

PRESERVICE TEACHERS' JOURNEY TOWARDS CULTURAL COMPETENCY

By

Sabrina A. Perez, M.Ed., B. S.

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Committee Members:

Rolf Straubhaar, Chair

Miguel A. Guajardo

Minda M. López

Melissa A. Martinez

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all students who wish to feel safe in schools where they are free from harmful inequitable practices.

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The past four years of my life has been a rollercoaster of events and emotions. One constant in my life has been my pursuit of accomplishing this doctoral degree. The stars have aligned, and I have been able to have the emotional, physical, and mental capabilities to achieve this goal.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
ASL	American Sign Language
CT	Cooperating Teacher
CRT	Critical Race Theory
CSP	Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy
ELL	English Language Learner
FCS	Family Consumer Science
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer,
SPED	Special Education

ABSTRACT

Teachers are at the front lines every day as educators. Their interactions whether positive or negative will have a lasting impact on students' lives. The purpose of this study is to better understand how self-reflection and identification of implicit biases function as tools that can help early career teachers in their journey towards cultural competency.

The following research questions have guided this study: (1) How do preservice teachers describe the role of their backgrounds (i.e., race, ethnicity, etc.) in relation to this process? (2) How does a preservice teacher's identity shape their pedagogical approach? (3) How do preservice teachers describe the role of their implicit biases related to cultural scenarios that they are presented with and will be presented within their future careers? The study included four preservice teachers who were in their final year of their teacher preparation program at Texas State University. The data they provided was gathered through three interviews. The theoretical framework used to guide this study was funds of identity. The findings of the study revealed several themes among the participants which were operationalization/definitions of social justice, perceived lack of "White" culture, trauma, deficit thinking and funds of identity. Finally, implications and recommendations were presented.

I. INTRODUCTION

I have never had the opportunity to be a preservice teacher. Fresh out of college I had a job lifeguarding, but no real long-term career goals. After some time, I figured I would try teaching. I went through an alternative certification program and became a teacher. After two years of teaching, I decided to get my master's degree in counseling while continuing to teach full-time. After four years of teaching and finishing my master's, I became a school counselor. My career goal is to share with others my experiences and the knowledge I have gained throughout my many years as an educator.

Soon after my first year of teaching (though I would stay in the classroom for three more years), I knew I wanted to become a counselor. I was intrigued by the Gear Up program on my campus that focused on college access. I became involved with the program and found out that one of the ways to be a Gear Up facilitator was to become a counselor, so that became my next career goal. I taught during the day and went to school at night for another two years. It has now been over ten years that I have been a school counselor, working in elementary, middle, and high schools. My career as a counselor has given me numerous experiences with all types of teachers. However, many of the negative experiences I have had have been with new teachers. Throughout my years as a counselor, I have found that first-year teachers often have issues connecting particularly with students of color. These issues manifest themselves in different forms, from teacher qualms with minor behaviors to outright refusal to communicate with students. Because these types of issues have continued to come up throughout my counseling career, they have inspired me to explore the cultural competency of preservice teachers and how early career teachers such as these could become more culturally competent. In this study, I

focus on preservice teachers because I believe if this population can explore and begin their journey to cultural competency before becoming a teacher, they may have fewer behavioral issues in the classroom once they start teaching full-time. Even more important than avoiding behavioral issues, I believe that if they can become culturally competent, new teachers can form more meaningful relationships with their students and create a safe, inclusive environment in which *all* students can thrive.

To orient this study, it is first necessary to identify the literature upon which I am building here to discuss cultural competency. In the academic literature, one term that has been created to address how we might provide an equitable education is the notion of closing the *opportunity gap* (Milner, 2020). According to Milner (2020), "... the Opportunity Gap Framework shepherds educators into reflective spaces where they consider inputs – mechanisms, practices, policies, and experiences that influence students' opportunities to learn" (p. 21). While this compelling framework has begun to be discussed by various prominent theorists in the literature (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2013, 2020), I have not found evidence of opportunity gaps narrowing in the districts in which I have worked. A possible reason the opportunity gap may exist and will continue to exist is the lack of culturally relevant teaching practices among educators. As Milner (2020) states, "Addressing opportunity gaps requires that educators develop the mindsets, dispositions, and belief systems to do so. There is no magic potion to disrupting centuries of oppression, White supremacy, and inequity" (p. 22).

A step in the right direction to address opportunity gaps would be to implement and foster culturally competent practices among teachers and all staff that work at schools. These culturally competent practices would focus on sustaining safe pedagogical

spaces for students and staff. To create a secure and functioning environment, I argue that culturally responsive practices should begin to be embedded in teacher candidates as they are encouraged early on to begin the journey towards cultural competence.

In making this argument, I draw upon my own experience as well as the academic literature. Looking back on my time as a teacher, I can acknowledge that I had several biases (which I possibly continue to possess, as the journey to cultural competence is life-long). For example, I realize that while I was a math teacher, I held the girls in my classes to a higher standard. As a woman myself, I felt they should not fall into the stereotype that men are better at math and science. During my four years of teaching, I taught mainly Mexican and Mexican American students. I showed favoritism to the Mexican students who had immigrated to the United States because, in my opinion, I believed they had a greater desire to learn and valued the free education they were receiving. I attributed the misbehavior of Mexican American students to them taking education for granted. They had been born citizens, so they had been a part of the education system their whole life. I assumed they took little value in it. These are only a couple of biases that I can consciously remember, which I'm sure are only the first layer of the implicit biases I held during my time teaching. My eyes and heart slowly began to open to the possible harm these biases could inflict upon students when I was becoming a counselor, and I began to try to change my thoughts by beginning my journey towards cultural competency. I believe this can mostly be attributed to the self-reflection that I practiced during my master's degree program in Counseling and my Ph.D. program in School Improvement.

During my counseling program and later my Ph.D., many of the courses I took forced me to do a deep dive into the person I was and who I wanted to become. I believe during this time I began my own cultural competency journey. Through my coursework, I began the process of focusing on my background and how it had shaped various parts of my identity. I began by first working through the trauma I experienced as a child. I am a child of a divorce. I am a sexual and emotional abuse survivor. I grew up in poverty and as a mostly independent young girl. My mother worked double shifts most days, which left my sisters and I to fend for ourselves. When my mother *was* present, she was most often focused on my older sister, who had many behavioral issues; and when my mother's focus was not on her, it was on my younger sister, who also required a lot of attention. I was the middle child, and as a result I often felt that I faded into the background and felt isolated from all my family members, both throughout my childhood and now continuing into my adult life. After my parents' divorce, we moved from New Jersey—which was full of my father's family—to South Texas, where I had no family. We felt significant cultural shock because we were from an East Coast Puerto Rican family. Although we were not close to each other as family members, we did have different family traditions than those I encountered upon moving to South Texas where much of the population was Mexican/Mexican American.

Furthermore, I had experienced feelings of abandonment from both my parents, as neither of them was there for me as a child even though I physically lived with my mother. My father stayed in New Jersey and later ended up in prison; either way, our contact ceased when they divorced. I have always been told I am strong and independent, so perhaps my mother felt I did not need her as much as my sisters. If she did feel that

way, she was wrong. From my perspective, she was not there when I needed her the most, and if I appeared strong and independent, that was a role I felt forced into, one I hid behind. When I was abused, yet again, my mother was absent. When my abuse was reflected in behavior that was seen as problematic in my school, she handed responsibility for that onto my school counselor, who was supposed to control any behavioral outburst I had due to what happened to me. So there I was as a 9 year old girl, feeling forced to act strong and independent while working through my traumatic experience alone. My experiences with abuse were not talked about in my home, and I had no one to turn to that could help me work out my trauma or my feelings of abandonment.

When I think about these “highlights” of my life, I know that processing these experiences as an adult is where my own journey towards cultural competency began. My identity took shape at a very early age. During the various personal narratives I completed as part of my coursework during my graduate work, I was able to do some soul-searching, be honest with myself, and confront the sources of many of the implicit biases I held as well as stereotypes and prejudices that I had come to believe in as a part of my everyday life (Makaiau & Freese, 2013).

I also believe the compassion and empathy that I practice every day with my students grew out of my life experiences. I know that as a teacher and counselor, I was able to be present for my students and help them process their own trauma because I could recognize myself in them. In this way, by processing and learning from my own experiences, I learned from myself; however, in my own journey towards cultural competency I have also learned from others. Collectively over the years we spent in our

coursework, my counseling cohort shared our stories, and as a result we were able to become more understanding about each other. We started the program together with a number of assumptions about each other; however, I believe that we personally left the program as changed individuals that were going into our counseling careers with reframed ideas of the different life experiences people could have and a new awareness of the differences we can have across cultures. I felt very similarly during my Ph.D. program because again, my cohort and I were able to share various parts of ourselves that added to our personal growth.

It is on the basis of this personal experience that I conceptualize cultural competency as a journey, rather than a point any of us ever “reach.” My cultural competency journey is not finished, but I can acknowledge where it began, and where it still needs to go. As Freire (1998) states, “Education does not just make us educable. It is our awareness of being unfinished that makes us educable” (p. 58). My cultural competency comes both from my own experiences that have shaped my identity as well as the work I have done to process those experiences as an adult. This is why in the chapters that follow, I lead my participants through various exercises intended to help them talk through and process their own life experiences and how they have shaped their own cultural competency.

In this operationalization of cultural competency for this study, I build upon these personal experiences as well as the scholarly literature (Desai, 2019; Ford & Whiting, 2007). Luquis, Perez and Young (2006) define cultural competence as “an individual demonstrating the ability to understand and respect values, attitudes, and beliefs across cultures” (p. 233). Bustamante, Skidmore, Nelson, and Jones (2016) use the following

definition: “Notions related to the construct of cultural competence have been applied specifically to the field of education to describe how well educators respond to diverse groups of students in K–12 classrooms, including acknowledgment of the cultural knowledge and experiences that students bring to the classroom” (p. 299). Gallavan (2011) describes cultural competence as a process of understanding and accepting oneself, one another, and all of society, both locally and globally. Ukpokodu (2011) defines cultural competence as believing in (a) a centrality of culture in teaching and learning, (b) an ability to construct a strong racial and cultural identity, (c) a systematic demonstration of positive dispositions toward diversity, and (d) a reflective cultural knowledge base (p.437). The definitions presented by these scholars provide the backdrop on which I here create my own definition. As a scholar, I define cultural competency as (a) respecting and understanding individual differences, (b) self-reflection and identification of cultural humility in yourself, and (c) continuous practice of a positive frame of mind towards diversity.

Implicit biases are found in everyone. Most racial biases are unconscious, and must be challenged—if not, they will only continue to grow (Desai, 2019). As Fiarman (2016) argues, “We absorb bias in the same way we breathe in smog - involuntarily and usually without awareness of it” (p. 10). The first step towards eradicating implicit biases within ourselves is to recognize the various biases we hold and call attention to them. As illustrated in the literature (Desai, 2019) and my own experience highlighted above, preservice teachers can begin this process through self-reflection. When teachers can better understand themselves and the reasoning behind their actions and thoughts, they can be better prepared to enter the classroom setting with an open mind and heart.

As a counselor, I have heard teachers make many negative references toward students. Often the teachers in question were preservice teachers who were interning on my campus, and most often their negative references have been toward students of color. Students came in to speak with me about the way their teachers talk to them, often feeling like they are being talked down to, not called on, or even worse, being targeted based on their identity. As argued by Luquis, Perez, and Young (2006), these issues are something that could be solved with relationship building and trust. However, the classroom environment in the cases of these students I counseled was not safe for either party, because the biases had already shaped the classroom dynamic. Cultural competence was not a part of the equation.

Problem Statement

The focus of this study is on preservice teachers and their cultural competency. Specifically, I worked with teacher candidates who were in the final year of their teacher education program. This study examined participating teacher candidates' backgrounds and their understandings of how their identities impact their teaching pedagogy, as well as any implicit biases that may shape their future work with diverse populations. This work required self-reflection on the part of the participants and a development of trust between them and myself as the researcher so that participants would be open to exploring those issues with me.

Even with the best of intentions, educators still have ingrained beliefs and attitudes that influence their actions that may be in direct conflict with the diverse students, families, and communities in which they serve. As Ezzan (2014) argues "A culturally proficient leader values the difference and the growth that occurs from

increased knowledge and about those who are different from them” (p. 2). Growth can occur when an educator or future educator examines themselves, their identities, and biases. The purpose of this study is to provide a clear example of what can occur for preservice teachers when they are led through this process of self-examination.

Implicit biases affect everyone. A teacher’s personal beliefs explain how they see the world and those around them, as well as the way they see themselves in the world (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Unfortunately, many preservice teachers do not have the opportunity to investigate this aspect within themselves or the knowledge that it is an important part of themselves that needs to be explored. The purpose of this study is to better understand how self-reflection and identification of implicit biases function as tools that can help early career teachers in their journey towards cultural competency.

Research Method and Questions

This study was conducted using a qualitative method, specifically an intrinsic case study methodology. Qualitative methods are both meaningful and diverse and can provide an analysis of the many subtle ways people communicate (Gibbs, 2007). For this research, an intrinsic case study “resembles the focus of narrative research, but the case study analytic procedures of a detailed description of the case, set within its context or surroundings, still hold true” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 99). The narrative approach that I undertook for this study allowed for the voices of the participants to tell their stories in an unstructured manner. The flexibility of qualitative research allowed for the study to be guided by the data collected and themes identified through the analysis process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The opportunities that an intrinsic case study methodology permits are

beneficial for this research because it allowed the voices of the preservice teachers to be heard and for their views to be expressed, as will be seen in Chapters 4 and 5.

To gather as much data that could be used to gain an understanding of the topic being explored, focusing on depth in each case rather than breadth from a large number of cases, four preservice teachers were recruited to participate in the study. Multiple perspectives from a diverse group of participants allowed for the study to maintain its trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was my objective to explore participants' identities and implicit biases to gain knowledge from various perspectives. The themes that were developed throughout the study and that are analyzed in Chapter 5 come from the different participants' perspectives.

The following research questions have guided this study as I have sought to understand participating preservice teachers' journey to cultural competence and how they believe their cultural competence will affect their future teaching practices.

1. How do preservice teachers describe the role of their backgrounds (i.e., race, ethnicity, etc.) in relation to this process?
2. How does a preservice teacher's identity shape their pedagogical approach?
3. How do preservice teachers describe the role of their implicit biases related to cultural scenarios that they are presented with and will be presented within their future careers?

Theoretical Framework

This study focused on the self-perceived identities and implicit biases of preservice teachers and their journey towards cultural competency. Therefore, this study uses the theoretical framework *funds of identity*. The funds of identity framework is

derived from the funds of knowledge theoretical framework, which refers to “repositories of identity to which people have access. Consequently, the funds of knowledge are funds of identity when people use them to define themselves” (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 37). Identity is something that is both internalized from outside resources but also externally shows who we are as people based on our specific history, and cultural and social involvement (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Esteban-Guitart, 2012). Funds of identity can be broken down into 5 areas: geographical, practical, cultural, social, and institutional (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Esteban-Guitart, 2012).

Funds of Knowledge

A funds of knowledge framework is grounded in the seminal work of Luis Moll, Norma González, and Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006; Suber, Vujasinović, & Esteban-Guitart, 2016). As argued by Suber, Vujasinović, and Esteban-Guitart (2016), “These funds of knowledge are the result of people’s lived experiences, including their social interaction, their participation in multiple job markets, and their varied language-related activities” (p. 4). As further explored by Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014), “At the intersection of anthropology, psychology, and education, the *funds of knowledge* approach assumes that families and communities are valuable educational resources (p. 35). Funds of knowledge framework focuses on the information gained from the community and family that an individual experiences in everyday life. This is a part of their culture because it is a part of what they do, say, and live daily (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). Funds of knowledge is a great place to start when beginning to work on cultural competency—however, as a structural framework focused on the community level, it is also lacking tools to explore the individuality of specific

participants. Not all people subscribe to all aspects of funds of knowledge that are at their disposable in their everyday lives. As a result, I have instead chosen funds of identity framework, which will allow me to focus on the individual and who they are on a more personal level.

Funds of Identity

As Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) argue, “The world we live in is ‘identified,’ full of resources for making people’s identities” (p. 37). Using funds of knowledge frame of reference allows teachers to look at overall family and community resources, yet it is lacking the theoretical tools to fully explore the individuality of students and people (Suber, Vujasinović & Esteban-Guitart, 2016). By using funds of identity as a framework, I will be able to dig deeper into participants’ backgrounds and the way those backgrounds have shaped their experiences with cultural competency. The term funds of identity is based on the simple premise that people have and accumulate not only their household’s funds of knowledge but also life experiences that ultimately help to define themselves (Suber, Vujasinović & Esteban - Guitart, 2016). As Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) state,

People define themselves through other people and through the artifacts and resources – visible and invisible – of their social and cultural worlds. In that sense, social relationships, significant others, particular activities and practices, political ideologies, religious beliefs, or any other artifact, such as a flag or a song, become resources for making and expressing identity (p. 36).

While examining preservice teachers' implicit bias, the funds of identity framework identify five areas I use here to determine how personal identity affects participants’ cultural competency. “Moreover, funds of identity are not only tools that can be used to identify funds of knowledge inscribed into acts of identification (self-definition, self-

presentation), but they are also mobile resources used with pedagogical purposes to facilitate connections among the learning contexts and experiences of individuals” (Suber, Vujasinović & Esteban - Guitart, 2016, p. 6). The funds of identity theoretical framework not only incorporates the aspects that makeup of the funds of knowledge framework, such as family, community, and culture, but also allows the focus to be on the individual's own “interests, activities, and experiences” (Morren López & Saunders, 2020, p. 307).

Many preservice teachers lack activities that facilitate an in-depth look into their lives and the way those lives inform their teaching practice. This is due to the lack of opportunity for self-reflection and self-exploration. This gap of information about oneself is an issue because it is missing a vital part of being a teacher, which is building a safe classroom environment and productive relationships with students. This part of the work of being a teacher is positively benefitted when an individual examines their identity and cultural competency. By using the theoretical framework of funds of identity to analyze participants’ reflections, I am here able to gain further insight into participants perceived cultural competency and the way it affects their practice.

Contributions and Significance of the Study

Cultural competency in education needs to be addressed because ultimately, many people are striving to eradicate the opportunity gap and ensure equitable academic success for all students but despite good will, they do not have the tools. Furthermore, this needs to be contended with because culturally relevant school practices start before entering the school environment. As Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) argue, “Examining unconscious bias is an ongoing and necessary professional practice that

cannot be neglected even when race discussions are woven into every thread of the school's fabric" (p. 15). There may be preservice teachers that are not ready to examine their biases, even when they recognize not doing so may come at the expense of understanding racial and cultural student needs (Brooks, 2015; Chu, Sayman, Carrero, Gibbon, Zolkoski, & Lusk, 2017; Milner, 2020).

Teachers are first responders; they are some of the only people students see daily, and they are the people that students spend the most time with during the academic year. The exploration process regarding teacher identity and cultural competence which I have begun here is important because preservice teachers must begin to understand their implicit biases and begin working towards creating awareness and cultural competence for their future teaching practices. Culturally competent teachers have the power to promote student success, which overall can positively affect the culture of a school. This study explores the extent to which current preservice teachers develop cultural competence via their background and identity, as well as documents examples of how that cultural competency can be fostered through purposeful identity-probing experiences such as the identity web (Amaral, Wang, Zhang, Kretz, Sanchez, Griffin, Rodriguez & Liu, 2020). As a result, this study can have an impact on how teacher candidates think about their identity in relation to their future classroom. It should bring attention to what is currently lacking for preservice teachers who might be working with populations from backgrounds that differ from their own, as well as promote best practices for teacher candidates.

Methods

This study has been conducted using a qualitative method with an intrinsic case study as the methodology. The opportunities that a case study methodology permits are beneficial for this research because it allows the voices of the preservice teachers to be heard and for their views to be unapologetically expressed. Four preservice teachers were recruited to participate in the study. They were White women seeking a secondary education certification from the same institution. This study is unique because it uses funds of identity as a theoretical framework to examine the experiences of preservice teachers in their final year of their teacher preparation program.

Definition of terms

Several terms that will be used throughout this study are self-reflection, diversity, equity, cultural competence, and culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Self-reflection is the act of focusing on and examining one's own hidden biases and committing to an act of correcting them (Moule, 2009).

“Diversity is about raising personal awareness about different cultural categories of individual differences, and how these differences enhance or hinder the ways students and teachers generally interact with each other” (Keengwe, 2010, p. 203).

“Equity: Access to material and human resources in proportion to needs. Once disparities have been identified, if we proceed with equal allocation of resources, the disparities continue. Equitable allocation responds to identified needs” (Terrel & Lindsey, 2009, p. 17).

“Cultural competence is defined as an individual demonstrating the ability to understand and respect values, attitudes, and beliefs across cultures” (Luquis, Perez, Young, 2006, p. 233).

“Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster - to sustain - linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation. CSP positions dynamic cultural dexterity as a necessary good, and sees the outcome of learning as additive rather than subtractive, as remaining whole rather than framed as broken, as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits” (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 1)

Organization of Remaining Chapters

The remaining chapters of this paper will focus on the literature review, methodology, findings, and conclusion. The literature review will explore deficit thinking, cultural competency, implicit biases, and identities of preservice teachers. The methodology will highlight the research questions and look further into the methods that were used in my research with these four preservice teachers. The findings will review the three interviews conducted with each of the participants. The conclusion will provide themes, implications, and suggestions for further research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to examine how preservice teachers perceive their cultural competency and assess their implicit biases. Given that most K-12 students in the United States are being taught by White middle-class women whose positionality and personal and family history differ from their own (Adnot, Dee, Katz, & Wyckoff, 2017), K-12 teachers must be taught to establish connections and positive relationships with their students, in particular those from backgrounds different from their own, to better understand how to effectively teach them (Borrero, 2011).

In preparation to reach the purpose of this study, I have reviewed the relevant literature related to deficit thinking, cultural competency, implicit biases, and the identities of preservice teachers. I will cover those pieces of literature, in that order, in this chapter. For this review, the terms preservice teachers, student teachers, and teacher candidates will be used interchangeably to refer to students in college/university teacher preparation programs.

Deficit Thinking

As stated by Valencia (2010), one of the seminal scholars to have built the existing body of theory around deficit thinking, “The deficit thinking model... [posits] that the student who fails in school does so because of his/her internal deficits or deficiencies” (p. 6). Some teachers come into the classroom with a mindset that they will have set rules and expectations that need to be followed. Milner (2020) paraphrased this mindset this way: “Those students need to adapt and assimilate into the culture of ‘my’ classroom and accept the consequences if they do not” (p. 40). Within this mindset, if there is any variation in student behavior relative to teachers’ expectations, specifically,

when it involves “those” students, “those” that are culturally different from the teacher (Milner, 2020), the consequences are inequitable and oftentimes come without any specific warning or chances given. As Milner (2020) states, “For students to have a chance at success in the classroom, and thus in society, they must understand that they live in a system that can be oppressive and repressive” (p. 40). Or as Valencia (2010) puts it, “Deficit thinkers avoid systemic approaches to school reform and focus on this simple kind of solution: ‘Fix’ the individual student” (p. 9).

This oppressive and repressive reality of our schools has huge consequences for our students’ lifepaths. As stated by Valencia (2010), “The history of deficit thinking in education teems with examples of how macro- and microlevel educational policies/practices fueled by class and racial prejudice kept economically disadvantaged students of color in their place” (p. 9). Unfortunately, we live in a society and have an education system in some areas where teachers make predictions about which students will end up in prison or a part of the legal system in a negative way that is rooted in a culture of hate and perpetuates the deficit thinking in society. Again, as Milner (2020) puts it, “If teachers believe their students will fail and become incarcerated, they likely will treat them in ways that essentially guarantee such an outcome... students usually meet the expectations educators establish - whether high or low” (p. 42). This is a problem that can be addressed through meaningful interventions. While a lack of learning opportunities and meaningful student relationships will impede teachers' progress towards inclusive classrooms, specific interventions intended to help teachers reflect on their own backgrounds can improve their classroom environments by building their cultural competency, as I will explore in the next section.

Cultural Competency

In addition to the potential presence of deficit thinking in preservice teachers, another issue that can keep White middle-class teacher candidates from connecting to students from backgrounds different from their own is a lack of cultural competency. What does it mean to be culturally competent? First, we must define what we mean by culture. Culture “involves every aspect of human endeavor, including thought, perceptions, feelings, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 2017, p. 143). Not only does culture affect and shape all aspects of the human experience, but it is also dynamic and ever-changing, encompassing “worldview, thought patterns, epistemological stances, ethics, and ways of being along with the tangible and readily identifiable components of human groups” (Ladson-Billings, 2017, p. 143).

In keeping with this understanding of culture, cultural competence refers to a skill—the ability of individuals to understand their own culture as well as the cultures of others (Ladson-Billings, 2017). While cultural competence defined is for people of all races and ethnicities because it will essentially help them navigate the diverse world we all live in, Ladson-Billings (2017) notes that in her experience as a teacher educator, her White, middle-class students have a particularly strong experience when through their coursework they realize that they too have culture.

In this work, I use this operational definition of cultural competence: “Cultural competence is defined as an individual demonstrating the ability to understand and respect values, attitudes, and beliefs across cultures” (Luquis, Perez, & Young, 2006, p. 233). Preservice teachers ideally should be put in situations before entering the classroom that will help them develop cultural competence, so they are prepared for

whatever they encounter once they enter a classroom setting. The more familiar they are with a diversity of cultural lived experiences, the better equipped they can become to work with students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Talbot, 2011).

In a quantitative study done by Yang, Cox, and Cho (2020), cultural competence was described in the context of three components: emotion, behavior, and cognition. Including emotion here is a much-needed contribution, given that the experience of encountering and becoming familiar with the cultural difference tends to involve emotional reactions (Yang, Cox & Cho, 2020). Using all three aspects of Yang, Cox, and Cho's (2020) study can help develop culturally competent teacher candidates.

According to Morettini, Brown, and Viator (2019), "cultivating culturally competent teachers improved student achievement and a more equitable school environment" (p. 357). Student teachers and teachers alike need to remember that becoming a practitioner of culturally relevant pedagogy is a process that takes time and commitment and although it may be difficult at times, the results are rewarding (Borrero, Flores, de la Cruz, 2016). Teaching is not just something that is learned in a classroom and stops. Rather, it is a growth process. Maxine Greene (1988) felt that she was always changing, always moving forward, and always becoming; this is the way she approached teaching and the way she hoped teachers would as well. Gardner Pilot Academy's principal speaks about biases and equity as a lifetime learning process and that many times people are scared to investigate their biases because it is a complex system (Collins, 2019). Learning about ourselves is a process that does not stop.

Implicit Biases

As Shields (2019) states, “Given the decades and centuries of White dominance and hegemony, the persistence of systemic racism in organized systems and structures of education must be recognized, challenged, and overcome, beginning with educators within global systems of education” (p. 3-4). One of the lasting impacts of White dominance and hegemony is an implicit bias regarding how we see and what assumptions we make about people who are different from us. Confronting issues involving race and racism can be messy and is often not addressed as an effort to avoid conflict, avoid making White people uncomfortable and avoid tense situations (Fiarman & Benson, 2020). As a society, we must increase our awareness of our own implicit biases to begin to move past them. In Fiarman’s (2016) words, “Racism today looks different from the racism of 50 years ago. Most of us condemn overt bigotry. But this doesn’t mean racism has been eliminated; it has just gone underground” (p. 12). One of the most common terms to describe this “underground” racism is implicit biases.

Acknowledgment of Implicit Biases

An incredibly frustrating part of the lived experience of people of color is noting how their interactions with others, particularly White people, are shaped by implicit bias. As Desai (2016) puts it, “No matter what ‘otherworldly talent and beauty and brilliance’ people of color possess, we come into this already expected to be less than ‘what we truly are’” (p. 1035). In response to implicit biases in the K-12 classroom, students of color have begun to create what is referred to as hybrid identities (Irizarry, 2007). Hybrid identities are the way that these students are dealing with their experience with society and the outside world that is different from what they experience inside the classroom

(Irizarry, 2007). Essentially, these students are having to become a mix of what is expected of them in one place (school) and what is expected in another (home life). If teachers desire to do what is best for their students, they must acknowledge their implicit biases, defined by Staats (2016) as “the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner” (p. 29). This is an issue not just because of how it affects students of color, but also because it affects issues such as teacher retention. Teachers who work in schools that are culturally unfamiliar due to their own background experiences can become “overwhelmed, underprepared and many leave the profession after only a few years” (Schauer, 2018, p. 1). Buehler et al. (2009) explain that some preservice teachers fear they “couldn’t be White and culturally competent at the same time” (as cited by Sherow, 2017, p. 275). Implicit bias is a concept that must be understood and reflected on for educators to become culturally competent teachers (Sherow, 2017) who feel sufficient confidence and satisfaction to stay in the profession and their classrooms long-term. All students need consistency from teachers who are ready to teach and understand them.

Examining Implicit Biases

Not every teacher who ends up teaching in a school with students from diverse backgrounds has experience of being educated in such a school, nor are they familiar with what these types of schools entail. According to Borrero’s (2016) study, student teachers discussed their motivation for teaching in non-White, lower socioeconomically schools as stemming from their own experiences growing up in similar educational spaces, their desire to be change agents to students like themselves and to “rectify a lot of the injustices that pervade our shared world” (p. 111). Studies like this show why

recruiting more teachers of color is an important policy step—however, in the spirit of this study, and recognizing that the majority of those entering the profession are still White middle-class women (Adnot, Dee, Katz, & Wyckoff, 2017), we also need to address cultural competency for White middle-class preservice teachers.

Exposing teachers to their core beliefs is an important step in becoming a culturally proficient educator. Teachers first need to examine and understand themselves and their motivations before they can understand anyone else, especially students who differ from them. As argued by Bersh (2018), a key step in becoming a culturally competent educator starts from within and is a journey that must be examined critically and honestly. Implicit biases are thoughts that are deep in our unconscious minds (Staats, 2016). Student teachers and teachers alike must explore their biases and beliefs about various cultures regardless of their ethnicity or race. Even if teachers look like the students they are teaching, there is still the possibility that they do not understand them due to a lack of self-examination. As Terrell and Lindsey (2009) state, “Tools of cultural proficiency are predicated on your ability and willingness to recognize that change is an inside-out process in which we are students of our assumptions about self, others, and the context in which we work with others” (p. 20). Taking on the perspective of self-reflection allows for a person to grow and will allow them to examine their teaching pedagogy concerning the way they will address their classroom and their students. According to Schauer (2018), shifting perspectives are important in diverse environments because teachers can practice reflection and make meaning of the diversity they are encountering. This type of reflection is important for preservice teachers because it will

allow them to process their thoughts and ideas about diverse schools and their place in them.

As Desai (2019) states, “While it might be farfetched to say educators racially profile Black and brown children, it becomes less dubious when data states an overrepresentation of them are being suspended, expelled and disciplined” (p. 1038). Establishing a safe environment in a classroom for preservice teachers while they are going through their coursework is important for them to be able to critically examine themselves and their biases because “discussion of race, class, and opportunity, and privilege often elicit emotional responses” (Chiu, Sayman, Carrero, Gibbon, Zolkoski, & Lusk, 2017, p. 48). Being able to freely discuss sensitive issues in a safe environment is a part of the growing process that all educators should experience. As Makaiau and Freese (2013) put it, “An intellectually safe community of inquiry created spaces for rethinking and digging more deeply to uncover our personal beliefs, stereotypes, biases, and contradictions” (p. 145). In a safe and respectful environment, students and teachers alike will be able to feel comfortable openly discussing sensitive issues and unpacking their own biases through self-exploration. In Desai’s (2019) classroom, he ends one of his classes by showing two children in hoodies. One child was his Black son, the other was a young White boy. He asked his class “Think about which son has to be worried about wearing a hoodie? Why does this have to be his reality?” (Desai, 2019, p. 1042). Boundaries were pushed and many students felt uncomfortable discussing racial issues and acknowledging White privilege (Desai, 2019).

Preservice Teacher Identities

People become teachers for many reasons—for example, because they want to work with kids, create change, learn from, and teach kids and give back (Borrero, 2011). As one teacher states, “I am passionate about working with youth...because teaching has deep social importance” (Borrero, 2011, p. 21). Such a response is not atypical of a teacher. Mainly the motivation for teaching comes from the heart. According to Borrero (2011), preservice teachers often reported that caring and love are some of the most important parts of being a teacher. That said since preservice teachers can have these motivations without any experience working in schools, preservice teachers’ unconscious thoughts still need to be explored and interrogated. Preservice teachers can have everything they need regarding materials and methods they have been taught, but still have attitudes and beliefs regarding diversity that need further examination and unpacking (Unrah & McCord, 2010).

According to Gay and Howard (2000), there is a lack of teachers of color teaching in urban settings. This creates what they call a “demographic divide” (as cited in Borrero, 2011, p. 18; also see Borrero, Flores, de la Cruz, 2016). Because there is a lack of teachers of color teaching in urban settings, many of the teachers are White (Borrero, 2011). How White teachers make meaning of their racial identities and place them within their context of work with minority students is important to understand, as these inform how teachers can negotiate issues of race within their classrooms (Schauer, 2018). Regardless of the socioeconomic background or how a White teacher grew up, their perceptions need to be explored because their White background makes a difference in their teaching. As all teachers bring their positionalities which inform how they see their

students and the world, self-examination is a crucial part of working towards cultural competence.

Some academics argue that White preservice teachers do not recognize their privilege, while others say some do understand it to an extent. As Unruh and McCord (2010) state, “Preservice teachers who are dispositionally more open-minded, socio-politically liberal, and more sympathetic toward other people exhibit more positive beliefs about diversity in a school setting” (p. 4-5). On the other hand, according to Brooks (2015), when several activities in his class required discussing culturally sensitive issues, the students were disengaged or could not think or express themselves outside their own cultures and beliefs. Some students disclosed that they felt they would offend someone because they did not know how to talk about their culture and beliefs in a heterogeneous group (Brooks, 2015).

Love (2014) asserts that while many teachers’ actions are driven by unconscious bias, in the end, we want teachers to be critically self-reflective and disrupt their own implicit biases. After all, those types of biases are what often lead to unfair discipline practices which damage the social, emotional, and mental wellness of students.

Conclusion

As I have argued in this literature review, self-reflection is a large part of becoming culturally competent. It is incumbent on individuals to examine themselves to prepare to teach in a diverse classroom. This study is important because through it I push participating preservice teachers to examine their implicit biases and delve into their identities to understand themselves better so they can become culturally competent teachers in their future careers. This study is thus able to inform how cultural competence

can be learned because being a culturally competent teacher is an essential part of ensuring *all* students' success.

III. METHODOLOGY

As outlined in the previous chapters, the purpose of this study is to focus on participating preservice teachers and their journey to cultural competence. The focus of this study is on examining individual teacher candidates' experiences and reflections on their efforts to become culturally competent, which includes understanding how their backgrounds, identities, and implicit biases shaped their learning and ability to work with diverse populations. In this chapter, I will outline the methodologies I have used here to document these reflections, experiences, and efforts in the lives of my participants.

Research Methodology and Questions

This study has been conducted using a qualitative methodology, specifically the intrinsic case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An intrinsic case study “resembles the focus of narrative research, but the case study analytic procedures of a detailed description of the case, set within its context or surroundings, still hold true” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 99). The flexibility of qualitative research allowed for the study to be guided by the data collected and themes identified through the analysis process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The opportunities that an intrinsic case study methodology permits are beneficial for this research because it allowed the voices, reflections, and perceptions of participating preservice teachers to be heard unfiltered.

To gather data that will be used to gain an understanding of the topic being explored, four preservice teachers were recruited to participate in the study. Multiple perspectives from a diverse group of participants allow for the study to maintain its trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is my objective as the researcher to explore participants' identities and implicit biases to gain knowledge from various individuals

and perspectives. The themes that are developed throughout the study came from the different participants' perspectives.

The following research questions were explored in this study to understand the preservice teachers' journey to cultural competence and how it will affect their future teaching practices.

1. How do preservice teachers describe the role of their backgrounds (i.e., race, ethnicity, etc.) in relation to this process?
2. How does a preservice teacher's identity shape their pedagogical approach?
3. How do preservice teachers describe the role of their implicit biases related to cultural scenarios that they are presented with and will be presented within their future careers?

Overview of Methodological Approach

Setting. The research was conducted in a setting that was comfortable for each participant. Due to potential concerns related to COVID-19, the interviews were conducted via Zoom, with participants able to choose where they were physically present while on Zoom. Conducting the research in a way that allows participants to choose a natural or comfortable setting, provides a "richness of what is happening and emphasizes the way that it involves people's intentions and strategies" (Gibbs, 2007, p. 4). The natural setting the participant chose allowed the researcher to observe the participants in a place they feel safe, therefore making the interactions authentic.

Methods. The research has been conducted through interviews. There are both structured and semi-structured interviews. The structured interviews include questions about the participants' demographics and background (see Appendix A). The semi-

structured interview questions delve deeper into cultural awareness via open-ended questions which allowed for further exploration of the research topic (see Appendix B). Additional semi-structured interviews were conducted about the participants' identity and how they see it affecting their teaching practice. Lastly, the semi-structured interview included a discussion of two different case scenarios (see Appendix C). The case studies that were used in the final interview are named Multicultural Day Parade and Family Night (see Appendix E and F).

While the full case scenarios are available in Appendix E and F, I here present a summary of each of them so that the reader can have a general sense of what participants were responding to in their final interview. Multicultural Day Parade is a scenario that involves a school that is having a Culture Parade. The students are asked to dress up in clothing from countries outside of the United States of America. The teacher in the case study, Ms. Morrison, shows her students a kilt that is a part of her Scottish heritage. She uses this example to explain to the students that they are to bring their costumes for the parade. On the day of the parade, she encounters an issue with two students who brought clothing that is deemed everyday wear as opposed to the cultural costumes as they were instructed. One student is White, and she brought a soccer uniform, and the other is African American who brought jeans and her favorite sweatshirt. The students are not allowed to walk in the parade even though one of the students explains to Ms. Morrison that the clothing does represent her culture. Ms. Morrison's concerns were about what other students and staff would think about them being allowed to walk in the parade and possibly being made fun of because they were wearing everyday clothing (See Appendix E for the full case scenario).

Family Night is a case scenario about a school that hosts an evening for families to attract English Language Learners (ELL) and their families with the hope that it will help increase math skills. The event included a dinner and student performances in addition to the online resources math presentation. Fliers in various languages were sent home to encourage attendance at the event and it was scheduled to last an hour. On the evening of the event, the usual families that attended school affairs arrived, however, several of the ELL families did not arrive till past the start time. The teachers decided to change the order of the program by talking about the math portion first and saved the student performances for later so that the late families did not miss their children performing. The ELL families stayed in the back of the cafeteria when they arrived and talked during the event. Following the event, they continued talking so Ms. Stowe passed out a handout about the online math resources that were made by Mr. Nelson. No parents talked to her or asked any questions which caused her concern. The teachers debriefed after the families left. Ms. Stowe discussed her concerns about the disinterest from the ELL families as other teachers expressed how upset they were about the ELL families arriving late and talking to each other during the presentation. Mr. Nelson recognized that stereotypes were being reinforced, however, he could not identify the lesson the teachers should learn from the family night (See Appendix F for the full case scenario).

Researcher. I as a researcher have been the only individual interacting with the participants and collecting their data. By being the only researcher, I was able to establish a good rapport and relationship with the participants, so that the most honest and best data was collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The topic of cultural competency is sensitive

and has required the participants to engage in self-exploration and self-reflection, so a trusting relationship between the participants and myself as the researcher was essential.

Multiple participants’ perspectives. To gather diverse data that can be used to gain a good understanding of the topic being explored, the participants were selected from the Texas State University teaching program. I worked with professors from the teacher preparation program at Texas State University to help gather participants from their classes of future teachers. These Texas State University professors allowed me to send emails to their course students describing my study and asking for volunteers. Selecting participants with multiple perspectives from a diverse group of potential participants has allowed for the study to maintain its validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The themes that were developed throughout the study came from the different participants’ perspectives, and not from my own as a researcher.

Table 1 *Participant identifying information*

Participants (pseudonyms)	Age	Area of Study
Gigi	30	Secondary English
Raquel	22	Secondary English
Jessie	37	Family Consumer Science
Hanna	20	Special Education, minor in Communication

Case study research. For this research, an intrinsic case study has been the methodology used. An intrinsic case study “resembles the focus of narrative research, but the case study analytic procedures of a detailed description of the case, set within its context or surroundings, still hold true” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 99). The flexibility of qualitative research allows for the study to be guided by the data collected and themes emerge through the collection process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The opportunities that a

case study methodology permits were beneficial for this research because it allowed the voices of the preservice teachers to be expressed in a way that is conversational and authentic.

Data Analysis. Initially, I began to implement Merriam's (2009) seven steps during the data analysis process: read the first interview transcript, annotated the transcript, assigned codes to pieces of data, created a running list of codes, and repeated steps one through four for each interview, eliminated redundant codes and grouped codes into categories. However, I turned to open coding (Burnard, 1991) to code the 12 interviews I had with the participants to find any dominant themes that emerged through the data. For this process, I read through the transcripts of the interviews while listening to the audio of the interviews. This is a method I practiced ensuring the transcripts were accurate as well as internalizing the information. At this point in the open coding process, I was doing line-by-line analysis and making notes about various concepts I saw develop, this process followed Merriam's first and second steps. As I will explore in the following chapters, I found themes related to a perceived lack of "White culture," various funds of identity correlations, trauma, cultural awareness about social justice, and deficit thinking. According to Khandkar (2009), the benefit of doing this type of open coding analysis allows the researcher to build directly from the raw data and create a descriptive framework in addition to contributing to the validity of the work. This method helped me see trends that emerged from the data.

After my initial read-through and listening of the audio, I then followed Merriam's (2009) steps one through four by again going through the transcripts and grouping the notes I initially took, and further investigate the data. I initially found three

reoccurring codes: lack of “White” culture, deficit thinking, and cultural awareness about social justice. These codes became apparent in when I reviewed the personal history interviews as well as the identity web conversations. I completed three rounds of data review to ensure the themes and trends I found were present and accurately represented in the data through specific quotes from the participants. My intent was to recognize any additional thematic concepts I may have missed. In Vivo coding was used to honor the participants' voices (Saldaña, 2009). I further identified the final two themes found largely in the identity web interviews as well as while reviewing the case scenario transcripts. A total of five themes were found and will be discussed in chapter five.

Philosophical Assumptions. As the researcher, I here voice two philosophical assumptions, the first being an epistemological assumption and the second being an axiological assumption. By epistemological assumption, I refer to “how knowledge is known – through the subjective experiences of people” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). This assumption is based on my research questions that require an in-depth look into an issue of culture, so getting close to the subjects and interacting with them in their environment is vital to data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In terms of the axiological assumption, I selected this approach because of my own biases and values that are tied to my views about cultural competence and how it affects education. My overall experience in education contributes to specific biases and values that have been established over 16 years. Axiological assumptions require that I disclose my values and biases to the participants and recognize that the study will also be gathering value-laden data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Positionality. The purpose of this study, as I have previously stated, is to specifically explore the experiences of cultural competency of White women. My primary motivation for this is because, as Flory and Wylie (2019) have stated, “Most U.S. teachers come from middle-class backgrounds and attended schools grounded in cultural ‘normalcy.’ These teachers are likely to encounter students who are ethnically, culturally, and socioeconomically different than themselves, especially if they teach in urban communities” (p. 1320). As will be seen in the findings, the information in the previous statement resonates with various parts of all four participants’ experiences.

As a Puerto Rican female, my demographics are and have been different from the majority of the individuals I have worked with during my public school career, as most of my colleagues have possessed the demographics listed by Flory and Wylie. Within this study, I investigated the cultural competency of these preservice White female candidates from my own subjectivities as a Puerto Rican first generation college graduate from a single parent lower-income family. According to the *National Center for Education Statistics’* most recent data from 2017 – 2018 National Teachers and Principal Survey, 80% of teachers are White and non-Hispanic, while only 9 % are Hispanic. I acknowledge and understand that this numerical dominance of non-Hispanic White teachers makes me the minority among educators. I chose to pursue this research precisely for that reason. I am the minority in this community, but in part because of that my personal experiences have given me an insight to the struggles the students experience when they are interacting with teachers who are demographically different from themselves. When I began conducting this research, my minority status not only as an educator but as a Ph.D student were evident. As referenced by the *Digest of Education*

Statistics (2012), 5.5 % of Hispanic females obtain a doctoral degree (Table 339). My motivation for this research came from my personal experiences with students who have struggled with teachers who do not relate to them. As a Latina educator working with many Latina/Latino students, and now conducting research in K-12 schools, my identity has been a source of power and strength. As Crumb (2017) argues, “Working class Latina doctoral students often consider their underprivileged upbrings as an aspect that has aided their persistence” (p. 31).

However, as I also stated in chapter one, my cultural competency is unfinished. “Education does not just make us educable. It is our awareness of being unfinished that makes us educable.” (Freire, 1998, p. 58). I have and continue to examine my identity. I know that my cultural competence is like a road trip. I will experience some beautiful landscapes, but at times the road may get bumpy depending on the contexts and communities I drive through. My journey is different from my participants, but all our journeys towards cultural competency include one key factor: Identity. Our identity shapes us and our interactions with those around us.

This is an issue that I believe needs to be addressed because ultimately, we are all striving to eradicate the opportunity gap and ensure success for all students. Also, this issue is important because culturally relevant school practices start before entering the school environment. Preservice teachers must be aware of their implicit biases as they move towards cultural competence in their future teaching practices. As a researcher, I must also be aware of my biases and own how they might affect my work.

IV. FINDINGS

This chapter provides the findings from the intrinsic case studies of the four participants who participated in this research study. The names of the individuals were changed to protect their anonymity. Each case study provides an overview of the three interviews that were had with each participant. The case studies are broken down by interview and the information discussed during each meeting. Every participant was treated as their own individual case as opposed to an all-inclusive case study due to the complexity and specificity of the interviews and the experiences and mindsets expressed in them. As stated by Lucas, Fleming, and Bhosale (2018), such case studies have “the flexibility to delve into and unpack more complex experiences and circumstances which may not have a specific or singular outcome” (p. 216). Each of the teacher candidates were very different individuals with a great deal of variety in background and point of view.

For each participant, the first interview was a structured interview oriented around questions that would guide participants to share their personal backgrounds and establish a rapport. The second interview delved into their identities by completing an identity web and discussing it in-depth. The final interview had the participants analyze and discuss their reactions to the two case scenarios introduced in Chapter 3, one oriented around a Multicultural Day Parade and the other around a Family Night. As a reminder from Chapter 3, the Multicultural Day Parade case describes a day in which the students were asked to bring cultural clothing that represents their ethnic heritage. Two students were denied participation by Ms. Morrison because she believed that they did not follow directions because they brought everyday clothes instead of their costumes (See appendix

E for further detail). The Family Night case describes a school making outreach to ELL families to increase math skills via online resources, specifically through an evening outreach family night activity with a presentation and student performances. In this case, many ELL families arrived late to the event, stood in the back of the cafeteria, and talked throughout the presentation. Following the presentation, they continued their discussion and did not interact with Ms. Stowe when she handed them information about the online resources. In the described case, Mr. Nelson is a veteran teacher who recognizes the discontent of many teachers about the event and notes how teachers reinforced stereotypes about ELL families afterward. The participants, acting as Mr. Nelson, need to explore what they could do to address the situation (See Appendix F for further detail).

The rest of the chapter will explore in more detail the interactions I had with each of the participants during this series of three interviews. As noted above, all names used here are pseudonyms.

Gigi

Gigi is a White 30-year-old North American female teacher candidate at Texas State University. She agreed to be a research participant because she felt that she was culturally competent and wanted to grow in her knowledge. As I will explore in more detail below, in the first interview she discussed how she felt she became culturally aware through her personal exposure to other cultures. We had three interviews throughout a two-month period. Our first interview was very general. This makes sense, as Ravich and Carl (2016) argue, “The development of relationships is an incremental, complex, multifaceted, and vital process that is at the heart of qualitative research” (p. 350). The

first interview was very important because we were getting to know each other and establishing a strong foundation for our next interviews.

In the first interview, I inquired about her reasons for going into teaching and how she ended up at Texas State University. The second interview focused on her identity. In that second interview, Gigi completed an identity web (which I share below as Figure 1) and which we discussed in detail. In addition to the identity web, several aspects of her identity were also discussed. Our third and final interview was unstructured and explored Gigi's reaction to the two different case studies described above (and in further detail in Chapter 3).

Personal History

During our first interview, Gigi revealed that her eventual career goal is to become a school counselor; however, she is enrolled in this teacher education program at Texas State University to become a teacher first. As she states, "Counseling has always been what I wanted to do. I've been led to schools because that's where you access a lot of kids that wouldn't normally have access to therapy outside of school" (Gigi, Interview 1). This reminds me of Emdin's (2016) point regarding the need for therapeutic opportunities for students in schools, as he states, "We tend to associate PTSD with combat veterans, but too often we fail to recognize that young people experience trauma regularly in ways that go unnoticed or unrecognized" (p. 22).

Before starting her career as a teacher, Gigi earned a previous bachelor's degree in psychology from UT-Austin. However, she felt that going through the Texas State University teacher preparation program would help her feel successful in the classroom before moving to a counseling position. "I knew I would not be confident in a classroom

unless I felt like I was well versed in the subject that I was teaching... let's get a core subject so I can teach that and be confident in the classroom instead of second guessing myself every minute" (Gigi, Interview 1). This statement shows her earnest commitment to preparing herself for her future career as a school counselor and emphasizes her self-awareness about her current mindset. In research done by Kiramba, Deng & Viesca (2022), they found that the teachers' own perception of their readiness for teaching affects the teaching and learning that will happen in their classrooms. Similarly, it is important for Gigi to feel comfortable and ready to teach in her future classroom.

Although Gigi already has a degree from UT-Austin, it was on recommendation from her friends that she sought out a teacher preparation program at Texas State University, which she had heard has the best teaching program in the area. She also was encouraged by friends to take as many courses as she could with a professor I here call Dr. M.

Although her required courses at Texas State University have not included multiculturalism or diversity topics as a central focus, she has previously taken a few such courses for her psychology degree. Additionally, Dr. M is "all about thinking about each individual student that you have and like the tools that you can provide them to make them successful in the classroom outside of TEKS and like the traditional school" (Gigi, Interview 1). Gigi has also received some guidance from another professor regarding ways she can interpret student needs that go beyond teaching, which she feels adds to her cultural competence.

In addition to the lessons she has learned through Dr. M's class, Gigi grew up aware of her privilege. "So just being hyperaware of my identity as a straight White

female and the benefits that I get from being a part of, what's the opposite of minority?" (Gigi, Interview 1). She was able to learn through experience that she does have White privilege by being a part of the majority race. She experienced firsthand the way teachers treat students of color because although she was only one of two or three White students in her K-12 experience, she felt the privilege bestowed upon her. For example, she remembered being called on by teachers while other students were not. She also recognized the discomfort the teachers felt in dealing with other students they were not familiar with. "I definitely feel lucky that I was made aware of my privilege from 15 years old" (Gigi, Interview 1). As a future educator, Gigi's experience with seeing how students of color were treated differently by White teachers helped shape her future self as a teacher and how she will treat students.

Identity Web

During our second interview, Gigi and I focused on her identity. This included talking through her family makeup, past and present, her identity web indicated in Figure 1 below, and how all those things will translate into her teaching style and approach. We first focused on her background and her current family.

Gigi grew up in Houston, Texas, and attended what she considered "good schools" until the age of 15 (though she did not go into detail regarding what made these schools "good" in comparison to others). At that time, her family moved to Kyle, Texas, which is a suburb of Austin. "I'm thankful now as an adult, and when we moved to Kyle, I was able to go to a low SES high school where I was the minority as a majority." (Gigi, Interview 2). In this new environment, Gigi was able to recognize and experience firsthand the microaggressions that some teachers impose upon students of color. When I

refer to microaggressions, I am building on the work of Solórzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000), who define microaggressions as “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed towards people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (p. 60). In this interview, Gigi was able to recognize microaggressions she witnessed growing up and put a name on them.

At the time of our interview, Gigi has both her parents and says that they are still happily married. Shortly after high school, Gigi herself got pregnant. She has created her own family unit with her husband, two children and has been married for the last 11 years. “So, a young mom and wife, stay-at-home mom for a little bit and went to college. I took a semester off and then went to college and still graduated with the rest of the people... same semester that all my friends are graduating” (Gigi, Interview 2). Her perseverance is evident in her ability to be a wife, mother, and college graduate with her peers.

Next, we reviewed Gigi’s Identity Web as seen in Figure 1. The web asked for her to identify her sex, gender identity, gender expression, spiritual beliefs, class, nationality, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, physical ability, immigration status, and political beliefs. Additionally, there were blank spaces; as I did not give explicit direction for Gigi to fill these in herself, she left them blank. I intentionally did not give any of the participants direction about how to fill out the web so they could fill out what they felt was important for their own identity. We started with her gender identity, which she identified as cisgender, which she defined as follows: “It just means I was born as the gender I identify as” (Gigi, Interview 2). As explained by Johnson (2013), “If one’s gender identity aligns with sex morphology, s/he is said to be cisgender. These definitions emphasize that sex

and gender are most frequently identified in relation to a stable and socially binding center when, in fact, the categories of sex and gender are constructed and performed” (p. 138). The definition of cisgender is important to note as it relates to Gigi’s identity and how she recognizes it is a part of her privilege. Her gender expression is mostly feminine, which she explains as “There are definitely times where I’m still almost non-binary because I don’t feel like clothes or the way you identify or express yourself should be genderized. But I mostly present feminine” (Gigi, Interview 2). Although Gigi identifies as feminine, she refers to feeling non-binary at times. This reference shows her knowledge of various LGBTQ+ terms, as does her definition to me of how she understands the term cisgender.

Next on the web, Gigi identified her sexuality as heteroromantic bisexual. “So I’m attracted to females. I love the female body, but I’ve never actually been in a relationship with a female. Like it’s been one-night stands or just hookups in the past... I’ve only been with my husband since we’ve been married” (Gigi, Interview 2). Heteroromantic bisexuality was an interesting concept to me, one I had not heard before. When she discussed it with me, she was extremely informative and had her own explanation for a term that is not common to me. Her meaning of heteroromantic as she explains it is that “I only date men but as a bisexual, I’m attracted to both” (Gigi, Interview 2). As I further probe into this term, I found a basis for it in the academic literature. As stated by Antonsen, Zdaniuk, Yule, and Brotto (2020), “a heteroromantic bisexual person [is one] who is romantically attracted only to the opposite sex but sexually attracted to both men and women” (p. 1619). I appreciated this aspect of the conversation, as not only is an understanding of the various terms used to describe

sexuality important for future use in the classroom, but it also presented an opportunity for learning to me as the researcher.

Although Gigi stays current with various terms, her gender identity seems to be something she anticipates being an issue in the classroom. Gigi has very strong convictions about gender identity. Regarding transsexual identity, Gigi does not seem to believe it is possible to be transsexual: “Having to keep my thoughts of this kid is not a boy. She’s a girl and she is just confused and is a lesbian. I can’t like, I don’t know, the whole gender ideology thing has really messed with me as an adult” (Gigi, Interview 2). In explaining her feelings about different students' ideas of their own gender identity, I feel Gigi was demonstrating her own bias towards the transsexual community, having a rather fixed opinion as opposed to being open to students’ possible different understandings. She went even further, arguing that kids identifying as transsexual has become “contagious,” which she feels is attributable to social media (Gigi, Interview 2). Even though Gigi recognizes that she will have issues in her classroom if she openly expresses her opposition to transsexual identity, I would again argue this is a bias that needs to be further explored and adjusted before she enters the classroom. We further discussed that although it may be hard, it is good to recognize the issues ahead of time so she can essentially work on not bringing that into the classroom. This led to us discussing a part of her identity that she feels she will be able to bring into the classroom without controversy: her self-identification as a writer.

Gigi has always self-identified as a writer, which is a large part of what led her to become an English teacher. “So I’m going into English because I feel like writing is a really amazing tool to be able to process trauma and to be able to process hard things in

kids' lives. So helping them find a voice through writing is definitely what's leading me to be an English teacher until I can get into counseling" (Gigi, Interview 2).

In addition to being a writer, Gigi's own trauma she experienced as a child is something she believes will help her connect with her students. Gigi revealed to me she has been sexually and emotionally abused. She feels she has processed through that trauma, though that processing continues into adulthood. This personal connection to trauma is something that can allow for further connections with students who may have experienced the same. Relationships with students are important to classroom management and overall attributes to students feeling safe. As Terrell and Lindsey (2009) state, "Together we have a role in making a vision of inclusive education accessible for all demographic groups of students" (p. 112). Gigi's past and her desire to create a space in her classroom to help students with trauma issues is a great way to build relationships with students in her classroom. "The mental health side of it and be like, 'Hey, look, I've struggled with this too, like you can talk to me or I can help you find strategies to get through it'" (Gigi, Interview 2). In addition to her plan for an inclusive classroom, Gigi is tapping into her identity to create a connection with her future students.

Gigi and I continued to talk about how she sees parts of herself in ways that will help kids—at the same time, she recognizes that she will likely receive pushback from parents. "I don't think I'm going to be a teacher that parents like, and that's okay with me because I'm not there for parents, I'm there for kids and to help them be individuals and not products of their environment" (Gigi, Interview 2). Gigi's recognition of a possible conflict is concerning, as she demonstrates no regard or concern for how parents may feel regarding her opinions about sexuality and religion. At this point on Gigi's path to

education, she is still holding strong about how she will put students first regardless of how parents feel about their own child's sexual orientation or beliefs regarding it.

Another aspect of her identity that she feels will help her in the classroom is her identity as a "mental health and sexual abuse survivor and emotional abuse survivor" (Gigi, Interview 2). She hopes to create an inclusive safe classroom where students "can be themselves. They don't have to pretend to be someone they're not" (Gigi, Interview 2). While this is a fine sentiment, I believe that Gigi is wavering regarding what she will do in terms of students "being themselves," given her firm beliefs about transsexuality as being a social media trend and "contagious."

In our interview, I pushed this discussion further, asking what Gigi would do should she have a student who self-identifies as transsexual. Gigi feels that she will be able to resolve any such issues by being able to "BS my way through interactions... even if I don't believe it. If they believe it, I want to encourage them to be confident in themselves and their beliefs" (Gigi, Interview 2). While an appealing statement to anyone who supports transsexual students, her strong beliefs regarding the transsexual community shared earlier in the interview give me pause as to how this would play out in real life.

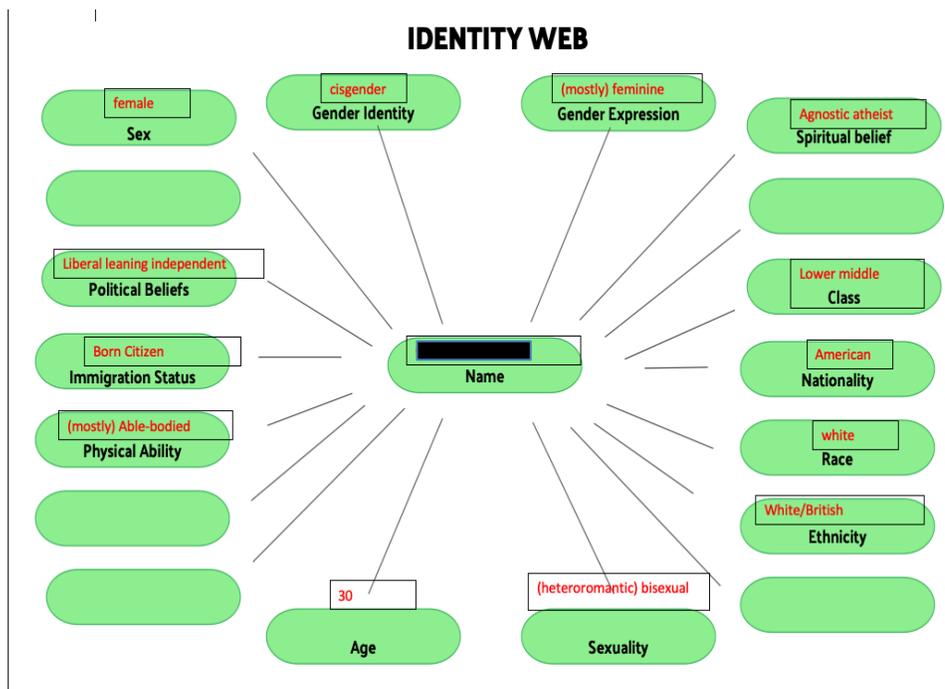


Figure 1 *Gigi's Identity Web*

Case Studies

At the beginning of our third interview, Gigi read through Scenario 1, which is the Multicultural day parade (see Appendix E for a full description of the scenarios). As discussed in Chapter 3, the Multicultural day parade involved students who were not allowed to participate in the parade due to not bringing costumes that teachers felt sufficiently represented their heritage. The teacher felt that they would be ridiculed for not following directions. As we discussed the scenario, one of Gigi's biggest takeaways was the use of the word "costume" to describe traditional clothing specific to students' home cultures. "... costume... That seems really bad, a bad way of expressing what kind of clothes you should be wearing because it's not a costume. They are traditional attire"

(Gigi, Interview 3). To Gigi, referring to culturally specific clothing as “costumes” takes away the cultural significance of the clothing.

This specific scenario had Gigi questioning herself and what she would have done. One aspect she thought would be useful would have been to expand on different types of heritages and different types of clothing in the classroom before the event. She wavered a bit when she discussed what she would have done about allowing the two students to participate in the parade: “I probably would have let them walk in the back. That seems wrong too” (Gigi, Interview 3). When she attempted to decide (to let them participate, but in the back), she still questioned that decision. The questioning of her initial thought does imply that she acknowledges the negative connotation of that action (putting students of color in the back). At this point in our conversations, she had presented herself as very knowledgeable about various marginalized communities (in particular the LGBTQ+ community), but as we dived deeper into actual scenarios, her lack of knowledge and confidence about multicultural differences became more apparent. While we were speaking, she narrated her thought process as she tried to figure out what should be included in multiculturalism. “And multicultural also includes American, if it’s multicultural, and I don’t know” (Gigi, Interview 3). In this instance, despite the use of the term “American” to refer generally to countries and cultures throughout both North and South America, Gigi seems to be referring more specifically to the cultural elements she associates with the United States of America. This came up in the context of Keisha, a Black student in the case study scenario who wore her favorite hoodie and jeans to represent her culture. To Gigi, this brought up questions about multiculturalism and what is included—the teacher in the scenario believes this is everyday clothing, rather than a

cultural costume. Gigi seemed to be arguing that if Keisha is wearing everyday “American” clothing, does that not also represent an aspect of multiculturalism? After all, culture is not wholly based on ethnic heritage, but also on what an individual is exposed to growing up as and how they live in their everyday lives. That said, given this response, I do not think Gigi seemed to grasp the notion of multiculturalism fully. Gigi also seemed uncertain, as she continued to question whether she would let the students participate, finally deciding that she would ask another teacher.

As we discussed and probed further into why she would ask another teacher, she explained her lack of self-confidence: “I already have imposter syndrome before I start working, and I don’t always feel confident in my judgment and someone who’s been in the job longer than I, may have different perspectives and different opinions” (Gigi, Interview 3). This lack of confidence is something many new teachers and people experience in a new position or career. Questioning how things should be done is typical behavior. However, she did end up changing her viewpoint when I asked if there was anything that would prevent her from taking a stance herself on allowing the girls to participate in the parade. Following that question, she began taking a firmer stance on the side of supporting the students in their choice of clothing: “I don’t know, if they belittled the students ... I’m going to let them [the students] because you’re making fun of them for not understanding” (Gigi, Interview 3). Here she seems to take a different stance than before, when she determined earlier in our conversation that she would ask another teacher for help; however, when she considered the possibility of the students being mocked, she changed her position. This shows Gigi’s compelling motivations to protect students from those that would hurt them or belittle them.

In further discussion of what could be done differently, we came back to the use of the word “costumes.” Word choices are important to Gigi as well as inclusiveness. When there is a multicultural parade, she believes that “So we’re just going to point you out for being different than us. I think you have to straddle a line between making differences seem much greater than they actually are and celebrating difference for what they are” (Gigi, Interview 3). This comment reinforces Gigi’s back-and-forth way of thinking about culture. She is still exploring what culture means in a broad sense, but her heart is always focused on students. One way she plans on incorporating differences into her future classroom is through journaling. “So being able to write about their cultures or write about things that have happened, that may be microaggressions that have happened to them to be able to really, I don’t know, process it and explore different parts of their identities that they may not explore” (Gigi, Interview 3). Throughout our interviews, Gigi would consistently return to her identity as a writer. I appreciate her thoughts about her future classroom and her efforts to embrace her identity to do what she believes is best for kids.

We moved on to the next scenario regarding Family Night (see Appendix F for a full description of the scenarios). As was discussed in Chapter 3, the Family Night scenario is about a group of teachers who put together an event to encourage ELL families to attend and enhance the students’ math skills. The night does not go as planned because several of the targeted families are late, the program must be adjusted, and the ELL families stay in the back of the cafeteria and talk to each other during the program. Gigi’s first reaction was “I think Mr. Nelson may be the only sane person, but also may have gone about it a bit wrong” (Gigi, Interview 3). In this scenario, Mr. Nelson

recognizes there is an issue with the perception of the ELL families. He recognizes that stereotypes are being reinforced amongst the other teachers; however, Gigi pointed out that it is problematic that Mr. Nelson cannot recognize what the specific issues are that are causing the teachers' negative views. She very quickly recognized that the ELL students have non-English speaking families and there was not a translator at the gathering. She saw the families very differently than what was expressed in the teachers' debrief. Gigi felt that "they're talking to the other ELL families in the language that they're comfortable with... A lot of them probably speak Spanish, so to have a presentation specifically for them and to not offer it in Spanish seems kind of counterintuitive" (Gigi, Interview 3). While this mention of Spanish language translators seems a good faith effort toward inclusion, it also reveals a broad assumption Gigi makes about the ELL families in the vignette. She instinctively assumed the ELL families would be Spanish speakers, perhaps because that is the most common non-English language spoken in the area in which she currently works. She does not consider that there may be other cultures and languages being spoken. She took her assumptions a bit further by referring to the families that were talking in the back as immigrants. In my experience as an educator, Spanish-speaking families are not always immigrants, and that assumption creates a very limited view of ELL students and their families. Additionally, she said "Whenever there's a language barrier, oftentimes kids and families feel stupid, even though they're not stupid and they can process stuff. Not being able to communicate with someone else makes you feel stupid" (Gigi, Interview 3). This statement took a lot to process. I know from my communication with Gigi that she has strong feelings when she believes something is wrong and negatively affects students—that is, she instinctively

takes a stand to defend those she feels are being targeted. However, that defensiveness (possibly interpretable as a mistaken White Savior mentality [Straubhaar, 2015]) here is based on some faulty assumptions and problematic word choices. She chose to use the word “stupid,” though I do not believe she meant it with any malice—likely she was trying to say that not communicating in a language someone understands defeats the purpose of trying to help them learn something (in this case, at a Family Night activity). However, she is making her own assumptions about what a person is feeling who does not speak the language being spoken to them, assuming that participants who do not share her background or positionality would react in the same way that she would in each situation. Throughout this scenario, I noticed a repeated pattern of her making assumptions on behalf of members of cultures she is not a part of and is not necessarily familiar with. Perhaps there is a level of assumed familiarity based on her own past experiences in a majority-Latino school while growing up in Kyle, Texas, as she mentioned in Interview 2.

When I asked what she thought the families standing in the back were doing, more assumptions followed: “standing next to someone who understands your language and your experience definitely would foster a sense of community” (Gigi, Interview 3). While her comments about factors that can lead to community unity hold weight, she is also making assumptions about members of shared ethnic heritage also having a shared language. When discussing the portion of the written case study when Mr. Nelson shares that he feels the experience “reinforced stereotypes,” I asked Gigi what stereotypes she thought were in question here. She stated, “That they are not engaged with their kids’ schoolwork ... they work too much or just like my microaggressive stereotypes that

people have where they don't actually think it's a stereotype but it is" (Gigi, Interview 3). In this statement, Gigi is thinking about different ideas the teachers who put together the parent night are having, and she brings up microaggressions in terms of stereotypes. When she says this, I think it goes back to her experiences with those around her and the experiences she had as a child growing up that she spoke about during Interview 2. She witnessed a lot of microaggressions when she attended a school as a member of the racial minority (in this case, White). If Gigi was a part of the teacher debrief, she asserted that she would have "felt uncomfortable listening to other teachers talk about the stereotypes or talking bad about the parents... I don't think I would have been able to sit through them just bad-mouthing the people who are already marginalized" (Gigi, Interview 3). Although she does not discuss what she would have said specifically, based on her previous interviews and comments I do believe she believes she would speak up. Her passion for students would shine through during this discussion.

We discussed some final thoughts about the overall interview process and where Gigi felt she was in terms of her cultural competency and awareness. Gigi felt that her awareness stemmed from how she grew up being "a minority as a White person... having friends who are people of color who have shared with me that I have microaggressions" (Gigi, Interview 3). Her experiences growing up and with the people she surrounded herself with are pulled from her funds of identity and have greatly shaped how she sees herself as an educator. She asserted that because America has immigrants all over, she will end up having a student that she will be able to "honor that and being able to see them for their identity, being a minority, being an immigrant and all the different things that they experience in their life" (Gigi, Interview 3). The previous statement highlighted

her deficit thinking. Gigi believes that she will keep her eyes open to opportunities to get to know her students, however, it is also telling that she seems to by default associate students from different cultures with being immigrants, which is not true.

Lastly, Gigi wrote up some of her final thoughts:

I thoroughly enjoyed being apart [sic] of this research project! It helped me really be able to identify the reasons I'm becoming a teacher and what my goals for my future classroom will be. I felt I was able to express my desire to help kids learn who they are and grow into social justice warriors while protecting their own identities. Learning a little bit more about myself through the identity web and subsequent interview by talking through influences and experiences of my life added language and labels (for lack of a better word) to my own identity that I hadn't previously considered. I think the second interview was my favorite of the three for this reason. I think knowing that my gender critical views may not translate well to kids that are entrusted in my care is a valuable insight to keep in mind when I learn how to keep that particular part of my identity a secret from the kids I will grow to love. Realizing that my status as a sexual and emotional abuse survivor may help me offer emotional and physical support for kids going through similar experiences as I did, and also encouraging them all to use writing in a way that I was never told to process their grief and traumas will absolutely be valuable to their lives, and this interview process definitely helped open my eyes to tools I can give to them to help them process properly. I won't lie, the last interview made my brain hurt a little bit. Realizing that many of the experiences I will have as a teacher are full of nuance and there is no "right answer" to any given scenario was a bit of a wake-up call to the image I had in my mind of how I would handle culturally sensitive situations. I pride myself on being highly aware of my privilege as a White heterosexual-presenting person, but until this process I'm not sure I had a clear indication on how I would use that privilege in a positive way when it comes to interacting with minority identified people. The diversity parade scenario was particularly troubling for me to be able to think about what I would have done in that situation, but I think I would have allowed the students to walk the parade after having time to reflect. Ironically, my daughter's school is having a cultural diversity dress-up day this Friday, and wouldn't you know it one of the lines in the instructions say "you can dress up in your uniform from the sports you play in, activities you do, family heritage, whatever they feel makes you feel like *you!*" Thank you for allowing me to be apart of this research project and I wish you all the success!

(Gigi, Interview 3)

Speaking on a personal level, I thoroughly enjoyed my interviews with Gigi. She is an extremely passionate individual who was able to teach me a few things I did not

know about the LGBTQ+ community. With that said, I believe she has plenty of room to grow as we all do. Gigi's deficit thinking was displayed through some of her statements were highly presumptuous and lack in-depth knowledge of the various cultures she brought up in discussion or which came up in discussing the case scenarios. I was concerned about the absence of regard for parents and flags went up when she discussed her feelings about transsexual youth. My overall experience with Gigi was positive. I truly believe her heart is in the right place to be an educator who wants what is best for all kids.

Gigi's final letter reassures me that while I am unsure how she will act in her future classroom concerning cultural competence, she holds positive associations with the idea, which will likely make her more receptive to such discussions in the future. She was able to speak her truth throughout our conversations and I appreciate that the identity web was an eye-opener for her. She was able to explore her funds of identity and learn about herself as well as foresee some possible issues that may arise in her future practice. However, our discussions of sexual identity were troublesome throughout the interview series. I got concerned about her feelings about trans adolescents because they are so strong and not inclusive. Her viewpoint about transsexual students is based on her opinion and how she feels about their identity rather than the academic literature, or transsexual narratives which share their own truth. It conflicts with what she says about students feeling safe and accepted in her future classroom. I appreciate that she reflects on that in her final letter, which shows that she has shown some further self-awareness around this aspect of cultural competence. Throughout my time talking to Gigi, I felt a

great connection with her passion to help students. She expressed herself well and openly shared her desire for a future career in education that is student focused.

Raquel

Raquel is a White 22-year-old North American female teacher candidate. She agreed to be a research participant. We had three interviews over a two-month period. Our first interview was general information gathering so we could set the tone for our future interviews and establish a rapport. I inquired about her reasons for going into teaching and how she ended up at Texas State University. The second interview focused on her identity. Raquel completed an identity web which we discussed in detail. In addition to the information she put on her identity web, several aspects of her identity not included on her web were also discussed. Our third and final interview was unstructured and explored Raquel's reaction to two different scenarios. The scenarios were about possible cultural events that occur in schools that she may encounter when she becomes a teacher.

Personal History

Raquel decided to go into teaching because her mother is a teacher. Although she felt she was pressured to decide in high school what she wanted to do, she now feels she choose correctly. "I kind of committed to it ... then the more I thought about it, the more like it just seemed right" (Raquel, Interview 1). This decision about what Raquel wants to do with her future career is something that not all students have to face. Some students do not get the opportunity to have a choice regarding their future due to circumstances they cannot control, such as family obligations or lack of finances for higher education. Throughout our interviews, Raquel acknowledged her privilege of being a White female

as well as the privilege that stems from being a part of a wealthy family. She believed school is not for everyone because at some point she felt it was not for her. She credits her parents with getting her to where she is today. “I kind of want to be that for students who don’t necessarily have that at home or you know, just be the teacher who’s actually passionate about what they teach” (Raquel, Interview 1). When we discussed this, Raquel reflected more specifically on the support she received from her parents. They helped her find her footing in school and pushed her toward attending college, where she decided on a career in education. She believed that many students she will work with will not have that kind of support, so she wanted to be that person for them in the same manner her parents were for her.

Raquel never seriously considered another career path. While she had a lot of “pipe dreams” for different careers such as a lawyer or social worker and even a speech pathologist, in the end, she went back to following in her mother’s footsteps. “I started as Special Ed but I just decided I didn’t think I had the ability to do that, it’s a lot ... it would have driven me insane... I see it happening to my mom” (Raquel, Interview 1). According to Hallahan and Kauffman (2000), there are seven aspects of special education: individualized instruction, carefully sequenced tasks, stimulation and awakening of children’s senses, meticulous arrangements of the children’s environment, reward for correct performance, tutoring in functional skills, and belief that every child should be educated to the best ability possible. Although she is following in her mother’s footsteps as a teacher, it will not be in special education. As illustrated in the Hallahan and Kauffman (2000) framework, being a special education teacher is a huge responsibility and requires a specific skill set to meet all the individual students’ needs.

Currently, Raquel is an English major with a minor in secondary education. She plans to teach English at a high school.

“College was always the option for me because there wasn’t any money concerns my way” (Raquel, Interview 1). Even though she had a minor hiccup academically, she has always been on the path to college since her parents bought an account in the Texas Tomorrow fund for her and continued to support her through her college journey. The Texas Tomorrow Fund “ran from 1996-2003 and enabled more than 150,000 account holders to pre-purchase all or a portion of undergraduate tuition at then-current rates” (Baylor, 2010, p. 5).

There are many aspects to Raquel’s journey that have her on a path that is not the norm for many other preservice teachers. In our interviews, she continually acknowledged how abnormal her current path is in relation to other college students: “I’m very privileged in saying this, but it was the easiest route for me was to do this. I am living lavish out here; rent free, really no financial concerns, which is I think is a huge barrier in college for a lot of people” (Raquel, Interview 1). To be honest, there were times while Raquel was speaking that my own implicit biases arose. Sometimes I felt that she was overly flippant about her privilege and what she had been given by her parents. However, I made an extra effort to recognize it and not let it overshadow our conversations.

As with Gigi, Raquel chose Texas State University over other public state schools she applied to because in her social circles it is known for its education department. “It started as a teaching school” (Raquel, Interview 1). Indeed, until 1923 Texas State University was Southwest Texas State Teachers College (Name History, 2022). Another

factor in Raquel choosing Texas State was the proximity to her parents' home in Austin, as she wanted to stay close to home because she sees her parents often.

According to her, Raquel's experience at Texas State University has been good. She likes her professors Dr. W. and Dr. M. There has not been room in her schedule for any courses outside of her degree plan, and there are not any multicultural or diversity courses she is required to take—however, she thought about taking a Black American literature course. Nonetheless, she decided against it due to the time and professor. “8 am with a professor that has like a 1.5 on Rate My Professor ... is just not selling it for me” (Raquel, Interview 1). For context, “Rate My Professors is the largest online destination for professor ratings...User-generated content makes Rate My Professors the highest trafficked site for quickly researching and rating professors, colleges and universities across the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom” (Altice USA News, 2022).

Due to some early GPA issues, Raquel asserted that she has “missed the opportunity to take classes that were a little bit out of my comfort zone” (Raquel, Interview 1). She had to disregard extra courses so she could catch up and work on her GPA so she could be on time with a four-year graduation plan. According to her, this issue was another reason why she was not able to take multicultural courses. Her use of terms such as “courses out of her comfort zone” could be interpreted as displaying a lack of desire to expand her cultural competency. She discussed a few books she read in her coursework that addressed some issues of diversity, such as Kathleen Cushman's *Fires in the bathroom: Advice for teachers from high school students* and *The first-year teacher survival guide* by Julia G. Thompson. She mentioned that Thompson's book has a chapter “addressing equity in your classroom but in all the things they talk about, you

know, I think I'm pretty conscious of" (Raquel, Interview 1). I noted that while she asserted that she was conscious of equity issues, that was largely not visible in her contributions to the discussion in Interview 1, except regarding acknowledging her White upper-middle class privilege.

Nonetheless, Raquel believed herself to be forward-thinking. "I consider myself at least trying to be very progressive ... I grew up pretty wealthy, predominantly white suburb and I have had to expose myself to things and learn about, you know, other hardships facing certain groups of people" (Raquel, Interview 1). According to Raquel, she has done some self-exploration and learned from various people in her life and reading information that she feels will make her more knowledgeable about others so she can be a better teacher.

Identity Web

During our second interview, Raquel and I focused on her identity. This included talking through her family makeup, past and present, her identity web, and how all those things will translate into her teaching style and approach. We first focused on her background and her current family. She has a small family that consists of her mother, father, and brother. She is close to one set of grandparents. "I consider it to be very privileged because I had you know, pretty much anything I could ever want, except a horse, I wanted a horse... My family is still in the same house I grew up in" (Raquel, Interview 2). Raquel here notes how due to her financial privilege, her family makeup and lifestyle is different from many others, including the other participants in this study.

Raquel's mother is a teacher, so she was able to attend different schools from those she was zoned for geographically, due to her mother's knowledge and connections

in the education system. She changed elementary schools from the one in her neighborhood to one her mother worked at and back again. She attended two middle schools but developed behavioral issues, so her parents put her in a school that they felt was better for her. That school ended up being a private school where she spent two years, before moving again to St. Michael's, which was a private catholic school. She was not allowed to go to public school because her family feared her behavior issues would resurface by being around students that they considered bad influences.

Although Raquel's family is small, they are not all close. She does not speak to her brother regularly. Her mother is an alcoholic and has been in treatment facilities various times. She is close to her mother's parents while not being close to her mother, due to her problems with alcohol. Her father seems to be the rock of the family. He financially supports Raquel, her mother, his mother, and various other family members. He chooses to continue to support Raquel's mother while she suffers from alcoholism and debilitating debt. They stay married because according to Raquel, "she wouldn't be able to support herself on her income with her lifestyle choices" (Raquel, Interview 2). Her father and grandparents take care of the "burden" her mother puts on the family. Raquel's relationship with her mother is strained. "My dad took me to everything and I've even tried bringing it up now [with her mother]... it was just so boring [Raquel's mother's response]" (Raquel, Interview 2). According to Raquel, her mother's priorities were different, so unfortunately, she did not make time to be there for Raquel when she had swim meets or other school events. On the other hand, she has a strong relationship with her father and grandparents.

Moving on to her web, we discussed her sex, gender identity, and expression. She is female, she expresses feminine and identifies as cisgender. In her actions and clothing choices, she has always leaned toward the feminine. “I feel most confident whenever I’m embracing the things that make me more feminine” (Raquel, Interview 2). According to her, her femininity is very important to her in part because she has been mistaken for a boy before and has been called sir on various occasions.

Although Raquel went to a private catholic school, she is an atheist. “I try to respect other people’s religions, but there are some extreme sects out there” (Raquel, Interview 2). She has seen her father’s religion be extreme while she was growing up, due to the way her aunt was treated as a woman within their denomination. As a result, her dad pulled back from religion as well. She does not have an example of religion from her mother to follow, either. Raquel’s mother claims to be Buddhist, but according to Raquel, her actions say otherwise.

In her identity web, Raquel dug deeper into her previous discussions of social class. “I’m starting to understand more that my version of middle class is, you know, higher than some versions of middle class” (Raquel, Interview 2). Throughout our interviews, Raquel has made various references to her family’s wealth and her comfortable lifestyle. In this interview, she shared how now that she is a college student and exposed to different people, she is realizing the extent of her privileged lifestyle. She has gone from believing she is middle class to affirming that she is “higher middle class” (Raquel, Interview 2). She considers herself a White able-bodied American. We clarified that she is a United States citizen, not a naturalized citizen.

At this point in the identity web discussion, we delved into her political beliefs. She identifies as a leftist. “I tried to educate myself on things and the more I learn, the more I was like ‘Wow, this system is not set up to benefit anyone’” (Raquel, Interview 2). As she noted, Raquel has made efforts to get more informed, and with that comes the continuing recognition of her financial privilege. As to why she leans left politically, Raquel shared that she has friends that are trans and have a different socioeconomic background than she does because they grew up in poverty, at some points experiencing homelessness. This provides some insight into Raquel’s political views and some of the areas where she has tried to develop further cultural competence.

When asked, Raquel initially stated that she will be able to share all her identity with her students. She then backtracked, saying that she wouldn’t share her political or spiritual beliefs or her socioeconomic status. Aside from the legalities that prevent educators from expressing political and religious views, she expressed that she felt personally that such things should be kept out of the classroom. In part, she felt that discussing her wealthy upbringing might prevent her from connecting with some students. I can understand this, and honestly, I felt it harder to build rapport with her after learning about her wealth and lack of financial concerns, given the relative lack of financial privilege I had growing up.

Interestingly, Raquel assumed she would work at a school that has students from low socioeconomic statuses. “I’ll probably leave out that part and say that my dad is a veteran, so that helped get through college just because it’s a little bit less, ‘Oh, well who does she think she is? She doesn’t understand my situation’” (Raquel, Interview 2). I find it admirable and important that she recognizes parts of her identity that may prevent her

from creating student relationships while seeking out a balance that allows her to share other pieces of herself at the same time.

“I’m just going to put as much of my personality into my classroom as possible and hope my students come to the right conclusion about me” (Raquel, Interview 2). She shared that she wants to have a bookshelf in the classroom showcasing books she loves personally. Additionally, she feels very strongly about showing her support for the LGBTQ+ community by having a Pride flag in her classroom. According to her, the experiences she had at her Catholic school modeled how closed-minded some teachers could be relative to sexuality, which motivates her to want to have a welcoming and inclusive classroom. In her experience as a substitute teacher, she mentioned having to remove students who were insulting trans students. She felt she already knows and has had sufficient experience handling situations with students who openly make a classroom unsafe for others.

“My political beliefs are shaped a lot by all of the rest of my identity” (Raquel, Interview 2). She felt so much of her identity stems from her political beliefs—indeed, she believes that your politics dictate the type of person you are. For Raquel, politics tie into religion, sexual orientation, and how tolerant of others a person is. When discussing her future classroom, Raquel modeled what she planned to say to establish a safe space, namely: “This is a safe space to talk about what you want to talk about, but you’re not going to say things that make other people feel unsafe in your space” (Raquel, Interview 2). Ultimately, Raquel expressed that she wants to bring what she deems to be the best part of herself and others into her classroom.

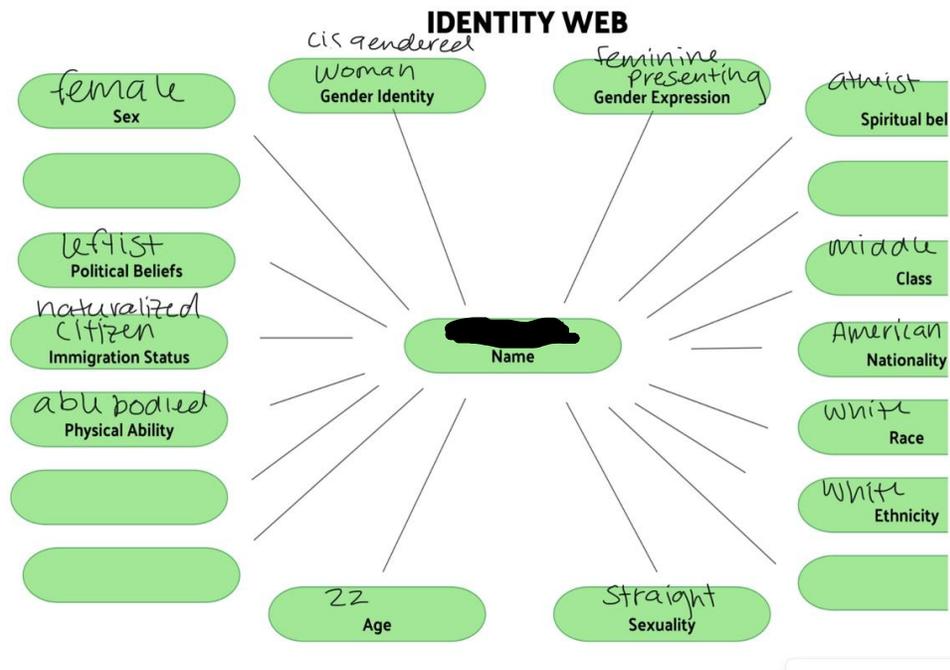


Figure 2 Raquel's Identity Web

Case Studies

Raquel read through Scenario 1 which is the Multicultural day Parade (see Appendix E for a full description of the scenarios). As discussed in Chapter 3, the Multicultural day parade involved students who were not allowed to participate in the parade due to not bringing costumes that represented their heritage. The teacher felt that they would be ridiculed for not following directions. When discussing how the teachers acted, Raquel shared “I don’t disagree... That’s probably what I would have done...that’s not cultural clothing. That’s your soccer uniform... that’s something you wear to school every day” (Raquel, Interview 3). On the whole, Raquel agreed with how everything in the scenario happened. She did not see the soccer uniform or the jean and sweatshirt as something that is cultural clothing. In her opinion, the sweatshirt could be considered generally American culture held by all people. When discussing what would be

considered cultural clothing, she shared that cultural clothing is something that is worn traditionally for special events. Within this definition, she vehemently expressed that to her, a soccer uniform is not culturally significant.

We discussed how she sees culture and what she would have done for the multicultural day. “I perceive culture to be, you know, a multinational multiethnic celebration” (Raquel, Interview 3). As examples, she referenced Mexican cultures that she has seen on social media getting their costumes ready for events in Mexico, as well as the lederhosen that some Germans wear. In her opinion, she believes that culturally relevant clothing is worn at celebrations and special occasions in different countries, nations, and regions. As a White female, she would not have participated in the parade because she believes she does not have culture and she did not grow up with traditions. This is interesting considering similar trends seen in the literature—as Picower (2021) has shared, “Many Whites see their culture as just ‘normal,’ ‘American,’ or generally ‘bland’” (p. 7). Raquel’s feelings about culture are common because her own culture needs more exploration.

We moved on to the next scenario regarding Family Night (see Appendix F for a full description of the scenarios). As was discussed in Chapter 3, the Family Night scenario is about a group of teachers who put together an event to encourage ELL families to attend and enhance the students’ math skills. The night does not go as planned in the scenario, because several of the targeted families are late, the program must be adjusted, and the ELL families stay in the back of the cafeteria and talk to each other during the program. “I feel like [if] teacher are going to draw conclusions about someone’s family and their children off of one event...They probably shouldn’t be

dealing with children” (Raquel, Interview 3). Raquel’s initial gut reaction was seeing the judgment from the teachers and not being okay with what was said by teachers about the ELL families.

“They set up the event like food and entertainment is more of like a social gathering... I feel like family engagement was boosted” (Raquel, Interview 3). The initial purpose of the meeting was to bring in the ELL families to get them engaged in the happenings of school with their children. The event had a few hiccups because parents were late, and the ELL families engaged with each other in the back of the cafeteria during the presentation, both of which were actions that Raquel interpreted as “rude.” In her words, “It’s a little bit rude... That’s just different, you know, to go back to culture. I guess it’s just a different cultural standard that something like that is something you can talk during” (Raquel, Interview 3). Although the families were engaging with each other, talking during a presentation was unacceptable behavior for Raquel. To my mind as a researcher, this reflects some underlying cultural assumptions on Raquel’s part, as she assumed that it is rude or at best a different cultural standard to talk during a presentation without knowing what was being talked about or why. That said, she also focused on the community building aspect of the conversations that were happening. She felt that it was important for the families to interact with each other because it builds trust between them and their children.

We concluded the last scenario by discussing the fliers. “So clearly, you know, they have the understanding that those parents only speak that language or only read the language for the most part so why do you only go halfway?” (Raquel, Interview 3). Fliers were sent home in the children’s home language—however, the fliers at the event and the

presentation itself were not in home languages. The teachers acknowledged that the ELL families speak different languages, however, they did not follow through with the action of accommodating the languages. When parents did not take the fliers at the event, teachers assumed they do not care or are not interested in their children's schooling, not taking into account the lack of language accommodation. Overall, Raquel noticed and prioritized several factors: that the families were making connections with each other, which was a net positive, and that for the teachers' part, the event could have provided more translation and accommodation for the families.

Lastly, Raquel wrote up her final thoughts:

Growing up I never had to experience any cultural insensitivity and that is a privilege I had being a White student in a middle class area. But one of my biggest pushes in being a teacher is the fact that I had so many teachers who essentially made me lose my desire to learn. I loved learning until I spent too long in school. Then I felt unchallenged and unmotivated by the things we were doing in schools and when teachers never made the effort to push me to do more or give me opportunities for new things to challenge me I became complacent and comfortable slacking. Then at some point my excelling turned into below average grades and I became disinterested. This is, what I believe, one of the worst things that happened to me as a kid. I understand my circumstances are not everyone's and like we discussed I go out of my way to be as respectful as possible and I try and educate myself on how to create an equitable learning environment in my classroom for all students. I don't want anyone to be discouraged from participating out of fear of being judged or ridiculed. From my identity web I feel like I did not learn anything new about myself, just maybe the definition of naturalized citizen. Because I try to be as self aware as possible not a lot of the web was eye opening to me except the fact that I am the child of an alcoholic which is something I wouldn't have considered as an identifier beforehand. I feel like the scenarios we went over, more than anything, showed me how multi faceted things are in environments with so many people and demographics. I feel like I learned a little more especially the multilingual families one, which opened my eyes to more possibilities I had not considered before.

Overall I am proud of my cultural competency as a whole but I think, and this goes for all teachers and people, the minute I say I have learned everything there is to learn then I have failed. Educating myself on other people's experiences and cultures is an ongoing lifelong project and I'm sure there is still a lot to learn but all I can do is try and learn it.

(Raquel, Interview 3)

In all of Raquel's interviews, she acknowledged her White privilege and her wealthy family. Those pieces of her funds of identity were a constant reference point throughout our interviews. She wants to help others who are less fortunate and hopes that that part of herself is evident to her students. Raquel shared that her heart is in teaching and being there for students, and that she is open to learning and growing. At times her deficit thinking did not allow her to recognize her lack of cultural competency and she made assumptions about different cultures or subgroups. Her experiences growing up even in a different environment than she currently is substituting and being a student teacher, has allowed her to see and know both positive and negative examples of the kind of teacher she wants to be. Her Catholic school experience had a great impact on the kind of teacher she does *not* want to be. Specifically, she wants students to want to learn and she wants her students to feel safe in her classroom. That is one of the most important aspects of her journey. Overall, she recognized that she has a long way to go in terms of her cultural competence, but she also acknowledged that it is a lifelong process.

Jessica

Jessica is a White 37-year-old North American female teacher candidate. She agreed to be a research participant. We had three interviews over a two-month period. Our first interview was general and established our initial rapport for the rest of our interviews. I inquired about her reasons for going into teaching and how she ended up at Texas State University. The second interview focused on her identity. Jessica completed an identity web which we discussed in detail. In addition to the information she put on her identity web, several aspects of her identity that were not on her web were also discussed. Our third and final interview was unstructured and explored Jessica's reaction

to two different scenarios. The scenarios were about possible cultural events that occur in schools that she may encounter when she becomes a teacher.

Personal History

“I’m a student and I want to be a teacher when I grow up” (Jessica, Interview 1). After she said this, I immediately felt we were going to have a great conversation. We were able to establish rapport quickly when she made that joke. Jessica decided to become a teacher after a major life change and her experience being a substitute teacher. “So I’m attempting to be a teacher because people tell me I’m good at it” (Jessica, Interview 1). She received good feedback regarding her teaching when she was a substitute, so she went ahead and pursued it as a career. Being a 37-year-old mother of three and a student, in a way that is similar to Gigi (who was also older than a traditional undergraduate), she can bring different experiences into her world of being a student and future teacher. “I was a stay-at-home mom for 12 years, and during that time I homeschool [my children]” (Jessica, Interview 1). She felt she has developed teaching skills both from her time educating her children and her experience as a substitute. I was curious to see what was going to unfold about her as we progressed through our conversations.

Feedback was important to her and helped motivate her to pursue teaching. “...there was a teacher that was actually sitting in the classroom. That was her office when I was teaching that class... it was just sit down, shut up work but I was still interacting with the kids, and I was encouraging them. She gave me some really positive feedback that I really liked” (Jessica, Interview 1). I could hear in her voice her

excitement for teaching. This moment was important for her, as it represented her getting validation prior to her educational journey even starting.

From an early age, Jessica was interested in both a teaching career and attending Texas State University. “Three of the four of them [aunts] have teaching degrees from [this same university], so just kind of seemed like that’s where I should be” (Jessica, Interview 1). Texas State University seems to be a family tradition for her. While she lived out-of-state for a time during her married life, she came back to Texas in part to continue the family tradition of attending Texas State University and starting a teaching career. “Basically, I was an art teacher on Saturdays. So that was another like teaching experience that pushed me to, you know? But otherwise, I haven’t really done anything professionally” (Jessica, Interview 1). This comment felt interesting, as by stating that she hadn’t “really done anything professionally,” she discounts her experience helping kids as a stay-at-home mom, art teacher, and homeschooler. I found this to be a pattern of humility that continued throughout our interviews. In my opinion, these prior experiences need to be recognized as a part of her journey.

Jessica is going to school to be a Family Consumer Science (FCS) teacher. “I think I’m going to graduate with like a 186 credits just with my bachelors” (Jessica, Interview 1). She began Texas State University with 90 credits, but only 30 credits counted towards her degree, so she was only able to take courses and electives that would count towards her teacher education major. Her prior credits are from bouncing around at various colleges and universities where she was not able to finish due to the responsibilities and requirements of stay-at-home motherhood. I probed about multicultural courses in her past. “I took a class from [a prior university] that was about

China... it was supposed to be like a cultural competency type class but I didn't do very good" (Jessica, Interview 1). This particular statement gave me pause. Sometimes classes do not go well for people, but not because they cannot grasp the concepts. I probed to find out more why she felt she hadn't done well in the class, and she shared that "I didn't know where I was fitting in at the time. I didn't know where I belonged. I moved back to Texas. I lived in an apartment with my sister" (Jessica, Interview 1). She was going through a life change at the time, and online classes were a new concept. She felt she lacked support and did not know what she was doing. To my mind, all of her explanations are fair assessments of where she was at regarding her cultural competency but do not have to do with her current growth.

Because she is a FCS major, she does get to take classes that touch a bit on cultural diversity. For example, he has a course that discusses family systems. "You have to be mindful of other people's family systems, especially in classrooms and stuff" (Jessica, Interview 1). To Jessica, thinking about family systems in terms of culture awareness is a way to identify the various types of family structures that students may be a part of. Jessica felt that through this coursework, she began to recognize the diversity within those systems. Additionally, she has a great cooperating teacher (CT) who she felt is providing an excellent example for her by showing Jessica how to create relationships with students from diverse backgrounds. As she states, "she's bilingual so it's really funny to me. It's interesting to watch her interact with the Hispanic students because they like in the middle of a sentence, just switch languages" (Jessica, Interview 1). When she observes these interactions, Jessica is connecting the linguistic diversity in her classroom with the way her CT approaches her interactions with specific students. Switching

languages, or translanguaging (García, Johnson, Seltzer, & Valdés, 2017), has been shown to be a means of helping students who speak languages other than English understand what is happening in class, as well as a way for teachers to connect with students. “I can see it on their faces [the students], that it’s comforting to them to know that they can just go off in a different language and it’s okay” (Jessica, Interview 1). For Jessica, seeing students feel safe and comfortable in her classroom has been very rewarding, and something she appreciates getting to experience before she has her own classroom. Since not all teachers are bilingual (just as Jessica is not), Jessica is aware that she will have to find other ways to connect with students and to make them feel comfortable. “I need to be able to find what I do have in common with them to be able to teach them effectively” (Jessica, Interview 1). In statements like this, Jessica recognizes that she has work to do to find connections with her students. Recognition of areas that need growth is an important first step to building cultural competence.

“I think the biggest thing to be aware of it [cultural diversity] and aware of what the students are needing” (Jessica, Interview 1). She discussed being familiar with Hispanic culture because that has been the culture she has been most exposed to; however, in her observation course, she has found the school she is at is even more diverse than she expected. She has recognized that she needs to adjust what she knows and expects to see in a school environment. I believe she has a good grasp of what she will need to do when she encounters a culture she is not familiar with. For example, in discussing one student, “the girl with the hijab, like I’m not very well versed in what she believes, so I would, if I had a student like that, I would definitely need to do a bit more research” (Jessica, Interview 1). Jessica demonstrated willingness to try to understand a

different culture, which is extremely important in creating and maintaining relationships with students. “I want my classroom to be a comfortable place for students to learn. I want them to feel like they’re safe in my class” (Jessica, Interview 1). I found her early awareness about the need for students’ comfort to be admirable. This statement happened early in our conversations, but overall, I found it to be an example of her general character. When modeling how she saw herself expressing herself to her students, she shared the following: “I’m going to make mistakes, and it’s okay if you [students] correct me, then I think that’s a good way to start with people, especially people that might be a different culture or have, you know, differences than you” (Jessica, Interview 1). Ending our first interview on this note I was able to understand how Jessica sees her future as an educator. She feels she is aware of who she is and what areas she lacks in terms of her cultural competency.

Identity Web

Identity web interviews really get to the heart of the research participants. I enjoy the insight they provide into who the participant truly is. Jessica grew up in Canyon Lake, Texas as the youngest of five kids. She graduated high school at the same time her mother graduated from college with her master’s degree. Interestingly, she did not mention her father when we spoke about her family make up. Because she was the youngest, she spent a lot of time at her mother’s best friend's house and felt she was raised by them. She left Texas for a brief time to attend Brigham Young University but returned to Texas and attended Austin Community College. She ended up getting married and pregnant, so she dropped out of school. She and her husband moved to Roswell, New Mexico where she lived for about 12 years but for the last three years, she has been living

again in Texas. Currently she is going through a divorce and so now she considers herself a single mother of three. Her children are ages nine, 12 and 15 at the time of our interview. We also discussed the current identity crisis she is facing by being a part-time mother and a single individual on alternating weeks. “I need to figure out my own identity before I can be a part of somebody else” (Jessica, Interview 2). The acknowledgment in that one statement shows she is putting time and effort into finding herself after being a divorcee and breaking up with her most recent boyfriend.

Before we dived into Jessica’s identity web, she brought up some identity work that she is currently doing on her own. About a year ago, Jessica almost died. She declined to speak about it in detail but did say that experience began her self-identified identity crisis. She began keeping a log of who she feels she is at her core. “I’m a caretaker... I belong among the wildflowers. They’re considered a weed, but they’re not weeds, that’s like who I am” (Jessica, Interview 2). She feels that like wildflowers, she does not always belong in certain places she finds herself. She is still finding her place in the world, but one part of her identity she feels that is a part of “both Jessicas” is that she is a creator. She feels she has imparted this part of herself on to her children and they have become creators as well. This part of her identity is so strong that it led her to her current career choice of being a Family Consumer Science teacher.

As we went through her identity web, she identified as a 37-year-old straight female, who is an American, middle-class agnostic able-bodied native-born libertarian. She had a question mark by her class because she is unsure if as a divorcee, she considers herself middle class as she has no direct income. However, her children live a middle-class lifestyle due to her ex-husband. We spoke a bit about nationality as she chose

American. “We didn’t have like the nationality that we celebrated because a lot of people like, if your family is from Mexico, even if you’ve been in the United States for the last three generations, you still have those traditions... we’re just traditional meat and potatoes, American” (Jessica, Interview 2). In this statement, she makes some assumptions about Mexican traditions and who is or is not “American.” In so doing, she reveals some of her personal views of an implied separation between Mexican Americans, even those who have been here for generations, and “meat and potatoes” Americans. To Jessica, to be “American” is not anything special because to her mind there are no special traditions. “I guess I could have put Texan... this is where I belong. I belong in the Texas Hill Country specifically” (Jessica, Interview 2). As we discussed it further, Jessica more firmly came to self-identify as Texan rather than American.

“I am a creator and I think that would be something that I would definitely share with my students” (Jessica, Interview 2). Throughout interview two, Jessica continued to come back to her identity as a creator. It is such a large part of who she feels she is, both in her past life and who she is now. She specifically chose the FCS teacher pathway because it will allow her to share her gifts with her future students as she does with her own children. “I may feel comfortable sharing my family background... it helps the students realize that their teachers are real people” (Jessica, Interview 2). This is important to her because it all ties back to her goal of having her students feel safe in her classroom and make connections with her. She wants to be relatable to the students by sharing that she is a mother who has children their age and is also a “dog mom.” She does recognize that she will need to have boundaries with the students, for example, “I wouldn’t be telling the kids what I do on the weekends when I’m not with my kids”

(Jessica, Interview 2). In these statements, she draws a line between what she will and will not plan to share with students, sharing a bit of herself to make connections while also making personal boundaries. Additionally, she plans to avoid all things political or religious. She referred to the legality that prohibits discussion of those topics in schools. However, she will be a FCS teacher and making various items around the holidays will come up. “We have to have at least two religions represented to be safe for our freedoms [teacher freedoms]” (Jessica, Interview 2). She has learned through her courses that although she is agnostic, she can and will allow students to express their beliefs and will make sure that more than just one religion is presented. She will not be sharing her agnostic beliefs not only due to the legalities but also, she does not feel comfortable sharing them. “I would be asking more about what they believe and what they want to share” (Jessica, Interview 2). This is a great way to get more information from students and find out about them. Instead of sharing something she does not want or can share with her students, she is turning the information gathering sessions around and will get to know her kids.

We discussed any perceived conflict with her future students surrounding her identity. “My music taste” (Jessica, Interview 2). The only issue she can find she will have conflict with students is surrounding music. In her current experiences as a substitute, she identified differences between her own musical tastes and those of the students with whom she has worked. She usually comes to an agreement with her students regarding their music and hers. Sometimes she uses it as a sharing opportunity, while at other times, they just agree to disagree, and students wear headphones. I pushed her a little more about conflicts she foresees and although hesitant, she finally let me

know she has a class bias. “I’ve always kind of had a problem with the higher-class students, like the ones who think they’re everything” (Jessica, Interview 2). This issue for Jessica stems from when she was bullied while she was in school. Students who were well-off were unkind to her, so she feels that experience has created a bias because she grew up poor. “I might be favoring more of the lower middle-class kids and then the higher class kids being like, ‘Okay, you’re just a bitch” (Jessica, Interview 2). Those are some significant issues and harsh words she has to say about upper middle class/high class students. While this bias is strong, she recognizes it as an issue she will have to resolve.

To round out Jessica’s second interview, we closed it by focusing on her creator identity. It is her strongest sense of self. Her artistic side and creativity shine in everything she does, including her clothing. “I make all my own dresses... I can just be like, put it out there for everybody to see. I’m comfortable with it. So it makes them [students] more comfortable with the idea of being a little bit different” (Jessica, Interview 2). In her current position as a substitute, she makes connections with students because they compliment her dresses, and she believes they get to see a part of her they can relate to and makes them see her as a real person.

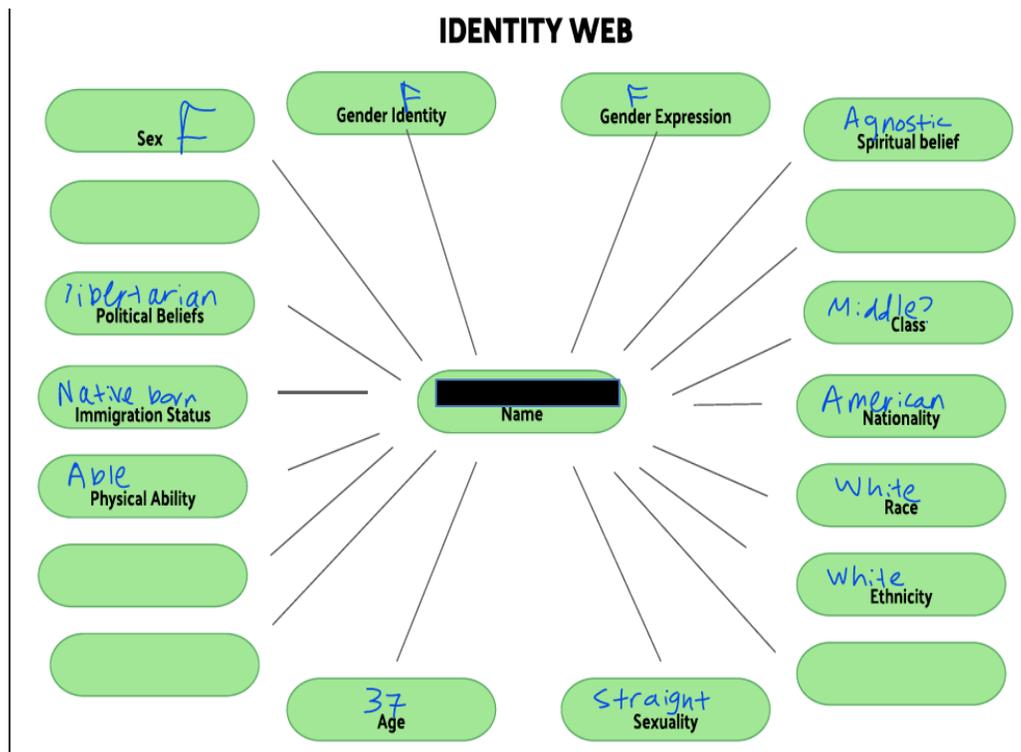


Figure 3 *Jessica's Identity Web*

Case Studies

Jessica read through Scenario 1 which is the Multicultural day Parade (see Appendix E for full description of the scenarios). As discussed in Chapter 3, the Multicultural day parade involved students who were not allowed to participate in the parade due to not bringing costumes that represented their heritage. The teacher felt that they would be ridiculed for not following directions. Jessica was immediately able to relate to this scenario, as her daughter had just brought home a project where she would need to dress up a doll in her own family culture. Jessica identified this experience as one of the first times she began to process what culture means. “I was thinking I would dress the doll with jeans and a T-shirt because we don’t have, you know, like traditional culture passed down through generations, this is our culture” (Jessica, Interview 2). Not feeling

like you have a specific culture is something that also came up with Raquel. Both felt that being White means they do not have a culture. In this case, Jessica does not believe she has a culture at all and makes comparisons to Mexican cultures who have rich traditions.

“I can understand why the teacher would say no, but it does feel like an inequity... I can understand both perspectives, like the teacher not wanting just our everyday current culture represented” (Jessica, Interview 3). This piece of the scenario had Jessica significantly wavering, as she did not feel she sufficiently comprehended larger issues of culture sufficiently to address or answer this issue. It raised a larger issue in our conversations so I addressed it and asked her what culture means and what would be appropriate in this scenario. “It’s muddy... Because what exactly defines the culture? Like is it traditional? Is it like from the generations past or is it currently what we’re doing? Everybody already shares on a common level in the current state so.” (Jessica, Interview 3). As we can see through the various participants, culture means something different to each one of them. Culture “involves every aspect of human endeavor, including thought, perceptions, feelings, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 2017, p. 143). Even with a clear definition, culture still takes on a life of its own depending on who the person is and how they identify and identify it.

“When we go out and we see people on the street, we are experiencing a cultural parade... you see the country kids with their cowboy hats and you the goth kids with their big boots and you see the sorority girls in their not so much you know” (Jessica, Interview 3). This is the view that Jessica is taking on what she views as current culture and various subcultures. It is her version of American culture, which she considers everyday culture. This is her view for justifying not allowing the two girls in the scenario

to walk in the multicultural parade. However, she also feels this further emphasizes how “muddy” she feels cultural representation is and why allowing students wearing what they want “would raise issues” (Jessica, Interview 3).

I inquired a bit further into what Jessica would do as a part of the school’s multicultural committee. She did not quite answer the question but suggested students should be a part of the committee and they can decide whether or not jeans and a T-shirt are acceptable. Putting the responsibility on students could be seen as a way to deflect responsibility, or a deflection from engaging in discussing the actual issue at hand (that is, the legitimacy we give or don’t give to various cultures). Furthermore, she says “there should be limits, like there should only be so many people representing each culture” (Jessica, Interview 3). I found this suggestion regarding limiting involvement to be confusing because it seems counterintuitive to do so since we were talking about equity and trying to include all students. However, we did not have time to process it because our conversation took another direction.

The direction that our conversation took went into school assemblies and how Hispanic Heritage month and Black History month are both celebrated, while Europeans are not. At a previous school Jessica worked at, she discussed her concerns with a Black teacher who was responsible for organizing the events around the school. “I don’t feel like I’m represented in the school, like as a culture. Yes, a lot is focused on White people, but the culture of the school doesn’t include my people” (Jessica, Interview 3). This comment was particularly interesting to me, as it seemed to contradict our previous conversation when she shared feeling as if she does not have a specific culture. If she does not have a specific culture, how can work be done to explicitly acknowledge that

culture in schools, as she requested in her conversation with her Black colleague? In our conversation, Jessica acknowledged that she may have been culturally insensitive, but continued to defend her point, feeling unrecognized the way Hispanic and Black students and communities are in the school calendar. As one suggestion towards accommodation, Jessica said cultural celebration could depend on the makeup of the school. This made me probe further into her understanding of Black History and Hispanic Heritage months.

“I understand like so much of history is based on European domination and they’re trying to bring other cultures to the forefront...They’re trying to trying to cancel out history that, like we didn’t really have Mexican history until the Europeans came over...And I do feel like cultures need to be celebrated and they need to be expressed and we do need to remember where we came from. I just feel like my culture is being canceled out” (Jessica, Interview 3). There is so much to unpack with that response to National months of remembrance. Overall, Jessica has been positive about all cultures throughout our interviews, so when she discussed this scenario, it brought up a side of her that I had not seen before. She went from not having a culture to feeling as if her culture is canceled, which felt like a significant change from her original stance. “We’re not completely equal, but we can’t take away from somebody else to try to make us feel equal” (Jessica, Interview 3). The point she is trying to get across is one of equality and inclusiveness for all. However, in her framing of the subject, Jessica does not seem to fully recognize the structural inequities that National months of remembrance were specifically structured to counter. As explained by Doharty (2019), “Dr Carter G. Woodson, an African-American historian, founded what started as a weeklong series of events, ‘Negro History Week’, marking the achievements and contributions of African-

Americans in the United States in 1926. These events are observed during the month of February, which coincides with the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. In 1976, 'Negro History Week' became Black History Month" (p. 115). And as outlined by Cortez (2018), "Hispanic Heritage Month is a national observance that recognizes the contributions made by an estimated 57 million Latinos and Hispanics in the US and celebrates their heritage and culture" (p. 901). The history behind these months shows they were specifically created because beforehand, the entire curriculum was oriented around "White history" and "White culture." Understanding history and the reason behind celebrating marginalized groups is a lesson for everyone.

I wanted to close out the scenario by going back to how Jessica would handle the situation and clarify her overall view of cultures. "I feel it would have been appropriate to put those two in and then after the parade, if there were concerns, field them and deal with them as they come" (Jessica, Interview 3). In the end, despite her shared feelings of cultural exclusion, I found it interesting that Jessica's impulse was to lean towards inclusion and validating student expression. She was very open about the need to create a discussion about cultures. She reinforced that student voices are important in decisions that directly affect them, again arguing that students should be on the planning committee. "You explain exactly what culture is... there has to be a boundary of what is the culture and students need to understand what they're getting, what they're signing up for or what they could be signing up for. At the same time, jeans and a T-shirt is our culture" (Jessica, Interview 3). She says that she while does not know how she would explain culture to students, she would start by using a dictionary definition and provide

context to the students about different cultures. This response raises other questions—most of all, while culture may have a specific definition, does culture have boundaries?

We moved on to the next scenario regarding Family Night (see Appendix F for full description of the scenarios). As was discussed in Chapter 3, the Family Night scenario is about a group of teachers who put together an event to encourage ELL families to attend and enhance the students' math skills. The night does not go as planned because several of the targeted families are late, the program must be adjusted, and the ELL families stay in the back of the cafeteria and talk to each other during the program. Jessica immediately focused on the sense of community the families standing in the back had. "The families were coming together and they were engaging with each other and building community, like that's part of what they were looking for" (Jessica, Interview 3). The event is specifically for family engagement but also, they were trying to increase math skills for ELL students and their families. Regardless of their engagement level in the presentation, Jessica felt that what was going on with the connections the families were making with each other made the event successful.

While discussing this scenario, Jessica makes several references to the actions taken by the families, being a "cultural thing." For example, "They learn and intake information more from having a discussion with somebody rather than having a flier or rather than watching a presentation...that might be a cultural thing" (Jessica, Interview 3). As with Raquel, Jessica here reveals some assumptions about the culture and practices of participating ELL families. She further went on to assume how this time is possibly the only time they have to socialize due to their multiple jobs.

After the event concluded, the teachers debriefed on the event. Mr. Nelson felt stereotypes were reinforced. When Jessica and I discussed what kind of stereotypes were held by the teachers, she mentioned “They’re [the parents] not interested in their children’s schooling, they’re lazy... education might not be as important to these cultures as it is to us [the teachers]” (Jessica, Interview 3). She was able to come up with these examples very quickly because in her experience, they are commonly thought of and can be heard about students in the teachers’ lounge or in teacher discussions.

Jessica believes that one thing that could have been done differently would have been to have more interaction with parents. “Actually talking to parents or trying to communicate with them... we’ll take the flier [to the parents]” (Jessica, Interview 3). Interaction with parents goes a long way so it is something to be considered when planning events. Jessica relates parent engagement to teaching. In her opinion, teaching is not as productive when it is just lecture based; there must be interaction from all involved. She mentions that the teachers should be interacting with the families as well as addressing any language issues. She makes important points about types of communication and how to make it successful with students and parents. Another difference she would have liked to do is stations rather than a large presentation style event. Stations would help create small groups that would allow for the interaction between the teachers and families that Jessica has mentioned.

Lastly, we discussed any final thoughts she had. “...I’ve always been surrounded by when I think cultural I think Mexican American... I’m comfortable learning other people’s cultures... what if I’m surrounded by a culture that I don’t understand?” (Jessica, Interview 3). Throughout our interviews Jessica has made several references to

Hispanic or Mexican culture because it is familiar to her. Throughout her life, she has been exposed to those cultures, and she expressed feeling comfortable with them. Her hesitation is coming up because she does not know how to adapt to working with new cultures. "...different cultures are going to absorb things differently...so understanding that is important as a teacher" (Jessica, Interview 3).

Lastly, Jessica shared her final thoughts:

I originally wanted to be a teacher because as a substitute I was introduced to a lot of different students. I like getting to know them and personalities. It is interesting to me how close we all live in proximity to each other but how different we all live. I'll be honest, the idea of being a teacher is more and more terrifying to me each and every day, and this research experience didn't help in that regard. Yes, I love the students but having to get to know each and every culture and love them in that too is daunting. Cultural competency will help with differentiated instruction and reaching all of the students in my classes. This is disjointed. I'm sorry.

(Jessica, Interview 3)

Jessica's interviews went well. After reading through her final thoughts, I can hear her saying how daunting teaching will be. She has been a teacher for most of her adult life, having homeschooled her children and worked as an art teacher at the farmer's market and as a substitute. I did find that Jessica demonstrated some deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010) while discussing the case study scenarios. Some of her descriptions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans and their behaviors during the family night discussion had negative connotations. Additionally, she was able to explain that through her funds of identity her familiarity with Hispanic culture comes from her experiences she has had while growing up in areas with large Hispanic populations. Comprehensively speaking, she is a mother and a caretaker with experience teaching, so transitioning into a classroom might be easier for her than for others who lack those experiences.

Hanna

Hanna is a White 20-year-old North American female teacher candidate. She agreed to be a research participant. We had three interviews over a two-month period. Our first interview was general and established our rapport that continued through the rest of the interviews. I inquired about her reasons for going into teaching and how she ended up at Texas State University. The second interview focused on her identity. Hanna completed an identity web which we discussed in detail. In addition to the information she put on her identity web, several aspects of her identity were also discussed. Our third and final interview was unstructured and explored Hanna's reaction to two different case scenarios. The scenarios were about possible cultural events that occur in schools that she may encounter when she becomes a teacher.

Personal History

My first interview with Hanna was very interesting because I discovered she is the youngest of the four participants but will graduate at the same time as the others. She is taking eight classes during the semester that we spoke to graduate quickly and begin her career. Hanna is a special education (SPED) major with a minor in communications. Her motivation to pursue teaching comes from her sister's Cerebral Palsy medical condition and Hanna's experiences growing up. "The only stability I had was school...no matter what school I went to, there was always a teacher there that cared about me when I didn't have other adults that cared about me" (Hanna, Interview 1). Her mother was in and out of prison, so Hanna and her sister were constantly moved around. She attended 13 different school districts during her K-12 experience with various housing situations in between. Teachers provided a consistently safe environment for her, so she knew she

wanted a career as a teacher. “I had amazing teachers while my sister had horrible teachers, so I chose SPED because I was like they were the most vulnerable people of society” (Hanna, Interview 1). Her sister’s experience as a special education student was vastly different from Hanna’s experience as a general education student, so it has fueled her passion to help students with disabilities.

Being from East Texas, Hanna felt that she needed to go to college immediately or she would not be successful. She received scholarships and was able to attend her first-choice school, Texas State University. She enjoys the environment and the well-educated, passionate faculty. Although at an early age, she knew that her career path would be teaching, she did think about being a different type of teacher. She explored music education and English. She is passionate about both subjects but ultimately chose to pursue special education and tie in her passion for writing by getting a minor in communications. Texas State University is a great school for Hanna because it fits her budget and is just far away enough from family. “You need space and you need time to like, grow and develop on your own and be who you want to be” (Hanna, Interview 1). Hanna felt that moving away from her family in East Texas would allow her to develop into the person she is meant to be while exploring a different place.

Hanna has relied heavily on her advisors to help her find her way. “If I didn’t have advisors, I would be so lost” (Hanna, Interview 1). She looks to them for guidance each semester and follows the plan they lay out for her. The classes she takes are heavily focused on things she would need as a special education teacher, but she also gets to intermingle with the other education majors and explore different electives. “I love taking different courses and learning about stuff and being diverse... I’m in communication and

gender studies... this summer I took a diversity theory, a race theory class” (Hanna, Interview 1). She has used her elective classes in a way that allows her to further her knowledge and grow her cultural competency. She discussed a gender project she was completing for her course which allowed her to examine different aspects of herself. “My gender project talks about intersectionality and how all of our identities kind of relate to each other but also that either grant privilege or give us oppression” (Hanna, Interview 1). Although we were not discussing identity, her experiences with the courses she is taking and has taken have expanded her knowledge about her sexual orientation, race, and her White privilege.

Growing up, Hanna moved to various places and attended different schools, which she feels gave her an open perspective. “I would be the only White kid in my school and there would be some times where I’d notice there was like everyone was White and there was like one student of color. Not that being the only White person is anywhere equivalent to being the only person of color because it’s definitely not. But it is awkward” (Hanna, Interview 1). Her various experiences have led her to want to explore other cultures and become more educated about them. “I also know that when I am going to be a teacher, you’ll be working with so many different people, and I want to make sure I’m educated enough, that I make them comfortable and that they’re successful because they’re not going to want to learn if they think I’m [they’re] never being represented” (Hanna, Interview 1). Although this was our first interview, my initial thoughts about Hanna as a teacher were positive. She is thinking actively about ways to be a successful teacher and make all her students feel safe and respected, key aspects of cultural competence.

Identity Web

Hanna's second interview and her discussions about her identity pieced together more of who she feels she is at her core. Her love and care for students was expressed when I learned more about her. Hanna grew up moving around a lot as a child due to her family situation. Her mother was in and out of jail and her father could not care for her due to a disability. She has an older sister who she cares deeply about that is 15 or 16 years older than her and has Cerebral Palsy. At a point in her life, they were separated due to her mother's time in prison. "So I kind of moved around and lived with a bunch of different people" (Hanna, Interview 2). The people she lived with varied from her brother's mothers, cousins to family friends. The only stability she had, which was mentioned in the previous interview, was school. "So most of my focus, like growing up, is like paying attention in school, doing my extracurriculars, doing what I thought I needed to do so that I could like eventually be successful and get out of there" (Hanna, Interview 2). Her experience growing up solidifies why she is a 20-year-old senior in college and well on her way to becoming a teacher by 21. Her motivation to be successful and the trauma she has experienced makes her teacher identity come to life.

When we got further into Hanna's family makeup, her detailed story contributed to her self-perceived sense of cultural competency. When Hanna's mother got out of the prison system she was reunited with her sister, thus becoming a caregiver for herself and her sister. "I did a lot of the roles that you would do as a caretaker, just because... I had raised myself" (Hanna, Interview 2). Growing up, Hanna blamed a lot of the trauma she had experienced on her mother and had not confronted her father about it until recently. She bounced house to house and place to place, all while enduring a lot of abuse. She

does not specify the type of abuse, and I did not push for further details, but from our conversation, it seems at least one portion of the abuse was emotional. Whenever she was not wanted by someone, she had to move to another place. She continues to feel unwanted even now. A few months prior to our interviews, she confronted her father about how he treated her growing up and it ended badly. “So he kicked me out. So I was actually homeless this summer and he took my car...So when I think about family I don’t really have any... I really do feel like I’m kind of by myself” (Hanna, Interview 2). She occasionally talks to her mother, but only to check in on her sister. All others she was with growing up, she has removed them from her life. Many are on drugs and do not contact her either way. “I knew, like I couldn’t resolve any of my trauma if I was going to continuously, like let people who abused me like, stay in my life” (Hanna, Interview 2). She is healing herself in a very powerful way. She recognized people that were keeping her down and is emotionally mature enough to cut them off to make her life better despite the cards she was dealt.

Returning to the next place on the identity web, Hanna’s sex, gender identity and expression are all female. “I just feel really comfortable expressing myself as a feminine person” (Hanna, Interview 2). In her opinion, she conforms to what society deems to be feminine. She does not express any other way. She is straightforward about her other parts of her identity as well, she is a non-disabled, American born citizen who is both racially and ethnically White. However, once we delved more into her religion, politics and sexual orientation, her sense of identity became more complex.

We began to examine her religion. She is not religious and does not have a label. As she has grown up, she questions the Christian beliefs she was raised with. “My family

has horrible morals, basically none... they're racist and they say horrible things about the poor even though we grew up poor, they're just uneducated" (Hanna, Interview 2). This created a lot of confusion for her growing up because she referenced "loving thy neighbor," something she learned in church, but her father who also attended would state outright that he did not like "brown" people. As a child, she corrected him. "I understood the concept of like respecting others before they did" (Hanna, Interview 2). This caused a lot of issues with her because she felt she was receiving very conflicting examples of how to live. The adults she was with followed a religion, though as she perceived their actions, those actions contradicted that same religion. This discussion led into her sexuality and how she questions it. "I feel like religion caused a lot of fear for me. Like it made me feel like I couldn't be myself" (Hanna, Interview 2). She had this revelation as she has begun to question her sexual orientation and whether she is gay. To this day, she does not want to explore this part of herself because she is afraid of losing the family she has left if she comes out as gay. Although those relationships are not strong, she still does not want to lose them. In her web, she identified as straight. At various times in her life, she was told she was gay, but to this point that is not how she self-identifies. "It just feels like something that's forced on me so much that I almost want to reject it. But I'm like, I don't want to reject myself... when you're [she] steady and like emotionally ready, you can think about other things" (Hanna, Interview 2). Being told she is gay by others even though she does not identify that way is something that she believes others think about her but in her own mind, she wants to examine it when she is ready. Currently, she is in a committed heterosexual relationship, so she does not want to open that part of herself up

just yet. She is still growing into adulthood and healing from her past and has decided to save that exploration for another time.

In terms of politics, Hanna is left leaning but does not identify as a Democrat. She does not want to waste her vote so if she feels it is necessary, she will vote with the democratic party. As for her socioeconomic status, she considers herself to be lower class. “Growing up, I was homeless multiple times...we were on food stamps when we had an address... a lot of my support came from neighbors bringing over food or my grandma dropping off groceries from the church” (Hanna, Interview 2). Interestingly throughout this study, each participant must explain what they mean by their socioeconomic status because opinions vary by situation. Hanna’s situation growing up is not too different from her current financial situation. She works three jobs while taking eight classes. She is no longer homeless, but she limits how much food she eats. “Most days I don’t eat except for once a day because I can’t, I don’t have the money” (Hanna, Interview 2). This was difficult to hear, but she assured me she is okay. She is getting to a better place than she was while she was growing up. In terms of her future career, depending on the socioeconomic status of her students, her socioeconomic situation could help her relate to students that are in her situation. She will be able to recognize students in need as well as those that may be experiencing abuse.

We moved on to discuss how she will be sharing her identity with her students. She brought up the new law about critical race theory (CRT) not being allowed to be discussed. As Morgan (2022) has argued, “Many educators are concerned about the new laws designed to ban CRT, arguing that this theory is needed to help students understand their past... The fears educators have about these new laws involve how they will distort

history and punish teachers for teaching the truth” (p. 37). Hanna feels such issues are important in teaching curriculum, but also heavily political. In the end, politics is not something she plans to discuss in her classroom, because it’s “messy” and “not allowed.” Additionally, she will steer away from her spiritual beliefs and her sexuality. In Hanna’s opinion, there is too much controversy surrounding those topics. “[I] need to keep things focused on like their skills and them... I need to put extra effort into my students, make sure they’re learning” (Hanna, Interview 2). She wants to put the focus back on her students as opposed to herself. Being a special education teacher is also different because the students may need more academic attention than a typical student. Their needs are high due to various disabilities and learning styles.

As we’ve discussed, although filled with trauma, Hanna’s background is unique and interesting. A lot of her experiences relate to different student situations she may encounter while teaching. Currently, in a class where she is doing her teaching block, she is seeing a lot of what she considers verbal abuse happening to her students from parents. “I do share parts of my background with these students because I need them to see it’s hard now but it doesn’t have to be later... your parents don’t define you... you get to create your path” (Hanna, Interview 2). Making these connections with students before her career has started is showing her how much empathy and compassion she can have for them. She feels she is sharing with them her experiences, while also helping them learn how to function in society and build relationships with people despite their situation. She is careful not to share too much with her students. “So things that are more like sensitive or may be triggering to my students... then I definitely don’t want to bring them up... But I can relate to them and tell them it’s going to be okay, like family doesn’t

get to tell you who you are going to be” (Hanna, Interview 2). Speaking for myself as the researcher, I feel Hanna’s self awareness is a great quality for herself and her students.

The next part of her identity interview was about what part of her identity is truest for her sense of self. Throughout our conversation she exhibited so many aspects of her life that I could think of her as a survivor. However, she came up with something even better; she considers herself an advocate. She wants to continue to stand up for people with disabilities. That is her passion and is a large part of who she is. Not only does she advocate for people with disabilities, but she wants to be an ally for anyone who needs it. “I am doing the best that I can to use my privilege to help others” (Hanna, Interview 2). Despite what she has been through, she recognizes the benefits she has as a White, educated woman and she wants to do good. She acknowledges that some of her passion may cause some issues along the way. “I’m a pretty emotional, especially when it comes to the way others are treated” (Hanna, Interview 2). She has a plan for her future classroom to address any time she becomes overly emotional to any kind of injustice. She will make sure to be stern but also understanding. “I’m not being disrespectful to my students and like humiliating them at the same time... I will not tolerate any bullying in any form about anything ever” (Hanna, Interview 2). To Hanna, she sees issues that come up as lessons that will teach something valuable. She is willing to put aside curriculum to help teach a life lesson. For example, being a special education teacher there are times that many students have used the offensive word retard, which Hanna and I referred to as the R-word. She tries to correct the use of the term as well as provide context as to why it is inappropriate.

We concluded our interview with some final thoughts. Hanna brought up a mental health piece of her identity. She skimmed over it previously in our conversation, but in conclusion she felt a lot of her trauma and mental health is tied to her childhood. She said she has started to recognize signs in students when they need mental health or wellness checks. On another note, she recognized the need for educators as well. “Educators kind of experience a lot of compassion fatigue... if you’re not taking care of yourself and you start to slip, you really do like kind of let your students down” (Hanna, Interview 2). Before Hanna has even started her career as an educator, she is able to recognize the need to take care of herself. This to me seems a good sign for her future as an advocate and a compassionate educator.

Name: [REDACTED]
Sex: Female
Gender Identity: I identify as a woman. I fit many of the norms pushed onto women by society.
Gender Expression: I present my gender expression as very feminine. I enjoy doing my makeup often and wear clothing that is marketed towards women. I go by she/her pronouns. I also communicate and build relationships in ways that are typically more common with women than men.
Spiritual Belief: Not religious, no label. I still question my beliefs and am diving deeper into this identity. I was raised to be Christian but was never model religious values. I am still struggling to understand how this identity has shaped me in my life.
Class: I am lower class
Nationality: American
Political beliefs: I lean more left than right, but I do not identify as Democratic.
Immigration Status: born citizen
Physical Ability: non- disabled
Race: white/Caucasian
Ethnicity: white
Sexuality: I currently identify as straight, but I also have not decided to disclose my sexuality to anyone else in my life. I believe a lot of my hesitation stems from confusion, as well as the stress of coming out and not being accepted by others. I also would not know how to explain this to my partner.
Age: 20 years old

Figure 4 *Hanna’s Identity Web*

Case Studies

Hanna read through Scenario 1 which is the Multicultural day Parade (see Appendix E for full description of the scenarios). As discussed in Chapter 3, the Multicultural day parade involved students who were not allowed to participate in the

parade due to not bringing costumes that represented their heritage. The teacher felt that they would be ridiculed for not following directions. This scenario brought up different aspects of culture that Hanna felt she understood but struggled to put it into words.

Like Gigi, Hanna's initial reaction to the scenario was the use of the word costume to describe what students could wear to the parade. "It kind of seems weird to call like something that is a part of someone's culture, a costume... you don't dress up as cultures for Halloween because it's not a costume" (Hanna, Interview 3). I had not thought about costumes in terms of Halloween, and felt it was an excellent point that showed how that word choice could represent a value judgment on different cultures. She clarified that she would allow both girls to participate in the parade. "The girls tried, and I wouldn't want to tell students they can't express their identities in the way they're comfortable... it adds to their own identity" (Hanna, Interview 3). For Hanna, the issue in the scenario is the girls being excluded because they did not bring costumes. They brought clothing that they believe is their culture and makes them comfortable to express themselves, and to Hanna that is of primary importance. Aside from allowing the girls to participate, she would have provided multiple examples of what culture is and what they can wear for the parade to give the students a better understanding of cultural differences. She also tries to include the students who are not in touch with their cultural identity. She wants to acknowledge that it is okay for them not delve into their heritage and they can focus on the now. Much like the girls did in the scenario, they brought clothes that were their culture, which is a part of their identity.

Throughout that initial part of her analysis, she referenced heritage and used it interchangeably with culture, so we discussed that more deeply. "So it's hard for me to

answer the question because I don't want to sound ignorant" (Hanna, Interview 3). This was a common response of hers in our conversations, with her taking extra care before answering so she can think about what she is going to say so it comes out correctly.

"Culture is about ethnicity and kind of where your family comes from. When I think of heritage, I just think more of the traditions that your family holds...some of that tradition comes from your culture, some is just like the culture of your family but has nothing to do with ethnicity" (Hanna, Interview 3). That is her explanation of culture and heritage and her view of it. Some would agree, and others may have a different definition between the two, but it gives clarification of how she is using each of the terms while she is explaining her reaction to the scenario.

We discussed what she would do if she were on the diversity committee planning the event. She would not give a direct answer but did go back to including all students. "Don't turn kids away because they weren't meeting your expectations of what you believe their culture should be and encourage people to express their culture the way they are comfortable, encourage them to present themselves the way that matches their identity" (Hanna, Interview 3). Throughout our conversations, she has been consistently thoughtful about including all students. She takes extra care to think about others that may be left out or feel left out. She discussed how many people are not in touch with their cultures and spent some time thinking about ways to make them feel like that is okay. She wanted to make sure anyone on the committee is aware of it and how it can affect the students. In terms of conflicting issues surrounding the topic, Hanna again is very careful about what she wants to say. She wants to keep her professionalism intact and prefers to collect her thoughts and send them via email. "I really like to think about

what I'm going to say when I talk about diversity or cultures that I'm not a part of because I don't want to ever say anything that's offensive or just say something and I'm being ignorant and say it wrong" (Hanna, Interview 3). She does tiptoe around the issues but by taking her time, she feels she is able to articulate herself in the best way possible. She has had to put into practice addressing sensitive issues with her professors and has received somewhat positive reactions from them.

We circled around to how she does not feel she has a culture, something she shares with several other participants. She feels a lot of it is tied to family, which she does not have but also because she has White privilege. "I realized how much privilege that is to me to like not have to worry about my culture" (Hanna, Interview 3). She brings up her privilege from being White because she knows that people from so many other ethnic cultures have to worry about what they say, who they say it to, how they act, even how they dress. Those are issues she has not had to deal with and did not think about until some national and global events (for example, the George Floyd uprisings) raise her awareness. "I think that I definitely have been ignorant in the past. I'm still ignorant. I don't notice things until they're brought up, which I hate... I wish I was more aware" (Hanna, Interview 3). There are things that students and people around her are experiencing and will continue to experience so she is finding ways to make herself more knowledgeable. She wants to use the privilege she has to speak up for others that are not being heard but at the same time only to bring awareness to them as an ally. She knows she cannot speak for them, but she will do what she can to help. While this discussion veered a bit broader than the discussion of this specific case, I feel our discussion essentially brought to light Hanna's vision of how she will best support students.

We moved on to the next scenario regarding Family Night (see Appendix F for full description of the scenarios). As was discussed in Chapter 3, the Family Night scenario is about a group of teachers who put together an event to encourage ELL families to attend and enhance the students' math skills. The night does not go as planned because several of the targeted families are late, the program must be adjusted, and the ELL families stay in the back of the cafeteria and talk to each other during the program. Hanna was able to point out several things she identified as positive aspects of the event, and areas that she would have done differently.

“They sent out handouts in the home languages...they waited for the parents to arrive...they acknowledged the fact that some of them work and they can't just be there at every event” (Hanna, Interview 3). As seen in this comment, her initial gut reaction was to point out what she saw as the positive in the event, rather than immediately going to the negative. She understood why the parents might be late and would stand in the back with each other—in her mind, this would largely likely be due to cultural barriers. “That's comfortable for them, you know, to be with people who understand what they're going through” (Hanna, Interview 3). In her mind, they would stay together due to a sense of community. She felt the teachers should see and understand that the comfort they were establishing with each other is a positive element for the families and for the school. “They're [the families] going to have a little bit more comfortability each and every time they come in... maybe that encourages them to speak up later but at least they know that they're welcomed in the environment and that their students are welcomed” (Hanna, Interview 3). Again, Hanna here focuses on what she perceives as the positive.

In terms of things she would have done differently, Hanna discusses a way to incorporate the parents as opposed to viewing their lack of interaction in a negative way. She puts the responsibility on the teachers. “Initiate the conversation with them... you don’t have to wait for them to ask questions...you can ask ‘hey do you guys have questions? Would you like to me to relay any information that you may have missed?’” (Hanna, Interview 3). Hanna’s efforts at inclusiveness are clear in this statement. To her mind, the event is hosted by the school, so the teachers are responsible for its success. If they can shift their mindset to how they can pull the parents in as opposed to what they thought about the parents would change the event.

Mr. Nelson said that the way the ELL families acted at the event was reinforcing stereotypes. “A stereotype that he might be talking about that I’ve heard from teachers, which is disgusting, it’s just that they’re like parents that are either immigrants or like students with families that were immigrants that they just don’t care as much or that they’re not capable” (Hanna, Interview 3). Unfortunately, this is already a common experience for Hanna, even in her limited time as a student teacher. Furthermore, Hanna brought up more stereotypes she has heard from teachers, such as not caring about the ELL students because they do not care, and their parents do not care. She puts the responsibility back on the teachers and believes it is their job to figure out what is going on with a student, it is the teacher’s job to find out how they can help a student succeed.

Adding more to what Hanna would have changed for the event, she mentioned mass communication. She mentioned various means that could have been used to contact the parents in addition to the flier that went home in order to increase participation, such as calling parents and sending them an email. Additionally, she brought up recording the

presentation. That is something that has become increasingly common due to COVID, so it is a great way to get the information that is needed to all families that could not make it or that may need it as a refresher. When she brought that up, it led me to ask about translation services. “I think that when it comes to ASL [American Sign Language], I’m always like, oh get a translator but I forget that maybe verbal translation would help” (Hanna, Interview 3). Overall, for this event, Hanna focused on positive aspects and putting responsibility for overcoming any hurdles on the educators and not the families.

Lastly, Hanna wrote up some of her final thoughts:

I had never really explored the ways that my identities are interconnected. After taking a step back and reflecting on these different aspects of myself I have gained an understanding of how I can be a better teacher in the classroom. I know that as a White student I had more opportunities already set for me, and that society has been developed to best suit my needs. Going into the classroom, I will keep this in mind as I try to teach and demonstrate equity for my students. I know many White teachers often have a bad tendency to exclude other cultures from the classroom, but my goal is to appreciate these differences. I like to think that I have an all right cultural competency from moving around so much as a student, but in reality, I still have so much to learn about different cultures. I am excited to grow this competency and hope that I can apply what I learn to my students. I also know that as a teacher, I will learn a lot from my students as well. Just from building a good rapport with my students, I will begin to understand our cultural differences, and the things that I may need to change or add to the curriculum and instruction in order to help all of my students learn. This may be shifting away from traditional teaching strategies, and focusing more on relative teaching and performance assessments. This could also be paying attention to holidays that I don't celebrate in my culture, but my students do, or involving literature with diverse writers and characters.

(Hanna, Interview 3)

Hanna’s story broke my heart at times. As a researcher I had to take a step back from myself on several occasions so I did not switch to counselor mode. She is an amazing and resilient person. At just 20 years old, she is doing more for herself than any 20-year-old I knew at that age. It is all in an effort to better herself and her situation. She spoke with so much grace about her homelessness and the abuse she endured growing up.

Her cultural competence has been developed through her funds of identity, as she states in her concluding thoughts. At the same time, she knows that she still has room to grow, recognizing that she is not finished. In her final thoughts and in our conversations, she mentions moving away from curriculum to really focus on students and what they are going through. She wants to create and sustain relationships with them, which she feels will in turn increase her cultural awareness and competency.

Conclusion of Finding

As I outlined in Chapter 1, cultural competency is the primary metric by which I am exploring these White female preservice teachers' ability to work with their future students. In their development of cultural competency, they are working towards the goal of culturally relevant teaching. As Baines, Tisdale and Long (2018) state, the following are the kinds of goals being made by the participants in this study: "...[we are] teachers of every demographic as we strive for culturally relevant teaching that (1) affirms humanity, (2) addresses the reality that children learn biases from an early age, (3) rejects essentialization and paternalization, (4) teaches within and beyond systems of standards and mandates, and (5) actualizes the equity-based goals of #BlackLivesMatter" (p. 14).

Each participant in this study was different from the next. Some common themes arose, though—for example, as White females, they all stated they did not have a culture. "For some White people, the system remains masked because they do not realize that they have a racial identity, believing that people of Color are the only people with race" (Picower, 2021, p.7). This was common among the participants when we discussed their identity and when we discussed the multicultural parade scenario. It was not something I had considered when starting this research, but it helped me understand more about what

these women were thinking. All four women are working on their cultural competence and believe that they will be successful in the classroom. Throughout all our conversations, they all demonstrated an open-mindedness about their cultural competence and need to grow. While they are at different places in their journey, they all demonstrated a commitment to equity in their future careers teaching children.

Chapter four described the interviews I had with the four preservice teachers. The interviews were discussed specifically detailing various aspects of the individual teacher candidates and their individual journeys. The research participants spoke candidly about their lives, themselves, and the possibilities for their future classroom. The concluding chapter will provide an overview of the study, a deeper discussion of the study's findings through the application of the framework, funds of identity, and how it relates to the research questions. Implications and recommendations based on the study's findings will be given and the chapter will close with my concluding thoughts.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to focus on four White female preservice teachers and their journey towards cultural competency. This study examined these individual teacher candidates' background, their identity, and their reactions to and discussions regarding two different cultural scenarios. The first interview with the four participants gathered background information to determine where their funds of knowledge began. "These funds of knowledge are the result of people's lived experiences, including their social interaction, their participation in multiple job markets and their varied language-related activities" (Suber, Vujasinović & Esteban - Guitart, 2016, p. 4). The second interview involved funds of identity. The funds of identity framework is derived from the funds of knowledge theoretical framework which is "repositories of identity to which people have access. Consequently, the funds of knowledge are funds of identity when people use them to define themselves" (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 37). This interview allowed both the interviewer and participant to examine at a deeper level who the participant is and how that will transfer to the classroom. Lastly, in the third interview the participants were able to review two scenarios and think about how they would react if they were put in these situations. Each participant had different reactions to what was happening in the scenario and their cultural competency was tested. This study required the teacher candidates to self-reflect and explore different parts of themselves they had not previously thought about and how it will transfer to their teaching careers.

The following research questions were explored in this study to understand the preservice teachers' journey to cultural competence and how it will affect their future

teaching practices: How do preservice teachers describe the role of their backgrounds (i.e., race, ethnicity, etc.) in relation to this process? How does a preservice teacher's identity shape their pedagogical approach? How do preservice teachers describe the role of their implicit biases related to cultural scenarios that they are presented with and will be presented with in their future careers? The interviews, the participants identity webs and their final write up were the various pieces of data that were collected and reviewed to determine the preservice teachers' cultural competence.

The findings of this study serve to inform preservice teachers, administrators, teacher mentors, and instructional coaches to consider how teacher candidates will approach their future classes based on their identities and how it will inform their pedagogy. Correspondingly, the results may influence how teacher candidates prepare themselves to enter the classroom, how school districts provide support and development for new teachers, and how they can further grow their cultural competency to support their classrooms. In addition, it will add to the research that supports the need to have resources and structures in place to prioritize cultural competency for all educators to meet the needs of all students.

The following chapter will address each of the findings in reference to the three research questions. The findings of each question are broken down by participant. I also explore some thematic trends in the findings that do not fall neatly into the three research questions. These thematic discussions will be followed by a discussion of implications and recommendations for future research. Included in the recommendations are the limitations of the study.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1

The first research question (How do preservice teachers describe the role of their backgrounds (i.e., race, ethnicity, etc.) in relation to this process?) was answered in the first interview with each of the participants. Each of the participants were White females who were enrolled in their final year of their teacher preparation program. Each participant was different from each other in respect to their background.

Gigi is a 30-year-old married mother of two. She had been happily married for the past 11 years. She decided to be a teacher as a precursor to being a counselor. Her passion for helping students who have experienced trauma informs her decision to be a part of the education community. Gigi is completing her second bachelor's degree at Texas State University. Her psychology degree is from the University of Texas at Austin but chose to attend Texas State University because she believes it has the best teaching program in the area. During our conversation, Gigi discussed her awareness of her White privilege. She grew up in a setting where as a White person, she was the minority. She was able to see how students of color were treated through the microaggressions and implicit biases that her White teachers held. During our first interview, Gigi felt that her experience growing up at a minority majority shaped her cultural competency.

Jessica is a 37-year-old divorced mother of 3. She is pursuing a career as a teacher because of her background in substitute teaching as well as the feedback she received from others. She is the oldest of the participants and was able to bring a different perspective to the study by being a nontraditional student. After being a stay-at-home mom for 12 years, she went through a divorce which made her start her teaching career

journey. Jessica is from the Austin area, so she chose to attend Texas State University because several family members attended. Jessica is putting her creativity to work for her because she will be a Family Consumer Science teacher. She makes her own clothes, has experience in art and is generally a creative person so with this position, she will be able to share her knowledge. Although Jessica is aware that she is not fully culturally competent, her recognition of it helps her overall journey. She recognizes that her FCS teacher position will put her in situations where her cultural competency will be needed in dealing with students from a different race or discussing family structures.

Raquel is a 22-year-old full-time student. She self-identified as upper middle class, making her the wealthiest of the participants. She continually acknowledged her privilege related to class as well as her race throughout our conversations. She became aware of her privilege as she got older and knows she was not having a typical college experience due to her family's financial support. She is following in her mother's footsteps by becoming a teacher. The exception being that she is going to be an English teacher whereas her mother is a special education teacher. She chose to attend Texas State University because she is from the Austin area and it is close to her family. Raquel continues to work on her cultural competency through her interactions with others and some self-exploration.

Hanna is a 20-year-old single full-time student. She is the youngest of all the participants and the only one not from the Austin area. In addition to being the youngest of the group, she is also stretched very thin. Hanna was enrolled in 18 credit hours all while working three jobs. She is highly motivated to complete her degree and get started in her career. She was completing her special education degree and that was motivated by

her sister's special needs. She chose Texas State University because it is just far enough from her family in east Texas and cost-efficient for her. Hanna's cultural competency shines through in all our interviews. She is highly aware of her privilege as a White female at the same time her experiences as a homeless child and woman as well as her family situations have shaped her views about culture. Although Hanna accepts help she is given from others such as her extended family, friends, or advisors, she does not expect it. She is doing everything she can to change the situation she is in all while being there for her students.

Research Question 2

The second research question (How does a preservice teacher's identity shape their pedagogical approach?) was answered during the second interview and throughout various conversations as it came up in the other two interviews. The first interview was a general getting to know you conversation but delved into the background of the participants and started to shape who they are as individual teacher candidates.

Gigi

Gigi had very strong opinions about her sense of self and how that will be portrayed in her future classroom. She believes that she will say and do whatever needs to be said to avoid conflict with students. In her words, she can just "put on a show" for students as well as parents whenever needed. Another aspect of Gigi's future career is her experience with emotional and sexual abuse. Trauma is a large part of her experience in addition to her identity as a writer, so she plans to couple those aspects by having her students process their feelings through journaling. She wants to give them an outlet for their feelings as it is something that worked for her. Because of her experience and her

psychology degree, Gigi feels the mental health of her students is of the utmost importance. She wants to put their needs first and above what she believes even parents may want. She does not want to add the stress of grades to students even though parents may not agree. She will have some issues to contend with in that regard not just with parents but with administrators. Overall, Gigi's identity makes her approach to teaching one that is focused on students feeling safe.

Raquel

Raquel's identity is rooted in privilege. Not only is her identity as a White privileged female, but also a wealthy White privileged female. Throughout our conversations her wealth came up multiple times and referenced various parts of her identity and how she lives. She knows her identity will create barriers between herself and her future students because of the population she will be working with, so she plans to hide it as much as possible in an effort to create connections with her students. Just because she comes from a family of privilege, it does not exclude her from experiencing the hardship of alcoholism. Her mother suffers from alcoholism, so this aspect of her life has given Raquel an insight into a struggle some of her future students may be experiencing. As I have stated, Raquel is very aware of her privilege, so she has and continues to make a conscious effort to get to know struggles that others face. She does this through reading, keeping up with the changes going on around the world, and her relationships with various friends. She has very close friends that come from poverty and are a part of the LGBTQ+ community. Much of her passion stems from these relationships and her political beliefs. She plans for her future classroom to be inclusive

and accepting of all students with a particular emphasis on supporting the LGBTQ+ community.

Jessica

Jessica self-proclaims she was in an identity crisis. She experienced a trauma that has left her fractured. She is trying to find out who she is after the trauma and divorce. She was a single mother of three and mostly importantly, she is a creator. Her creativity and artistic nature is what will inform Jessica's pedagogy in her future classroom. Jessica will be incorporating various cultures into her future classroom as her position of Family Consumer Science teacher will involve creating items that many times will be tied to families, traditions, and holidays. Although Jessica has a conscious bias towards upper class individuals, she will make every attempt to create a safe inclusive environment for all her students.

Hanna

Hanna's story is different from the rest of the participants; what makes her stand out is self-awareness of her own trauma and privilege. Hanna has experienced homelessness, abuse, and poverty while she has been growing up as well as in her present life in college. She believes the student population she will be serving as a teacher will be from a demographic of low socioeconomic status, therefore, she feels her experiences will allow her to create connections with students. She will have an understanding of any poverty or trauma that her students experience. It will allow her to identify issues when they arise with students as she currently does in her student observation period. Additionally, the racism that Hanna recognized early in her childhood from her family has made her open to various cultures. Her future students will be different from her

White background so as she has demonstrated while growing up, her awareness and efforts to stand up to her family about the racial issues she saw will apply to her teaching practice. Hanna's overall pedagogy is student-focused, respecting others and full of compassion.

Research Question 3

The third research question (How do preservice teachers describe the role of their implicit biases related to cultural scenarios that they are presented with and will be presented with in their future careers?) was answered in the final interview and a few of the participants reflected more on it in their final write up. "Racism today looks different from the racism of 50 years ago. Most of us condemn overt bigotry. But this doesn't mean racism has been eliminated; it has just gone underground" (Fiarman, 2016, p. 12). As discussed in Chapter 3, the Multicultural day parade involved students who were not allowed to participate in the parade due to not bringing costumes that represented their heritage. The teacher felt that they would be ridiculed for not following directions (See Appendix E for further details). The Family Night scenario is about a group of teachers who put together an event to encourage ELL families to attend and enhance the students' math skills. The night does not go as planned because several of the targeted families are late, the program must be adjusted, and the ELL families stay in the back of the cafeteria and talk to each other during the program. (See Appendix F for full description of the scenario).

Gigi

Discussing the scenarios, a few of Gigi's issues surfaced such as her self-doubt and lack of cultural understanding. She wavered significantly about allowing the girls to

join the multicultural parade to the point of putting them in the back of the line. She recognized that it was wrong but could not firmly commit to what she deemed was right to do with the girls' situation. The more familiar they are with a diversity of cultural lived experiences, the better equipped they can become to work with students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Talbot, 2011). She lacked the preparation to understand truly what multiculturalism means whether that would have been through her university program or through her own journey. Furthermore, when we discussed Family Night, her implicit biases regarding immigrants came to the forefront. She refers to the ELL families universally as Spanish speakers and immigrants. She disregards the mention of the initial flier being sent home in various languages. She also refers to the families as immigrants on several occasions. She implicitly refers to the ELL families as immigrants. Some families may be immigrants, some may not. With our ever-changing society, the ELL families might have been in the United States for multiple generations, so the assumption that their use of spoken Spanish makes them immigrants is off base.

Raquel

The Multicultural day scenario happened as it should according to Raquel. She felt that the girls should not have participated in the event because Keisha was going to wear her favorite sweatshirt while Emily was going to wear her soccer uniform. Raquel believed that they were not wearing cultural clothing as per the directions of the event. Her implicit biases lead her to believe that cultural clothing are items worn for special occasions or events, not something that is worn every day. She references Mexican clothing she sees portrayed on social media as others are getting ready for events. Additionally, her implicit biases allow her to continue to refer to cultural clothing as

“costumes,” as opposed to understanding the meaning of clothing and that it is not just for special occasions. When we discussed Family Night, she felt that the families talking was rude. She believes that it is an aspect of culture that has the families talking during a presentation. Although she references translation services, she does not consider that it is possible the families are not just talking, but they are translating for each other. Her implicit biases will inform how she approaches her future classroom. There are areas related to these scenarios that Raquel will need to revisit to open her eyes further into various cultures. Fortunately, she acknowledged where she is lacking and has made a commitment to further growing her cultural competency.

Jessica

Before I address Jessica’s implicit biases that surfaced when we were reviewing the scenarios, a significant bias was revealed when we discussed Multicultural day. She contradicted herself a few times by stating as a White person, she does not have a culture but then she believes her culture is being canceled. She has strong feelings regarding the celebration of Black History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month because she felt her White culture is not being sufficiently celebrated. She believes that there would not be these celebrations if it were not for the Europeans dominating America. Even with this belief, she still maintained her openness to be inclusive of all her students and their cultures. Various implicit biases about culture surfaced during our conversation. She referred to the girls' clothing in the scenario as everyday clothes and did not believe they were significant to them. She also wanted to put a boundary on culture by limiting the number of cultural representations during the event. When we discussed Family Night, she again refers to culture. She stated several things are cultural, such as the ELL families

talking during the presentation. She believed they could be discussing the presentation and processing the information together or simply socializing. She believed their socializing is due to them not having any time to otherwise talk due to their multiple jobs. Jessica's implicit biases are acknowledged and in her final thoughts she knows she will need to keep herself informed about cultures so her classroom is inclusive.

Hanna

Throughout my conversations with Hanna, she always took care with her answers and did not make assumptions when we discussed the scenarios. I was not able to identify implicit biases she holds. She spoke very candidly about her lacking knowledge about various cultures, she also stated she has and may still be ignorant about cultures. Her responses to the scenarios referenced in chapter four show her cultural competency and how her identity has been shaped to respect cultures and raise her awareness about differences. As she discussed in her final thoughts, Hanna's future classroom will be safe for students because she is already doing work and will continue it so she can grow her cultural competence.

Themes

The following section provides an overview of the themes that emerged from the study's data. The themes relate directly to the cultural competency of the participants by illuminating the aspects of their cultural knowledge about social justice and how arose via their identities. The themes shed light on their views on social justice as opposed to all aspects of culture and their lack of identification with a culture. Furthermore, I explore themes related to trauma they experienced in their lives, demonstrations of deficit thinking, and how their funds of identity has shaped their views.

Operationalization/Definition of Social Justice

Participants Gigi, Raquel and Hanna had a large focus on LGBTQ+ issues and gender identity with regards to social justice, when discussing their own identities and identity webs, than about race issues, class issues, or other intersections of marginality.

Gigi and Raquel, both identified themselves as cisgender. Gigi was my first interview that discussed an identity web, so she was able to explain what the term means as I was not familiar with it. “It just means I was born as the gender I identify as” (Gigi, Interview 2). She also took her explanations a step further by explaining her identity as a heteroromantic bisexual. “So I’m attracted to females. I love the female body, but I’ve never actually been in a relationship with a female. Like it’s been one-night stands or just hookups in the past... I’ve only been with my husband since we’ve been married” (Gigi, Interview 2). Although Hanna identified herself as a female, she questioned her sexuality. This piece of her identity is important because she is repressing her thoughts about being gay. “It just feels like something that’s forced on me so much that I almost want to reject it. But I’m like, I don’t want to reject myself... when you’re [she] steady and like emotionally ready, you can think about other things” (Hanna, Interview 2).

Although Gigi is very knowledgeable about various terms and expresses herself thoroughly, she had some negative thoughts about students identifying as transgender. She focused on a social media hype that has left students confused about their gender. “Having to keep my thoughts of this kid is not a boy. She’s a girl and she is just confused and is a lesbian. I can’t like, I don’t know, the whole gender ideology thing has really messed with me as an adult” (Gigi, Interview 2). She attributed their gender identity to their sexual orientation, so she does not support any deviation of gender identification.

On the other hand, Hanna is not confused about her gender identity, but she is confused about her sexual orientation. Raquel's passion for LGBTQ+ stems from her relationship with close friends who are a part of the transgender community.

A focused theme for the participants regarding cultural competency surrounded LGBTQ+ identity and issues. However, Gigi was able to recognize through friends that she has microaggressions. Raquel, Jessica, and Hanna expressed the inequities in social classes which was a part of their identities. For Raquel, she is upper middle class and acknowledges that she does not have the same struggles as others from a low class. Jessica has experienced being both middle class and lower class when she was married and now that she is divorced respectively. Hanna has lived a life full of struggles due to her lower-class status both growing up and her current experience as a college student. Lastly, Jessica and Hanna acknowledge religious diversity. Jessica understands the need for it in her classroom as an FCS teacher whereas Hanna has witnessed first-hand people expressing their beliefs but not living them.

Overall, all the participants had some form of recognition of elements of identity marginalization but the most prominent was regarding LGBTQ+ diversity. This part of the identity has allowed them to recognize marginalization but for the most part, leaves out race issues. At the heart of all the participants, they all ended with wanting to have an inclusive classroom. They want students to feel comfortable and safe in their future classrooms.

Perceived Lack of “White” Culture

The Multicultural Day Parade discussion (See appendix E for the full scenario) brought up the issue of “White” culture or lack thereof for the participants. Gigi, Raquel,

Jessica, and Hanna identified their White privilege but at the same time stated they do not have a culture. The message seemed that was portrayed by the participants was that due to their race and ethnicity being White meant that they have no culture.

Jessica, Raquel, and Hanna equated culture with traditions, celebrations, and events that are a part of a person's heritage. "I perceive culture to be, you know, a multinational multiethnic celebration" (Raquel, Interview 3). "We didn't have like the nationality that we celebrated because a lot of people like, if your family is from Mexico, even if you've been in the United States for the last three generations, you still have those traditions... we're just traditional meat and potatoes, American" (Jessica, Interview 2). "I realized how much privilege that is to me to like not have to worry about my culture" (Hanna, Interview 3). Hanna knows that people from so many other cultures must worry about what they say, who they say it to, how they act, even how they dress. This perception came up with the participants in such a way that had them trying to find the meaning of culture and disregarding their own due to lack of understanding. So much so that for Raquel, she would not have participated in the parade because she believes she does not have a culture.

Gigi and Jessica thought about culture as American culture. "And multicultural also includes American, if it's multicultural, and I don't know" (Gigi, Interview 3). American culture is "everyday culture" (Jessica, Interview 2). Similarly, Raquel refers to cultural as everyday culture. "that's not cultural clothing. That's your soccer uniform... that's something you wear to school every day" (Raquel, Interview 3). This is a common perception that came up with the participants in a way to connect American culture with being White.

Through the final write ups that the participants did after interview three, they had time to reflect. They had time to think about the overall study and process the meaning of culture. The consensus was that they know the work they must do to be successful in their future classrooms. They have the best intentions for their students and will be working on ways to be more culturally competent and continue to grow in their practice.

Trauma

During our second interview, the participants explored their identities. Trauma was a major theme that surfaced in all the participants' identity discussions. One thing was clear: although they are different in a variety of ways, all four participants have experienced some form of trauma in their lives and continued to experience the consequences of that trauma in their contemporary lives and careers. Gigi's trauma was emotional and sexual abuse which has her experiencing PTSD to this day, Jessica's trauma was from a near-death experience that left her identity fractured, Raquel's trauma was from her mother's alcoholism which made her experience feelings of abandonment, and Hanna's trauma is from her life experiences which included homelessness, absent family, abandonment, and abuse. These experiences of trauma allowed for the participants to have an insight into traumatic struggles their future students may face.

"I had a lot of childhood trauma from my grandmother, my dad's mom. So definitely sustained emotional abuse from her. The reason I have PTSD now as an adult, is from also experiencing sexual abuse as a teenager" (Gigi, Interview 2). Gigi's identification with her trauma influenced her decision to pursue an eventual career as a counselor after getting several years of experience teaching. She also mentioned trauma as informing the writing work she wants to do with students: "So I'm going into English

because I feel like writing is a really amazing tool to be able to process trauma and to be able to process hard things in kids' lives. So helping them find a voice through writing is definitely what's leading me to be an English teacher until I can get into counseling" (Gigi, Interview 2). Speaking from her own personal experience with writing as a coping and healing mechanism for trauma, Gigi believed that writing will help her future students process their own forms of trauma.

While Raquel did not use the language of trauma when discussing her mother's alcoholism, the way she did describe that relationship and the way it has been influenced by alcoholism resonated with the literature on trauma. "The most out of the ordinary experience of my childhood with my mother is she is very much so an alcoholic" (Raquel, Interview 2). Raquel discussed how her mother causes problems for her father due to her alcohol problem, with her mother being in and out of treatment facilities with the financial support of her father and the rest of the family. Raquel's father is a large part of her life, and she noted a significant discrepancy between experiences with her two parents. "My dad took me to everything and I've even tried bringing it up now [with her mother] ... it was just so boring [Raquel's mother's response]" (Raquel, Interview 2). While Raquel seemed to downplay somewhat the affects her mother's alcoholism has had on her in our conversations, her descriptions of that relationship show evidence of trauma, albeit unaddressed trauma. If she takes efforts to address the impact that trauma has had on her personally, it would also be helpful in building her funds of identity so she can support future students with their own struggles with trauma.

Jessica was candid when she explained the ways in which her life was changed by her traumatic accident and near-death experience. "The biggest part of myself that I can't

leave behind is, a few years ago, there was an incident where I almost died ... I'm a different person" (Jessica, Interview 2). This change in herself led to fractures in her relationship with her now-ex-husband, as the accident precipitated their divorce. Since the event occurred in 2019, Jessica expressed feeling that she has had a broken identity. The only part of herself she could recognize from her past and present self was her identity as a creator, explored further in Chapter 4. This experience with trauma is something the Jessica will not leave behind and will be able to share with her students as a family consumer sciences teacher.

As I have stated previously, Hanna's life has been full of trauma, though she has made a conscience effort to heal herself and move forward with her life. "I made the decision to cut them off because I knew, like I couldn't resolve any of my trauma if I was just going to continuously, like let people who abused me like stay in my life" (Hanna, Interview 2). Although Hanna mentions abuse, she did not use the word trauma to discuss or describe that abuse—however, I could infer it. She was moved around between family members as a child while her mother was in and out of prison. She experienced abandonment with everyone in her life because she was only taken in by people when they felt like keeping her. Her father could not care for her and most recently kicked her out his home when she confronted him about the issues she experienced growing up. "The only stability I had was school...no matter what school I went to, there was always a teacher there that cared about me when I didn't have other adults that cared about me" (Hanna, Interview 1). Hanna's experience with teachers created a positive interaction with her future profession—in a sense, her career trajectory as a future teacher is directly related to her experiences with trauma throughout her life. All in all, Hanna's life trauma

has shaped her and continue to mold her into a strong, resilient, and empathic educator and human.

Deficit Thinking

The case study exercises in interview three brought up many underlying biases and examples of deficit thinking from Gigi, Raquel, and Jessica. When we discussed the family night scenario (see Appendix F for full description of the scenario) the participants reflected on a very real situation they could encounter in the teaching career.

Gigi discussed the experience the ELL families were having with the lack of translation for the families that created an implied barrier for them. “Whenever there is a language barrier, oftentimes kids and families feel stupid, even though they’re not stupid they can process stuff. Not being able to communicate with someone else makes you feel stupid” (Gigi, Interview 3). While arguably well-meaning and intended as an exercise in empathy, Gigi’s assumption that the families would “feel stupid” implies firstly that the families in the scenario do not understand English (that is, they could understand English but still choose to communicate with each other in Spanish). Secondly, for those families in the scenario who might not speak English, Gigi’s statement assumes that they would perceive a lack of English language fluency as an inherent negative trait, something they are “lacking,” when in truth they could be doing just fine in their lives without English language fluency.

When discussing the ELL families talking in the back of the room in this same case study, Raquel made some moral judgments about that behavior and made some wide-sweeping assumptions as to the participants’ motives. “It’s a bit rude... That’s just different, you know, to go back to culture. I guess it’s just a different cultural standard

that something like that is something you can talk during” (Raquel, Interview 3). Raquel’s deficit thinking is manifested here not only in assumptions as to why the families might have behaved this way, but a judgment about the “rightness” of the behavior. She framed their behavior as “rude,” and then assumed that such behavior might be acceptable in “their” culture, a thought which also implies a sweeping judgment of the people involved as having an inferior form of culture that accepts “rude” behavior and is assumed to be unable to process information in the same way as the dominant culture. “They learn and intake information more from having a flier or rather than watching a presentation ... that might be a cultural thing” (Jessica, Interview 3). All of these are examples of deficit thinking.

Funds of Identity

Funds of identity is the framework used for this research, and while my participants did not use this terminology when discussing their identities, it is a useful framework for interpreting the ways they *do* discuss and describe their identities.

For Gigi, in her self-descriptions she frames herself as a trauma survivor who plans to act as an advocate for struggling students. “I’m going into English because I feel like writing is a really amazing tool to be able to process trauma and to be able to process hard things in kids’ lives. So helping them find a voice through writing is definitely what is leading me to be an English teacher until I can get into counseling” (Gigi, Interview 2). The trauma she experienced has given her the drive to give back and help students. She wants to help them help themselves by journaling to explore not only their trauma, but other potentially difficult and challenging experiences.

Raquel grew up and continues to live a White female privileged life. In her framings of her identity, she chose to focus on her political commitments and the prominent place they play in her life. “I need to know your political beliefs before we’re in a relationship because I think that has a strong correlation with the type of person you are” (Raquel, Interview 2). Raquel talked a lot about politics and how she tries to stay informed as an effort towards cultural competency and understanding those whose lives are different from hers.

As noted above, Jessica was going through a self-proclaimed identity crisis, in which she saw her past and present selves as different people. “There are some parts of me that are like definitely a hundred percent part of her, and they’re definitely, a hundred percent part of me, and the biggest one is, I think, creation. She was a creator. I’m a creator” (Jessica, Interview 2). At the time of this study, Jessica felt split between two worlds, still in the process of finding herself. Her creativity was her anchor, as it was one of the elements of her personality that had stayed constant before and after her near-death experience.

In her own descriptions of her funds of identity, Hanna demonstrated exceptional resiliency in the face of hardship and trauma. “I do share parts of my background with these students because I need them to see it’s hard now but it doesn’t have to be later ... your parents don’t define you ... you get to create your own path” (Hanna, Interview 2). This particular statement identifies Hanna wholly because she recognizes that all her experience have paved the way for her current life. She did not let any of her challenges hold her back.

Table 2 *Themes Expressed by Participants*

Participants	Social Justice	Lack of “White” Culture	Trauma	Deficit Thinking	Funds of Identity
Gigi	<p>“So I’m attracted to females. I love the female body, but I’ve never been in a relationship with a female. Like it’s been one-night stands or just hookups in the past... I’ve only been with my husband since we’ve been married” (Gigi, Interview 2).</p> <p>[students] “can be themselves. They don’t have to pretend to be someone they’re not” (Gigi, Interview 2)</p>	<p>“American culture also includes American, if it’s multicultural, and I don’t know” (Gigi, Interview 3)</p>	<p>“I had a lot of childhood trauma from my grandmother, my dad’s mom. So definitely sustained emotional abuse from her. The reason I have PTSD now as an adult, is from also experiencing sexual abuse as a teenager” (Gigi, Interview 2)</p>	<p>“Whenever there is a language barrier, oftentimes kids and families feel stupid, even though they’re not stupid they can process stuff. Not being able to communicate with someone else makes you feel stupid” (Gigi, Interview 3)</p>	<p>“I’m going into English because I feel like writing is a really amazing too to be able to process trauma and to be able to process hard things in kids’ lives. So helping them find a voice through writing is definitely what is leading me to be an English teacher until I can get into counseling” (Gigi, Interview 2)</p>

Participants	Social Justice	Lack of “White” Culture	Trauma	Deficit Thinking	Funds of Identity
Raquel	“I’m definitely going to have a Pride flag...I’m just going to put as much of my personality into my classroom as possible and hope my students come to the right conclusions about me” (Raquel, Interview 2)	“I perceive culture to be, you know, a multinational multiethnic celebration” (Raquel, Interview 3)	“The most out of the ordinary experience of my childhood with my mother is she is very much so an alcoholic” (Raquel, Interview 2)	“It’s a bit rude... That’s just different, you know, to go back to culture. I guess it’s just a different cultural standard that something like that is something you can talk during” (Raquel, Interview 3)	“I need to know your political beliefs before we’re in a relationship because I think that has a strong correlation with the type of person you are” (Raquel, Interview 2)
Jessica	-	“We didn’t have like the nationality that we celebrated because a lot of people like, if you family is from Mexico, even if you’ve been in the United States for the last three generations, you still have those traditions ...	“The biggest part of myself that I can’t leave behind is, a few years ago, there was an incident where I almost died ... I’m a different person” (Jessica, Interview 2)	“They learn and intake information more from having a flier or rather than watching a presentation ... that might be a cultural thing” (Jessica, Interview 3)	“There are some parts of me that are like definitely a hundred percent part of her, and they’re definitely, a hundred percent part of me, an the biggest one is, I think, creation. She was a creator. I’m a creator” (Jessica, Interview 2)

		we're just traditional meat and potatoes American" (Jessica, Interview 2)			
Participants	Social Justice	Lack of "White" Culture	Trauma	Deficit Thinking	Funds of Identity
Hanna	"I kind of started questioning maybe my sexuality. And I was like, maybe a part of me oppresses it because I don't want to be like an outcast. I don't want to be abandoned by the family that I do have left" (Hanna, Interview 2)	"I realize how much privilege that is to me to like not have to worry about my culture" (Hanna, Interview 3)	"I made the decision to cut them off because I knew, like I couldn't resolve any of my trauma if I was just going to continuously, like let people who abused me like stay in my life" (Hanna, Interview 2)	-	"I do share parts of my background with these students because I need them to see it's hard now but it doesn't have to be later ... your parents don't define you ... you get to create your own path" (Hanna, Interview 2)

Implications

The research participants provided an array of insight into their cultural competency journey. The findings from this study will now be used to generate suggestions for increasing the cultural competency of preservice teachers. The suggestions focus on recommendations for teacher candidates.

The participants for this study had not had any formal classes regarding cultural competency, culturally responsive teaching, or multiculturalism. As argued by Bersh (2018), a key step in becoming a culturally competent educator is starting from within and is a journey that must be examined critically and honestly. The identity web piece of this study seemed the most powerful for all the participants because they were able to discover different aspects of themselves and how it will translate into their future teaching practice. A suggestion for individuals in the education community would be to have teacher candidates, new teachers, and veteran educators engage in this kind of work that explicitly focuses on identity. By focusing on identity, educators would be able to centralize areas they will need to improve their competency once they recognize it.

The participants submitted final thoughts after we concluded our interviews. They each were able to self-reflect on the process and their areas of improvement. Self-reflection is a process all practitioners should use to continue to grow. In terms of cultural competency in the classroom, educators should self-reflect not only on academic lessons but on student relationships, issues that arise and classroom disruptions as a way to make connections with their actions and their thought process.

With regards to professional development in areas of cultural competency and student teacher relationship building, Jessica referenced the positive interactions she

witnessed by her cooperating teacher, which gave her insight to the type of relationship she wants to have with her students. To her, the cooperating teacher's classroom served as a good example of a safe and inclusive classroom. Any modeling that is done by cooperating teachers for their student teachers will be beneficial if they are able to witness firsthand safe environments for students, as it will help preservice teachers to achieve the same in their own future classrooms. Districts and campuses should offer continuous cultural competency training for all the education community. By involving new and veteran teachers, the cycle of cultural awareness and student educational equity will continue.

Recommendations for Future Research

An outcome of this research is the information it provides about the questions the researcher was not able to fully answer. It is important to examine findings so that future endeavors might provide vital information to further the inclusiveness in schools.

Limitations

The study consisted of four White women who all attend Texas State University and are in their final block of classes for a secondary teacher certification. Their final block consisted of a semester of teacher observations and a semester of student teaching. The study was completed during their observation semester and the four participants were at the same high school with different cooperating teachers. The limitation this puts on the study is that they attend the same university and were at the same high school. Although they were all in the secondary education program, their classes differed because they are specializing in different areas.

Due to the limitations of this study, further research should include a longer study that follows the preservice teachers through their first year of teaching to further assess their cultural competency with additional identity work done. Additionally, a similar study can be done with preservice teachers who are not in their final year, so they have not had an observation experience at a school. The participants' background and identity can be examined for cultural competency at a different point in their journey without exposure to a school environment as an adult.

Conclusion

“People define themselves through other people and through the artifacts and resources – visible and invisible – of their social and cultural worlds. In that sense, social relationships, significant others, particular activities and practices, political ideologies, religious beliefs or any other artifact, such as a flag or a song, become resources for making and expressing identity” (Esteban – Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 36).

This study showed that there are gaps in cultural competency for preservice teachers. Their funds of identity and background play a significant part in their cultural competence development and future teaching practice. Much of the research discussed previously, revealed that self-reflection is a large part of becoming culturally competent. The participants of the study further emphasized the need for this type of self-exploration. This study showed the importance of having preservice teachers examine their implicit biases and delve into their identities to understand themselves better so they can become culturally competent teachers in their future careers. Their eyes were opened when they discussed the scenarios and the implications the various cultures will have in their future careers. All the participants of the study gained the knowledge that cultural competency is a key component of their future teaching pedagogy.

APPENDIX SECTION

Appendix A

Student Teacher Interview 1 Protocol

How do preservice teachers describe the role of their backgrounds (i.e., race, ethnicity, etc.) in relation to this process?

1. What made you decide to go into teaching?

Probe: What made you go the traditional teaching route as opposed to the alternative routes that are available?

Probe: Did you consider any other careers? If so, which ones and why?

2. What made you choose your teacher preparation program?

Probe: Was there anything specifically appealing about the program that made you decide to enroll in it?

Probe: Does it offer any special courses you are interested in that you can take as an elective or course you are required to take?

3. What types of multicultural courses has Texas State University offered?

Probe: If there aren't any available courses, have you learned in any of your courses about multiculturalism in any of your courses?

Probe: Has diversity, equity or inclusion been discussed in your courses in relation to working with students? In relation to yourself?

Probe: Have you done any self-identity or self-reflection activities or work in your courses in relation to multiculturalism?

Appendix B

Student Teacher Interview 2 Protocol

How does a preservice teacher's identity shape their pedagogical approach?

1. Tell me about your background.

Probe: For example, where did you grow up? What kind of school did you go to (urban or rural)?

Probe: What is the make-up of your family?

2. Fill out an identity web. The identities that you connected together are an on paper representation of **intersectionality**, a term coined by activist Kimberlé [Crenshaw](#) that is defined as *the interconnected nature of social categories like race, class, and gender that either heighten one's experience of privilege or marginalization.*

Probe: As a future teacher, what parts of your identity do you feel safe to share in the classroom?

Probe: As a student teacher, did you feel like you were represented in the curriculum?

Probe: Are there any parts of yourself that you feel you cannot fully embrace in your program? Or that you will be able to fully embrace in your future classroom?

Probe: Is there any time during your teacher preparation program that you connected with others in your program? Why or why not?

3. Which parts of your identity do you feel are most important to your sense of self?

Why?

Probe: What part of your identity are you most proud of? Why?

Probe: What part of your identity do you see has having the most impact on your interactions with your future students? Why?

4. What parts of your identity do you perceive may be a problem working with students who are different from you? Why?

Probe: What do you think about your identity will help resolve any future issues may perceive when working with students who are different than you?

Appendix C

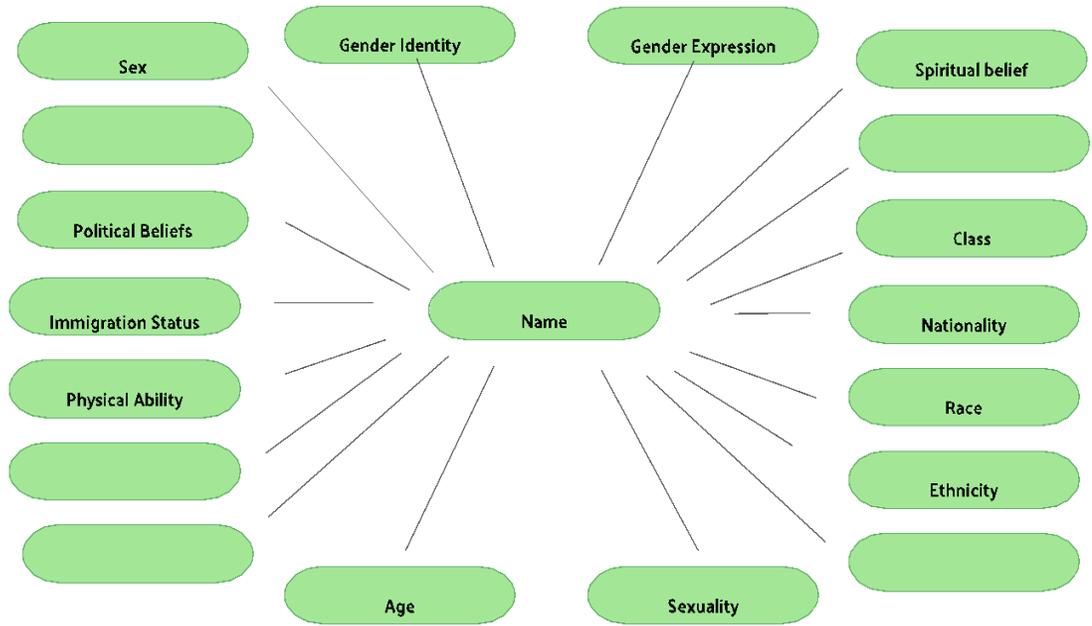
Student Teacher Interview 3 Protocol

How do preservice teachers describe the role of their implicit biases related to cultural scenarios that they are presented with and will be presented with in their future careers?

This will be unstructured interview. I will have 2 scenarios that I will present the participants with. I will give them time to review it then I will ask questions about the scenario. I will be looking for implicit biases and gauge their response.

Appendix D

IDENTITY WEB



Appendix E

Case Study 5.4: Multicultural Day Parade

In an effort to celebrate the growing racial and ethnic diversity at Eastern School, the school's Diversity Committee decided to sponsor Multicultural Day. Numerous performers were hired for assemblies and presentations. During the day's feature event, the "Culture Parade," students were asked to showcase cultural clothing they walked through the hallways. Teachers were encouraged by the committee to discuss clothing from countries outside the United States and to invite students who had such clothing to bring it to school for the parade. Ms. Morrison was excited about Multicultural Day because many of her students had parents who were immigrants. She imagined the day as an opportunity for those students to teach others about their cultures.

A week before the event, Ms. Morrison brought a kilt to class and explained its significance to the students. "This represents my Scottish heritage," she said, "and I am proud to show it to you today." She then asked whether students had "special costumes" at home that represented their cultures. Several students raised their hands, which prompted Ms. Morrison to discuss the events planned for Multicultural Day, including the parade. During dismissal the day before the parade Ms. Morrison announced, "Don't forget to bring your costumes to class tomorrow!"

The next day, Ms. Morrison was pleased to see several Hmong and Liberian students came with bags of clothing. She saw that two other students, Emily and Keisha, brought clothing, so she inquired about what was in their bags. Emily, a white student, excitedly pulled out her soccer uniform, and Keisha, an African American student, pulled jeans and her favorite sweatshirt out of her bag. Ms. Morrison told the two girls she appreciated their enthusiasm for Multicultural Day but that they would not be able to walk in the parade. She explained that what Keisha and Emily brought was everyday clothing rather than clothes that represented their ethnic heritages. Both girls protested. "This outfit represents my culture," Keisha argued. Ms. Morrison shared with the girls that she felt terrible about the confusion, but could not allow them to participate. "Maybe next year they'll expand the parade," she said.

After the girls walked away, Ms. Morrison considered changing her mind. She worried, though, that other students or staff would be puzzled by their participation and that Keisha and Emily would be ridiculed for not following directions.

Appendix F

Case Study 10.3: Family Night

In order to bolster family engagement and strengthen math outcomes among families who were masters of languages other than English— families of students in their English Language Learner (ELL) programs— Crestview School decided to host a Family Night. Teachers discussed ways to entice as many people as possible to attend. A light dinner and student performances would draw a crowd, they hoped. They sent home fliers translated into the languages spoken in the homes of each student. They arranged for students to perform songs they learned in music classes. Teachers planned a presentation to follow student performances about how to reinforce math concepts by utilizing online resources. The entire event would last only one hour, they decided, sensitive to the fact that many of their students' parents worked evening shifts or had other responsibilities that made long school events difficult to attend. Mr. Nelson, a veteran teacher, took it upon himself to create a handout about how to access online math tools.

The evening of Family Night, several families began arriving shortly before the published start time. The teachers noticed, however, that most early arrivers were families that attended every event. Five minutes after the scheduled start time, with several people seated and awaiting the performance but several other families not yet in attendance, the teachers decided to change the order of the program, moving their discussion of home support for math learning to the beginning of the evening, worried that families would be upset if they missed their children's performances. The teachers were relieved to see more families filing into the event as they were speaking. *This is a great turnout*, thought Mr. Nelson. He and several other teachers noticed that several parents and caretakers of ELL students stood in the back of the cafeteria rather than joining other families in the provided seats. Many were chatting. Several parents who arrived early and were sitting in those seats seemed visibly annoyed with the background noise.

Ten minutes after the event ended, many of the ELL families continued chatting. Ms. Stowe, a newer teacher, noticed several copies of the handout Mr. Nelson created left on the table so she handed one to each adult who did not have one. She felt disappointed that so few of the parents took time to ask questions when she handed it to them.

Once everybody left, several teachers met briefly to discuss the evening. Ms. Stowe expressed discontent over what she interpreted as disinterest on the parts of many ELL families. Other teachers complained that the evening was not a success because many of the ELL families arrived late and seemed more interested in side conversations than the presentation.

Mr. Nelson could tell his coworkers were discouraged. He knew it would reinforce stereotypes they had about certain families. He also knew the evening held an important lesson for the school, but he was not sure what that lesson was.

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