When Men are the Minority:
The Experience of Male Counseling Psychology Doctoral Students

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Introduction

Men in Psychology

- Men currently represent approximately 26% of counseling psychology doctoral trainees (APA, Commission on Accreditation, 2014).

- Men working in female dominated professions often experience career development difficulties (e.g., Isacco, Hammer, & Shen-Miller, 2016).

- Little research examining male counseling psychology doctoral students' (MCPDS) career development in the context of their masculine norms.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

- SCCT argues that gender interrelates with career self-efficacy and expected outcomes, which influences the formation of career goals, vocational interests, choice actions, and performance attainment (Lent et al. 1994).

- Gender role socialization processes can create opportunities, barriers, and supports to these formation.

Men in Female Dominated Professions

According to research…

- Men enter female dominated occupations for… interest and understanding, self-fulfillment, opportunities to care for others, and hidden advantages (e.g., Heppner & Heppner, 2009).

- Men have expressed perceived advantages such as… perceived as having stronger leadership skills, obtaining automatic respect and credibility, and greater connection with male patients and students (e.g., Bagilhole & Cross, 2006).

- Men face several barriers… isolation and rejection, role conflict, negative clinical match, lack a voice, lack of support, and stress related to being seen as less masculine (e.g., Shen-Miller & Smiler, 2015).

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Purpose

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Grounded in Social Cognitive Career Theory, this study used a modified version of consensual qualitative research design to examine how contextual, cultural and personal variables influence the career choice and development of MCPDS in the context of their masculine norms.

Research Questions

- Q_1: "Why do men choose counseling psychology as a profession?"

- Q_2: "What are men's experience in counseling psychology training programs?"

- Q_3: "What are men's opinion on perceived privilege as a male in counseling psychology?"

- Q_4: "What supports or barriers are associated with being a male in counseling psychology?"

- Q_5: "How do men make meaning of masculinity and role navigation in counseling psychology?"

Methods

PARTICIPANTS
- N = Nine MCPDS
    - Six in U.S. APA-accredited programs
    - Three in Turkey
- **Ages:** 29-33 years
- **Ethnicity**: Turkish (n=3), Asian (n=2), White (n=4)

Research Team
- ***Composition:*** faculty (n=2), doctoral students (n=5), and master's student (n=1) in counseling psychology
- ***Gender:*** 50% women; 50% men
- ***Ethnicity:*** Latinx (n=3), Asian (n=1), White (n=3), Turkish (n=1)

Procedure
- Students were recruited through emailing colleagues and listserv (CCPTP).
- Audio recorded interviews via telephone or Skype.
- Open-ended questions with possible follow-up questions
- Three interviews conducted in Turkish, later translated

Results

Supportive and Challenging Influences on Career Decision-Making

- Reasons for career entry into a counseling psychology doctoral program included: fit, previous experiences, future career goals, vocational interests, relational influences from family and peers, work values, and luck.

- Overarching categories based on responses that supported or challenged career decision-making included:
    - **Personal values and prior experience** (n=5)
    - **Family obligation** (n=4)
    - **Role models** (n=5)

Training Program Experience

Gender minority
- Outnumbered in comparison to women (n=9)
- Denied experiencing themselves as gender minority (n=6)

  "There's like 65% females in that class but I don't think I've ever felt like a minority."

Relationship with faculty
- Three participants stated gender was an influential factor in the dynamics with faculty.

  "It helps to have an advisor who is male, but… it's sometimes really hard to tell them what you feel, it sort of feels hard sometimes."

Allies
- Not identified an ally in their program (n=4)
- Four participants identified allies including faculty advisors, dissertation committee members, and peers.

Relationship with peers
- Intersecting identities, specifically race and sexual orientation seemed to influence connection with female peers for U.S. participants

  "I'm not sure if this makes a difference, because being identified as gay, so I feel like the female stance they are very readily are able to establish relationships with me."

Incivility
- No experience (n=5)
- Experienced incivility influenced by gender (n=3)

  "I also remember explicitly thinking like I wasn't asked for my opinion on any of that…I don't find it comical because I've actually had male clients who've presented with the same issue."

Results Cont.

Training Supports and Barriers
- The majority of U.S. and Turkish participants named friends, romantic partners, and family as the most supportive of their decision to pursue counseling psychology.
- Responses to barriers varied greatly: time investment, scientific rigor, relationships with faculty and supervisors, and a lack of racial ethnic minorities in the field

Perceived Privilege
- All participants identified privilege based on gender status including: power (n=2), higher demand (n=5), more credibility (n=3), and intersecting identities (n=3).

  "To be a male counselor or working as a counseling psychologist includes lots of advantages in our field."

Meaning of Masculinity and Role Navigation
Stereotypes
- Both U.S. and Turkish participants identified feeling expected to be "strong" and "independent" being a man.

Socialization
- Three participants stated feeling socialized to be emotionally restricted due to role socialization.

Discussion

- Our findings suggest that male gender norms influence career decision-making and career experiences of MCPDS.

Clinical and practical Implications for training
- Understanding this will benefit not only the individuals and training environment, but also the field of counseling psychology as a whole.

- Our results highlighted the role of faculty members' own gender role beliefs on student experience and career development. Thus, we encourage…

    - Faculty and supervisors to be aware of personal gender role beliefs and how they can influence their training of graduate psychology students.

    - Students and faculty be mindful of prejudice, stereotypes, and other biases that MCPDS might experience related to career choice and workplace experience as being male in the field.

- Findings can help training programs implement more effective recruitment strategies to increase the entry of underrepresented men into higher education in psychology.