to the needs of their clients.** Interns realized upon finishing their internship that much had happened in the counseling room in spite of their expectations of what a therapeutic session should be like, and expressed some frustration about their preparation, or at times, lack of preparation from their master’s programs. Though interns were able to describe skills they learned from their programs that were beneficial and helped them develop their clinical minds, all expressed that counseling psychology within their programs was taught through a private practitioner lens. Given the context of the internship at a nonprofit mental health agency, this lens was not useful at times. Cathy said that she had to adapt different things with different clients and she felt she was bridging the gap between all that she had learned and what she needed to do with her clients. Kathy expressed a similar experience and she added that her school didn’t teach her how to work with practical presenting problems, such as dealing with socioeconomic barriers. All the interns shared similar experiences from what they had or had not learned from each of their programs. For example, Kathy stated that what she learned in school
didn’t train her to deal with a client who is in physical pain every day; others shared they didn’t expect therapy to be more than processing presenting problems and that much of the work included case management tasks. Kathy added,

I feel like I have lacked some practical applications that some of my clients have asked for. They don't want an understanding of why they got to where they are. They want tools to be able to get to their doctor's appointments, or be able to get a job, or stuff like that, that I feel like I have had to learn this year, and I didn't learn in school.

Interns shared that in some ways the internship experience showed them that they had to forget some of what was learned in their programs, and that the population they were working with at the agency was hardly talked about in their programs. Interns shared that their master’s programs and faculty often taught counseling and therapy through a private practitioners lens. The programs taught about clients who could afford private practice fees and/or had choices, which was different to the clients the interns served at CHS. Sue said that in her program she mostly learned how to work with people, who had resources,

I think that people [faculty] in private practice mostly taught [in] my program and the expectation is that we will go into private practice.

Ron expressed his frustration with his training at his school where the therapeutic orientation leaned toward in depth narrative therapy and realizing his clients at CHS where not in a developmental space to do that type of therapy:

[I am] feeling frustrated with my education and training. All right, it's not working, but I've been trained in this for so long and now, I can't use it in the same way that I was hoping.
Sue added that in her program she learned a typical timeline of growth and change related to grieving that could happen in therapy. This timeline could be measured in stages and in years. However, she realized that this expected timeline was not a realistic expectation to impose on the clients in her internship. With the internship clients success had to be measured differently.

I think that the language that [faculty] used, me and a lot of my peers [interns at CHS] have been expecting these things to happen sooner, and they're just not. So it's different too how we do our own success and competence. If our clients are not there yet, that's totally fine. But the language that is used in our classes, academically, is that they should be at this whole other level that's just not realistic.

Interns expressed that though they appreciated what their programs taught them, that in many ways they had to discount some of it. The theoretical framework the interns learned at their schools seemed not to work in the practical world they found themselves in during their internships. Some had to go back to basics, 

I think that I've been going back more to my earlier classes that are more general and looking at things like psycho-education. I feel like I'd had to take what I have learned and get really creative with it and make it work. Having the expectation that probably about half of our session is going to be what would be termed real therapy.

Sue added,

I think with school, the most annoying thing is that I paid a lot of money for that program, that I really feel like I haven't learned that much from. That's a whole other thing.

Interns also expressed that they learned useful information from their programs that was helpful to their professional development. Becky expressed that her multicultural class in her
program was very beneficial to her work at the nonprofit agency. She said, “My eyes are a lot more open to issues of race.” However, she shared that the program didn’t teach her how to and when to engage race well within the therapeutic relationship. Ron shared similar opinion about his multicultural class and stated that readings were very powerful because they “opened up a place that I hadn't had some awareness.” Sue added that her program really didn’t seem to consider “that people might be doing therapy that's in a language other than English.”

Becky also shared that her program’s practicum experience had been a process of allowing her to listen to her body, which helped her be more attuned to her clients. Kris expressed similar learned skills, and she added that her program taught her that “people show up if you show up” in speaking of presence. Though that felt basic to her, she felt that being present with her clients was highly beneficial to navigate the internship context. The relational framework she learned from her program seemed to be beneficial as well as some interns stated it helped them not only to be present with clients but helped them improve their attunement to what clients needed.

I think that basic belief that we all need and want connection, that's probably another thing that sticks with me [from what Kris learned from school]”

Though interns were able to describe skills they learned from their programs that were beneficial and helped them develop their clinical minds, all expressed to some degree frustration about their preparation, or at times, lack of preparation from their master’s programs.

Research Question 3: Are there any practices or experiences that have assisted and helped counseling interns think about their work, their beliefs and values, and how they can best assist and support their clients?
Upon a careful analysis of the participants’ transcripts, the following three themes emerged in relationship to research question 3 and are presented in table 4 and discussed below.

Table 4

*Themes in Relationship to Research Question 3*

| Learning happened in collaboration with peers, supervisors and case consults. |
| Master’s program multicultural class seemed beneficial to the work. |
| Learning through reflection. |

**Learning happened in collaboration with peers, supervisors and case consults.**
Interns shared similar experiences about the work of therapy in a mental health non-profit agency, and were able to put in to words that much had happened in the counseling room in spite of their expectations about what sessions should look like. Interns described several ways they were able to learn during their internship. They learned from peers, supervisors, consult groups, and from their experiences in the agency. Some stated that at the beginning the learning surfaced out of problem solving; others described their learning as a process of trial and error as they tried different strategies to help clients; and most learned from reflecting on their experiences. Ron said that

> putting it into practice, and just open to seeing how it'll turn out. Like okay, if it's not helpful then scratch that off. If it is, hey great, let's keep it.

Some of the interns described that paying attention to their bodies was beneficial as they learned to be attuned to what was happening in the counseling room with their particular clients. And most described utilizing a process of reflection and personal reflective practices such as meditation, some form of reviewing, journaling, and personal therapy. Aside from personal
reflection that seemed to help improve awareness about their positionality as they worked with clients, interns stated much of their learning happened during supervision and in collaboration with other therapists, other interns, and in consult groups.

Interns shared that they were able to learn from their supervision and consultations about how to work with clients who struggled with a variety of problems including behavioral problems, clients who experienced trauma, and about accessing community resources. From their supervisors they received support; were able to learn therapeutic strategies; and they also learned about documentation, and using electronic health records. Kris stated that she constantly worked with her supervisor around a client who was referred to therapy because of behavioral problems, and she learned strategies to work with the client from him. She also described a season when she needed increased support around having a mostly female caseload that had experienced sexual assault. Kris stated that she consulted not only with peers and other therapists, but also brought cases like these to consult groups.

I'd get really stuck in my own stuff so much that I couldn’t understand what's happening for the client. That's most of the time I needed somebody else's help.

Sue stated that collaboration with her supervisor, therapists at the agency, and other health professionals at her paying job was very helpful to her.

I talk a lot with them on this is the issue that I'm seeing. Have you ever faced this before and what did you do?

Cathy also expressed that it was helpful to process cases with supervisor and consult groups, and that she felt supported not only at the agency, but also in the consult groups at her schools.

I have the support through being able to talk with other colleagues, being able to talk with other interns, having a supervisor, having intern meetings. I mean, there's been a lot of
support even at school.

All the interns spoke highly of their supervisors. Good supervisors seemed to allow autonomy, while still guiding the learning process; were described as open and available; and were intentional about modeling the use of time and space. During supervision, supervisors would offer strategies interns could try in sessions to work with a variety of presenting problems, and supervisors were able to share known referrals to community resources that interns could offer their clients; interns didn’t learn some of those in their master’s programs. Supervisors seemed to help interns connect theory with practice; and were good at processing cases with reflection, and at the same time offering interns concrete feedback about the work. Becky described this in her own words,

The way [my supervisor] was just asking these questions was like, well what were you thinking about? Why did you do that instead of this? Oh okay, so it wasn't just your gut. Your gut was telling you something and you were connecting that with the knowledge that you actually had. And so the way he was asking that question helped me bring the theoretical with the visceral. And all of a sudden they were starting to connect and go somewhere. That was really, really useful.

Cathy described her supervisor as supportive in her work and in her confidence as a therapist,

So she offered a lot of support, a lot of advice and a lot of techniques to use. Also, I think in both realms, between my supervisor and her helping me to feel like I know. I'm a counselor.

All of the interns seemed to learn from peers, supervisors, and in consult groups during their internships at CHS, and were able to describe many ways they were able to learn by problem solving, trial and error, and reflecting on their experiences.
Master’s program multicultural class seemed beneficial to the work. Interns expressed that what they have been learning from their programs was helpful to their professional development; however, a theme surfaced among them about how much of the learning from their program was not as useful to their work at the nonprofit mental health agency. An area that was helpful to most interns was their program’s multicultural class, which was beneficial in navigating the work with a diversity of clients at CHS. Becky said that through that class she was able to be more open to issues of race. However, she shared that the program didn’t teach her how to, and when to engage race well within the therapeutic relationship. Kris stated that her multicultural class helped her address difference in the counseling relationship, however, she shared that navigating the ongoing conversations about race had felt difficult because the experience was so different with each of her clients,

And figuring out how comfortable and/or important their racial identity is to them, feels still kind of difficult for me to gage. It feels difficult. And if it doesn't feel difficult then usually I'm wondering how much work the client is doing to make it not difficult for me.

Ron shared a similar opinion about his multicultural class and stated that readings were very powerful because they helped him be more aware of his positionality. Sue seemed grateful about her experiences with clients and in her school as these helped her be more aware of differences, and her privilege:

I think that I have gained more knowledge through school of a lot of racial concerns that I might not have had. The area where I grew up is pretty white, low income. I think that being at the school that I'm at that's in the city that it's in, it is still pretty white, but there is a lot more diversity than in my hometown at least. So it's been a lot of learning
experiences. I think what it has given me is the language to be like "I'm really white. You're really not. Let's talk about that."

Most interns also expressed to some degree anxiety about not feeling prepared to navigate the conversations about race in counseling sessions. Becky expressed,

The anxiety of being a white therapist with a black little girl. I'm like, okay, this feels like it needs to be something that's addressed. And then also a fourth grade girl, who's like, nope, there's nothing [to address]. And recognizing where she was in her racial development and then being the therapist, the person in charge, the person of power. Having to make a decision, is this a place that I need to pursue or not? And at that moment I decided not to because of her response. But then was her response to protect me? So there was a lot of anxiety in that and I'm not sure if I made the right decision or not. I made the best decision I could in the moment.

Most interns expressed to some degree that their master’s programs and/or classes didn’t teach them well how to navigate diversity of clients and/or diversity of presenting problems in the counseling context. Interns were able to identify that these conversations needed to be addressed well, and that harm could be done if they avoided them. The interns seem to think is really important that master’s programs help young therapists understand when, how and what is needed to engage race. Interns expressed anxiety in not feeling prepared to navigate the conversations about race in counseling sessions.

**Learning through reflection.** Interns described several ways they were able to learn during their internship, which also included learning from reflecting on their experiences. Most Interns described using a process of reflection or using personal reflective practices such as meditation, some form of reviewing, journaling, and personal therapy. Others, like Kris, had not
heard the two words put together – reflective practice. However, Kris was able to recognize that in her process of trial and error, and reviewing within supervision, that she engaged in some form of reflection.

In terms of learning, Sue stated that something deeper had to happen to learn, and that learning didn’t seem to happen for her in isolation. She stated that she liked bouncing ideas and experiences off of people and getting different perspectives. Interns seem to not have much to time to reflect, however, they recognized that they were using some form of reflecting within their limited time. One intern stated she reflected on her work and goals related to clients when she drove from one appointment to the other; others wrote down their reflections; and others reviewed their process with supervisors and peers.

Though some interns didn’t have a specific reflective practice, some interns had participated in an intentional practice to reflect on their work. Cathy shared that she was intentional about having a reflection process by journaling. She stated that her reflective practice helped her process her work with clients; the interventions she was using; her reasons for choosing those interventions; and was also able to be mindful about her own personal process.

I kept a journal while being here, and I would keep a journal of my process after working with clients. I think that really helped me to see my process over the course of time. And to reflect on ... it was more about my own personal experience as a counselor. What was coming up for me? What were my thoughts and feelings, and how that changed over time? I think really having that space to be able to reflect on that helped to be more aware of what was coming up for me.

Interns shared that they used a variety of practices to stay present in the moment with their clients. When interns noticed anxiety taking them “out of the room” they realized they
were not able to be helpful and/or able to determine what was needed from them or the counseling process. Presence and reflection allowed them to make adjustments to what they were experiencing with clients. And reflecting seemed to allow them to be present to what was needed.

Becky noticed that she wanted to have a formal reflective practice, however, this would’ve required time and intentionality, which most felt they didn’t have such energy or time. In consult groups the therapist and/or interns presenting a case would have to fill out a form that would facilitate presenting the case. This process seemed very helpful to Becky and seemed very close to using a reflective practice for the sake of learning:

I didn't end up doing [reflective practice] just because of time and energy. But then one of the last times I did my consults, I filled out the whole consult form and I felt like I learned so much just by these questions that I could answer on my own.

As interns described their learning process through supervision, consultation and reflection, they also described a deeper sense of reflection as they worked with their clients. All interns had the expectation that they would work with a diversity of clients, usually minorities, from underserved populations most likely from low socioeconomic status. The interns expected to work with populations who possibly didn’t look like them, as the majority of interns identified as white, and most expressed anxiety about working with diversity. Given some of these assumptions related to working with a diverse clientele, whom where often from marginalized groups; the interns believed that clients would be somewhat lower functioning. It was important for interns to address these assumptions, and in that process of reflecting on their work with clients, they seemed to name a deeper form of reflecting: a deeper reflection process not only about the work, but about their assumption and biases in their understanding of socioeconomic
differences. Cathy expressed that she had to constantly be aware of the dynamics that gender, age and race differences would bring to the counseling session. She stated that the experiences allowed her to grow in self-awareness, and to always consider what the relational dynamic and interactions were bringing up for her clients:

Ah, there's a difference here, and it was talked about. And so, I think that it just made me really self-aware of my experience and the differences and how that can translate in relationships or just in spaces. And so I think that fostered probably a self-awareness in a way that feels natural to me.

Cathy and Ron both expressed that their self-awareness also came from their personal experiences as well. Cathy described herself as being part of the minority as a white woman born and raised in Hawaii; and Ron described himself as Chinese American who is often the minority in many contexts. Ron shared that his ethnicity and background was helpful to some of his clients, and believed that he had a different experience in working with clients because of his cultural identity compared to the other interns. Ron noticed that some of his clients seemed to be able to build trust with him more quickly than past white therapists who had worked with the same clients:

With other clients, it was like, oh yeah, you get how Asian parents are, right? So, there's kind of like, you probably get what I'm talking about without me having to explain it.

All interns shared about experiencing a significant learning curve in working with diversity, and all interns seemed to describe increased awareness as they progressed through the internship. Becky stated,

I think I came from a very whitewashed culture where I would've been like, oh this is no problem. I can work with people of color. And would've been very racist and not known
about it. So now I have a better understanding of race. I don't know if I have a better understanding of my racism, but I have a better understanding of it is there and it exists. Interns also seemed to grow in self-awareness as they reflected on their experiences as they worked within the agency with their clients. Sue stated,

I am white. I am pretty white. You go back a lot of generations, we're quite white, so I am a member of the population that is oppressing them [clients] and is marginalizing them. That is hard to hold. It's hard when I go home and I can set all of this aside and not think about it. They [clients] can't do that. Ever.

And Kris shared of her own experiences:

I feel like I can navigate [the conversations] pretty well, but then I think there is the systemic blind spots that I have that I feel impact my work with the two of them especially that I probably don't realize. I definitely don't realize. But I think most of what I feel like I've found to be true is that if I bring it up and try to continue the conversation, that it varies greatly between people, what they want and if they want to acknowledge that I'm white and they're not white, 'cause sometimes they really don't seem to want to keep talking about it.

All interns described learning that seemed to happen as a result of their relationships with their clients at CHS. Given the exposure to a diversity of clients and diversity of presenting problems the interns where constantly challenged to address their assumptions and biases, not only about their school’s teaching, theory, and practice, but also about their blind spots of their racial and sociocultural understandings. However, it seemed clear that all interns were open for the challenge, and through reflecting, they identified ways in which they had learned and grown. Sue shared that her learning was significant and at times unexpected as she was faced with her
own ignorance about her blind spots in navigating her sociocultural understandings. She confessed that at times she was a bit cocky because of her background and experience, however she found that it was not enough to understand her client’s context. Sue shared about her relationship with a Hispanic client and how after many sessions needed to build trust, they were able to engage these hard conversations and learn from them:

"It has led to some really neat conversations about things like racism and structural oppression that she's been pretty open with me. I think that the benefit that I see of that now is that I am coming in where I know that this is a thing, but I don't know what it's like to live with it. So tell me what it's like to live with it for you. She at least has responded really well to that."

In summary, interns described using some process of reflection such as meditation, some form of reviewing, journaling, and personal therapy. Personal reflection seemed to help improve awareness about interns’ positionality as they worked with a diversity of clients, and a diversity of presenting problems. As interns worked with a diversity of clients and numerous presenting problems related to sociocultural barriers, interns also described a deeper form of reflection that seemed to enhance their critical consciousness about working with different populations. It was clear that all interns were open for the challenge, and through reflecting, they identified ways in which they had learned and grown when faced their blind spots while navigating race and sociocultural understandings.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the development of critical consciousness skills of master’s level counseling interns in their work in a nonprofit community mental health agency, Center for Human Services (CHS). Analysis of intern interviews generated insights into
participant experiences at CHS. These insights provide valuable information about interns’
development of critical consciousness skills and their impact, and help gain more awareness
about effective teaching and training through the adoption of reflective practice in an attempt to
recommend actions, and considerations to improve internship experiences in practical and
realistic ways for the sake of better prepared graduates.

Through the interviews each participant shared about their own experiences during their
internship, and though these were unique to them, many similarities in their experiences and
perspectives were evident. Through the analysis of their interviews eight themes surfaced related
to the three research questions.

Three themes emerged from the first research question about how counseling intern's
experience working with clients that may have significantly diverse life experiences, context and
socio-economic histories impact their perspectives of their client, and their critical
consciousness: clients in nonprofit mental health agency seem to have a lot more social capital
needs than therapeutic needs; clients in nonprofit mental health agency have more strengths than
interns assumed they did, and clients were able to achieve far more than interns expected; and
interns could build therapeutic relationships with their clients in spite of barriers.

Two themes emerged from the second research question about how does the internship
experience working with clients with significantly diverse life experiences, context and socio-
economic histories impact the way interns perceive and think about their role and practice as a
counselor: counseling interns perceived that it was necessary to first address clients’ needs
related to lack of social capital before able to engage in-depth therapeutic needs; and Interns
learned they needed to set aside what was learned at their schools in order to be present to the
needs of their clients.
Three themes emerged from the third research question about practices or experiences that assisted and helped counseling interns think about their work, their beliefs and values, and how they can best assist and support their clients. The interns reported that *learning happened in collaboration with peers, supervisors and case consults; learning happened through reflection and/or reflective practices; and that the master’s programs multicultural class was beneficial to their work at the agency.*

The following chapter will provide the support for these themes. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research will be addressed.
Chapter V: Discussion of the Research Findings

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

The problem identified is counseling interns’ ability to be critically self-aware as they work with potentially underserved and diverse populations in a nonprofit community mental health agency. This exploration of developing critical consciousness has implications for procedures at CHS, and has implications that impact the training of interns and clinical staff to ensure better internship outcomes making this research significant for students and the agency. In addition to the procedural implications for training and educating clinical staff, research on this topic provides opportunities to explore implications for practitioners at CHS as well as potentially beyond CHS, as internships are an experiential tool to train clinicians. The exploration of the interns’ development of critical consciousness skills and their impact shape the purpose of this research. The goal was to gain insight about effective teaching and training, through the adoption of reflective practice, in an attempt to recommend actions and considerations to improve internship experiences in practical and realistic ways for the sake of better-prepared graduates.

Review of the Methodology

The purpose of this study is to determine how the individual perspectives of mental health counseling interns at CHS may have or may not have developed in respect to critical consciousness as they report on their experiences and perceptions as they work with a diverse clientele and potentially underserved populations in a nonprofit community mental health agency. Given the goals of the research proposal, the theoretical framework of reflective practice, and the methodology chosen, the following questions were developed:
1. How does counseling intern's experience working with clients that may have significantly diverse life experiences, context and socio-economic histories impact their perspectives of their client, and their critical consciousness?

2. How does the internship experience working with clients with significantly diverse life experiences, context and socio-economic histories impact the way they perceive and think about their role and practice as a counselor?

3. Are there any practices or experiences that have assisted and helped counseling interns think about their work, their beliefs and values, and how they can best assist and support their clients?

To answer these questions this study utilizes a qualitative approach to investigate how counseling interns’ experiences as they work with clients may have been enhanced by using reflective practice. In qualitative research, data is collected through several protocols to learn from participants’ experiences and about their context. The participants in this study were counseling interns who were interning at the Center for Human Services (CHS), a nonprofit community mental health agency. All 8 interns were invited to participate, however, 5 interns chose to participate in the in-person interviews. Their experiences were explored through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interns’ responses were transcribed and read, and reread to explore and identify common themes and key findings that surfaced across their experiences.

Chapter Four provided the data from the interviews through the presentation of themes that were supported by the intern’s quotes. Chapter Five will provide the following: the presentation and discussion of key findings, as identified by the researcher; a discussion of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework; a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature review; implications for practice; conclusion; future studies and significance.
Discussion of Key Findings

The participants recounted their experiences related to their counseling internships, with a focus on their ability to be critically self-aware as they worked with potentially underserved and diverse populations in a nonprofit community mental health agency. Through the analysis of the interns’ interviews, the following key findings (listed on Table 5) emerged through the participants’ stories of their experiences.

Table 5

Key Findings

| Reflection was necessary to learn during internship. |
| Supervision and consultation provided significant support to interns' learning. |
| Interns needed more preparation from master’s programs to work with diversity of backgrounds and therapeutic needs. |

Reflection was necessary to learn during internship. Internships at CHS were clearly a significant learning experience for all of the participants of this study. Interns seemed to have learned about community mental health, resources and counseling strategies from their supervisors and peers, collaborated with other therapists, and reported having positive learning experiences with their clients as they were finishing their internships. It seems that reflecting on their experiences during the interview process for this study, was an enjoyable experience for some, as they were able to reflect even more on their learning. Reflecting became a major theme within their interviews, their learning process, and within their experiences at CHS. Interns described several ways they were able to learn during their internship, and it seemed clear that reflecting on their experiences facilitated learning. Most interns described using a process of reflection or using personal reflective practices to help them through their learning. Such
practices were meditation, some form of reviewing, journaling, and personal therapy. Others were able to recognize learning by utilizing a process of trial and error, and reviewing within supervision and consultation as reflection on their work. It was also clear that personal reflection seemed to help improve awareness about interns’ positionality as they worked with a diversity of clients, and a diversity of presenting problems while learning during their internship.

Though some interns did not have much time for intentional reflective practices, they still were able to recognize that they were using some form of reflecting. Becky noticed that she wanted to have a formal reflective practice, however, this would’ve required time and intentionality, which most felt was not possible due to lack of time. One intern stated she reflected on her work and goals related to clients when she drove from one appointment to the other; others wrote down their reflections; and others reviewed their process with supervisors and peers. Though some interns did not have a specific reflective practice, some interns participated in intentional practices to reflect on their work. Cathy shared that she was intentional about having a reflection process by journaling to help her process her work with clients. Journal writing is a practice that helps students capture their experiences while allowing them to think critically about those experiences with the hope that students will develop insights into their assumptions, beliefs, and fears that could interfere with their professional work (Griffith & Frieden, 2000). “The process of writing reinforces learning and facilitates professional and personal growth” (Griffith & Frieden, 2000, p. 86). In consult groups the therapist and/or interns presenting a case were required to fill out a form that would facilitate presenting the case. This process seemed very helpful to Becky and seemed very close to using a reflective practice for the sake of learning.
Interns described their learning process through supervision, consultation and reflection; and they also learned from the work with their clients. All interns had the expectation that in a nonprofit organization they would work with a diversity of clients, usually minorities, from underserved populations most likely from low socioeconomic status. Given some of interns’ assumptions related to working with a diverse clientele, whom where often from marginalized groups; the interns believed that clients would be somewhat lower functioning. It was important for interns to address these assumptions, and in that process of reflecting on their work with clients, they seemed to name a deeper form of reflecting: a deeper reflection process not only about the work, but about their assumption and biases in their understanding of clients living under the strain of poverty, and socioeconomic differences. All interns shared about experiencing a significant learning curve in working with clients from different races, cultures, who spoke different languages, and who experienced different socioeconomic realities. All interns seemed to describe increased awareness of these diversities as they progressed through the internship.

Interns described deeper learning that transformed their awareness – a shift in thinking, or a sudden new awareness through a connection to their interpersonal experiences. This seems to correlate well with the literature about reflecting and developing critical consciousness. Reflective practices can offer two critical dimensions for this kind of deeper reflection: one dimension looks beneath the surface of a situation, assumptions, thoughts, feelings and values; and the other one, considers broader sociological contexts and factors such as power, discrimination and oppression (Thompson & Pascal’s, 2012). This supports the development of critical consciousness, which involves a reflective awareness about the differences in power, privilege and inequities within social relationships to foster a shift on perspective toward social
justice; Freire (1993) calls this “reading the world” (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). Interns were able to learn, and reorient their perspectives, in the context of community mental health; from peers; from consult groups; and in supervision. Interns shared that they learned from their programs the importance of presence and attunement, and interns reported these were very useful in their work. Interns used a variety of practices to stay present in the moment with their clients, and presence and reflection allowed them to make adjustments to what they were experiencing with clients. Ultimately, reflecting seemed to allow interns to be present to what was needed from them in sessions, especially in the context of socioeconomic diversity, and factors such as power, discrimination, and oppression.

**Supervision and consultation provided significant support to interns' learning.** The interns in this study stated that they depended greatly on their supervisors, and consult groups, both at school and at internship site, to learn and develop their clinical minds around becoming a therapist in a nonprofit agency. It was in supervision and consults with peers and other clinicians that their understanding of their role and clinical practice were shaped, and where most of their more explicit learning took place. Interns stated that at the beginning the learning surfaced out of problem solving; others described their learning as a process of trial and error as they tried different strategies to help clients; and most learned from reflecting on their experiences.

Interns shared that much of their learning happened in supervision and consultations about how to work with clients. From their supervisors they received support, they were able to learn therapeutic strategies and about community resources, and they also learned about documentation using electronic health records. All the interns spoke highly of their supervisors, and felt that it was very helpful when supervisors would offer strategies they could try in sessions to work with a variety of presenting problems, and learn about referrals to community
resources that interns could offer their clients. Interns shared that some of those strategies and resources were not taught at their master’s programs. Supervisors helped interns connect theory with practice; helped interns reflect on their cases, and at the same time offered interns concrete feedback about the work. Kris stated that she constantly worked with her supervisor around a client who was referred to therapy because of behavioral problems, and she learned strategies to work with the client from her supervisor at CHS, not at her master’s program. Sue stated that collaboration with her supervisor, therapists at the agency, and other health professionals at her paying job were very helpful. Cathy also expressed that it was helpful to process cases with her supervisor and consult groups, and that she felt supported not only at the agency, but also in the consult groups at her schools.

**Interns needed more preparation from master’s programs to work with diversity.**

The interns in this study expressed some frustration about their preparation, or at times, lack of preparation from their master’s programs to work with diverse clientele, and a diversity of presenting problems. Most interns expressed to some degree anxiety about not feeling prepared to navigate the conversations about race in counseling sessions, however, some interns did share that they depended greatly on their master’s program’s multicultural class to improve their understanding and develop awareness about working with diversity. Apparently, there was just one multicultural class offered by the master’s programs, which interns felt was not sufficient.

Becky expressed that the multicultural class in her program was very beneficial to her work at the nonprofit agency. However, she shared that the program didn’t teach her how to, and when to engage race, within the therapeutic relationship. Ron shared a similar opinion about his multicultural class and stated that readings were very powerful because they “opened up a place that I hadn't had some awareness.” Sue added that her program really didn’t seem to consider
“that people might be doing therapy that's in a language other than English.” Most interns expressed to some degree that their master’s programs and/or classes didn’t teach them well how to navigate conversations about diversity with their clients within the counseling context. Interns were able to identify that these conversations needed to be addressed with clients effectively and responsibly, and that harm could be done if they avoided these conversations. The interns noted the importance of master’s programs helping novice therapists understand when, how and what is needed to engage race. This seems to correlate with the literature as those who have, and will have, the roles of counselors, leaders and teachers, need to learn to recognize “the cumulative impact of racism” (Varma-Joshi, Baker & Tanaka, 2004, p. 203). Failing to educate and train professionals and educators about the impact of racism and oppression could be “an act of violence in itself” (Varma-Joshi, Baker & Tanaka, 2004, p. 203).

Furthermore, though interns were able to recognize that clinical skills learned from their programs were beneficial and helped them develop their clinical minds, all expressed that in their master’s program, counseling psychology was taught through a private practitioner lens. Given the context of the internship at a nonprofit mental health agency, this lens was not useful at times for interns to feel prepared to work with a diverse clientele presenting with a myriad of issues within this context. Cathy said that she had to adapt her program’s teachings. She felt she was bridging the gap between all that she had learned from her program and what was required to do on behalf of her clients. Kathy expressed a similar experience and she added that her school didn’t teach her how to work with practical presenting problems, such as dealing with socioeconomic barriers and presenting issues related to those socioeconomic barriers. All the interns shared similar experiences from what they had or had not learned from each of their programs.
All five counseling interns who participated in this study shared they had assumptions about the clients they would serve in a nonprofit agency. They assumed that a client from a nonprofit counseling agency, who may be lower income, would not be as stable or invested in therapy as a client who had resources and was able to seek out services within the private sector. Most interns shared that they worked with families that experienced barriers such as poverty, homelessness, in addiction recovery, and with many other barriers such as discrimination, single parent households, and chronic medical and/or mental health conditions. Many interns had the experience that most of their clients were surviving their circumstances and seemed to not have space in counseling sessions to do therapy: talk therapy to work on family of origin issues and/or trauma utilizing aspects of psychodynamic, narrative and/or existential models carried out within a western psychological lens.

Interns realized that most of their work included supporting clients in a multiplicity of tasks such as teaching clients a variety of coping skills, helping them find jobs or housing, or learning about parenting, hygiene and self care. Interns shared that though not impossible to some degree, that having moments of working with emotions related to trauma or family of origin issues seemed to not be as prevalent in their sessions. Interns expressed they appreciated what their programs taught them about what therapy should be, however in many ways they had to discount some of that learning while on their internships. Additionally the many barriers that the clients experienced and brought to sessions impacted interns’ assumptions about what therapy should look like, and the theoretical frameworks the interns learned at their schools sometimes were not effective. Nonetheless, interns also reported that they had capacity to use presence and attunement to navigate disorienting dilemmas related to the needs of their clients. These significant skills could have been learned from their master’s programs and, it seems that
they come from an attachment-based therapeutic model. According to Siegel (2010a), presence is profoundly helpful and “the most important element in helping others heal” (p. 2). Further, when therapists are able to cultivate presence, they can better tolerate discomfort in order to let the therapeutic process unfold naturally. Being present and attuned allows the therapist to notice their urges to do something or immediately fix a situation because of the discomfort and judgment they might be experiencing (Siegel, 2012a). Additionally, experiencing a therapist’s attunement repeatedly over time helps individuals develop the capacity to regulate emotions (Feldman, 2007). By intentionally cultivating presence, therapists are better able to attend to themselves, their clients, and the therapeutic relationship” (Baldini, Parker, Nelson, et al., 2014, p. 222). Interns were able to offer care and support to their clients by offering presence and attunement to their clients’ needs at CHS.

**Summary.** Interns seemed to have learned much during their internships through supervision, consultation and through reflection. It’s clear that reflection facilitated interns’ learning. Most interns described using a process of reflection or using personal reflective practices to help them through their learning. While each of the five participants in this study enjoyed their internships, they reported not feeling fully prepared from their master’s programs to do the work with the population at a nonprofit agency. Most interns expressed to some degree that their master’s programs and/or classes didn’t teach them how to navigate a more diverse clientele and they reported having a significant learning curve in working with a diversity of presenting problems. Interns relied on their support and guidance from their internship supervisors, professional consults with other clinicians and peers at the internship site, and to some degree, their own program’s case consults, to adequately serve their clients. Interns also relied on using the skills of presence and attunement as they worked with clients.
Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

The main theory comprising the theoretical framework for this study included reflective practice. *Gibbs' Reflective Cycle* (Gibbs, 1988) has been chosen to better understand the learning process of counseling interns. *Transformative Learning Theory* (Mezirow, 1978a) has been chosen as a secondary theory to explore a deeper sense of learning through reflection. Both theories emphasize adult learning through reflection. Gibbs’ reflective cycle is partly inspired by Kolbs’ experiential learning cycle, and its process is essentially a cycle that provides useful questions to structure reflection. Transformative learning theory describes how people develop and use critical self-reflecting to consider their beliefs and experiences, and over time, change dysfunctional ways of seeing the world.

**Gibbs’ reflective practice.** Professor Graham Gibbs published his Reflective Cycle in his 1988 book *Learning by Doing*. Gibbs’ reflective cycle is partly inspired by Kolbs’ experiential learning cycle, and its process is essentially a cycle that provides useful questions to structure reflection. This model encourages critical reflection by thinking through all the phases of an experience, in order to convert new learning and knowledge into action and possible change. Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle can be useful to students in learning contexts, and those new to reflecting given that it has defined steps. The six stages of this reflective cycle are *description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan*.

Using Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle (1988) as a framework allows practitioners to explore and learn from their experiences by answering a series of ordered questions guiding on to the next stage of the reflective cycle in order to arrive at new knowledge and change. It was clear that interns used forms of reflection during their internships. This reflection facilitated learning, and allowed interns to examine their values, potential changes in practice, and respect for difference.
Though Gibbs’ specific practice involving answering specific ordered questions was not categorically assigned or used by interns, all interns used some form of reflection during their internship, even if they were not aware of this.

Most Interns described using a process of reflection or using personal reflective practices such as meditation, some form of reviewing, journaling, and personal therapy. Though some interns didn’t have a specific reflective practice, some interns had participated in an intentional practice to reflect on their work. Cathy shared that she was intentional about having a reflection process by journaling. She stated that her reflective practice helped her process her work with clients; the interventions she was using; her reasons for choosing those interventions; and was also able to be mindful about her own personal process. Cathy’s process seemed quite similar to Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle (Gibbs, 1988) which is a process that essentially provides useful questions to structure reflection. In her journaling, she asked herself similar questions: “What was coming up for me? What were my thoughts and feelings, and how that changed over time?” Cathy felt that having space to reflect helped her be more aware of what was coming up for her. Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle is an accessible and practical reflective process that can be used to determine if interns experienced a version of reflection. Given the data, it seems clear that interns reflected in several stages and in several contexts.

Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle begins with the stage of Description. The Description stage describes events according to what happened and who was there. Interns shared how during supervision and consultation they were able to process their client cases. As they processed cases with supervisors at the beginning of their internships, interns realized that their learning happened out of problem solving, a process of trial and errors, and through reflecting with supervisors and peers. In consult groups the therapist and/or interns presenting a case would have
to fill out a form that would facilitate presenting a client case. This process of describing cases to peers seemed very helpful to Becky and seemed very close to using a reflective practice for the sake of learning. The *Feelings* stage of Gibbs’ Cycle includes an exploration of thoughts and feelings at the time of the events. Reviewing cases with supervisors included processing thoughts and feelings related to the work. Kris was able to describe a season when she needed increased support around having a mostly female caseload that had experienced sexual assault. Kris stated that she consulted not only with peers and other therapists, but also brought cases like these to consult groups as she learned to sort out her own feelings: “I'd get really stuck in my own stuff so much that I couldn’t understand what's happening for the client. That's most of the time I needed somebody else's help.”

The *Evaluation* stage includes an assessment of what did and did not go so well in the event. Interns had to evaluate constantly not only what they had learned from school, and what they needed to do with clients, but also determine what was working or not. Interns seemed to be able to evaluate their biases and blind spots within supervision and consults. They were able to begin the process of challenging their assumptions and biases that informed their perception of clients’ capacity to grow. Cathy stated that she was aware of her privilege as she worked with marginalized populations and that she had assumptions and biases about her clients’ ability to live empowering lives because of their low socioeconomic status. All interns shared similar experience of evaluating and challenging their perceptions during supervision and consults.

Interns seemed to be analyzing their growth throughout internship constantly. This *Analysis* stage in the Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle consists of reflection about incident, feelings and evaluation of what happened to make sense of the experience. It was clear that through supervision and collaboration in consults that interns reflected on what could have hindered or
helped the situations they found themselves in. Supervision, experiences, and their education were referenced for improvement for the sake of linking theory with practice. Supervisors allowed interns to process cases; helped interns connect theory with practice; and at the same time were able to offer interns concrete feedback about the work. Some interns had to adapt what they had learned from school to meet the needs of their clients. Cathy said she felt she was bridging the gap between all that she had learned and what she needed to do with her clients. Kathy expressed a similar experience and she added that her school didn’t teach her how to work with practical presenting problems, such as dealing with socioeconomic barriers. All the interns shared similar experiences from what they had or had not learned from each of their programs.

Through reflection, interns were able to become aware of surfacing dilemmas and pursue different strategies to work more effectively with their clients, and to continue to challenge their perceptions and frames of references as they worked with a diversity of clients.

In Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle, if interns had completed all steps of the cycle effectively and honestly, they should have been able to reach a Conclusion about how to improve and/or develop in the areas of growth. Interns reached many conclusions as they processed and reflected on their clients. Interns learned they had to address mental health differently with different clients. Interns learned they needed presence, acceptance and/or attunement as they worked with their clients because this helped them establish rapport with clients; figure out what to do in sessions; and become aware of what their clients were bringing to and needing from sessions. Interns had to learn how to assist clients from different cultures feel comfortable enough to share their experiences in the counseling setting when there existed incongruence between clients’ cultures and western psychology approaches. Interns shared how they realized their role was to be more than a therapist to their clients. Their role at this nonprofit agency included counselor, case
manager, translator, and advocate. Interns shared that they needed more training to navigate
difference more effectively and responsibly; and that they needed to shift their expectations
about what therapy could look like. Given all they had learned, the interns chose possible
*Actions* to handle similar situations more effectively in the future.

Though the work at the nonprofit agency was challenging work, interns felt it was
necessary and significant to learn. Most interns noticed their biased perceptions and expectations
challenged and shifted. It was clear that all interns were open for the challenge, and through
reflecting, they identified ways in which they had learned and grown when faced with their blind
spots while navigating race, culture, and socioeconomic understandings. Interns described a
deeper sense of reflection – perhaps critical reflection – that allowed them to be challenged and
allow learning to be transformed into change.

**Transformative learning theory.** Mezirow (1978a) identified several phases of
transformative learning, and this study focuses on the first phase, which is when an individual
experiences a *disorienting dilemma*. A disorienting dilemma is when an individual experiences a
dilemma or situation that no longer fits with their frame of reference or meaning perspective,
causing reflection and an openness to other perspectives. The process of transformative learning
begins when adults perceive their current frame of reference or meaning perspective to be
problematic. Counseling interns were faced with disorienting dilemmas, such as working with a
diversity of clients that challenged their expectations, biases and assumptions about their clients,
their role and the work. These challenging disorienting dilemmas compelled interns to reconsider
their beliefs in ways that fit the new experiences. According to Mezirow, these shifts happen
through “critical reflection" in the context of dialogue with other people.
Interns were constantly being presented with dilemmas, and though at the beginning these dilemmas may not have led them to intentionally question their current perspectives, it seemed clear as they progressed through the internship that questions began to surface. Questions about how and what they were being asked to do in relation to the work with clients began to surface in supervision, consults, and with their peers at their master’s programs. The participants described transformative learning experiences as they ended their internships. Interns had to address assumptions and biases about their clients, and in that process of reflecting on their work, they seemed to name a deeper form of reflecting: a deeper reflection process not only about the work, but about their assumption and biases in their understanding of socioeconomic differences and their impact on clients. According to Mezirow (1997) transformative learners are able to move “toward a frame of reference that is more inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective, and integrative of experience” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Furthermore, the literature states that therapists need to navigate socioeconomic diversity, and the impact that social, political and economic oppression has on clients. “Counselors work in an increasingly complex cultural milieu where every encounter with a client must be considered multicultural in nature” (Collins, Arthur & Wong-Wylie, 2010, p. 340). According to Collins, Arthur and Wong-Wylie, reflective practice “is a central component of professional competence and necessarily involves attention to culture” (p. 340). Self-awareness of values, assumptions and biases is the basis for counselors to enhance competence especially within multicultural practice (Collins, Arthur & Wong-Wylie, 2010).

Deeper reflecting in the context of a disorienting dilemma seemed to produce learning when something shifted for the intern. One of Kathy’s shifts happened when she brought up her client at a case consult group. She stated it was helpful having other people reflect back to her
how she was working on her own agenda in therapy, and not listening to her client in session. Kathy stated, “Eventually it was obvious to me that we [intern and client] were arguing every time we met, and that wasn't helpful.” Kathy also noticed another important shift that facilitated transformation in her learning as she worked with a diversity of clients. She said the shift came out of being impacted by people – a client or a friend – who are typically directly affected by oppression, “that's what causes me to reflect on my impact.” Cathy shared that her learning didn’t come just from an analytical standpoint but from being open to feeling or being present, “If I'm elsewhere or I'm not being present with my heart open in the full experience, I'm not taking in all that I can learn in that experience.” Ron described his learning shifts a little differently, “there can be some energetic shift, and it feels more like a softening, oh, so that's what that's about. And it kind of changes my posture towards myself and towards another person.”

Sue also stated that something deeper had to happen for her to learn from the dilemmas she was experiencing. Learning didn’t seem to happen in isolation. Sue stated that she liked bouncing ideas and experiences off of people and getting different perspectives. Sue shared that her learning was significant and at times unexpected as she was faced with her own ignorance about her blind spots in navigating her sociocultural understandings. Because of Sue’s experience and background in working with a diverse clientele she at times became overconfident, however she found that it was not enough to understand her client’s context to engage well. Most interns expressed how their biased expectations were challenged and shifted, especially when their clients desired growth and success, and were able to attain those in different ways. Sue explained further, “I think that it has shifted my expectations of them and what they will achieve or accomplish, or what achievement or accomplishment looks like.”
All interns shared about experiencing a significant learning curve in working with diversity, and all interns seemed to describe increased awareness as they progressed through the internship. Becky stated, “So now I have a better understanding of race. I don’t know if I have a better understanding of my racism, but I have a better understanding of it is there, and it exists.” And Kris shared of her own experiences: “I think there is the systemic blind spots that I have that I feel impact my work.”

It was clear that all interns were open for the challenges that surfaced through their internship experiences, and through reflecting, they identified ways in which they had learned and grown when faced with their blind spots while navigating race and sociocultural understandings; and their expectations about their role and practice as therapists.

**Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Literature Review**

This study explored the use and development of critical consciousness through the lens of reflective practice by considering Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988) and Mezirow’s Transformational Learning Theory as models to guide the exploration. Selection of this lens and theories was inspired by educator Paulo Freire (1972) words on developing critical consciousness. Freire proposed in his writing that developing critical consciousness gives us the ability to perceive social, political and economic oppression that could compel us to take action against these. As detailed throughout this study, participating interns seemed to have used some form of reflection that allowed learning and increased awareness as they worked with clients from different socioeconomic, cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds. This section compares the findings from this study with the literature review presented in Chapter two. The sections that follow are: becoming a mental health counselor, social justice, inequity and oppression; reflective practice; supervision; and personal and professional development.
**Becoming a mental health counselor.** As stated in the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) an individual who earns a graduate behavioral science degree in a field relating to mental health counseling has to provide an official transcript that includes either a counseling practicum, or a counseling internship, or both, with supervised direct client contact (www.doh.wa.gov). The counseling internships are also described as a requirement in The AMHCA Standards for the Practice of Clinical Mental Health Counseling and must include pre-degree clinical experiences that meet the minimum training standards of 100 Practicum and 600 Internship hours, and an hour of clinical supervision by licensed supervisor for every 20 hours of client direct care. The interns in this study participated in a 20-hour internship placement where they provided direct service to clients and received supervision, consults with peers and other therapists, and a monthly collaborative intern meeting for additional support. All interns came from private master’s counseling programs, and as described before, they came to the internship with many assumptions about completing and internship in the nonprofit sector. The interns interviewed had the assumption that working in nonprofit mental health agency was difficult work, and to some extent a required piece of their educational process that was essential to graduate. Most interns didn’t express desire to work in nonprofit beyond internship, though they accepted to a certain degree that they might need to if they aspired to accumulate clinical hours toward licensure expeditiously. Upon getting their license, typically two years after graduation, most expressed that they wouldn’t work in a nonprofit mental health agency due to work load, job stress and financial uncertainty, which is one of the reasons employee turnover in nonprofit agencies is so remarkable (Howe & McDonald, 2001).

**Social justice, inequity and oppression.** The literature on social justice stated that racism and oppression can be institutionalized and impact leadership; implementation of
policies; delivery of services without equally diverse staff representation; and approaches to hiring and retention. This makes it possible to have staff and faculty with limited understanding to what it means to be facing oppressive barriers, such as breaking free from poverty, and other injustices. Some of these issues can be operating at CHS and master’s level programs in implicit and explicit ways. Interns reported that their counseling psychology master’s were taught through a private practitioner lens. One intern stated that her program really didn’t seem to consider “that people might be doing therapy that's in a language other than English.” Given the context of the internship at a nonprofit mental health agency, this lens was not useful at times. Interns at CHS had a limited understanding of what it means for clients to be facing oppressive barriers due to poverty and other injustices.

Interns had the expectation that they would work with a diversity of clients, usually ethnic, cultural and racial minorities, and most likely clients experiencing many socioeconomic barriers. At the beginning of their internships the interns expected to work with populations who possibly didn’t look like them, as the majority of interns identified as white. Due to the diversity in socioeconomic status, the interns believed that clients would be somewhat lower functioning upon beginning their internship. Interns shared that the barriers seemed to prevent more traditional in-depth therapeutic work, and especially at the beginning, interns felt pressured to do therapeutic work. This pressure seemed to surface from interns' own expectations about what the work should look like given what they had learned from their master’s programs. Interns also expressed being aware of their assumptions and biases that informed their perception of clients’ capacity to grow. Cathy stated that she was aware of her privilege as she worked with marginalized populations and that she had assumptions and biases about her clients’ ability to
live empowering lives because of their low socioeconomic status, and their ethnic or racial background.

Institutionalized oppression exists, and that was clear as interns expressed their biases and blind spots as they worked with clients, however, supervisors and interns remained open to examine their biases. Eradicating oppression requires much more than personal and professional awareness; and interns faced plenty of opportunities to learn and increase their awareness during their internships. As evident in the data, interns reported opportunities to reflect within supervision and with peers. CHS was able to provide a collaborative reflective culture that allowed interns to explore their biases and assumptions as they worked with clients.

Collaborative reflective cultures attempt to address the important topics of oppression, privilege and injustice. According to the literature adults may be able to address, rethink and revise their assumptions in a safe context when engaged in collaborative reflective practice (Drago-Severson, 2009). Furthermore, the literature described the notion that academia is rooted in fundamental assumptions about education and justice within a Euro-Western context, and these are internalized by faculty, students and within the structures, policies and procedures of the organization (Campbell & Baikie, 2013). Meaning, students may come to academia with a “positivist and modernist epistemology” wanting to learn “the true facts” to practice “the right way,” and though they might be eager to learn about and from others who experience oppression or privilege, they might be less inclined to explore their own positionality (Campbell & Baikie, 2013, p. 457). Even with the possibility of these being at play at CHS, interns were able to process openly their experiences with the goal of becoming more aware of their blind spots – and the blind spots of the systems involved. Interns had to learn how to assist clients from different
cultures feel comfortable enough to share their experiences in the counseling setting when their cultures were not accustomed to a western psychology approach.

As interns realized at the end of their internship that much had happened in the counseling room in spite of their expectations of what a therapeutic session should be like, they began to put words to the reality of their role and practice in a non-profit mental health agency. The work seemed to encourage interns to develop awareness about their positionality, biases and assumptions as they worked in a nonprofit community mental health agency. Interns learned that they needed to address barriers before or simultaneously with mental health issues. Most interns expressed how their biased expectations were challenged and shifted, especially when their clients’ growth and success were attained in different ways. Given that counseling provides the space for clients to tell their stories, that space must be one that acknowledges the themes of diversity, justice and inequity. Especially those who have, and will have, the roles of counselors, leaders and teachers, need to learn to recognize “the cumulative impact of racism” (Varma-Joshi, Baker & Tanaka, 2004, p. 203). Failing to educate and train professionals and educators about the impact of racism and oppression could be “an act of violence in itself” (Varma-Joshi, Baker & Tanaka, 2004, p. 203). And counseling internships at CHS provided the space for future counselors to increase awareness of their positionality in order to work well with clients. The supervision supported interns’ process of learning.

Supervisors provided autonomy to interns and guided the learning process by teaching strategies to work with diversity of clients who struggled with a diversity of presenting problems. Supervisors helped interns connect theory with practice; and helped them reflect on cases. Interns began to learn that the ways they were working with clients, regardless of their presenting problems, were actually therapeutic in nature. As interns became more experienced, they began
to perceive a shift in these self-imposed expectations and noticed that they were being more aware and/or attuned to what was in the counseling room. Through the learning process, counseling interns established therapeutic rapport and connections with clients, in spite of the many barriers clients experienced and in spite of the interns’ biases. It seems that most of the interns had the capacity to navigate the disorienting dilemmas they faced during internships, which could signal strengths of their learning from their master’s programs. It seems that interns also learned to see therapy in a bigger frame, as it is possible that their scope of therapy was somewhat limited when they began their internship. It could be said that is not that therapy was different in a nonprofit agency, but that as interns began to reorient themselves to where the clients were, and continued to become attuned to the clients’ needs, interns learned to become therapists. Their image of therapy was somewhat expanded.

**Reflective practice.** According to the literature, reflective practice is the practice in which an individual witnesses his/her own experiences and takes a closer look to deeply explore them, in order to learn from those experiences (Amulya, 2011). Interns reported they learned much during their internships. They learned from supervisors and peers, collaborated with other therapists, and spoke highly of their clients upon finishing their internships. Reflecting was a major theme within their interviews, their learning process, and within their experiences at CHS. Interns described several ways they were able to learn during their internship, and it seemed clear that reflecting on their experiences facilitated learning. It seems that this correlates well with the review on reflective practice that describes that when reflective practice is done collaboratively, it provides the opportunity to dialogue – thinking and looking together – which impacts learning, teaching and leadership process; and allows the growth of capacity to manage complexity by reviewing, and considering alternatives that could provide better ways of thinking and
responding (Drago-Severson, 2009). It’s worth noting that to some extent the work also asks interns – and clinicians – to engage in some version of reflection with every case consult, treatment planning note, and session note written. Some of these charting actions provide opportunities to review episodes with clients by using some form of reflection that can include *description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan*, which are the stages of Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle. Interns described their learning process was possible through supervision, consultation and reflection: reflection through dialogue. Interns descriptions of deeper reflection as they worked with their clients, correlate well with Mezirow’s (1978a) Transformative Learning Theory, and Freire’s (1993) emphasis on reflection through dialogue stating, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 72).

Given that human beings hold assumptions that guide thinking and actions, reflective practice can help understand those assumptions by examining them critically cultivating “meaningful personal and professional learning, behavioral change, and improved performance (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 76). Interns reported that they began their internships with many assumptions: clients would not look like them; they would work with marginalized groups; and clients would be lower functioning in many areas of life given their socioeconomic barriers. It was important for interns to address these assumptions through supervision and through reflection. The preparation of future counselors should include awareness of their beliefs and attitudes and their impact on those they serve. Troutman and Parker-Williams (2014) stated, “while counselors may make focused efforts to prevent the imposition of values, the internalization of societal biases can affect therapeutic efficacy in ways that are unknown to
counselor” (p. 6). Reflection provides the context to test assumptions and creates the possibility for revision of values and internalization of societal biases. Most interns described using a process of reflection or using personal reflective practices to help them through their learning. Such practices were meditation, some form of reviewing, journaling, and personal therapy. Others were able to recognize learning by utilizing a process of trial and error, and reviewing within supervision and consultation as reflection on their work.

Furthermore, some reflective practices, as described by Thompson and Pascal (2012), go beyond the traditional definitions of reflection and describe dimensions to consider in order to have deeper reflection: one dimension looks beneath the surface of a situation, assumptions, thoughts, feelings and values; and the other one, considers broader sociological contexts and factors such as power, discrimination and oppression. Mezirow’s Transformational learning process begins when adults perceive their current frame of reference or meaning perspective to be problematic. Counseling interns where faced with disorienting dilemmas, such as working with a diversity of clients that challenged their expectations, biases and assumptions about their clients, their role and the work. In terms of learning, interns described that something deeper happened in order to learn – a shift in thinking; or a sudden new awareness through a connection to their own lives - and that learning didn’t happen in isolation. Presence and reflection allowed interns to make adjustments to what they were experiencing with clients. Reflecting allowed interns to be present to what was needed from them in sessions.

Critics of using reflection as a process of life-long learning question the how, when, where and why reflection should take place, especially for busy professionals who may be short on time, and if they do engage reflection, would that process be “applied in bland, mechanical, unthinking ways” due to the possible misunderstanding and potential difficulties about how to
exactly apply a practice effectively (Finlay, 2008, p. 1). Some participants in this study did not have much to time to have an international reflective practice, however, they recognized that they were using some form of reflecting within their limited time. Some interns expressed that they wanted to have a formal reflective practice, however, this would’ve required time and intentionality. Most interns stated they didn’t have time to do so. One intern stated she reflected on her work and goals related to clients when she drove from one appointment to the other; others wrote down their reflections; and others reviewed their process with supervisors and peers. It was clear that many types of reflective practices were used.

There is a call to develop techniques or strategies for developing reflective practice, and a potential limitation to this development of techniques or strategies is that reflective practice can be described in many ways (Okech, 2003). Meaning, reflective practice is understood and it's done in different ways in different professional contexts (Okech, 2003). Though it was clear that interns used some form of reflection, it might be important to define and describe if a particular reflective practice paradigm is needed or adopted by counseling interns within their internship context.

**Supervision.** Supervision is part of training within the counseling field (Worthington & Roehlke, 1979) and is part of the counseling internships at CHS: interns received weekly individual supervision, and also participated in consult groups with other clinicians, and had a monthly intern support group. Interns reported having good supervisory experiences that allowed learning. Supervisors need to be attentive to what behaviors and traits are perceived by supervisees as desirable for good supervision, given that supervisees’ perceptions of how good or bad the supervisory relationship is may impact their counseling performance (Worthington & Roehlke, 1979). Additionally, the supervisory relationship seems to have important influence on
supervisee learning (Ladany, Mori, & Mehr, 2012). In this study all the interns reported learning how to do the work from their supervisors; and the learning impacted interns’ work positively. The participants reported that they had good supervisors that allowed autonomy, while still guiding the learning process. Interns described their supervisors as open and available. These positive qualities seem to correlate well with the literature review which states that supervisors empower the supervisee through autonomy and openness; when supervisors demonstrated clinical knowledge that is disclosed appropriately, and is relevant to supervisee's concerns; and when supervisors offered positive and challenging feedback (Ladany, et al., 2012).

Effective supervisors work toward a strong working alliance, and ineffectiveness in supervision is possible when the supervisory alliance is not strong enough to survive problematic behaviors (Ladany, Mori, & Mehr, 2012). Participants in this study reported fairly strong working relationships with their supervisors. During internships supervisors offered strategies interns tried in sessions to work with a variety of presenting problems, and supervisors were able to teach interns about community referrals and resources to offer their clients since interns didn’t learn some of those strategies in their master’s programs.

Interns noted that supervisors helped them connect theory with practice. Supervision also provided the space to process cases for the sake of learning. The literature suggested that supervisors should use appropriate self-disclosure, and empathetic responses to model relationship development, which facilitates a safe environment for honest interactions and increased intimacy (Huffman & Fernando, 2011). This creates an ideal setting for reflective practice, and the findings in this study suggest that supervisors allowed space for reflection and learning.

Given the number of supervision experiences students, interns and counselors experience
throughout their career, and the number of ineffective supervisory experiences reported, training of and accountability for approved clinical supervisors should be considered (Ladany, Mori & Mehr, 2012). Supervisor accountability in demonstrating proficiency has not received much research attention.

**Professional and personal development.** As detailed in this study, interns shared they brought many assumptions and biases about the work in a nonprofit counseling agency, and about the clients they would serve. Interns needed spaces to process and reflect on these assumptions in order to learn. Given the data, it seems that the internship process at CHS provided the space for reflection. According to the literature adults may be able to address, rethink and revise their assumptions in a safe context when engaged in collaborative reflective practice (Drago-Severson, 2009). Collaboration not only helps build strong and nurturing learning communities, but they also provide a safe context where team members can broaden their perspectives, take risks, engage in reflection, examine assumptions and behaviors, which help with the growth and development of individuals (Drago-Severson, 2009). Upon ending their internships, participants reported that they experienced professional and personal growth as they faced many opportunities to challenge their assumptions and biases about their clients. Interns also shared increased awareness of their positionality, which affects their worldview. Even if interns reported not feeling prepared from their master’s programs to navigate the diverse clientele and the diversity of presenting problems in mental health nonprofit setting, it seems that they were prepared and open to grow at this nonprofit agency.

Creating learning cultures using reflective practice within teams, and perhaps within counseling intern cohorts, requires trust and openness (Drago-Severson, 2009). “It is hard to improve practice alone; we need each other to grow best” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 158). The
literature suggests that educators who engage reflective practice improve their practice and thus improve and/or enhance student learning. It wasn’t clear if supervisors engaged in their own reflective process at CHS, but the data in this study suggests that interns identified opportunities to reflect on their work, their clients, and their roles within supervision, consults and within their personal learning process. Supervision and consultation during the internships provided a holding environment for reflective practice and learning, which according to the literature is where individuals can engage in meaningful conversations about work, home and anything significant; where support can be offered through affirmation about what is working; and where safe spaces can develop for deeper reflection to be possible (Drago-Severson, 2009).

All interns described learning that affected their professional and personal development, which seemed to happen as a result of their relationships with their clients at CHS, their supervision, consultation and their reflection process. Both professional and personal growth was a result of interns’ exposure to a diversity of clients and diversity of presenting problems. Interns were constantly challenged to address their assumptions and biases, not only about their school’s teaching, theory, and practice, but also about blind spots in their racial and sociocultural understandings. Interns’ process of reflection such as meditation, some form of reviewing, journaling, and personal therapy provided professional and personal development as well. Therapy and the exploration of life stories can happen within personal therapy, and it has been recognized that personal therapy for therapists and trainees serve several purposes: professional development during their career, and therapy can support resilience and psychological well being (Wigg, Cushway & Neal, 2011). Through personal therapy, supervisors, clinicians and interns may become aware of their own stories, meanings, and transference issues, which then can
enhance reflective skills to engage in deeper reflection about their interpersonal work and their learning.

**Implications for Practice**

Given the literature reviewed and this study’s findings, there are many implications for practice to be considered. This study explored counseling interns working in a nonprofit mental health agency working with clients from marginalized groups in society. Interns are typically privileged and have not experienced social exclusions, and this is reflected in the overarching research question of how reflection could enhance critical awareness of counseling internship students. This exploration of developing critical consciousness has implications for procedures at CHS, and has implications that impact the training of interns and clinical staff to ensure better internship outcomes.

Interns had many opportunities to be challenged not only about their expectations about what therapy would be like in a nonprofit agency, but also were challenged by the diversity of clients they served, and by the presenting problems their clients brought. Given the data gathered for this study, interns perceived that it was necessary to first address clients’ needs related to lack of social capital, and interns learned they needed to set aside what was learned at their schools in order to be present to those needs. Interns need to be better trained in increasing their awareness of the impact of poverty and lack of social capital, for the sake of challenging presupposed assumptions and biases and develop critical awareness: critical awareness not to only deepen understanding, but to make a difference in the world. It was clear that interns needed to develop reflection in order to be better prepared for a diversity of issues encountered in therapy; interns needed to be trained for uncertainty given that learning specific responses to specific scenarios will not adequately prepare any counselor.
To an extent it seemed that interns were prepared for uncertainty. It is important to note that interns expressed learning from their programs the ability to be present and attuned to their clients, and these skills seemed to develop more as they progressed through their internships. It can be said that possibly through the teachings of their programs interns were in fact prepared to be disoriented in some ways, though they expressed not feeling prepared by their master’s programs to work with a diverse clientele and a diversity of presenting problems. This ties to Mezirow’s disorienting dilemmas, which challenge individual’s thinking and promotes the use of critical thinking to consider if underlying assumptions and beliefs about the world are accurate (Mezirow, 1978a). Interns were able to navigate the variety of disorienting dilemmas they faced and were able to learn from them.

Furthermore, the dissonance that seemed to exist for interns about their education and the work in nonprofit agencies seems to add to the disorienting dilemmas. It is possible that the master’s programs are setting this up. And does this dissonance between their education and the work at nonprofit agencies create limitations on interns/therapists’ capacity to work in that context as a long-term career choice? It might be beneficial to evaluate the levels of interns’ disorienting experiences before, during and after their internships to determine if they could be prepared differently for non-profit work. This awareness could equip future counselors to feel better prepared to sustain work in nonprofit agencies longer.

Since it seemed that the preparation of interns should include practices that enhance reflection about the work in nonprofit agencies and about their positionality, there seems to be a need to consider consistent supports and teaching that directly correspond to counseling internships in nonprofit mental health agencies. In addition, though we all could use further training in multicultural humility, it was clear from the interns that one multicultural class in the
master’s programs was not sufficient. Most interns expressed feeling inadequately trained while working with a diversity of clients and a diversity of presenting issues. Exploring the curriculum standards from accrediting bodies such as COAMFTE and CACREP helped support the above recommendations. The Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE), which has set the standards for master’s in marriage and family therapy, has established nine curriculum core standards (www.coamfte.org). The two standards that relate to this study’s recommendations of providing teaching about nonprofit work, and adding more multicultural trainings are the Diverse, Multicultural and/or Underserved Communities standard and Community Intersections & Collaboration standard, which addresses developing competency in multidisciplinary collaboration. The Council of the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), which has set the standards for master’s counseling programs, has established eight curriculum core standards (www.cacrep.org). The two standards that relate to this study’s recommendations of providing teaching about nonprofit work, and adding more multicultural trainings are the Social and Cultural Diversity and Counseling and Helping Relationships standards (www.cacrep.org).

In reviewing these core standards in COAMFTE and CACREP accredited programs, it seems most programs offer just one multicultural class, and some offer an additional elective on training on specific populations such as Counseling African Americans, Asian Americans, Clients with Disabilities, LatinX Communities, etc. Furthermore, aside from courses in becoming a systems therapist to work with addiction, couples and families, to name a few, most programs do not seem to offer specific courses about the work in community mental health agencies. Given the curriculum standards of these two accrediting bodies, it seems that it would be beneficial that master’s programs offer additional courses that cover those standards more
extensively for the sake of better-prepared counselors, who would view the work in nonprofit agencies not as disorienting and daunting, and could potentially consider that work a viable long-term career possibility.

Given this, not only should master’s programs offer more preparation on nonprofit work, and multicultural competence and humility, programs should also prepare students become reflective practitioners to increase awareness of their positionality. The preparation of future counselors should include awareness of their beliefs and attitudes, and the impact on those they serve. It seemed clear that the participants in this study wanted to learn about, and had focused their efforts to navigate diversity within the therapeutic relationship as best they could, however, they also experienced how it was possible that imposition of their values and the internalization of society biases impacted therapeutic efficacy. Interns should continue developing reflective practices to become critical thinkers.

Critical thinking must include the practice to analyze the therapist’s work in order to question, reflect on, and consider changing assumptions, with a willingness to deal openly with challenging and conflicting views. It seemed that this was possible within the internships process within supervision, consults and within interns’ personal learning practices. Master’s programs and internship sites need to be cognizant of the needs of interns in developing effective reflective practices as it is a strength in their learning process. Faculty and supervisors should be trained, and be able to teach and mentor in becoming reflective practitioners. In addition, faculty and supervisors should be trained - and be able to teach and mentor - in the need for multicultural counseling as there is an ethical consideration that counselors must work toward becoming competent multicultural counselors (American Psychological Association [APA], 2002).

Worthington, Soth-McNett, and Moreno (2007) presented that therapists who were competent in
multicultural counseling worked better across racial and ethnic differences, and were perceived to be “more attractive, trustworthy, and expert” (Troutman & Parker-Williams, 2014, p. 5).

Master’s programs and internship sites must explore practices that can help develop critical awareness to enhance learning opportunities for interns. Faculty and supervisors can create opportunities for critical thinking so that students have opportunities to engage through journaling, dialoguing, and critically question their own assumptions and beliefs. As mentioned before, to some extend the work also asks interns – and clinicians – to engage in some version of reflection with every case consult, treatment planning note, and session note written. In many ways reflection is already part of the work. Interns need to be trained in doing these charting tasks well for the sake of reflecting on their work to better care for clients.

It is important for students to consult, collaborate and be inspired by colleagues’ learning processes. Master’s programs and internship sites must provide opportunities for students to relate to others as learners because transformation often happens in community. More so, when reflective practice is done collaboratively, it provides the opportunity to dialogue – thinking and looking together – which impacts learning, teaching and leadership process; and allows the growth of capacity to manage complexity by reviewing, and considering alternatives that could provide better ways of thinking and responding (Drago-Severson, 2009). Gibbs, Freire and Mezirow support the notion that learning through reflection happens in dialogue, in community, which in a way supports the concept of good supervision. As mentioned before, supervision allowed interns to dialogue and reflect on their experiences, and further, supervision seemed to allow the development of critical consciousness as interns reflected on their work with a diverse clientele. Freire states that the “development of critical consciousness involves a reflective awareness of the differences in power and privilege and the inequities that are embedded in
social relationships” (p. 783). Supervision seems to offer the ideal context for developing critical consciousness as they are called to strive to develop and maintain self-awareness regarding their diversity competence, which includes attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Supervisors also need to understand that they serve as important role models regarding openness to self-exploration, to understanding of biases, and be willing to pursue education or consultation when indicated (APA, 2014).

Furthermore, master’s programs and internship sites need to better understand the incongruence of theory and practice as interns, who come from private master’s programs, begin to practice in nonprofit counseling agencies. The role of a private practitioner is different than the role of a therapist in a nonprofit agency. A therapist in a nonprofit agency typically takes on a social justice-counseling paradigm that understands how oppression impacts client’s mental health. Nonprofit mental health agencies typically require the counselor to adopt an identity of advocate and active agent of change. Non-profit mental health counselors are expected to disrupt the status quo in society and dismantle systems that keep their clients oppressed and thus negatively influence psychological well-being. Master’s programs and internship sites need to train interns in the range of therapist roles, and expand the framework of what therapy is.

Lastly, most interns expressed that upon graduating or licensing they wouldn’t work in a nonprofit mental health agency, which is one of the reasons employee turnover in nonprofit agencies is so remarkable. Studies have confirmed that dissatisfaction with pay and career advancement opportunities, combined with hard work and lack of resources, are among the reasons why nonprofits cannot retain qualified workers. Even public service-minded individuals will not be retained by organizations offering hard work at insufficient wages (Dicke, 2002). Master’s programs and internship sites must make sure interns feel prepared to do the work
required of them, and upon graduation, community mental health agencies need to be able to offer positions with competitive wages with clear paths of professional development and advancements compared to for-profit organizations or private practice. It would be beneficial that master’s programs offer additional courses that prepare students for nonprofit mental health internship settings. According to the interns, more preparation would have helped them feel better equipped to allow them to view the work in nonprofit agencies not as daunting, and potentially consider that work a viable long-term career possibility.

**Significance of the Study**

As Collins, Arthur and Wong-Wylie (2010) write, “Counselors work in an increasingly complex cultural milieu where every encounter with a client must be considered multicultural in nature” (p. 340). The literature has an abundance of articles on multicultural counseling describing the ethical consideration that counselors must work to become competent multicultural counselors (American Psychological Association [APA], 2002). Counseling interns who are typically privileged and have not experienced social exclusions are often interning in nonprofit community mental health organizations where they work with marginalized groups in society (Mapp, 2013; Rosen, McCall & Goodkind, 2017). This study is significant because counseling interns need to be provided with adequate education in working with a diverse clientele presenting with a diversity of presenting problems. Interns also need to be provided with training on reflective strategies to increase self-awareness as they do the work. The exploration of the interns’ development of critical consciousness skills is significant because the lack of awareness can impact the work with clients negatively. Expanding the research on developing critical awareness through the use of reflective practice has implications on the professional and personal development of counseling interns, and has significance in the
domains of policy, practice and research within master’s programs and internship sites. Considering reflection and the adoption of reflective practices, such as questioning through a reflective cycle, reflecting collaboratively, or journaling, within master’s programs and internship sites can help improve internship experiences in practical and realistic ways for the sake of better-prepared graduates. Through reflecting and writing, interns can begin to identify effective interventions as clinical practice and experiences are critically evaluated by noticing patterns, themes, personal reactions during and after interventions in order to create more wholistic and coherence understanding (Griffith & Frieden, 2000).

Interns need to learn how to navigate work in nonprofit settings with openness to be challenged to reconsider their blind spots and biases as they work with a diversity of clients. The assumption is that interns must mature in their personal and professional development, capacity and ability for reflection, through personal therapy, their own supervision, and by other formal and informal learning (Bui & Baruch, 2010; Drago-Severson, 2009; Okech, 2008; Wigg, Cushway & Neal, 2011). If effective reflective practice is not in place, relationship dysfunction will manifest as insecurity and anxiety in the interactions with others, which can potentially affect the therapeutic relationship and outcomes. Counselors need to navigate socioeconomic diversity and the impact that social, political and economic oppression may have on clients.

One of the many definitions of reflective practice is the “active, ongoing examination of the theories, beliefs, and assumptions that contribute to counselors’ understanding of client issues and guide their choices for clinical interventions” (Griffith & Frieden, 2000, p. 82). Counselor competence includes the characteristics of self understanding, awareness, and the clinicians ability to understand complex problems; it seems fitting that learning and developing reflective thinking must be part of counselor education programs (Griffith & Frieden, 2000); and Peterson
(1995) stated that educating reflective practitioners could be a significant part in counselor preparation given that empirical studies failed to describe advantages of traditional clinical training. Master’s programs and internship sites need to make sure they produce reflective practitioners out of their educational programs.

In summary, this study is significant because if the experiences of the intern participants in this study are true of other interns working in nonprofit settings, they rely on their master’s programs, internship sites, supervision experiences, colleagues, and their own reflection process to obtain the adequate training to ensure their success in their education and internship. Thus placing much responsibility on programs, internship sites and the student to become responsibly aware of the needs of clients in a non-profit community mental health agency.

**Future Studies**

There is much more that can be learned about counseling internship experiences, and several areas are worthy of further exploration. This study helped expand the knowledge around reflective practice and how it can enhance the learning experiences of counseling interns. There is a call to develop techniques or strategies for developing reflective practices that are adequate for counseling interns. Practices such as reflecting collaboratively, reviewing, personal therapy and journaling were practices utilized by the interns in this study. A potential limitation to this development of techniques or strategies is that reflective practice can be described in many ways; meaning, reflective practice is understood and it's done in different ways in different professional contexts. Also, there is a need to explore definitions and descriptions of reflective practice in order to facilitate implementation and measure its outcomes. In addition, it was clear that using both theoretical frameworks - reflective practice and transformational learning theory - were complementary for this study, and further study on the pairing of both theories seems helpful to
explore adult learning. Furthermore, it may be helpful to explore interns’ attitudes and
motivation towards self-exploration and reflective practice in order to help them choose the
reflective learning approach that complements their personality and learning style to maximize
learning.

Through presence and attunement, interns were able to navigate when faced with what
Mezirow (1978a) would refer to as disorienting dilemmas. Interns were able to learn from these
dilemmas in spite of their perception that they were not prepared to do the work in a nonprofit
agency. This piece is worth studying further: is the preparation of interns to be attuned to
navigate these dilemmas in a nonprofit agency within the scope of internship sites, or the
master’s programs? Furthermore, does the dissonance between the education interns received
and the work at nonprofit agencies create limitations on interns’ capacity to do the work in
nonprofit agencies? It might be beneficial to evaluate the levels of interns’ disorienting
experiences before, during and after their internships to determine if they could be prepared
differently and more efficiently for non-profit work. Could this equip future counselors with the
skills and knowledge to feel better prepared to sustain work in nonprofit community mental
health agencies longer?

As far as the learning contexts represented in this study, it seems that it would be
beneficial to further study the necessity of counseling master’s programs and internship sites’
curriculum to include additional preparation and/or courses in the areas of multicultural
counseling, and the development of reflective practices as significant parts in counselor
preparation. This includes the need to explore training of faculty and supervisors on reflection;
training and evaluation process of the clinical supervision offered; and capacity for faculty and
supervisors to teach on and work in multicultural counseling contexts.
Conclusion

The research questions that directed this study were:

1. How does counseling intern's experience working with clients that may have significantly diverse life experiences, context and socio-economic histories impact their perspectives of their client, and their critical consciousness?

2. How does the internship experience working with clients with significantly diverse life experiences, context and socio-economic histories impact the way they perceive and think about their role and practice as a counselor?

3. Are there any practices or experiences that have assisted and helped counseling interns think about their work, their beliefs and values, and how they can best assist and support their clients?

Interns were able to identify that their perspectives of their clients had evolved throughout their internship, and that the exposure to a diverse clientele, good supervision, consult experiences, and the use of reflection and/or reflective practices increased awareness about their positionality. The internship experiences also impacted interns’ perception of their role and practice as counselor in a nonprofit organization, and their framework of therapy expanded. Reflection facilitated transformational learning experiences. Interns were disappointed to discover they were lacking learning from their programs, and stated they needed more preparation in multicultural counseling to work effectively with a diversity of clients that presented with a variety of unexpected presenting problems. However, interns also showed they had capacity to use presence and attunement to navigate disorienting dilemmas, and the needs of their clients. These significant skills could have been derived from the master’s programs’ teaching.
In conclusion, this exploration on counseling internships seen through the lens of reflective practice to enhance the quality of service, has informed the goal of helping interns become reflective practitioners in order to increase awareness about positionality, interpersonal interactions, teaching and therapeutic effectiveness, performance, and practice. Ultimately, the implication of this study is that self-reflection is significant and of much value to individuals who engage in activities intended to contribute to the development of others (Hay, 2007), which includes faculty, supervisors, counselors, and interns.
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Appendix A

Recruitment Email (Initial Message)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Vanessa Villavicencio Requests your Participation

Dear CHS Interns,

My name is Vanessa Villavicencio and I am the Mental Health Associate Director at the Center for Human Services, and I am also a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I am conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants.

I am researching counseling interns’ ability to being critically self aware as they work with diverse populations in a nonprofit community mental health agency. My goal is to explore interns’ development of critical consciousness skills to gain insight about effective teaching and training in an attempt to recommend actions and considerations to improve internship experiences. This exploration may have implications for procedures at CHS, and has implications that impact the training of interns and clinical staff to ensure better internship outcomes.

If you choose to participate in this study, I will be interviewing you about your counseling internship experiences. The expected time commitment is meeting in person for an interview that will take between one and two hours long. These interviews will be recorded.

If you are interested in learning more about this study and participating in this interview, please email me at villavicencio.v@husky.neu.edu and include the information listed below. I will provide you with additional details about the study.

Name:
Email:
Phone Number:
Preferred days and times to meet (including weekends):

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Regards,
Vanessa V. Villavicencio
Appendix B

Recruitment Email (Targeted Message)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Research Study with Vanessa Villavicencio

Dear (Intern),

I hope you are doing well!

As you may know, I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I am conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants.

I am researching counseling interns’ ability to being critically self aware as they work with diverse populations in a nonprofit community mental health agency. My goal is to explore interns’ development of critical consciousness skills to gain insight about effective teaching and training in an attempt to recommend actions and considerations to improve internship experiences. This exploration may have implications that impact the training of interns and clinical staff at CHS to ensure better internship outcomes.

I’m writing to see if you would consider participating in this study. If you choose to participate, I will interview you about your internship experiences. The expected time commitment is meeting in person for an interview that will take between one and two hours long. These interviews will be recorded.

If you are interested in learning more about this study and participating in this interview, please email me at villavicencio.v@husky.neu.edu and include the information listed below. I will provide you with additional details about the study.

Name:
Email:
Phone Number:
Preferred days and times to meet (including weekends):

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Regards,
Vanessa V. Villavicencio
Title: Reflective Practice: Exploring counselor interns reflection in nonprofit community mental health setting

Principle Investigator (PI): Dr. Chris Unger, Northeastern University

Co-Investigator: Vanessa Villavicencio, Northeastern University

Purpose: I am inviting you to take part in a research study. The goals of this study will attempt to explore counseling interns’ experiences and perceptions as they work with a diversity of populations in a nonprofit community mental health agency. Focus will be given to how a counseling intern’s experiences as they work with clients may have been enhanced by using reflective practice. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a counseling intern working in a mental health non profit agency working with a diversity of clients.

This study will involve one in person point of contact with the researcher. The point of contact will be an in-depth interview with the researcher (approximately 45-90 minutes). Should the researcher require clarification or additional information based on what was divulged during the initial interview, a follow-up interview will subsequently take place. The interviews will be audio recorded for transcription and analysis purposes. The exploration of the interns’ development of critical consciousness skills and their impact shape the purpose of this research as one to gain insight about effective teaching and training through the adoption of reflective practice in an attempt to recommend actions and considerations to improve internship experiences for the sake of better trained graduates.

Procedure: If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to participate in an individual interview. For this in person interview, you may select a location that is convenient and comfortable for you. All interviews conducted in person will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. Any information you provide in writing will also be analyzed. All materials will be stored securely and your name will be omitted. Instead, a pseudonym, which you may select during the initial meeting, will be used to organize the information.

Risks: The primary risk associated with this study is the discomfort you may feel discussing your struggles within your internship experiences. The researcher will respect your boundaries during the interviews and allow you to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. The researcher will provide you with resources for additional support if needed.

Benefits: There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, the researcher hopes that the information gathered through this study will provide insight about counseling interns’ experiences that could enhance the teaching and learning of the internship program at CHS. Though some interns may have previous personal or professional experiences that prepare them for working with oppressed and marginalized populations, others may have difficulty identifying with those concepts in practical ways. This study attempts to explore how interns are able to do the job within that context. The findings from this study will be shared
with interns, supervisors, clinical staff, and administrators with the intention of strengthening the internship program.

Confidentiality: Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers will see the information about you. If you decide to participate, you will select a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study to protect your identity. Any reports, presentations, or discussions associated with this study (i.e. doctoral thesis, journal articles, conference presentations) will utilize this pseudonym and will not include any personal information linked directly to you. Information about your age, gender, race, and field of study will be included to help others understand and interpret the research findings. Our interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. The researcher will code the written transcript to identify patterns and themes within your interview and across interviews with other participants. All physical documents or files related to this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All electronic files will be stored in a password protected online file storage program and on an external data storage device. Only the researcher will have access to these storage mechanisms. All data will be retained for three years and then destroyed.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may decide not to participate and you may withdraw at any time. You are not obligated to answer all questions that are asked of you during interviews. You may indicate your desire to skip a question by stating “pass.”

Will I be paid for my participation?
There will be no remuneration for your participation in this research study.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
You will be responsible for the cost of traveling to the interview site. However, you will be able to select an interview site that is convenient and comfortable for you.

Contact Person: Please contact Vanessa Villavicencio at (206) 501-6047 or via email at villavicencio.v@husky.neu.edu or Dr. Chris Unger who is overseeing my research at c.unger@neu.edu if you have any questions about this study. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115. Telephone: 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

I agree to take part in this research.

______________________________________________________________________________
Signature of the person agreeing to take part  Date

______________________________________________________________________________
Printed name of person above  Date

______________________________________________________________________________
Vanessa Villavicencio, Student Researcher  Date
Thank you for your interest in participating in my research. Before we begin the interview, please review the consent form and sign it if you agree to participate. The consent form provides a short overview of the study and the interview process. The consent form outlines what I will do to protect confidentiality. Please review the consent form carefully to make sure you are comfortable with everything detailed on the form.

This study is meant to focus on counseling interns experiences who may be typically privileged and have not experienced social exclusions and are often interning in nonprofit community mental health organizations where they work with marginalized groups in society. And though some interns may have previous personal or professional experiences that prepare them for working with oppressed and marginalized population, others may have difficulty identifying with those concepts in practical ways. Please provide honest responses based on your experiences as you have worked in this context throughout your internship. Additionally, I will be recording the interview, so please do your best to speak clearly.

We will begin the interview in a few minutes. This process will take between 60 and 90 minutes. I will ask that you share your experiences while interning. I encourage you to speak openly about the questions. There is no time limit for specific questions, so it is fine to go into detail with your responses.

The first few interview questions will be on your specific experiences at CHS, and then we will proceed to in-depth questions.

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

1. **What does it mean to you to be counseling intern?**
   
   *Possible prompts: In non profit?*

2. **What is like to be an intern at CHS?**
   
   *Possible prompts: Surprises? Supports?*

3. **Tell me about your experience working with your clients this year as an intern?**
   
   *Possible prompts: Any specific stories of successes? Any stories of difficult experiences?*

4. **What is your perception of your clients?**
   
   *Possible prompts: Assumptions. Views. Differences.*

5. **What have you learned from working with your clients that has been significant?**
   
   *Possible prompts: What are the lessons related to? Clinical skills? Culture? Differences?*
6. Why do you see those as significant? How did you learn those?
   Possible prompts: Did you use any skills? Did you learn that at school?

7. How has that changed the way you think about your clients?
   Possible prompts: In what ways? Do you have a story?

8. Has that changed the way you work with clients?
   Possible prompts: How were you able to make the change? How did you arrive to those changes? Were you surprised?

9. What about your master’s program has had a significant impact on how you perceive your clients?
   Possible prompts: How so? Any stories?

10. What about your master’s program has had a significant impact on how you work with clients?
    Possible prompts: How so? Any stories?

11. Can you tell me about the people you turned to for support?
    Possible prompts: Who did you talk to? What type of advice did they give you? How did they help you? What was helpful?

12. Did you learn specific skills to work with your clients/populations?
    Possible prompts: How? Where did you learn those?

13. Do you know what reflective practice is? Do you use a reflective practice?
    Possible prompts: How so? Describe. Was it helpful in working with your clients? Your learning process?
Subject Line: Vanessa Villavicencio Requests your Participation

Dear Interns,

One week ago, you received an email about a research study that I am doing for my doctoral thesis.

This is a reminder to email me at villavicencio.v@husky.neu.edu if you are interested in participating.

Thank you again for considering participation in the study.

Regards,

Vanessa Villavicencio

*Note: This is a follow up email that will be sent to students that do not respond within seven days of the initial email. For the follow up email, the initial email will be forwarded to interns so they can easily view the information included and respond appropriately.