AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION AND SUPERVISION DOCTORAL PROGRAMS (306 pp.)

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This phenomenological qualitative study explored the experiences of individuals with visual impairments in counselor education and supervision doctoral programs. Six participants from counselor education doctoral programs around the United States were purposefully sampled and interviewed to ascertain their lived experiences of their doctoral experiences and their thoughts about the doctoral process as result of these experiences.

Data were analyzed using a five-step process and revealed seven overall themes: (a) the presence of ableism in the doctoral process, (b) the inaccessibility of the doctoral process, (c) advocacy for self, (d) feelings of social isolation, (e) positive experiences in the doctoral process, (f) the evolving identity as a doctoral student with a visual impairment, and (g) recommendations for improving student experience.

Participants’ collective academic, social, and professional experiences while in their doctoral programs were mirrored in the identified themes and used as a basis for understanding the experiences of this population within counselor education doctoral programs.
The findings of this study revealed participants feeling as though they experienced ableism throughout the doctoral process; feeling as though they experienced issues related to inaccessibility in their doctoral experience; feeling as though they were social isolated whether due to the nature of the doctoral program or because of their visual impairment; feeling as though the role of advocacy played a significant role in their doctoral experiences, feeling as though they did have positive experiences that helped them to grow as counselor educators, and feeling as though their identities as doctoral students with visual impairments evolved throughout the doctoral process. The findings also revealed participants providing recommendations for improving the experiences of future counselor education and supervision doctoral student with visual impairments. These recommendations should be taken into great consideration as the participants provided valuable insight into their own experiences as well as what doctoral programs, faculty, and potential doctoral students with visual impairments could do in order to improve the experiences of the population. Additional research extending the study to include a new sample, investigating faculty members’ experiences with having doctoral students with visual impairments in their courses, extending the study to include doctoral students with other disabilities in the sample, and the use of different methodologies (e.g., ethnography, case study, Q-methodology, etc.) is warranted.