

Constructing the Developmental Model of Relational Consciousness Positionalities in Counseling

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ABSTRACT

For decades, professional counselors have considered the importance of multiculturally competent practice. Counselors affirmed with the adaptation of the Multicultural Social Justice and Counseling Competencies that social oppression influences professional practice. These competencies call for counselors to gain knowledge, awareness, skills, and actions to address relational dynamics and societal forces of power, privilege, and oppression. We aimed to describe how counseling professionals' (CPs') perceptions of these dynamics have influenced relational patterns across the scope of professional counseling. Twenty-one (N = 21) participants from diverse backgrounds examined their lived experiences of power and privilege dynamics as students, pre-licensed counselors, counselors, supervisors, and counselor educators. The findings of the constructivist grounded theory study led to the formulation of the Developmental Model of Relational Consciousness Positionalities, which describes the attitudinal commitments of CPs' progressive awareness of power and privilege. The model offers implications for ongoing change across the types of relationships within the counseling field.

KEYWORDS: Positionalities, power, privilege, multicultural and social justice, professional counseling

The introduction of the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (Sue et al., 1992) launched counselor educators and supervisors into a concerted movement toward diversity, equity, and inclusion to guide effective therapeutic interactions across human differences. A review of relevant counseling and psychology literature in the United States showed a variety of strategies that are now employed in graduate education and in the professional field to assist counseling professionals with decreasing the negative effects of the historical and current consequences of social oppression (Chu et al., 2022; Clark et al., 2022). Some of the personal and professional development interventions in practice include deepening self-awareness of racial and cultural identity, exploring white fragility and white privilege, developing a broaching attitude, addressing microaggressions, acknowledging and responding to intersectionality, integrating cultural humility and social justice in clinical practice and supervision, plus asserting the indivisibility of multicultural counseling and social justice (Bayne et al., 2021; Day-Vines et al., 2021; Day-Vines et al., 2007; Davis et al., 2016; DiAngelo, 2018; Dollarhide et al., 2016; Chan et al., 2018; Hook et al., 2013; Ratts et al., 2016; Ratts, 2017; Sue, 2010; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Counselor educators have also integrated pedagogical and andragogical approaches, such as critical consciousness introduced by Freire (1987) and transformative learning by Mezirow (1991), to teach social and cultural diversity (Barrio Minton et al., 2014). Both teaching and learning methods are designed to facilitate self-

awareness and social awareness. Consequently, the counseling profession's affirmation that social oppression impacts client outcomes and counselor effectiveness by explicitly naming privilege, power, and oppression in the Multicultural Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts et al., 2016) was a natural progression.

Social Oppression Influences on the Field of Counseling

Decades of social science research articulated the systemic implications of social oppression on human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Du Bois, 1995; Freire, 2018; Neal & Neal, 2013; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and 21st-century scholarship concludes that social injustices result in poor physical and mental health among people, including mental health professionals (Hightower, 2024; Kirkbride et al., 2024). Social oppression describes the ongoing exploitation and disempowerment of a marginalized group within society, whereas relational oppression refers to the subordination and unfair treatment of members of one group by members of another group (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Social scientists have identified two oppressive forces embedded in social interactions. Those forces are power, which involves manipulating people's access to resources and influencing decision makers, others, one's life and privilege, defined as a right, benefit, or advantage given to people within preferred social identities or statuses (Jones-Smith, 2018). These definitions suggest that social and relational oppression create detrimental visible and invisible structures between groups of people. Unsurprisingly, counseling studies evidenced that relational and social oppression influence counselor educators, supervisors, counselors, and students, often creating a microcosm of society within the profession (Brooks et al., 2021; Dollarhide et al., 2016; Shand-Lubber & Baden, 2023; Thacker & Barrio Minton, 2021). The body of counseling and psychology research clearly confirmed the need for CPs, which in this study includes educators, supervisors, licensed and provisionally licensed counselors, and students, to engage in an ongoing process of oppression awareness (Bayne et al., 2021; Bayne et al., 2024; Chu et al., 2022; Clark et al., 2022; Thacker & Barrio Minton, 2020).

Current State of Social Justice Research

The emerging field of social justice in counseling aims to denaturalize oppressive structures while naturalizing the diversity of human expression, particularly in heterogeneous societies like the United States (Harley et al., 2002; Robinson, 1999). However, CPs have not outlined guidance beyond competencies to progress toward an anti-oppressive field of practice or society because multicultural and social justice counseling research has lacked a systemic design to address the multilayered and dimensional influence of social oppression (Clark et al., 2022). Scholars are developing a variety of tools to advance anti-oppression practice and research. For example, Peters and Luke (2022) developed ten interdisciplinary principles for anti-oppression, while Killian et al. (2023) validated a self-report instrument to measure perceived multicultural and social justice counseling competencies. The ten principles were an initial attempt to unify multicultural and social justice research by operationalizing specific characteristics of anti-oppression practices through a critical analytic synthesis of interdisciplinary literature (Peters & Luke, 2022). Additionally, the multicultural and social justice counseling competencies self-report instrument was validated to provide CPs with an objective measure to monitor their lifelong journey toward competency. These tools applied across professional practice have the potential to support the aspirational outcome of social justice, which is to "remedy social oppression and ensure that all persons have equitable access to resources and opportunities that have historically been reserved for those of privileged life status" (Counselors for Social Justice, 2020, p. 3).

Present Study

Like Peters and Luke (2022) and Killian et al. (2023), our study sought to contribute to the body of system-focused, social justice research. The purpose of this qualitative, constructivist grounded theory study was to articulate CPs' perceptions of themselves and others, grounded in their lived experiences of power and privilege in relationships within a profession that aspires toward anti-oppressive practices. Our study answered the following question: How has the inclusion of the power, privilege, and oppression paradigm influenced CPs' perceptions of relationships across human differences within their lives and educational and clinical settings? We aimed to describe how the practice of promoting oppression awareness, knowledge, skills, and actions, while intentionally infusing the experiences of people from marginalized groups, has changed CPs' understanding of relating across human differences.

Method

Sample Procedures and Participants

We received Institutional Review Board (IRB; #T20210201764) approval prior to data collection and obtained updated approvals as needed. We applied theoretical sampling procedures. (Charmaz, 2024). Twenty-one participants ($N = 21$) living in the United States were included in the study (Review Table 1). Demographic data from national sources suggest that 47.73% to 67% of CPs are from White, non-Hispanic, European ancestry (Data/USA, n.d.; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs, 2025). The demographics of the study participants mirrored those of national statistics. Participants were recruited through professional counseling social platforms and snowball sampling.

Table 1
Study Participants' Demographics

Pseudonym	Affiliation	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Age	Affectual identity	Religion/Spirituality
Arthur	S-PLP	White	man	38	heterosexual	Christian
Lani	S-PLP	Asian/White	woman	53	heterosexual	Interfaith
Luz	S-PLP	Native/Hispanic	woman	40	heterosexual	Spiritual
Miriam	S-PLP	White	woman	42	bisexual	Jewish
Natasha	S-PLP	Black	woman	39	heterosexual	Christian
Piper Indigo	S-PLP	White	woman	28	bisexual	Christian
Tito	S-PLP	White	man	32	heterosexual	Christian
Carmen	LPC-S	Hispanic/White	woman	52	heterosexual	Christian
Chris K	LPC-S	White	woman	57	heterosexual	Spiritual
Jonathan	LPC-S	White	man	33	bisexual	Christian
Lee Ann Hall	LPC-S	White	woman	48	heterosexual	Christian
Liam	LPC-S	White	man	45	heterosexual	Christitan
Rab-ter	LPC-S	Hispanic/White	woman	41	heterosexual	Christian
Sarah	LPC-S	White	woman	63	heterosexual	Mormon
Allie	CE	White	woman	33	bisexual	None
Dr. Chelsea Dynamic	CE	Black	woman	30	bisexual	Agnostic
Counselor	CE	Black	woman	43	heterosexual	Christian
Jen	CE	White	woman	35	heterosexual	None
Mary White	CE	Black	woman	UA	heterosexual	Christian
Nikki	CE	White	woman	30	bisexual	None
Piper	CE	Black	woman	35	heterosexual	Christian

Researchers Reflexivity and Assumptions

The racial and ethnic identities of the authors in order are as follows: Black-Afro-Caribbean American, Afro-European American and White-European American.. We are cisgender heterosexual women with differing ability statuses. We identify spiritually as Protestants from varying denominations. We, the first and third authors, have combined 15 years of experience as counselor educators and 52 years of experience as licensed professional counselors. The second author is a doctoral student in counselor education and supervision, as well as a provisionally licensed professional counselor. All three authors have lived experiences that demonstrate a commitment to partnering with domestic and global communities to repair relational ruptures.

Our experiences influenced the assumptions we brought into the study. We assumed that we did not need to define the relational constructs that produced participants' oppressive experiences. Instead, we adopted the general phrase Model of Oppressive Relationship Dynamics to describe oppressive experiences in relationships (MORD). We conducted the study with the assumption that the misuse of power and privilege perpetuates relational and social oppression, as per Jones-Smith (2018). We believed the U.S. historical and current context would influence the study sample. We assumed that fewer participants who identified as non-Hispanic, White and European American, cisgender heterosexual men, and a greater number of participants from minoritized groups would volunteer for the study. We also assumed that study participants from historically marginalized and underrepresented populations would describe direct experiences of

MORD more often than study participants from majority and represented populations. We also assumed that study participants would describe similar perceptions about power and privilege in their professional and personal lives because counseling research suggested that professionals create a microcosm of society. We also assumed that participants would express positive changes in relationships based on their knowledge of MORD.

We applied CGT analytic tools to ensure methodological integrity. First, we co-constructed the study findings with participants during data collection, analysis, and report writing. Second, we interrogated our presumptions of MORD and the concepts that comprised it through debriefing meetings and collective memo writing. We engaged in critical questioning of each other's assumptions during the coding and theory-building process to support the possibility of recognizing and articulating the co-constructed findings authentically (Charmaz, 2017). We did not code individual or collective memos. We used memos to facilitate the dual engagement process, which involved monitoring the influence of our biases, assumptions, and re-examining our evolving interpretations (Fischer, 2009).

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection occurred from January 2022 to December 2023. We collected and stored data using password-protected, institutional-sponsored software and devices. Eligible participants received the full informed consent to sign and returned it to the first author. Additionally, we utilized an online platform to generate automated transcripts for the interviews and initial feedback sessions. We edited, validated, de-identified, and stored all data under participants' pseudonyms and by group affiliation. We deleted the recorded interviews from the online meeting software account. We maintained the pseudonym key, informed consent, and completed demographic surveys in a separate password-protected folder. The first author ensured data management and security throughout the research process.

Qualitative data were collected in two phases, with a third phase dedicated to member checking, each associated with participant incentives. The first author facilitated the distribution of the incentives. Participants received the associated incentive upon completing each phase. In Phase one, participants completed a 30-minute salient experience interview, which required them to answer six demographic questions and share two experiences of power and privilege, either as a counseling professional or in their personal lives (\$15 e-gift card). Two researchers reviewed and discussed the salient experiences to generate follow-up questions. Phase two consisted of a 90-minute semi-structured interview (\$20 e-gift card). The interview had three parts. In part one, researchers asked participants follow-up questions from the salient experiences interview. Parts two and three of the interview involved participants processing and describing relational patterns within and outside the power and privilege paradigm. These parts of the interview referenced and compared the participants' salient experiences to explore, examine, and generate insights about their lived experiences. The research team rotated the lead interviewer role to conduct the semi-structured interviews. All data was analyzed manually using Word and Excel throughout the data collection process and concluded in December 2023.

Phase three of the study took place from May to June 2024. Participants were invited to member-check the initial study findings by attending or viewing a recording of a 45-minute presentation based on their affiliation with the field of counseling (\$15 e-gift card). They were invited to complete a findings questionnaire that asked them to rate the degree to which the presented findings confirmed their contribution to the study and share comments. We used the feedback collected via member checking to inform theoretical coding.

Analysis

We analyzed the data using the constructivist grounded theory approach of initial, focused, and theoretical coding to generate the applicable theory to answer the research question (Charmaz, 2024). Initial coding involved labeling bits of data line-by-line from a critical inquiry perspective (Charmaz, 2017) and identifying power, privilege, and oppression as co-constructed by participants and researchers. The initial coding process produced 288 unique data points. Focused coding was conducted by raising initial codes to analytic relevance (Charmaz, 2024). We recoded the initial codes into 82 unique, focused codes to comprehend participants' relational experiences. Next, we collapsed these focused codes through consensus into 16 themes that described the conditions and associated consequences of power and privilege. Theoretical sufficiency was achieved by formulating categories from the data (Charmaz, 2024). All (N = 21) participants in the study contributed to each category. The first author, informed by phase three of the study, then proceeded with theoretical coding. The first author created four theoretical codes by interpreting focus codes. The first and second authors then reviewed and revised the theoretical codes and explanatory framework through consensus.

Trustworthiness

We promoted trustworthiness and strove to meet the criteria for GCT studies through sustained engagement with data, data analysis procedures, memo writing, peer debriefing and consensus, and triangulation with prior research (Charmaz, 2024; Creswell & Baez, 2020). Study participants aided credibility and resonance. Six participants engaged in member checking of initial codes and transcripts. Nine participants checked initial findings through verbal and written feedback on the initial findings. Eight participants and three external auditors provided either written or verbal feedback on the theoretical findings to aid with originality and usefulness. Two of the auditors were former members of the research team for this study. They were selected due to their familiarity with the study. Prior to leaving the team, these auditors assisted with revising the interview protocol, conducting semi-structured interviews and initial coding of transcripts, and participated in peer debriefing meetings. The third auditor was a method consultant. The auditor reviewed and provided feedback on focus codes. All auditors reviewed the findings. We incorporated feedback from the study participants and external auditors throughout the report writing process.

Findings

The purpose of our study was to develop an explanation of CPs' perceptions of oppression in their relationships based on their lived experiences. We sought to answer the central question: How has the inclusion of the power, privilege, and oppression paradigm influenced CPs' perceptions of relationships across human differences within their lives and educational and clinical settings? Our study findings suggested that the inclusion of this paradigm has changed perceptions of relational patterns by facilitating relational consciousness in counseling, meaning that counseling professionals from dominant and minority groups develop a progressive awareness of oppression that disrupts historical conceptualizations of living in a racialized and socially identified society.

This awareness catalyzes the development of complex attitudinal commitments to equitable, interdependent relationships across cultural and social identification differences. We interpreted these changes to produce the Developmental Model of Relational Consciousness

Positionalities (DMRCP; Review Table 2). Before presenting the findings, we provide an overview of the co-constructed model.

Explanation of DMRCP

Participants described a persistence in relationships across racial and social differences, accompanied by a greater awareness of the deleterious effects of MORD on themselves and others. This oppression awareness appeared to alter the perceptions of counseling professionals, leading to the development of their intrapersonal and interpersonal processes and actions toward a more relationally conscious positionality.

Oppression Awareness

Participants described an awareness of the harmful influence of MORD. They unanimously experienced oppression in relationships as abuse or misuse of power and privilege. Participants experienced power in relationships as the ability to facilitate people's access to resources and influence decision-makers, others, and their own lives. They also defined privilege as a right, benefit, or advantage given to people within socially preferred identities or locations (Jones-Smith, 2018). Notably, $n = 17$ study participants belonged to one or more historically marginalized and underrepresented groups. However, all participants ($N = 21$) were also identified as belonging to one or more historically privileged and dominant groups. They also reported within-group differences that produced MORD. Consequently, study participants' experiences of social and relational oppression seemed associated with abuses and misuses of racialization and socialization in their lives and in the field of counseling. Participants' perceptions of MORD in relationships were indistinguishable from their personal and professional lives. Mary White, a study participant, provided an exemplary summary of participants' experiences of MORD as both a visible and an invisible phenomenon.

Table 2
Overview of the Developmental Model of Relational Consciousness Positionalities

Positionalities	Oppression Awareness	Intrapersonal Processes and Actions	Interpersonal Processes and Actions
<p>Siloed</p> <p>CPs deliberate acceptance of how they are different from others and experiencing isolation during interactions.</p>	<p>CPs perceive that power and privilege are unchangeable and exclusionary.</p>	<p>Acknowledging exclusion to observing human differences.</p> <p>CPs felt sense of being controlled because they were different from others, which led to the action of a resolve to continue to view themselves positively and feelings of being misunderstood.</p>	<p>Recognizing external influences on the sense of self to noticing identities.</p> <p>CPs' awareness of others' negative perceptions created relational distress, resulting in sympathetic feelings toward their differences from others, which helped CPs protect themselves from MORD.</p>
<p>Deprived</p> <p>CPs' dissonance between one's identities and contributions accepted by others, and having them diminished or overlooked during interactions.</p>	<p>CPs perceive that power and privilege suppress human differences.</p>	<p>Observing self-development to admitting the significance of labeling oneself or others.</p> <p>CPs' openness to others' views of their social or cultural identities led to self-suppression of those identities and internal distress about belonging to and having an affinity for group identities.</p>	<p>Expressing the complexity of relating across differences to articulating authority in relationships.</p> <p>CPs' awareness of their willingness to allow others to describe their identities, resulting in feelings of frustration and confusion, when others discredited and minimized them based on their social and cultural identities.</p>
<p>Connected</p> <p>CPs' consciously regulate their representations of social and cultural identities to assist themselves and others in navigating interactions.</p>	<p>CPs perceive that power and privilege are unchangeable, exclusionary, and suppressive.</p>	<p>Appreciating others different from oneself to accepting vulnerability in systems.</p> <p>CPs' curious and empathetic engagement with their view of self as one notices others, leading to an understanding of others' exclusionary and suppressive experiences.</p>	<p>Defining MoRD as a dynamic relational system to honoring others.</p> <p>CPs intentionally account for their perceptions of differences in social and cultural identities by adjusting behaviors and engaging in advocacy, resulting in a myriad of feelings.</p>
<p>Interrelated</p> <p>CPs' beliefs about self and others must change to manage and transform the potentially deleterious effects of MORD.</p>	<p>CPs perceive that power and privilege are changeable, transferable, and shareable.</p>	<p>Resisting oppressive ideology to limiting MoRD's influence on one's perspectives of others.</p> <p>CPs decenter perceptions of social and cultural identities that sustain MORD and internalize their inclination toward misusing MORD with equal significance.</p>	<p>Working from a shared mutually beneficial perspective to advocating to increase power for all.</p> <p>CPs extend and receive compassion to navigate conflict in relationships, enabling CPs to advocate within and across group differences.</p>

She said:

So, we know that it's there. And then there are other times when it gets bumped up against or rubbed up against where it's like, Yeah, I'm frustrated. I'm a little angry about this, that you just go, Oh, yeah, that is there.

Participants perceived oppression awareness as experiences of themselves and others as being subjugated, suppressed, simultaneously subjugated and suppressed, and liberated in relationships. We identified these four experiences of MORD as relational consciousness. The model suggested that participants did not initially perceive positive changes in their relationships with increased awareness of MORD; however, participants did describe specific perceptions of themselves and others during social interactions, according to each experience of relational consciousness, which progressed them toward more anti-oppressive perceptions of themselves and others.

Types of Positionalities

Each form of relational consciousness corresponded with an attitudinal commitment to relationships across social and cultural differences or positionalities: siloed, deprived, connected, and interrelated. We combined and expanded two previous uses of the term positionality to fully articulate our model. Previous scholars defined positionality as a value and constructed hierarchy toward self and others that legitimized degradations or privileges given to others according to one's social and cultural identities (Robinson, 1999; Harley et al., 2002). Additionally, Sibbald et al. (2025) highlighted that the occurrence of positionality statements in research articulates how the researchers' social locations situate them within hierarchies of power and oppression and subsequently shape researchers' interactions with research participants. Neither definition seemed to capture participants' enactment of oppression awareness. Our definition clarifies that participants' positionalities were expressed by their perceived ability to change the influence of social and relational oppression on their relationships across racial and social locations.

Each positionality was described by intrapersonal and interpersonal factors. Participants' enactment of these factors corresponded with the definitions of these terms found in the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts et al., 2015). According to Ratts et al. (2015), intrapersonal processes and actions are defined as encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral experiences related to the formation of social and cultural identity. Interpersonal processes and actions refer to the cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses and intended outcomes that occur during social interactions. We present the DMRCPC from least to most relationally interdependent positionality (siloed to interrelated); however, participants' experience of the positionalities is best understood as a complex, multidirectional, multi-positioned, and iterative process.

Siloed Positionality

The siloed positionality (SP) was associated with the awareness of oppression that subjugated CPs. This depth of MORD awareness highlighted participants' cognizance of imbalances of power and privilege that seemed unchangeable and the exclusionary nature of MORD.

Acknowledging Exclusion to Observing Human Differences

The intrapersonal process of acknowledging discrimination was described by participants' felt sense of being controlled because they were different from others. Lani explained how discrimination based on race left her and others feeling misunderstood:

Like African American women are accused of being the angry Black woman, right? And Asian American women are accused of being the, like we have certain stereotypes about our race, being subtle or what like that's a nice word for it, right? We're trying to save face for everyone, right? Our culture is about saving face and making sure people feel heard and included.

Arthur shared an experience of exclusion by White American women peers. He explained that these women "shut him down" as an unwelcome representative of White American men. Sarah shared a similar experience in her multicultural counseling course and general sentiment as "a religious minority." She said, "I felt powerless in the situation. The power dynamic was the professor over the student—it felt violating, like my values didn't count." Luz noted that "Native Americans are invisible." Piper articulated that her views about injustice were unwanted on a college campus. She explained that she changed her behavior to protect herself during the coronavirus pandemic. She said:

I remember there was a statement that went out about they didn't want us to wear anything politicizing. I remember I had a pair of earrings. I just so happened to come to campus that day with my Black Lives Matter earrings and mask on. And normally what I would do is switch when I was on campus—and that was problematic for me because I just had it on.

Participants' intrapersonal processes involved admitting they were excluded from engaging in activities under certain circumstances. Notably, participants' intrapersonal action was a resolve to continue to view themselves positively, which resulted in feelings of being misunderstood. The intrapersonal process and actions of this theme connected to participants' interpersonal response of actively noticing differences between themselves and others involved in the interaction.

Recognizing External Influences on Sense of Self to Noticing Identities

This interpersonal theme corresponded with intrapersonal process of acknowledging discrimination and the action of observing human differences sympathetically. Participants' awareness of oppression that subjugated them negatively influenced their perceptions of how others perceived them and created relational distress. Lee Ann indicated that she transferred from a counseling program because she feared peers viewed her as the oppressor. Sarah explained this experience while taking a graduate multicultural counseling course:

The whole atmosphere of the class was very confrontational. There was a good racial balance in the class, Hispanic students, Black students, and White students. And just hearing conversations with other White students and feeling like—it was kind of like we couldn't say or do anything right in the class because we were White. We were always going to be wrong. I was like, "This is a counseling class. It's multicultural. Why are we being confrontational?"

Sarah's account reflected the unprecedented experience of being excluded by students who were racially different. Moreover, she and other White American students felt siloed by the Black professor of the course.

Sarah's experience of feeling challenged and confused by others imposing their perceptions onto her was also expressed by Black, Hispanic, and Asian participants. Recognizing how external forces shaped their sense of self, participants aligned this insight with the interpersonal actions of intentionally observing their identities through an awareness of subjugation. Lani articulated the sentiments of the relational distress expressed by participants. She said, "I don't want to be like one of those people who have a huge chip on their shoulder based on race. And the reason people have a chip on their shoulders is because this shit happens all the time." Lani was referring to the stereotyping of Black and Asian women in employment and educational settings. Also, Jonathan said:

As a bisexual man, many people who are uncomfortable with my identity, even my own family. And I don't find that you just jump right into just canceling people. And I believe people can grow and change, but it's the denial of that opportunity that becomes oppressive. It's the denial of giving voices to people that becomes oppressive.

Jonathan highlighted the difficulties of remaining in relationships when participants perceived their identities were "denied." However, unlike Lani, who felt frustration and anger when observing the identities of others, Jonathan described feeling sadness and grief about the loss of an authentic relationship, and Sarah highlighted confusion and dismay in relationships. These participants expressed a range of feelings that influenced their perceptions of observing human differences, with some being included and welcomed, while others were excluded and barred.

Participants illustrated suspicion, caution, and fear, or a general attitude of mistrust toward MORD to protect themselves from psychological harm. We summarized that participants experienced a sympathetic attitude toward themselves. In the SP, participants had an awareness of differences in self and others' perceptions about them with a belief that self-perception was the accurate perception. Each positionality reflected the attitudinal outcome of self-acceptance of one's differences from others while feeling siloed during interactions.

Deprived Positionality

The deprived positionality (DP) was linked to an awareness of oppression that suppressed CPs, which meant that MORD restrained certain social and cultural identities and promoted others. This depth of MORD awareness highlighted participants' consciousness of relational inequities that legitimized and questioned the value of various human differences.

Observing Self-Development to Admitting the Significance of Labeling Oneself or Others

This intrapersonal theme of observing self-development within the DP describes participants' cognizance of self-suppression of social or cultural identities. Lee Ann described this significant moment in a counseling graduate program before she transferred:

I mean, honestly, with the last program I concealed my spirituality for four or five months, before we were on a unit that talked about faith. On the night I said, "well this is my Christian faith"—I think they all knew—I remember my heart beating rapidly. I remember sweating, thinking I'm going to reveal this, and I don't know how this is going to change the way they think about me. I really felt like it would be a negative thing for me to admit that.

Lee Ann's recollection explained an awareness of oppression that manifested as an internal distress of fear and worry about belonging to and having an affinity for group identities that are

perceived as unacceptable and unavailable within the counseling setting. Natasha provided further insight into participants' internal distress of fear and worry about belonging to certain social or cultural identities. Natasha expressed the internal tension of belonging to a historically oppressed group and being accused of inflicting a microaggression as a cisgender heterosexual woman during a counseling theories class presentation. She said, "These women only met me. This happened in spring. They met me in the fall. They just got to know me. They don't really know me."

The intrapersonal process of observing self-development was linked to the intrapersonal action of admitting the significance of labeling self or others because participants outlined an experience of identity dissonance. Participants highlighted the intrapersonal process that garnered the sense that one's social and cultural identity must be minimized in relationships. Participants' intrapersonal action was the observation of the negative or subordinate views presented about them or others, and the positive or dominant views presented about a social and cultural group different from their own.

Expressing the Complexity of Relating Across Differences to Articulating Authority in Relationships

This interpersonal theme describes participants' palatable awareness of suppressing parts of themselves, while assigning power and privilege within and across social groups. Natasha provided an exemplary description of this interpersonal process. She noticed how someone else labeled her character and behavior. She stated, "I was like—the definition of a microaggression is—honestly, sometimes well, sometimes it's intentional. Sometimes it's unintentional." She went on to express confusion and frustration because her self-identification was usurped by how someone else from another social group labeled her.

Articulating authority in relationships occurred when participants perceived that certain social identities were considered more credible and worth protecting than others, which required other identities to be restrained. Participants interpersonally perceived that others discredited and minimized them based on their social and cultural identities. They described the interpersonal implications of others' judgments on their ability to navigate counseling settings. Natasha explained how the interpersonal process evolved into articulating authority in a relationship. She explained an attempt to discredit her reported intent and minimize the sincerity of a subsequent apology. Jen discussed how she recommended students' removal from counseling programs and experienced institutional administrators challenging these decisions. Jen explained:

And that's the difficult thing, right, is because it's dispositional issues, you could have a student who's getting As in class, right, they're doing the assignments fine, but you're seeing these other things that play into it. And that makes it even harder to justify because then you're wanting to dismiss a student.

Jen emphasized that she felt confusion and frustration when her concerns about students were diminished and disputed by the administration. She clarified that administrators even accused her of "not liking students," which she adamantly denied. Olive shared a similar experience during her PhD internship when the professor of record responded to her concerns about a supervisee who was a man with a disability. Olive stated, "But the practicum instructor passed the student anyway, against my wishes, without telling me. I felt slighted and ignored, like she just ignored my feedback and perspectives and did what she wanted to do." Olive admitted that she had challenges with men in the past; however, she was intentionally managing her biases through self-awareness and supervision of supervision. Both participants described feeling ignored and slighted when others

were treated more favorably by authority figures who questioned their efforts to demonstrate cultural competence.

The DP outlined participants' conscious responses to their sense of identity being restrained and their behaviors being unfavorably judged by others. Participants admitted significant difficulties with acknowledging the dynamic and sometimes conflicting awareness of intersectional and intersectionality of identities in relationships. Participants demonstrated openness and willingness toward MORD; however, the awareness of having any part of their identities suppressed raised feelings of confusion and frustration toward authority figures. The DP encapsulates the dissonance between desiring one's identity and contributions to be accepted by others and continual experiences of having those desires diminished or overlooked.

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Connected Positionality

The connected positionality (CDP) was associated with the awareness of oppression that subjugated and suppressed CPs. The level of awareness explained participants deliberate attempts to modulate their sense of self while in relationships with people different from themselves. The CDP described participants' conscious regulation of their presentations of social and cultural identities to assist themselves and others navigate a preconfigured structure of MORD.

Appreciating Others Different From Oneself to Accepting Vulnerability in Systems

This intrapersonal process and action described participants' internal shift in perspective from protecting one's view of self to being curious and empathetic about one's view of self as one notices others. Participants perceived their experiences of privilege and power with curiosity, which appeared to allow them to understand different vantage points of a shared experience empathetically. These participants described an awareness of pre-configuration of MORD within the counseling settings that caused suppression and subjugation. For example, Carmen explained:

I think about one of my colleagues at the office is African American and there's some things for her even as simple as how she does her hair and what's required for her to do her hair versus me. There are challenges I do not have to face. I'm privileged that way.

Carmen's curiosity about her privilege allowed her to appreciate her diversity and inclusion in the workspace, while empathetically accepting the subjugated and suppressed experience of African American women within a shared work environment.

Liam further explained the intrapersonal process and action. He explored the MORD within supervision in his practice within inpatient substance use treatment. Liam explained that he and the supervisee were both White American cisgender men. However, Liam highlighted that, "I believe he identified as a person in recovery, which I think can be a real asset, and one of the challenges is, well, this worked for me. Therefore, it's going to work for everyone else." Liam noticed with curiosity the differences between him and the supervisee, both by role and lived experience. He appreciated the group identity that the supervisee shared with clients. He also articulated an understanding of the supervisee's potential vulnerability within the counseling system. In the role of supervisor, Liam admitted the challenges the supervisee faced in establishing appropriate boundaries and not imposing unrealistic expectations on peers. The conscious awareness of being actively involved in MORD—suppressed and subjugated as a social and cultural being—seemed to facilitate participants' movement to the interpersonal process and action in the CDP.

Defining MORD as a Dynamic Relational System to Honoring Others

This interpersonal process and action outlined participants' attempts to describe and engage with MORD as a dynamic relational system by adjusting one's behavior accordingly. Miriam explained the overall intent of this interpersonal action: "Most therapists or counselors nowadays try to reduce the power differential and reduce the sense of privilege that they have on that the client has." Miriam's statement suggested the desire to support the diversity and inclusion of the client. Lee Ann provided this example for Miriam's description of adjusting one's behavior according to MORD to empower a court-mandated client, "I did try to allow her to have as many choices within the parameters as possible—so how often she came, she just needed to come. I tried to let her have some choices there."

Rab-ter shared how her understanding of MORD has developed since her clinical internship nearly 20 years prior. She explained this about her first internship supervisor, "She held the power and privilege. I think in that context of that time, I think she was appropriate, but there was still a level of one-upmanship in a way, too." She went on to describe how she now navigates MORD by modifying her imposition of power and privilege to support the growth of others. Allie described an experience opposite of Rab-ter's. Allie shared that defining MORD as a counselor educator started with feeling like she "had significant power and privilege" to feeling like she had "no power and privilege" with administrators, but described how she remained committed to honoring students' needs. Dr. Chelsea provided another example in counselor preparation. She said:

All of our training will be very individualistic and very Western. I find that students who do come from non-Western cultures, folks of color, it's often a tricky game of "Okay. How do I pass this test in these classes? And then how do I fit this into a cultural framework for clients who look like me and who are naturally coming to me?" Or even if it is a White female student from the U.S., it's like maybe a lot of the clients that they're seeing are Black and brown kids.

Dr. Chelsea's process of describing MORD led to honoring the challenges with educational processes for counseling students from various sociocultural backgrounds. Her acceptance and respect for the defined relational system of MORD, as a form of westernization in counseling, facilitated her decision to modify teaching strategies to support her students' ability to meet educational requirements and the future needs of clients.

Participants in the CDP demonstrated curiosity and empathy. Participants became curious about the systemic and contextual factors influencing their power and privilege. Participants' curiosity about themselves seemed to support their empathetic honoring of others and sometimes their experiences of disempowerment, marginalization, and minimization. They admitted that defining MORD as a relational system fueled feelings of acceptance and respect, which included a desire to follow organizational systems to engage in advocacy. Participants also expressed unpleasant emotions such as frustration, anger, and defeat when MORD persisted. The CDP reflected the attitudinal outcome of participants affirming that power and privilege influenced their perceptions of themselves and others' social and cultural identities. It also included a commitment to cultivate a welcoming, inclusive setting across human differences with intentional effort. However, participants explained that the CDP sustained MORD.

Interrelated Positionality

The interrelated positionality (IP) was associated with the awareness of oppression that liberated CPs. Participants' progression to the IP seemed associated with their intrapersonal response to others usurping their power and evolving beliefs of privilege. Participants seemed to change their perception of self and others to manage and transform the potentially deleterious effects of MORD by promoting equity.

Resisting Oppressive Ideology to Limiting MORD's Influence on One's Perspectives of Others

This intrapersonal process and action articulated the consciousness of actively shifting one's perceptions of social and cultural factors that influence MORD. Luz, a student, explained that she was overcome with feelings of anxiety, confusion, and powerlessness when a professor failed to engage in conflict resolution. She stated, "I had to see the human behind the dynamic. The roles make us feel like oh, this person has power . . . and this person is powerless. . . . But really, we both have the same capacity for power." She explained that power and privilege are inherent in people and, as such, are perpetuated by them, suggesting that people can transform MORD. Carmen provided this example of resisting oppressive ideology to limit MORD's influence on her in clinical practice:

There will be people who come to my office as a counselor and think, oh, she's White. And so, they'll start talking badly about Hispanic people that are in their lives or whatever—not knowing that they're talking to. Oftentimes, I don't correct them because it allows me this peek behind the curtain, they would cover that up and not share.

Dynamic Counselor explained resisting oppressive ideology as a "figuring out of each other" based on one's social and cultural identities within various contexts, as one who has power and privilege. She shared her experience as a diversity hire at a university: "Although they're not supportive or they can't understand or don't know my full power that I possess, I think they're still learning." Dynamic Counselor's experience suggested that she and others did not have to change their social and cultural identities. She noted that the process was about learning how to interact with other people's perceived power and privilege. Rab-ter provided this thought about how participants were able to resist oppressive ideologies to limit MORD's influence on one's perception of others. She said:

I think we're referring to humility. I don't know how counselors can really separate themselves as a person from what they do. Everyone will have biases. There's no way we cannot. And that is my starting point. I mean, approaching life, any relationship with a sense of listening more than just assuming.

Participants embodied humility by viewing their and others' social and cultural identities as well as the propensity toward misusing MORD with equal significance.

Working From a Shared Mutually Beneficial Perspective to Advocating to Increase Power for All

This interpersonal process and action described participants' efforts to promote equity in the presence of MORD. Participants described changing one's perception of power and privilege to transferable and sharable relational dynamics. Mary White explained this about her relationships with students: "You need to hear me, and I need to hear you. I want to engage in conversation about all experiences and share information." She went on to express hopefulness about the transferability

of trainees' educational experience to their clinical practices and everyday lives. She noted that working from this shared perspective makes it possible to highlight trainees' "power and privilege potential blind spots."

Chris K. shared this impression of being in a master's program with racially and socially diverse peers. She said, "You couldn't just show up and not participate. You had to share. You had to be there." Chris K. clarified that each member of the cohort contributed to the well-being of the group to different degrees, and it was clear that "we were all here together." Chris K. emphasized the cohort modeled sharing power and privilege. Miriam described another example of a mutually beneficial perspective of MORD in supervision as a pre-licensed counselor. She explained, "I have a lot of power to shape the conversation. My ability to articulate what I want and present things in such a way to get what I need from my supervisor—that's my power."

Participants expressed an awareness that the type of oppression that liberated required compassion towards others to persist when conflict arises. Miriam noted that a compassionate attitude may require someone who has privilege to "share that privilege, give it up, or give it to another person." Jen shared how she and a senior faculty member, a White American cisgender man, worked together to facilitate her program improvement ideas in a work environment where she experienced implicit bias. She said:

He would also recognize people dismissing me or not taking me seriously. It was really frustrating for him. I kind of got to a point where I was like, "Look, if we pretty much agree on all the same things anyway, and me saying it doesn't get us anywhere, then you should be the one to say it because people usually view me as co-program director."

Jen's experience of a colleague advocating on her behalf suggested that compassion mitigated the interpersonal harm of MORD by increasing her power. Natasha also reported a compassionate experience with a CES faculty member, who was a White American cisgender man. She said his advocacy efforts felt like "the accomplice to the act of correction." Arthur shared his aspirational outcome of an awareness of oppression that liberated in the counseling profession, "I would think we would want to move towards empowering everybody." He adamantly expressed that it would be difficult to achieve everyone's empowerment because of people's ingrained presuppositions about social and cultural groups.

Participants in the IP demonstrated humility and compassion. Participants appeared to mediate their capacity to resist sociocultural oppressive ideologies using humility to perceive people different from themselves accurately during interactions. Humility also supported participants' recognition of the influence MORD and the opportunity to remain in relationships across cultural and social differences. Participants explained that extending and receiving compassion enabled them to advocate within and across group differences even when people misused power and privilege. The IP reflected the attitudinal outcome of participants' rejection of MORD and engaging in deliberate actions to benefit others.

Discussion

We identified four levels of attitudinal commitment to relationships across racial and social differences—siloes, deprived, connected, and interrelated—that constructed the Developmental Model of Relational Consciousness Positionalities (DMRCP) from 21 CPs' perceptions of themselves and others within a profession that aspires toward anti-oppressive practices. The DMRCP operationalized the complex interaction between CPs' perceiving the implications of living in a racialized and socialized society and engaging in relationships in the presence of racial and social identification differences.

Our use of the term positionalities expanded prior definitions in counseling and qualitative research to articulate a developmental and cyclical process of relational consciousness in counseling. The DMRCP suggested that participants' progressive awareness of MORD was influenced by their application of knowledge, skills, and actions of multicultural-social justice counseling theory (e.g., Sue et al., 1992; Ratts et al., 2016). Each positionality was characterized by CPs intrapersonal and interpersonal processes and actions that corresponded with a consciousness of MORD that was perceived as an attempt to exclude, restrain, exclude and restrain, or liberate them based on racial and social group categorization (Ratts et al., 2015; Sidanius & Pratt, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). DMRCP also supported the nested socioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that explained the influence of social systems on human development. Participants' awareness of MORD was informed by how they perceived external structures influenced their understanding of self and others. Additionally, the DMRCP seemed to complement the networked ecological model (Neal & Neal, 2013) that proposed that people create the levels of the socioecological systems according to their social interactions within each level. Participants' awareness of MORD seemed to deepen as they recognized and moved to change the influence of social structures within their relationships.

The four positionalities supported the findings of prior research on the experience of CPs. The siloed positionality (SP) aligns well with the contemporary interpretation of Du Bois's (1995) theory of double consciousness, as presented in Brooks et al.'s (2021) qualitative study of Black male counselor educators during the Black Lives Matter movement. Brooks et al. described Du Bois's (1995) phenomenon of second sight in their discussion of Black male counselor educators' and fathers' "unique awareness of how White America perceives them" that fueled relational mistrust (p. 12). We described the SP as a sympathetic internal acknowledgment of exclusion by others based on one's racial/ethnic identities, while observing that certain racial/ethnic identities were welcomed into counseling environments or second sight. The positionality also expands Brooks et al.'s (2021) acknowledgement of the influence of socialization of profession by race and parental status to include the second sight experience of CPs by social identities such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, and affectual orientation. Also, like the participants in Brooke et al.'s study, CPs reported experiencing a duality of perspective, twoness, by which they simultaneously had an awareness of how others perceived them alongside a contradictory self-perception. Du Bois (1995) illustrates twoness as: "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings: two warring ideals in one dark body" (p. 45). CPs also perceived that they warred against two ideals. CPs changed their behaviors when interacting with others who were different from themselves, often experiencing behavioral changes as necessary to protect their social and cultural identities, while simultaneously rejecting the celebrated identities of others. Moreover, participants described solidarity within racial and social groups to preserve their positive view of self. The SP described the tension between the dominant and minority conceptualizations of race and status groups that resulted in no real relationships across and within racial and social groups.

The deprived (DP) and connected (CDP) positionalities evidenced the pedagogical inclusion of critical consciousness in the field of counseling (Barrio Minton et al., 2014; Chu et al., 2022; Clark et al., 2021). Both positionalities demonstrated the awakening of critical awareness of social problems through CPs' ability to perceive, reflect, analyze, and courageously act against oppressive elements of reality (Freire, 1987; 2018). However, the positionalities differ by what Freire (1987) described as dialogical experiences that create critical attitudes. He described two dialogical experiences: anti-dialogue, referring to unidirectional, hierarchical communication depicted by arrogance and self-sufficiency, and dialogue, referring to bidirectional, egalitarian communication marked by humility.

The DP corresponded with Freire's anti-dialogical experience of critical consciousness. The positionality articulated participants' openness to observing the implications of racialization and socialization on their perceptions of self, and to admitting the significance of such development on their perceptions of cultural and social groups. The participants in this study reflected on, analyzed, and acted upon conscious responses to feeling like their identities were being restrained and on experiences of having their behaviors unfavorably judged by others. Participants' anti-dialogical experience of critical consciousness led them to willingly act by engaging with the acceptable identity choices available to them, distancing themselves, and even navigating harmful allegations based on social and cultural differences.

The CDP aligned with Freire's (1987) concept of dialogue. In this positionality, participants described excluding and restraining characteristics of their social and cultural identities in relationships to support the inclusion of people different from themselves. They clearly took action to minimize their dominant social and cultural identities. Participants accepted the oppressive reality that people with minoritized social and cultural identities were vulnerable to MORD. The CDP represented a shift in participants' internal perspective from protecting oneself to becoming curious about and empathetic towards one's view of self and others, especially those in marginalized statuses. The CDP resembled the antiracist action phase of Shand-Lubbers and Baden's (2023) White antiracist identity framework and Dollarhide et al.'s (2016) social justice identity development, where predominantly White CPs actively honored others lived experiences through anti-racist practices of broaching, advocacy, and including people with marginalized statuses in counseling.

Freire (1987; 2018) did not address various forms of humility. His theory of critical consciousness also did not account for the intersectional nature of identities or the concept of intersectionality found in current counseling literature (e.g., Chan et al., 2018), which limited the application of the dialogical experience of critical consciousness in this study. Specifically, participants in our study exhibited cultural humility in the context of the CDP (e.g., Bayne et al., 2024; Hook et al., 2013; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998), rather than a general attitude of humility. Participants highlighted the relational tension between the dominant identities held by minoritized groups and the possibility that dominant groups could also hold minoritized identities, a concept also found by Thacker and Barrio Minton's (2021) study of CPs who were women, LGBT, and people of color.

The IP was also consistent with counselor educators and continuing education providers application of transformative learning theory to teach social and cultural diversity content (Barrio Minton et al., 2014; Chu et al., 2022). Although Barrio Minton et al. (2014) noted that the counselor education pedagogical literature did not provide a clear rationale for utilizing this adult theory, Chu et al. (2022) found that multicultural and social justice education programs for mental health providers most often included the transformative element of critical reflection.

Mezirow (2009) indicated that two essential features of transformative learning theory are freedom to engage in critical self-reflection on assumptions and real-world opportunities to validate the transformed insights. He indicated that these features influence people's frames of reference, operationalized as habits of mind (e.g., unquestioned and sometimes unconscious ways of thinking, feeling, and acting) that are articulated within a point of view (e.g., conscious beliefs, memories, and value judgments that are available for feedback from others). The IP appeared to demonstrate these essential features. The positionality also included the transformative learning theory characteristic of a disorienting dilemma, an experience that challenges a frame of reference (Mezirow, 1991).

The IP seemed to emerge when participants perceived the outcome of a dialogical experience as disorienting or disruptive. They engaged in critical reflection to resist their habitual

patterns of thinking about social and cultural group differences, thereby limiting the influence of MORD on their perspective of others. The critical reflection involved rational discourse through introspection as well as dialogue with others who affirmed their perceptions of MORD. The IP described a transformation of participants' perceptions of themselves and others and the mutability of MORD. Participants described how perceiving themselves and others as racialized and socialized supported their ability to transform their points of view of self and others from unidimensional to intersectional construals of identity. They also noted that this awareness facilitated an orientation away from misuses of power and privilege.

The IP promoted relationships focused on alleviating the harmful effects of MORD. The participants drew on relational humility and compassion to reject MORD and engage in deliberate actions to benefit others. Participants appeared to deliberately focus on promoting equity in relationships. They described changing their behavior to working in relationships from a shared perspective and advocating for and increasing power for all. Our study found that the IP represented the intended purpose of adult education according to Mezirow (1991; 2009) because the positionality described participants' emancipation from "problematic frames of reference—the structures of culture and language through which they construed meaning by attributing coherence and significance to their experience" (p. 92) and progression toward "allowing everyone to participate more fully and freely in reflective discourse through the acquisition of a critical disposition and reflective judgment" (p. 96). Mezirow (1991) does not name this transformed consciousness, but references conscientização by Freire (1987; 2018), which is the highest level of critical consciousness.

Interestingly, our study's findings contradicted the anti-oppressive principle identified by Peters and Luke (2022) of centering minoritized populations to counteract historical systems of dominance. Our study findings showed participants in the DP perceived a sense of identity suppression when a single racial or social identity was emphasized, while another was minimized. We also indicated that participants consciously both excluded and restrained parts of themselves in relationships to center a particular group in CDP. We found that CDP created opportunities for relationships across social and racial identification differences, while reinforcing participants' historical perceptions of power and privilege. Our findings suggested that centering a shared vision of equity within and across human differences may be a more viable anti-oppressive practice.

Our findings on the disposition of compassion, as described in the IP, supported Peters and Luke's 2022 incorporation of compassion as a mechanism for wellness and self-care. However, our study found that these dispositions seemed to help CPs change MORD, rather than demonstrating vigilant resistance to oppression. Specifically, we found that cultivating compassion and relational humility to promote equity facilitated CPs' wellness and self-care. We also found that the DMRCPP partially contributed to Peters and Luke's principles of developing critical consciousness, critical reflexivity, unlearning privilege and domination, and co-constructing relationships and communities. The developmental model articulated that CPs across historically marginalized and dominant racial and social groups can progress toward broadening their perspective about the negative implications of oppression and develop an interdependent, equitable approach to relationships.

In sum, our study concluded that participants' levels of relational consciousness within counseling settings coincided with their perceptions of relationships in their everyday lives. This concurs with studies that have shown how relational and social oppression have influenced CPs to create a microcosm of society within the profession (see Brooks et al., 2021; Dollarhide et al., 2016; Hays et al., 2007; Shand-Lubbers & Baden, 2023; Thacker & Barrio Minton, 2021).

Limitations

The study has several limitations. The study sample limits the transferability of the findings. Men were not represented in the counselor educator group, and 95% of the participants had completed training after the 2000s. Men who are counselor educators may have a dissimilar experience of MORD, which might modify the positionalities identified in the study. Additionally, study participants represented those trained eight years after the initial introduction of multicultural competencies, suggesting that the findings are most applicable to counseling professionals educated in the new millennium. The method of the study is another limitation. Constructivist grounded theory relies on the co-constructed and interpretive process of study participants and researchers, indicating that different researchers interacting with the same study participants or the same researchers with different study participants would vary the qualitative research findings. Even with these limitations, the study's sample size, systematic approach, and analytic rigor offer meaningful applications to the field of counseling.

Study Implications

The implications of the Developmental Model of Relational Consciousness Positionalities (DMRCP) span the scope of counseling practice. The DMRCP was co-constructed from the lived experiences of CPs from differing racial and social backgrounds who were exposed to education and training that aimed to change oppressive relationship dynamics in the field of counseling. As such, the DMRCP provides CPs with an explanatory framework to identify their various attitudinal commitments to relational consciousness within the paradigms of intersectional identity and intersectionality. The model embeds a contemporary explanation of DuBois's (1995) double consciousness, Freire's (1987) critical consciousness, and Mezirow's (1991; 2009) transformative learning theory to explain how changes in CPs perceptions of oppression can positively influence relationships within and across human differences, aligning with multicultural and social justice counseling competencies (Ratts et al., 2016). The model has four positionalities—siloes (SP), deprived (DP), connected (CDP), and interrelated (IP)—that represent how CPs engage intrapersonally and interpersonally in relationships.

Like other 21st-century models of development in counseling and psychology (e.g., Bayne et al., 2024; Dollarhide et al., 2016; Shand-Lubbers & Baden, 2023), DMRCP is grounded in participants' awareness of oppression. The DMRCP builds on these models by considering CPs with all their identities, dominant and marginalized, to articulate how they perceive themselves and others as people living in a racialized and socialized society. The inclusion of intersectional identities and intersectionality within DMRCP has the potential to assist CPs with describing the nuanced experience of relational dynamics in counselor education, which encourages CPs to explore themselves as racialized and socialized beings and the implications of social and relational oppression on themselves and others. It infers that CPs must view themselves and others based on their known racial and social identities, consider the influence of oppression on those identities, and establish an other-oriented relationship. Realistically, the model highlights that CPs' relational consciousness positionality may impair their ability to relate interdependently with others and engage in self-protecting behaviors that perpetuate social and relational oppression.

The model also suggests that CPs' ongoing exposure to societal changes may lead them away from or toward interdependent and equitable relationships across human differences, depending on their engagement in dialogic experiences, critical self-reflection of assumptions, and opportunities to validate their transformed perceptions. It also indicates that CPs' ability to exhibit openness, willingness, curiosity, cultural and relational humility, and compassion toward themselves and others can influence positionalities. The DMRCP's progressive mapping of these

intrapersonal and interpersonal processes and actions offers specific recommendations for counselor educators, supervisors, and practitioners.

Counselor educators can use disorienting dilemmas to scaffold learning that prompts reflection and movement. For instance, in a multicultural classroom, students positioned in SP may withdraw or display defensiveness. Instructors can normalize discomfort, introduce case studies that center intersectionality, and guide students in reflective writing to help them recognize how siloed thinking affects their counseling practice (Mezirow, 1991). Students in DP often emphasize only their dominant or marginalized identities, which creates relational silencing. Educators can design intersectional case studies with a global perspective, rooted in a collective legacy, to expand awareness and affirm complexity (Chan et al., 2018). These practices situate accountability within the classroom and highlight the ethical responsibility to uphold equity across counseling contexts (Ratts, 2017).

Clinical supervisors can support supervisees by naming the value judgments, beliefs, and memories reflected in their positionality, and supporting them through disorienting processes. For example, a supervisee in DP may experience identity dissonance when working with a client from a low-income background. Supervisors can frame this experience as an opportunity for critical self-reflection on assumptions, provide tools such as genograms that capture broader sociocultural contexts, and integrate broaching strategies to prevent relational silencing (Day-Vines et al., 2021). Relational-cultural supervision practices help supervisees navigate discomfort while cultivating empathy and accountability, leading to growth toward CDP and ultimately IP (Dollarhide et al., 2016).

Practitioners and graduate students using DMRCPC can map client experiences alongside their own positionality to identify risks of stagnation. Remaining in CDP, for example, may create patterns of self-suppression where a counselor or graduate student continually centers others' expectations without honoring their own professional style. To counter this, counselors could practice authenticity within therapeutic alliances and facilitate advocacy through community engagement opportunities that sustain empowerment (Brooks et al., 2021), drawing on a disposition of relational humility and compassion. Integrating these practices enables counselors to balance advocacy with authentic presence, strengthening relational equity across counseling relationships.

Across education, supervision, and practice, the DMRCPC underscores that movement between positionalities is not static but developmental. Transformative learning theory emphasizes that such a movement requires critical reflection and the reintegration of new perspectives (Mezirow, 1991). The DMRCPC, therefore, equips counseling professionals to hold tensions in relationships, move beyond binary thinking, and embody the ethical commitments central to multicultural and social justice counseling (Ratts et al., 2015; Peters & Luke, 2022).

Conclusion

The constructivist grounded theory study introduced the developmental model of relational consciousness positionalities. The positionalities can guide CPs' understanding of how privilege and power influence relationships within counseling. The developmental model explains CPs' iterative intra- and interpersonal responses to integrating multicultural and social justice counseling concepts into practice, while facilitating their counseling role within a socially identified, racialized society.

Future qualitative researchers could advance this research by developing a self-report and informant rubric for educational settings. An exploratory pilot study of the rubric could provide counselor educators with initial data on the utility of the framework for evaluating and supporting

graduate students from historically dominant and marginalized groups. The rubric could also be used to advance the study of relational humility and compassion within social justice research, which appears to be in its infancy. Moreover, our study suggests that there is another level of relational consciousness in counseling, beyond critical consciousness, introduced by Freire (1987; 2018), that might better explain the transformation of the frames of reference described by Mezirow (1991). Future qualitative researchers could conduct a phenomenological study to identify a third level of consciousness-raising in counseling, beyond double and critical consciousness, which encompasses awareness of oppression, including intersectionality and intersectional perspectives. Future quantitative studies could investigate the relationship between this explanatory model and cultural competence self-assessment inventories, such as the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competency Inventory developed by Killian et al. (2023). Researchers could also develop a standardized instrument to categorize people within the model, which would support predictive and comparative quantitative studies that could investigate the likelihood of a positionality based on self-assessment inventory scores or changes in scores over time. We hope CPs will utilize the model in their practice to deepen the field's understanding of the implications of human differences in relationships.

Authors Contribution

Michell Temple was the major contributor to the manuscript's writing. All authors read and commented on drafts and approved the final manuscript.

Research conceptualization, data collection and analysis: Michell Temple

Data analysis and wrote portions of the implications: Shawna Jantz

Data collection and analysis, assisted with revising and editing manuscript: Paula Tipton

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this study.

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Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, Michell Temple. The data are not publicly available due to limitations in the informed consent signed by study participants.

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