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How Graduate Counselor Education Students Articulate Professional Purpose as It Relates To Clinical Population Selection

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HOW GRADUATE COUNSELOR EDUCATION STUDENTS ARTICULATE

PROFESSIONAL PURPOSE AS IT RELATES TO CLINICAL POPULATION SELECTION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Christina M. Riga

December 2015

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
Department of Counseling, Psychology and Special Education

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

Executive Counselor Education and Supervision Program

Presented by:

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September 29, 2015

HOW GRADUATE COUNSELOR EDUCATION STUDENTS ARTICULATE
PROFESSIONAL PURPOSE AS IT RELATES TO CLINICAL POPULATION SELECTION

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ABSTRACT

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By

Christina M. Riga

December 2015

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers

The purpose of this study was to examine how the ability to articulate a professional purpose informed the lived experiences of master's-level post-practicum students during their practicum experience. This qualitative phenomenologically oriented study used Damon's (2008) definition of purpose, Gestalt principles of figure and ground (Polster & Polster, 1973), van Manen's (1990) four lived existentials, and existing literature regarding the construct of purpose as its theoretical underpinnings. There is no existing literature on how a professional purpose, or the lack of one, factors into a novice counselor's selection of a population with which to work during the practicum experience, and whether the presence or absence of a professional purpose affects the student's ability effectively to perform during the practicum.

For this study, eight master's-level post-practicum students were interviewed regarding their experiences of working with clients at a number of practicum sites. The data were

summarized into five themes that included the following: the process of population selection that lacked intentionality, the phenomenon of clinical resonance, the unprepared counselor, the lack of a professional purpose, and the challenge of dealing with resistant clients. The study suggests that the lack of self-awareness evidenced by an inability to articulate a professional purpose leads to a stressful first professional experience. Under such circumstances, overmatched counselors may be drawn to clients who mirror their own unresolved issues, and thus, may fail to provide clients with appropriate care and to receive the supervisory support needed for building clinical skills. The research raises a pedagogical issue related to the need for self-reflection in counselor education programs and suggests that the counseling field should reexamine the distinction between professional and personal development for counseling practitioners. Suggestions are made as to ways to promote self-awareness in counselor training programs so that students will be more likely to formulate a professional purpose, which brings intentionality to population selection that is consistent with the profession's insistence on intentionality in other aspects of counseling practice.

DEDICATION

To my mom and dad: The late Giuseppe D. and Maria A. Riga

The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.

—Pablo Picasso

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Finally and always, I thank God for allowing my dream to come true.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The current study picks up on the recent renewed interest in the topic of purpose in popular culture and scholarly research. Historically, the concept of purpose has been conflated with the idea of meaning in life (Bundick, 2009; Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). Damon (2008) was the first to distinguish one from the other, and this study employs his definition of purpose: "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self" (p. 33). Damon's definition presumes that an individual with purpose has established a goal with these multiple dimensions: the goal has personal significance, applies the individual's skills set to address a need for those skills, and benefits the larger world. Having an established purpose is critical, because it is a contributing factor for those who are successful in life (Damon, 2008). This study takes a narrower view of purpose, in that it examines how the graduate counselor education student's professional purpose relates to the selection of a client population, and how the student's ability to articulate a professional purpose may affect the counseling session.

A Brief History of Purpose

Damon's (2008) definition of purpose implies that the individual has achieved some measure of awareness, self-understanding, and self-acceptance rooted in a sense of personal identity. Ideally, an individual continually revisits his or her purpose so that it evolves during each stage of life development. These stages are the framework for a cumulative process in which an individual's successful negotiation of each developmental phase affects his or her progress through the next phase. Purpose is important at every stage of life, but according to Erikson's theory of personality development, the articulation of an established purpose is particularly significant during the phase of identity development that occurs between the ages of

12 and 18 (Erikson, 1968). An individual who fails to establish an identity during this phase may lack confidence and could make life-altering choices solely based on others' expectations; for instance, a son may decide to become a doctor in order to satisfy his parents' ambitions rather than out of an internalized established purpose (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 2010).

Economic and social conditions have changed since Erikson formulated his stages of human development. In light of these changes, Arnett (2000) has forwarded the identity phase to the "emerging adult" period between the ages of 18 and 25, when individuals make decisions about career choice, marriage, children, and their worldviews. Arnett (2000) is optimistic that emerging adults have the capacity to resolve the identity phase with some measure of success. However, Damon (2008) has found that youth do not so easily find their place in life, and he challenges higher education to provide opportunities for discourse that might better prepare students for life and its transitions.

The inquiry into the importance of purpose and its link to identity, self-awareness, and self-acceptance is centuries old. Socrates (470-399 B.C.) famously said that the unexamined life is not worth living. For Socrates, knowledge is derived not from the world outside, but rather from the soul within, and the path to this knowledge is through dialogue (Stromberg, 1987; Friedman, 1979). *Dialogue* in this sense refers to internal talk, thinking, and reasoning rather than to conversation with another (Friedman, 1979). While most early thought on the subject of self-knowledge implicitly assumed that it is achievable as well as desirable, recent research on self-knowledge has raised questions about how much, how accurately, and even whether a person can know himself or herself. Vazire and Carlson (2010) define self-knowledge of personality as "accurate self-perceptions about how one typically thinks, feels, and behaves, and awareness of how those patterns are interpreted by others" (p.606). They suggest that some

"accuracy of self-knowledge exists but leaves something to be desired" (Vazire & Carlson, 2010, p. 605). Another study on self-knowledge casts doubt on self-reports, concluding that they are unlikely to be very informative because individuals who do not know themselves well are probably unaware of their own ignorance. Such individuals may also tend to exaggerate their abilities in order to be perceived in a favorable light (Vogt & Colvin, 2010). These findings challenge the traditional view of self-knowledge as the *sine qua non* of psychotherapy, and reflect differing schools of philosophical thought on whether it is ever possible to know what is "true." Nonetheless, concerns about the degree to which self-knowledge can be "authentic" are not necessarily at odds with existentialists such as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Sartre, who held that individuals have an obligation to come to terms with their true nature, and with social psychologists like Jahoda (as cited in Brown, 1991), who defined a mentally healthy person as one whose actual self is closely related to perceived self.

Viktor Frankl (1984) established the importance of discerning meaning in life, a prime component of purpose. Frankl was a prominent Austrian psychiatrist who developed his theory of Logotherapy after enduring the horrors of imprisonment in a concentration camp during World War II. The name *Logotherapy* is derived from the Greek word *logos*, denoting "meaning," and focuses on the "meaning of human existence as well as on man's search for meaning" as man's primary motivational drive (Frankl, 1984, p. 121). Because the search for meaning is man's primary motivation, the lack of awareness of meaning creates an inner emptiness, which Frankl (1984) called the "existential vacuum" resulting in "noogenic neurosis."

More recently, researchers have investigated meaning in life to assess its psychological impact on and benefits to the individual. In a case study, Steger and Kashdan (2007) found that individuals who felt their lives had meaning realized positive effects such as increased optimism,

greater self-actualization, and higher self-esteem as well as less depression and suicidal ideation. Brassai, Piko, and Steger (2011) studied meaning in the lives of Romanian adolescents, and found that it served as a protective factor against health risk behaviors such as binge drinking, substance abuse, unsafe sex, lack of exercise, and diet control. They also found that meaning in life was linked with positive affect, happiness, and optimism (Brassai, Piko, & Steger, 2011). In another study King, Hicks, Krull, and Del Gaiso (2006) found that personal meaning is important for health and well-being (Ryff & Singer, 1998); in emerging adults, personal meaning has been found to be a marker of therapeutic growth and well-being, and a facilitator of adaptive coping (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006; Steger & Kashdan, 2007).

The Study

This study continues the inquiry into the importance of an established purpose by examining the impact of purpose on the effectiveness and well-being of graduate counselor education students at a particular point in their professional development. After choosing to enter the counseling profession and completing most of the required academic training, the graduate counselor education student usually selects a population with which he or she will work during the practicum experience. This is one of the first professional decisions a novice counselor makes. This study focuses on this specific point in the professional development of a graduate counselor education student, and asks how a sense of professional purpose, as it relates to the selection of a client population, affects the student's lived experience. This topic has not yet been explored; this research raises questions for further study, including what process is best suited for pursuing an inquiry into professional purpose, and what effect purpose might have on an actual counseling session from the client's point of view.

Many factors can go into the choice of a work site and selection of a client population. I have heard graduate counseling education students say that they selected a client population on the basis of mundane considerations, such as ease of commute, convenience, and a perceived lack of alternatives. In addition to these practical reasons for selecting a site, a novice counselor might also believe that personal experience with a particular issue will translate into authority that will help others in a similar situation. Considerations like these fall into the gray area where justification and motive may overlap, but not necessarily overtake, purpose. That is, one student may select a site on the basis of purely practical reasons and still embrace the experience. Another student may want to help those who are suffering in ways in which the student has also suffered. These motives are legitimate. But a student's passion for the profession, while not insignificant, is not necessarily evidence of professional purpose, which presupposes that the student has the necessary skills to address an identified need. Similarly, the passionate student may not have the larger perspective in which his or her professional purpose has meaning beyond the self. Professional purpose may be informed by passion, empathy, and other drivers, but is distinct from them.

Kurt Goldstein believed that the drive toward self-actualization is the single inherent motive in every human (Hall, Lindzey & Campbell, 1998). People achieve self-actualization in various and individual ways, but typically through discovery of what they like to do and what gifts or constructive potentials they have (Hall, Lindzey, & Campbell, 1998). Similarly, Maslow proposed, "…in practically every human being, and certainly in almost every newborn baby, that there is an active will toward health, and impulse towards growth, or towards the actualization of human potentialities" (Maslow, 1971, p. 24). This motive is so compelling that it must operate even when an individual does not recognize it. This seemed true in my supervision of graduate

counselor education students, where I observed a pattern in which supervisees who had "unfinished business" seemed to choose to work with clients who had very similar unresolved issues; for example, a graduate counselor education student who was bullied as a child and had not engaged in self-reflection on that experience chose to work with young bullying victims during his practicum. He explained that choice by saying that he could relate to the clients' experience. In practice, however, the counselor's own need for resolution and integration made it difficult for him to attend to the client's needs and caused unproductive tension in the supervisory relationship. The population choice provided opportunities for the counselor's healing and self-actualization, but interfered with his professional effectiveness.

The pull toward self-actualization, then, can be at odds with a graduate counselor education student's articulated established purpose, in that the student counselor may be "pulled" away from a purpose that benefits others and toward a more internally-driven motivation. In a manner analogous to the sympathetic resonance that occurs in a stringed instrument when it vibrates in response to external vibrations of a harmonic likeness, a graduate counselor education student might experience "clinical resonance," and be attracted to conditions that could lead to his or her own healing. There have been no studies regarding the possibility that a graduate counselor education student may gravitate toward clients with the same or similar unfinished business. If this were found to be the case, the field could benefit from protocols and practices that might identify this tendency and that would prepare novice counselors to deal with its ramifications.

This is not to suggest that novice counselors should be steered away from certain experiences. Krumboltz (2009) proposed the "Happenstance Learning Theory," which hypothesizes that "human behavior is the product of countless numbers of learning experiences

made available by both planned and unplanned situations in which individuals find themselves" (p. 135). Certainly, exposure to multiple career options or a choice of client population that seems random or casual may ultimately support a graduate counselor education student's personal growth. For purposes of this study, the graduate counselor education student's ability to articulate a clear established professional purpose in choosing a population with which to work is primary; other factors that influenced the choice are secondary and significant only to the extent that they may interfere with purpose or cloud the student's ability to discern purpose.

Discerning Purpose

Purpose, as Damon (2008) defines it, derives from achieving clarity about a goal that is personally meaningful and has consequences for the larger world. Put another way, an articulated purpose can reveal "figure:" in the context of this study, "figure" is what was in the novice counselor's focus or awareness with regard to population selection (Polster & Polster, 1973). The student's motive may have been less distinct in his or her experience and out of awareness, or "ground." Frequently, ground consists of unfinished business that lingers in the background and repeatedly emerges, when triggered, until it is resolved (Polster & Polster, 1973). Like water seeking its own level, unfinished business unrelentingly seeks resolution; "these incompleted directions do seek completion and, when they get powerful enough, the individual is beset with preoccupation, compulsive behavior, wariness, oppressive energy and much self-defeating activity" (Polster & Polster 1973, p. 36). The interplay of figure and ground, as examined in the narrow context of a graduate counselor education student's population selection, may have significant repercussions on the counseling process and the supervisory relationship. Possibly, this interplay might be a basis for predicting the progress and outcomes of the novice counselor's first professional experience.

Damon (2008) further asserted that purpose motivates, energizes, and enhances confidence, optimism, and a sense of satisfaction. Research suggests that engaging in discourse that reveals purpose has benefits such as avoidance of burnout (Damon, 2008), life satisfaction, psychological well-being, authentic happiness (Ryff et al., 2004; Ryff & Singer, 1998), flow and creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1977). Astin (2004) suggests that cultivating purpose and meaning should be one of the central tasks of higher education. Damon (2008) challenges higher education to achieve this outcome, questioning whether current practices in higher education afford students this necessary and important opportunity.

There is no research or literature on the topic of how graduate counselor education students articulate their professional purpose in relation to their selection of a client population, and the effect that purpose might have on their first professional experience. There are recent studies, however, on the importance of effective preparation for graduate counselor education students before they undertake practical application of techniques and theories that they know only as abstractions. For example, Ventura (2010) assessed supervisees' readiness to work with an assigned population of trauma victims. The data revealed that the supervisees were not prepared to work with trauma, and documented the ensuing potential for damage to the client and the supervisee's self-esteem. The study found that improper attendance to a client's experience of trauma could potentially re-traumatize the client. Feeling "less than" as a result of this outcome, the supervisee can feel so unworthy as to abandon the field (Ventura, 2010).

In a similar study, Owens (2011) examined the lived experience of resident assistants, undergraduate students who live in dormitories and are expected to provide support for the other students in the building. Although resident assistants were trained to work with residents who presented counseling or crisis intervention needs, the study revealed that the training was

8

inadequate to prepare resident assistants for the multiple and overwhelming demands of the role. They were overmatched by students' self-destructive behaviors (drug overdoses, suicide attempts, etc.) and by medical problems requiring quick and calm intervention, such as seizure episodes. Instead of welcoming student requests for help, resident assistants lived in fear that a student might knock on their doors. Over time resident assistants experienced burnout, secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, and other symptoms of severe stress (Owens, 2011).

In addition to this limited research on the importance of preparing students who are taking up professional roles for the first time, some general articles on the proper conduct of clinical supervision discuss troublesome emerging themes and how appropriately to address these themes, such as conflict (Pearson, 2000), anxiety (Gazzola & Theriault, 2007), and countertransference (Collins & Long, 2003), in supervision. These articles are in alignment with the notion that motivations that are out of awareness, or "ground," are distinct from a clearly articulated purpose, which a novice counselor might experience as "figure." These articles reinforce the view that both figure and ground should be of concern to the clinical supervisor. This aspect of the research will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter II.

There is, of course, a great deal of literature concerning the effects of projection and countertransference on the counseling and supervisory relationships. Projection is a tendency to give to the environment something–a judgment, a feeling, a quality or attribute–that actually originates in and belongs to the self (Corey, 2009). Like a Freudian defense mechanism, projection is an interruption to contact that provides relief from the pain of owning one's unbearable feelings. When a counselor projects attributes of self onto a client, it does not matter whether the client actually presents what is in fact the counselor's issue; what matters is that the counselor cannot "see" the client, who is obscured by the veil of the counselor's projection.

Countertransference exerts a similar detrimental effect on the relationship. Countertransference is the process by which the client evokes beliefs, attitudes, and feelings in the therapist that may interfere with the therapist's objectivity. Countertransference is a form of role reversal in the counseling relationship: the counselor "needs" the client to behave in a certain way, for the counselor's benefit, and loses the ability to focus on what the client needs. According to Freud, countertransference is the result of unresolved conflicts in the counselor's own life (as cited in Owens, 2011). Countertransference can also occur when the counselor absorbs traumatic feelings being explored by the client (Collins & Long, 2003; Figley, 2002). This study examines the effect of professional purpose and whether it shapes the graduate counselor education student's experience before, during, and after the counseling relationship begins. It does not explore the issues of projection or countertransference, except to document whether they emerge once the counseling and supervisory relationships have been established.

Gestalt theory concepts of figure and ground, as articulated by Polster and Polster (1973), inform this inquiry. In interviews, graduate counselor education students were asked to articulate their professional purpose as it related to their selection of a particular population, in order to identify the perceived figural rationale for the choice. Data concerning ground was to be elicited through open-ended questions, and provided a glimpse into motivations that may or may not have supported the stated purpose. Self-reporting on counseling sessions and the supervisory experience revealed the effect of figure and ground on both relationships, as well as on the students' perception of their professional effectiveness as counselors.

This study examines how graduate counselor education students articulate their professional purpose in relation to population selection, and how this may influence the outcomes of the ensuing counseling process. A graduate counselor education student might be

attracted to conditions that could lead to his or her own healing; this tendency may be integral to the student's stated purpose or may interfere with it. In either case, the field could benefit from identifying the basis upon which a graduate counselor education student selects a population with which to work, and from devising strategies that reinforce a strong professional purpose or that minimize the effects of its absence early in a counselor's career.

Statement of the Problem

Graduate counselor education students encounter many challenges as they engage in practicum experience. Stress and anxiety are inherent in what, for most novice counselors, is their first professional placement (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Pearson, 2000; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003). At its worst, the anxiety of the situation can be paralyzing for the student (Owens, 2011). At its best, the novice counselor grows along with the client (Gazzola & Theriault, 2007). In either case, the hope is that the novice counselor will learn from the practical experience without making errors that could harm the client. This experience is daunting even for students who have excelled in the academic portion of their program; there is no guarantee that a student with high grades will have the capacity to translate and apply theory in a counseling session (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003). Some students perform better than others; while there are many possible explanations for variations in competence and performance, this study concerns the effect of the student counselor's professional purpose–or lack of purpose–on experience and performance.

Most graduate counselor education students are in the "emerging adulthood" phase of development, in which they are expected to make their own decisions, often for the first time, about consequential issues like love, marriage, children, career, and worldview (Arnett, 2000). Although purpose-infused action can make a difference at any stage of life, it appears to be

11

critical during this identity phase of development (Damon, 2008). While Arnett (2000) concludes that many emerging adults navigate this developmental period with some measure of success, Damon (2008) argues that this is less often the case. He believes that the failure to achieve a consistent sense of well-being at this developmental stage may stem in large part from the individual's failure to understand the importance of having, and acting in accordance with, an established purpose. Lack of purpose, due either to a failure to identify a purpose or to appreciate the need for one, can have demoralizing effects on the individual that can last a long time and leave people feeling empty and resentful (Damon, 2008).

As previously described, in this study purpose is defined as "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self," (Damon, 2008, p. 33). It is "the final answer to the question of 'Why? Why am I doing this? Why does it matter? Why is it important for me and for the world beyond me? Why do I strive to accomplish the end?'" (Damon, 2008, p. 33). Having an established purpose is part of what motivates, energizes, and imparts confidence and optimism in the individual; it can make the difference between those who succeed in their endeavors, and those who do not (Damon, 2008).

Bundick (2009) confirmed that having an established purpose during emerging adulthood is associated with psychological well-being and, in the absence of mental illness, confers psychological benefits well into adulthood (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Psychological well-being in this context is associated with *eudaimonia*, the sustained happiness that flows from an established purpose, rather than with the more fleeting hedonistic happiness derived from pleasure-seeking pursuits (Bundick, 2009; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Ryff, Singer, & Love, 2004). In ancient times, Aristotle (350 B.C.) posited the connection between *eudaimonia* and internal

daimon or true self, the uniqueness with which individuals come into the world. In his view, the central human task is to discover *daimon* through the process of self-reflection. Aristotle's philosophical model meshes with research confirming that the fruitful search for meaning in life, characterized by self-reflection and open-mindedness, has been consistently related at any age to greater optimism, self-actualization, and self-esteem, as well as to lower depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (Steger & Kashdan, 2007).

Finding purpose is an internal process through which individuals seek a better understanding of themselves, their values, skills, and how they relate to the external world (Damon, 2008). Such self-insight and self-knowledge is a function of self-awareness, which is necessary for identity development (Erikson, 1968). Self-awareness is considered an important characteristic across various cultures (Quinn, 2012) and has been cited by Carl Rogers as a particularly essential quality in the effective counselor (Overholser, 2007).

This study furthers current thinking on purpose and its connection to well-being and effectiveness by inquiring into the application of these findings to graduate counselor education students undertaking a practicum experience as part of a program preparing them for the counseling profession. These students are, for the most part, emerging adults. They have already made the pivotal choice to enter the counseling field. Their first professional choice as novice counselors is to determine what population they will serve during their practicum experience. If this choice derives from an articulated professional purpose, the research implicitly indicates that the novice counselor has engaged in personal growth, has or can develop relationship-building skills, and has healthy self-esteem and a sense of command over life (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, & King, 2009). These are central components of well-being, health and happiness (Bundick, 2009; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Ryff, Singer, & Love, 2004). In counseling,

these components are also critical to working effectively with clients (Overholser, 2007). A novice counselor's lack of purpose might have negative implications for performance that would taint his or her practicum experience as well as the experiences of clients and supervisors who are part of that experience.

On the other hand, articulating a professional purpose may provide the graduate counselor education student with a solid foundation likely to enhance the prospects of ultimate professional success. A professional purpose enhances confidence and self-esteem, and can ward off the effects of burnout (Damon, 2008), a discouraging condition that could cause a novice counselor prematurely to abandon the field (Ventura, 2010). At the very least, a lack of purpose may be a manifestation of a lack of self-awareness that can diminish the novice counselor's practicum experience. It may also indicate that the novice counselor has not yet developed the psychological maturity accurately to assess and process the complex dynamics at work in counseling. Polster & Polster (1973) discuss the role of perception in the individual's movement toward closure:

> The perceiver not only structures what he perceives into economical units of experience, he also edits and censors what he sees and hears, selectively harmonizing his perceptions with his inner needs. Just as a hungry person perceives food when it is not there, so does another unsatisfied person continue to work out, in his current activities, unfinished business from his past. (p. 31)

Similarly, Rogers (1961) states that:

> Individuals who are more mentally healthy may be able to more easily understand themselves because there is less of a need to engage in distortion or denial among well-

adjusted individuals than among those for whom accurate self-knowledge highlights personal inadequacies and painful truths. (as cited in Vogt & Colvin, 2010, p. 240)

Carl Jung's concept of synchronicity specifically suggested that "in the process of psychotherapy there is often a significant relationship between the patient's problem and the therapist's own struggles" (as cited in Roehlke, 1988, p. 133). Bolen (as cited in Roehlke, 1988) also described the counseling process as a synchronous opportunity for the therapist to encounter aspects of himself as he sits with his clients. If conducted with awareness and proper timing, the counseling session is an opportunity for both client and therapist to move toward resolution (Roehlke, 1988). It seems likely, then, that a practicum student who has little or no self-awareness may be less effective, and might actually do harm. That student might be less able to tend to the client, and may re-traumatize the client as a result; depending on the issue, the practicum student might also become re-traumatized. The consequences of a lack of self-awareness may carry over into the supervision relationship, making it more conflicted even if the supervisor is skilled in that role.

This study sheds light on the very real challenges graduate counselor education students face as they take their fledgling steps as clinicians. Course catalogs from universities around the country commonly describe the practicum in various fields as one in which a series of practical experiences help students learn how to assume professional roles in a variety of practice settings and to develop professional identification with the field. The practicum is a learning experience geared to the student's level of expertise. Programming based on the student's need for practical application of academic learning, and the University's desire for a formative assessment of the student's ability and confirmation of the relevance of its curriculum, must account for the fact that this is a setting in which mistakes will probably occur. The population served is comprised

of real clients, with real issues, and a legitimate expectation that the novice counselor is capable of offering real assistance. Steps must be taken to minimize potential harm to the client. This study examines whether one of those steps might be affording an opportunity for graduate counselor education students to develop and articulate a professional purpose as it relates to the selection of the population.

Graduate counselor education students embarking on their practicum are placed in a position that may be more stressful, and ultimately less productive, if they have not been led to it by an established professional purpose. As a novice supervisor, for example, I observed a pattern in which graduate counselor education students under my clinical supervision chose populations that mirrored unresolved issues of their own, with no awareness of the parallels. Counseling and supervision outcomes suffered as the student counselors struggled to help clients handle issues that they had not worked on themselves. These novice counselors–and their clients–might have had a much different experience if the counselors had been guided by a heightened awareness of professional purpose, as defined in this study, in selecting the population for their first professional clinical experience.

Although it may be realistic to expect that novice counselors will make mistakes with their clients, in order to learn from them, it also could be argued that academic institutions must provide more targeted support to insure that graduate counselor education students do no harm while they learn. The Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the ACA (2014) states that, "counselors practice only within the boundaries of their competence…" (p. 8) to protect the client from possible harm. The Code seems to impose a form of self-monitoring, and does not articulate the parameters of a training program's responsibility for ensuring competence in the student. However, this study provides insights into how the process of articulating a professional

purpose can enrich the practicum experience for counselors and their clients. It raises issues with respect to the pedagogy of counselor education, an area of inquiry that is relatively new and not yet well-developed (Ventura, 2010). Because this study is a step toward establishing that there may be a link between a graduate counselor education student's emerging professional competence and his or her self-awareness, as manifested in an articulated professional purpose, it might also raise the larger question of whether the line between personal and professional development should be less distinct in counseling than it is in other fields. It certainly raises the question of whether higher education institutions should make a concerted effort to initiate a dialogue about professional purpose with their students, to ensure a greater chance of their earliest professional success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative existential phenomenology-oriented study is to explore the lived experience of the graduate counselor education student as it relates to the process of selecting a population with which to work. According to van Manen (1990), the genesis of any research study is an experience accompanied by a sense of curiosity about the potential of the same occurring again with another. As a novice supervisor, I detected a possible connection between a supervisee's lack of professional purpose and his or her lack of intentionality concerning the choice of population. I wondered whether the supervisee who has not reflected upon his or her sense of professional purpose would be more likely to gravitate towards a population that mirrors his or her unresolved issues, seeking the potential for resolution as described by Polster and Polster (1973). I observed that a lack of professional purpose can lead to issues in supervision such as countertransference, resistance, feelings of incompetence and inadequacy, and re-traumatization; and that these issues can be compounded by the supervisee's

17

difficult relationships with clients in the mirror population. I was curious about whether my experience was an isolated incident. If there is a pattern around the role of purpose in the graduate counselor education student's process of population selection, I wondered what implications it might have for the field.

There is already much research on how a counselor's own unresolved issues can disrupt counseling and supervision. However, no research has been done on how the graduate counselor education student articulates his or her professional purpose in choosing a population with which to work. The more we know about how graduate counselor education students engage in their own learning journey, the better we can prepare them to attend to their clients' needs. This study demonstrates a pattern in which a graduate counselor education student's lack of professional purpose results in choices that make the learning journey more painful and difficult for the counselor and client. There are a range of ways in which that pattern might be disrupted. For instance, it may be time to re-evaluate the field's general view that a graduate counselor education student's decision to attend counseling is a personal, optional choice. There is much at stake in the counseling profession, and to the extent that a graduate counselor education student's use of self undermines his or her professional competence, educators in the field may well ask whether personal and professional development should be viewed as separate domains.

The purpose of this investigation is to identify patterns that may shed light on the graduate counselor education student's learning experience and how that experience might be enhanced for the ultimate benefit of clients and the profession as a whole. This inquiry concludes, therefore, with findings that can be shared with other professionals as part of a discussion about what supervisors can do to prepare graduate counselor education students for the most productive practicum experience. These areas have not been thoroughly studied despite

18

their potential to have a lasting effect on graduate counselor education students, their clients, and their supervisors.

When unresolved themes emerge and are brought to figure or awareness, the supervisee can grow and change; change is incremental, not monumental. For that reason, supervisees might gain the most benefit from engaging in professional purpose discourse or self-reflective analysis early in their training, the better to anticipate and prevent any damage that might otherwise occur during the practicum. The pedagogy in relation to this issue is discussed in Chapter II, and this study's ramifications for the pedagogy are discussed in Chapter V. Perhaps a larger question is what deters graduate students from engaging in discourse on professional purpose or pursuing self-reflective work. A study that examines the relationship between articulating professional purpose and effectiveness in the counseling and supervision relationships and shows why this self-reflective work is important may motivate students to engage in it, and inspire instructors to encourage or even require it. An emphasis on development of professional purpose might result in much-needed clarity in the field: according to the American Counseling Association (ACA), "strengthening identity" is a top concern and goal for the profession (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011). This priority is striking for what it acknowledges as absent in the field. If, overall, the counseling profession itself struggles with articulating and strengthening professional identity, counseling students must certainly struggle with these constructs. We must consider the implications for our profession, students, and counseling sessions. This study illuminates a connection between professional purpose, as it relates to a graduate counselor education student's selection of a client population, and the development of professional identity that has been deemed so important to the field as a whole.

Research Questions

This research explores the lived experience of the graduate student in counselor education as it relates to the process of selecting a population with which to work during the practicum placement. The guiding question of this inquiry is:

1. What are the lived experiences of graduate counselor education students in selecting the clinical population for their practicum experience?

Subsidiary questions that assist in capturing the totality of the lived experience of the graduate counselor education student and the process of population selection include the following:

1. How do graduate counselor education students articulate a sense of professional purpose as it relates to the selection of a population with which to work?

2. How might the collected data speak to the need for changes in graduate counselor education programs?

Protocol for Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

First, I secured permission from the department heads of counseling at several graduate counseling education departments certified by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) in the Western PA region to gather my sample. Second, individual professors granted my request for permission to speak in class to the post-practicum students. I explained my study to the class, and asked for volunteers. Interview appointments were scheduled at a time and location convenient for the participants, at either the assigned campus of the student or at Duquesne University's Canevin Hall. Most individual interviews lasted for approximately 45 to 60 minutes, after informed consent had been explained and understood, and relevant forms had been signed. Questions for the semi-structured individual

interview can be found in Appendix A. Interviews were recorded on audiotape for later

transcription. Each student participant was asked to review the transcription for accuracy and

authenticity upon its completion. The student's name never appeared in the description of the

data, on the audiotape or in the transcription. Transcriptions did not include material from

interviews that might identify the subjects or anyone to whom they refer. Audio recordings were

analyzed and transcribed by the Investigator alone, and were destroyed at the conclusion of the

research. All written materials, including consent forms and the key that links subjects' numeric

codes and names, remain in a locked file in the Investigator's home. Transcriptions will be

retained for a period not exceeding 5 years, per the recommendation of the National Institute of

Health (NIH).

Limitations of the Study

This investigation used purposeful sampling to select approximately eight to twelve

graduate counselor education students, without regard to age, sex, or race, who had completed

the practicum experience in a CACREP graduate counseling education program in the Western

PA region. Results may not be generalizable beyond the specific population from which the

sample was drawn, due to the sample's small size. There was also no way to insure that

participants' responses were truthful. Similarly, participants might not have recalled events as

they actually occurred because of selective memory or the distorting effect of time. Interviews

were captured on audio recordings only, so the experience was not reproduced in its totality. To

compensate, I documented as many of the non-verbal elements of interviews as possible in field

notes, and incorporated the various methods to counteract potential researcher bias, as described

in the next chapter.

Theoretical Framework

Data derived from interviews were coded and categorized according to the three theoretical frameworks that inform this investigation: purpose, gestaltism, and van Manen's existential phenomenology-oriented theory. The development of theories about what constitutes "purpose" has been discussed earlier in this Chapter. I employed the Gestalt approach when I supervised graduate counseling education students and began to formulate the questions that have resulted in this research. I adopted other, equally valid, approaches in those sessions as well. While I favor the paradigm of the humanistic-existential approach, I believe that all theoretical orientations have their usefulness and rationale. Hansen (2014) discussed the various psychotherapy orientations and meta-analysis outcomes and found that none was significantly more effective than another (Smith & Glass, 1977). This finding has been consistent throughout decades of research (Wampold, 2001). However, the figure-ground concept lends itself to an inquiry into what is in and out of the awareness of graduate counseling education students, and provides consistency in the way I have thought about this subject since I first became interested in it. The constructs of purpose and figure-ground were the primary methodologies incorporated in this research; van Manen's existential phenomenologically-oriented theory was included to provide additional context for examining this study's guiding question, but not to the same extent. Each of these theoretical frameworks is explained in detail later in this chapter.

Gestalt Perspective

Gestalt principles—particularly figure, ground (Polster & Polster, 1973), and the benefit of attending to a subject's experience rather than to an intellectualized version of it—provide a theoretical framework for interpreting the data in this study. A graduate counselor education student's response to a direct question about his or her process of population selection identifies

the perceived figural rationale for that selection. Other data relating to supervision and responses about the totality of the practicum experience identify the unperceived rationale outside the counselor's awareness, or ground. Both aspects of the counselor's experience are important to the data analysis because this research is designed to explore the impact of self-awareness, as evidenced by a clear professional purpose, on the practicum experience. The study inquires into the possibility that a graduate counselor education student's decision to work with a particular client population may be influenced by issues of which the counselor is unaware, and which only certain types of clients might be expected to present to a significant degree, as much as by the counselor's offered explanation for the choice.

The Four Lived Existentials

van Manen (1990) believes that the emphasis in phenomenologically-oriented research is always on the meaning of the lived experience, and that it is methodologically correct to "borrow" the experiences of others, because they allow us to become "in-formed." van Manen (1990) discusses the use of personal experience as a logical starting point for phenomenological research, on the grounds that others may also experience what one person has experienced. As described elsewhere in this Chapter, my research question developed in precisely this way after I observed that my supervisees seemed to have gravitated toward populations that mirrored their own issues, unaware of either this linkage or of the difficulties that would be likely to emerge as a consequence of their choice.

van Manen (1990) identifies four discrete aspects of experience that, in the aggregate, capture the essence of the subjective lived experience of the other. These "lived existentials" are lived space (spatiality); lived body (corporeality); lived time (temporality); and lived human relations. The lived existentials, which are described in detail below in Chapter III, provide the

theoretical framework for understanding the conceptual themes that emerged during the interview process. Ventura (2010) and Owens (2011) used this framework in their studies, which, like mine, investigate the impact of role readiness on successful student outcomes.

Operational Definitions

Purpose: "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self" (Damon, 2008, p. 33).

Professional Purpose: Purpose, as defined above, in the context of an individual's work in a chosen field or profession. There is no widely accepted definition of this term, which, in this study, is employed as a subset of a more generalized purpose or intention.

Graduate counselor education student: For the purpose of this study only, a graduate counselor education student is defined as a student who is currently enrolled in a CACREP accredited Masters program with a focus on school, community, or marriage and family counseling. These students have already completed their practicum requirements and are transitioning into the internship phase.

Gestalt figural: That which appears in an individual's awareness as a solid, well-defined aspect of experience (Polster & Polster 1973).

Gestalt ground: The part of experience that is receding, less distinct, and out of awareness (Polster & Polster 1973).

*Projection***:** In Gestalt theory, projection is an interruption of or resistance to contact whereby the individual disowns certain aspects of self and assigns them to the environment; the client can, therefore, blames others for his or her problems (Corey, 2009).

Unfinished Business: Gestalt terminology for the unexpressed feelings that are associated with distinct memories and fantasies. These feelings may be resentment, rage, hatred, pain, anxiety,

grief, guilt, and abandonment; they are not fully experienced in awareness. They linger in the background and bleed into the present, where they cause preoccupations, compulsive behaviors, wariness, and other self- defeating behaviors. This will persist until the person faces and deals with the feelings (Polster & Polster, 1973).

Clinical Resonance: For the purpose of this study only, clinical resonance refers to a graduate education counselor student's tendency to be attracted to potential client populations that mirror the student's own unresolved issues. The student may or may not have the self-awareness to detect this tendency and prepare for its consequences.

Countertransference: The process by which the client evokes beliefs, attitudes, and feelings in the therapist that may interfere with the therapist's objectivity during sessions. According to Freud, counter- transference is the result of unresolved conflicts in the counselor's own life (as cited in Owens, 2011). Countertransference can also occur when the counselor absorbs traumatic feelings being explored by the client (Collins & Long, 2003; Figley, 2002).

Counselor burnout: "A syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do people work of some kind" (as cited in Ventura, 2010, p. 246).

Resistance: Generally, a disruptive response by a client to a topic that is perceived as sensitive. From a Gestalt perspective, a way of coping with life situations that can be problematic if it interferes with healthy relationships or functional if employed with awareness (Corey, 2009).

Re-traumatization: An experience of trauma that recurs in the client when the counselor is not attending to the client's needs, or in the counselor whose unresolved issues are triggered upon hearing the client's stories of traumatic events (as cited in Ventura, 2010).

Synchronicity: "In the process of psychotherapy there is often a significant relationship between the patient's problem and the therapist's own struggles" (as cited in Roelke, 1988, p. 133).

Summary

To date there has been no literature on the lived experience of the graduate counselor education student and how the articulation of professional purpose, as it relates to the selection of a client population, affects that experience. There is a renewed general interest in the importance of and benefits to be derived from achieving clarity of purpose, particularly with this age group; this study explores how an established professional purpose may enrich a beginning counselor's first clinical experience. There is much literature concerning the effects of projection, countertransference, and other relational issues that occur during the counseling relationship; the process by which student counselors make professional decisions that create the framework for their practicum experience has not been studied. No studies have been done on whether there is a pattern to these "choices" that may be driven, at least in part, by a lack of professional purpose. Lacking purpose, graduate counselor education students may select a population with which to work because they have been "pulled" by their own issues; there is no accepted term to describe such a professional decision rooted in unawareness, which is defined as "clinical resonance" for purposes of this study. This novel study addresses a gap in the research, and may inspire further inquiry into how graduate counselor education students can better be prepared to meet the demands of their profession.

Organization of the Proposal

This research begins with a general description of the study, its rationale, and significance to the profession. More specifically, I discuss the importance of having graduate counselor education students identify, with intentionality, a professional purpose as it relates to

the selection of the population with which they will work. I employ Damon's (2008) definition of purpose and describe in detail its multidimensional meaning. I include the benefits of having a purpose and the potential risks inherent in its absence. I mention the protocol used in this study. Finally, I include a summary of the theoretical perspectives including Gestalt, and van Manen's existential phenomenologically-oriented theory.

The remaining parts of this proposal include Chapter II, an exhaustive review of the literature pertinent to this study; the literature review includes works on the history of purpose, its multidimensional definition, and its significance to this study. I discuss the research on the potential benefits of having an established purpose, and other studies discussing the deleterious effects of its absence. The review then shifts to examine the research on the potential implications a lack of professional purpose may have for the client, counseling session, and supervision. The literature review concludes with an examination of the research on counselor identity and development, and the pedagogy of counseling.

Chapter III discusses the methodology used in this investigation, explains and justifies the use of that methodology, and discusses the theoretical lens through which the data was analyzed. The methodology's theoretical framework, which includes Gestalt concepts and van Manen's Lived Existentials, are discussed in detail. Chapter III also sets forth the research design and protocols; how the inquiry was made trustworthy, and how the data was collected. Chapter III concludes with an account of the limitations and delimitations of this study, followed by a summary.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter discusses the scholarly findings that are relevant to this investigation. This study is the first to examine how graduate counselor education students articulate their sense of professional purpose as it relates to the selection of a population with which to work. Although this is a narrow topic, research on the effects of purpose has application to an examination of professional purpose; these findings illuminate the potential implications that an articulated professional purpose, or the lack of a professional purpose, may have on the graduate counselor education student, the counseling session, and the supervisory relationship. This chapter is comprised of four sections. The first section examines sources that discuss purpose as a broad concept, including its history, its definition and measurement, the benefits of discerning one's purpose, and the potential risks associated with a lack of purpose. This section also reviews research that pertains to the effects of establishing a professional purpose with intentionality, and how articulating a professional purpose might influence the graduate counselor education student, the client, the supervisory relationship, and the counseling profession. The second section discusses counselor identity and development. The third section discusses the literature concerning the theoretical framework used in this inquiry, including Gestalt theory, and van Manen's lived existentials. The final section examines the literature on recent trends in the pedagogy of counseling.

Having a purpose is one of the factors that makes the difference between those who flounder and those who are successful in life, and is of particular importance in the development of emerging adults (Damon, 2008) such as the participants in this study. These graduate counselor education students have undertaken a course of professional learning; this study examines how a sense of professional purpose informs their first practical professional decision,

made when they select a population with which to work. The findings suggest that we may well ask whether graduate counselor education students should be encouraged to cultivate a professional purpose and intentionally employ it in their professional decision-making. Arnett (2000) is confident that emerging adults have the capacity successfully to achieve their purpose; Damon (2008) questions whether higher education provides students with sufficient opportunities for discourse on purpose. This study takes Damon's question one step further by examining the qualitative impact of professional purpose on a specific group of higher education students already engaged in a process of professional development. Its findings could be the basis for additional research on whether the development of professional purpose is akin to preparation for effectively dealing with the inherent challenges that graduate counselor education students face in their first professional encounters with clients.

Purpose

The topic of purpose has been researched and analyzed for many years. From among the many definitions of 'purpose,' this study adopts the definition recently proposed by William Damon, who isolates three aspects of purpose extracted from three individual and separate measurement scales discussed later in this chapter. Purpose, according to Damon, is "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self" (Damon, 2008, p. 33). 'Stability' suggests that "one's purpose is deeply rooted in one's identity and has a life-long time horizon" (Bundick, 2009, p. 6). A 'generalized intention' dominates multiple domains rather than a single facet of life, such as a career choice (Damon, 2008). This multidimensional definition of purpose proposes that an individual has a set of skills that corresponds to a need for these skills; that there is some personal meaning associated with the individual's goals; and that the goals have a

perceived value or contribution to the world beyond the self. According to Damon, Menon, and Bronk (2003), "purpose has been conflated with 'meaning in life' in the literature, which has been influenced by Viktor Frankl's 'search for meaning.'" Purpose and meaning have been only recently distinguished from each other, in the research and findings of Damon (2008).

The History of Defining and Measuring Purpose

Viktor Frankl and his seminal work *Man's Search for Meaning* have greatly influenced scholarly thought about purpose (Bundick, 2009; Damon, 2008; Damon, et al., 2003). Frankl (1984) was a holocaust survivor whose wife, parents, and brother died in Nazi gas chambers. His philosophy, which evolved into his theory of *Logotherapy,* emerged as he endured extreme cruelty and loss. The name *Logotherapy* is derived from the Greek word *logos*, denoting "meaning," and the theory focuses on the "meaning of human existence as well as on man's search for meaning" as the primary human motivational drive (Frankl, 1984, p. 121). Because the search for meaning is man's primary motivation, the lack of awareness of meaning creates an inner emptiness, which Frankl (1984) called the "existential vacuum" resulting in "noogenic neurosis." Frankl's theory spawned a movement, in psychology and other domains, that focuses on the significance of purpose or meaning in life and its impact on an individual's well-being.

Instrumentation for Purpose Identification

The components of purpose have been refined through researchers' attempts to ascertain what difference it makes. To elaborate on Frankl's theory and his concept of noogenic neurosis, Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964) conducted a quantitative research study for which they devised a Purpose in Life Test (PIL). The PIL is based on an existential concept of 'purpose' or 'meaning in life' and contains twenty-two questions on a 7-point scale; it is similar to the Lickert scale and poses questions such as "Do you feel your life is without purpose?" (Crumbaugh & Maholick,

1964). The results of the study supported Frankl's noogenic hypothesis that a "complete emptiness of purpose in life" produces neurosis that takes an unusual form and has a psychopathological quality not presented in 'normal' groups (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964, p. 200).

Although the PIL questionnaire is in common use, it has been criticized because it inquires into items linked to other constructs, such as mood, which can lead to variations in results (Steger et al., 2006). Steger et al. (2006) hoped to eliminate this concern by conducting research on a newly devised instrument to measure meaning in life. Because 'meaning in life' has so many definitions, the researchers created their own: for the purpose of their study, meaning in life is defined as "the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one's being and existence" (Steger et al., 2006, p. 81). The study collected data from the results of a test consisting of 10 questions on a 7-point Lickert scale ranging from 1 = Absolutely untrue to 7 = Absolutely true. Participants were asked to rank the truthfulness of statements such as "I am always searching for something that makes my life feel significant" (Steger et al., 2006). The results revealed that the newly devised Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) was an improvement in that it offers the ability to measure the search for meaning in a shorter version with better discriminant validity and no construct overlap (Steger et al., 2006). This instrument is one of the three that was used to capture an aspect of the essence of purpose as defined by Damon, specifically for purpose identification (Bundick & Tirri, 2014).

Steger and Kashdan (2007) studied the longitudinal stability of well-being measurement instruments such as the Meaning in Life questionnaire (MLQ) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), which previously had been tested only on a short-term basis. During the study undergraduate student participants were given the MIL and SWLS questionnaires with follow-up

after one year. The results revealed that the measures appeared to be moderately stable, if not robust, over a one-year period, and that significant life events, such as divorce or unemployment, may influence levels of meaning in life and life satisfaction (Steger & Kashdan, 2007). Steger and Kashdan (2007) believe that the components of meaning in life are linked to self-understanding, including how individuals relate to others and to the environment.

Instrumentation for Goal-Directedness

Because purpose primarily dwells in the mind and has such a subjective impact, qualitative research tools used to study purpose present design and measurement challenges; an instrument's parameters must encompass the full range of potential experience while also allowing for the commonly held interpretations of terms. In the 1980s, for example, Ryff (1989) conducted research on psychological well-being in the belief that previous studies on this topic had neglected to define in theoretical terms the essential features associated with it. Ryff (1989) created a qualitative measurement to assess psychological well-being; this theoretically grounded instrument focuses on multiple domains attributed to psychological well-being, including self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. These domains give a complete picture of the individual's inner experience and the quality of the individual's interactions with the environment, and contributed to Damon's (2008) multidimensional definition of purpose. Because Ryff's model also describes qualities that have been specifically linked elsewhere to professional success in a counselor, it has been integrated into this study's examination of how an established professional purpose may affect the experience of the graduate counselor education student.

Although Ryff (1989) questioned the general applicability of her constructs on the grounds that they are derived from middle-class values and are thus not relevant or attainable for

32

individuals from different social classes, ethnicities, or cultural backgrounds, her model describes qualities that are central to the success of a counseling professional. For example, Ryff defines 'self-acceptance' as "a central feature of mental health as well as a characteristic of self-actualization, optimal functioning, and maturity" (Ryff, 1989, p. 1071). Self-actualizers have been identified as possessing "strong feelings of empathy," the capacity for rendering greater love towards others, and more complete identification with others. 'Positive relations with others' indicates the capacity for warm, trusting, and loving relationships. 'Autonomy' emphasizes qualities of self-determination, independence, and self-regulation of behavior; an autonomous person is able to trust the inner self, rather than constantly seeking answers from outside or bowing to external pressure. 'Environmental mastery' is the ability to choose or successfully create a suitable environment. 'Purpose in life' describes the individual's belief that life has purpose and meaning, and is associated with noble goals, intentionality, and a sense of direction. 'Personal growth' relates to the 'openness to experience' that promotes constant personal development. Ryff's six essential components of psychological well-being are theoretically based and correspond to what it means to 'be healthy, well and fully functioning." An abbreviated version of this instrument was used to capture the essence of purpose specific to goal-directedness in Damon's definition of purpose (Bundick & Tirri, 2014).

Ryff and Keyes (1995) revisited the structure of the psychological well-being instrument later in a study that examined a more nationally representative sample, and in which a confirmatory factor analysis provided support for the proposed 6-factor model.

Instrumentation for Beyond-the-Self-Orientation of Life Goals

The third instrument used to define purpose specific to 'beyond-the-self-orientation of life goals' measures selected items in connection with major life goals, including relationships,

religion, and social domains; it was developed by Roberts and Robins (2000; see Bundick &

Tirri, 2014). Participants rate the importance of seven life domains on a 5 point Likert scale,

from 1 = Not Important to Me to 5 = Very Important to Me. A sample goal, for example, would

be "having a satisfying marriage/relationship" (Roberts and Robins, 2000). Roberts and Robin

(2000) discuss the difference between personality traits, which are "our patterned ways of

behaving," and goals, which are "our aspirations for who we want to become and what type of

life [we want] to live," (p. 1286). Roberts and Robins researched whether personality traits

predict life goals; their conclusions were consistent with Socioanalytic theory, which suggests

that people select goals that reinforce their identity (Roberts & Robins, 2000).

The Happiness Factor

Happiness is another construct that is commonly linked to purpose (Damon, 2008) and to

psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Ryff et al.,

2004) in more recent research, although happiness as an ideal dates back to Aristotle's

Nicomachean Ethics. Ryff (1989; Deci & Ryan, 2008) distinguishes Aristotelian *eudaimonia*

from the more contemporary form of happiness that is derived from *hedonia*. The former is the

virtuous striving toward excellence based on one's unique talents and potential, which Aristotle

considered to be the noblest goal in life (Loomis, 1971; Nagel, 1972; Waterman, 1993). In

Aristotle's time, it was believed that each individual was born with a personal *daimon*, which

embodied the highest possible expression of one's nature (Loomis, 1971) and could be

manifested through early training in good habits coupled with deliberate intention and choice.

Eudaimonia is long-lasting and can be achieved through development of an individual's

strengths and virtues (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Norrish & Vell-Brodick, 2008). In contrast, hedonic

happiness is passive, pleasure-oriented and fleeting (Damon, 2008; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryff, 1989; Ryff et al., 2004).

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) believes that people achieve *eudaimonia* when they are in a state of 'flow.' This state occurs when one is completely immersed in an engaging activity, is intrinsically motivated, and is capable of holding the balance between the challenges of the activity and the skills required to meet those challenges. The individual must continually seek out challenges to maintain flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997); this process leads to improved performance, further learning and additional skill development.

Ways to Instill Purpose in Life

According to Kashdan and McKnight (2009), purpose is developed through proactive, reactive, and social learning. Proactive development occurs when an individual engages with the world, experiences life, and achieves a heightened awareness of his or her interests and skills; this process is consistent with Krumboltz's (2009) Happenstance Learning Theory. Reactive development occurs when an individual responds to a stressful life event such as losing a job, facing a terminal illness, or the death of a child by re-evaluating past beliefs about the meaning of life; this process is consistent with Frankl's (1984) Logotherapy. Social learning occurs when an individual experiences life vicariously, observes favorable outcomes, and later imitates the behavior; this process is consistent with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 2001). Kashdan and McKnight (2009) believe that purpose provides a solid foundation that permits the individual to be "more resilient to obstacles, stress, and strain" (p. 303).

Damon (2008) asserts that individuals can develop purpose in a more sequential process comprised of these steps:

1. Inspiring communication with persons outside the immediate family

2. Observation of purposeful people at work

3. First moment of revelation: something important in the world can be corrected or improved

4. Second moment of revelation: I can contribute something myself and make a difference

5. Identification of purpose, along with initial attempts to accomplish something

6. Support from immediate family

7. Expanded efforts to pursue one's purpose in original and consequential ways

8. Acquiring the skills needed for this pursuit

9. Increased practical effectiveness

10. Enhanced optimism and self-confidence

11. Long-term commitment to the purpose

12. Transfer of the skills and character strengths gained in pursuit of one purpose to other areas of life. (pp. 96-97)

Purpose as it Relates to Identity Phase of Development

According to Erik Erikson's psychosocial developmental stages, individuals develop purpose during the "identity stage" between the ages of 12 and 18 (Erikson, 1968). At this age adolescents engage with the environment and begin to form ideas regarding their identity in relation to family, friends, politics, school, and career choices. According to Erikson, individuals who have sufficient support can master this phase with some measure of success; without sufficient support, the individual will be left with feelings of identity confusion and uncertainty about how to proceed with life (Erikson, 1968). The sociologist James Marcia (2010) expanded the notion of the identity phase of development by proposing four types of identity. Each type

reflects the degree to which one is in the process of 'committing to' an identity and/or is 'in search of' identity; an individual's stage of identity development is indicated by the point at which search and commitment intersect. There is no normative developmental process through which the types are typically experienced, and an individual may occupy one or more stages in quick succession.

Marcia's (2010) four stages are identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement:

1. Identity diffusion is the lowest stage of identity development, in which the individual has no concept of identity and is making no effort to develop one. If the individual remains at this stage in adulthood, he or she will be likely to lack direction and independence, have difficulty establishing positive relationships, and can tend toward unethical behaviors.

2. During the identity foreclosure stage, the adolescent is blindly committed to an identity role often prescribed by family and/or significant others. This individual has committed to, and is no longer in search of, an identity even though this identity does not quite "fit" the individual. For example, an adolescent may pursue a medical career because of family expectations, and not as an expression of his or her own values and identity. Characteristics of the foreclosed adult include disapproval of displays of strong emotion, support for authoritarian views, and a need for social approval.

3. Identity moratorium occurs when the adolescent is in the process of identity exploration but has acquired only a vague idea; this person's identity remains

"under construction." This individual often has high anxiety tempered by high

self-esteem and an internal locus of control.

4. Identity achievement describes the individual who has committed to an identity

and continues to refine it throughout his or her life. This individual has developed

a self-concept, has adopted values, and has identified goals; these aspects of

identity are well defined, mutually aligned, and can be continually revisited and

retooled. This individual typically demonstrates autonomy and high self-esteem,

gains the approval of others, and is comfortable in any social situation (Marcia,

2002, 2010).

The identity phase continues to be associated with adolescence, when the individual

undergoes the dramatic physical, mental, and emotional changes that herald the transition from

childhood to adulthood. Although an established purpose is part of and consistent with identity,

purpose usually develops during the "emerging adulthood" years (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2000)

coined this term to describe the phase of development between adolescence and adulthood

(between the ages of 18 and 25), which more accurately reflects social and economic shifts that

have occurred since Erikson's time. While the responsibility for developing an established

purpose rests with the individual, Damon (2008) believes that emerging adults can receive

meaningful assistance in developing purpose from parents or significant persons outside the

immediate family, such as a teacher, guidance counselor, social worker, probation officer, or

professor.

The Benefits of Having a Professional Purpose

If purpose is "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the

same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self" (Damon,

2008, p. 33), then professional purpose expresses that intention in the domain of work. While popular self-help literature has recently spotlighted the ideal of the 'purpose-driven professional,' scholarly research has focused on identifying the components of purpose, distinguishing its impact across life domains, and bringing clarity to terms that are often used interchangeably in everyday speech.

Bundick (2011) performed a research study on the impact of having a single 45-minute discourse on purpose in life during emerging adulthood, and evaluated those outcomes 9 months later. Bundick discovered that the discussion could have "lasting psychological benefits, including increased goal directedness and greater life satisfaction" (2011, p. 89).

Lyubomirsky, Tkach, and DiMatteo (2006) researched the difference between happiness and self-esteem with a population of elderly Caucasian males. They discovered that the two constructs of happiness and self-esteem were in fact separate, yet highly correlated. They found that the best predictors of happiness were linked to extraversion, social relationships, purpose in life, and global life satisfaction.

Brassai et al. (2011) researched meaning in life with Romanian adolescents and concluded that meaning was a protective factor against health risk behaviors such as binge drinking, illicit drug and sedative use, unsafe sex, lack of exercise and diet control. This study also explored how the effect of perceiving meaning in life differed by gender. It found patterns of binge drinking, unsafe sex, and lack of exercise and diet control among females who felt that life was meaningless; among males, a perceived lack of meaning in life was associated with illicit drug and sedative use (Brassai et al., 2011).

Ryff et al., (2004) researched the physiological effects of well-being with aging women, distinguishing hedonic from eudaimonic well-being. The study hypothesized that eudaimonic

39

well-being rooted in purposeful life engagement would yield more positive outcomes than those associated with hedonic well-being. The results of this study did support the hypothesis, revealing that the aging women with greater levels of eudaimonic well-being had lower levels of daily salivary cortisol (stress hormone), pro-inflammatory cytokines (regulation of the body's immune system), cardiovascular risk (heart disease), and longer duration REM (rapid eye movement) sleep than those showing lower levels of eudaimonic well-being or hedonic well-being (Ryff et. al., 2004).

Deiner, Fujita, Tay, and Biswas-Deiner (2012) explored purpose in life as a predictor of life-satisfaction and self-satisfaction, after controlling for hedonic factors and affect. They discovered that purpose in life was the strongest correlate of both life-satisfaction and self-satisfaction, even when pleasant feelings were controlled. This study suggests that the experience of a high level of purpose may be a buffer against negative psychological effects and negative emotions.

Kashdan and McKnight (2013) researched purpose in life and its association with social anxiety disorder (SAD). They found that when people with SAD channeled energy toward a purpose in life, benefits were evidenced by an observed increase in self-esteem, meaning in life, and greater positive emotions. The reverse was not true, however, in that SAD patients who achieved elevated well-being from efforts unrelated to purpose in life did not then actively seek a purpose. Nonetheless this study suggests that purpose-driven progress is desirable and holds promise for positive movement away from the negative spectrum of distress, avoidance, and impairment (Kashdan & McKnight, 2013).

Steger, Mann, Michels, and Cooper (2009) examined the presence of meaning (POM), the search for meaning (SFM), and their link to variables including anxiety, depression, meaning

in life, and perceived health among smoking cessation patients. 'Presence of meaning' refers to the understanding of life experiences and an established purpose; 'search for meaning' refers to the intensity and activity with which one seeks to attain presence of meaning. Results revealed worse health and greater anxiety and depression among participants reporting lower POM. In addition, depression and anxiety were related to higher numbers of physician visits.

Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, and King (2009) researched the connection between accessibility of the true self and the experience of meaning in life, citing similar studies that found self-reported authenticity is positively related to self-actualization, self-concept clarity, and self-esteem. Similarly, authentic behavior has been linked to subjective well-being, self-esteem, positive affect and hope. Schlegel et al. (2009) supported previously held notions that the accessibility of the true self-concept is associated with a greater sense that life is meaningful.

Hicks and King (2007) studied the relationship between positive affect and meaning in life with a population of undergraduate students and found that there is a strong relationship between the two variables.

King and Napa (1998) researched the components of a 'good life.' After allowing for cultural nuances and the historical understanding of this term, the study found that a good life could be measured against three variables: happiness, meaning in life, and money. The results revealed that meaning and happiness were also consistent with the good life (King & Napa, 1998).

In summary, researchers who have investigated purpose and meaning in life have found them to be associated with increased goal directedness, greater life satisfaction (Bundick, 2011), positive affect, hope, optimism (Brassai et al., 2011; Burrow & Hill, 2011; Hicks & King, 2007; King et al., 2006), psychological well-being (Ryff et al., 2004; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Kashdan &

41

Steger, 2007), increased life satisfaction, increased self-satisfaction (Deiner, et al., 2012),

predictors of happiness and self-esteem (Lyubomirsky, Tkach, & DiMatteo, 2006), self-

actualization, self-concept clarity (Schlegel, et al., 2009), living the good life (King & Napa,

1998), eudaimonia (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryff et al., 2004; Ryff & Singer, 1998), increased

capacity to ward off distress, avoidance, and impairment (Kashden & McKnight, 2013), and

motivation (Damon, 2008; Frankl, 1984). Just as purpose correlates with positive physical,

social, and psychological well-being, low levels of purpose have been correlated with drug

involvement and risky and antisocial behaviors (as cited in Damon et al., 2003; Brassai, et al.,

2011; Deiner, et al., 2012). However, scrutiny of these findings reveals the lack of a commonly

accepted view of the nature of purpose and how it actually works; for example, Damon et al.

(2003) question whether younger people respond better when a purpose inspires them, and

whether purpose must always promote what is generally considered to be 'good' and exclude

what is generally thought to be 'evil.'

Professional Purpose as it Relates to the Novice Counselor and Assigned Client

An established purpose is critical to the well-being of the emerging adult (Damon, 2008;

Burrow & Hill, 2011; Kashdan & McKnight, 2009) and can be a predictor of outcomes for the

individual and for the manner in which the individual relates to society (Damon, 2008; Damon et

al, 2003). On the basis of these findings, a graduate counselor education student who can

articulate a professional purpose may be better equipped to succeed in working with a population

chosen in alignment with that purpose.

The factor that is common to counseling efficacy and the ability to articulate a

professional purpose is self-knowledge, as expressed in the age-old maxim "know thyself." Self-

awareness is the *sine qua non* of psychotherapy, and the literature also indicates that counselors

must be self-aware in order develop the capacity for self-awareness in their clients. Higher education affords students very few opportunities to develop self-awareness (Astin, 2004; Damon, 2008). This raises the question of whether a novice counselor can be present to understand the client if the counselor does not understand himself or herself.

This concern is not limited to the counseling profession. It informs the literature on effective teaching, in which self-awareness on the part of the teacher is critical to facilitating learning and growth in the student. Palmer (1998) discusses the teacher's need to "know thyself"; good teachers have identity and integrity derived from self-knowledge, despite the caveat that no one can fully be known, even to one's self. Palmer (1998) identifies 'bad teachers' as those who are distant from the self, and from the subject and the students they teach; 'good teachers' are those with the courage to join with self, subject and student.

Similarly, Hamachek (1999) supports the notion of "know thyself" by stating, "Consciously, we teach what we know; unconsciously, we teach who we are." The 'who we are' facet of our teaching personality contributes significantly to the positive or negative tone of a classroom and, certainly, to students' receptivity to learning" (p. 210). Although Hamachek intended his remarks for teachers, the parallel to counseling seems obvious; the same principle informed Rogers' (1961) earlier assertion:

> Individuals who are more mentally healthy may be able to more easily understand themselves because there is less of a need to engage in distortion or denial among well-adjusted individuals than among those for whom accurate self-knowledge highlights personal inadequacies and painful truths. (as cited in Vogt & Colvin, 2010, p. 240)

In the same vein, Polster & Polster (1973) discuss the role of perception in the

individual's movement toward closure:

> The perceiver not only structures what he perceives into economical units of experience,
>
> he also edits and censors what he sees and hears, selectively harmonizing his perceptions
>
> with his inner needs. Just as a hungry person perceives food when it is not there, so does
>
> another unsatisfied person continue to work out, in his current activities, unfinished
>
> business from his past. (p. 31)

As with teachers, self-awareness is critical to a counselor's effectiveness. Because an

individual must also cultivate self-awareness in order to identify and articulate a professional

purpose, it follows that the process of discerning professional purpose might be an important

component of a counselor's professional development, with profound effects on the novice

counselor, the counseling session and the supervisory relationship. In the context of counseling,

the capacity to articulate a professional purpose may indicate preparedness to take up a new,

challenging role, a quality that Ventura (2010) and Owens (2011) found lacking in their studies

of novice trauma counselors and resident assistants. Likewise, development of a professional

purpose may be seen as a form of 'proactive coping.' Aspinwall and Taylor (1997) conducted a

research study illuminating the importance of proactive coping as a useful means by which

individuals can mute or offset potential stressors. Proactive coping is defined as "efforts

undertaken in advance of a potentially stressful event to prevent it or to modify its form before it

occurs" (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997, p. 417). Whereas 'coping strategies' occur after something

has happened, 'proactive coping' minimizes unnecessary potential threats, existing harm, or

losses. Anticipating a known upcoming stressor such as a job layoff, for example, an employee

may spend time on building up a financial reserve or developing more marketable skills.

Although self-awareness is generally considered to be a vital ingredient of personal and professional effectiveness, the process of achieving it can be quite difficult. For example, in a study of barriers that prevent a military veteran with PTSD from entering into treatment, Sayer, et al. (2009) found that subjects were reluctant to re-experience pain so debilitating that it might interfere with their daily lives. While these veterans present an extreme case, the decision to forego therapy can also be driven by a multitude of factors such as pride; access barriers; competing duties and priorities, including familial obligations; skepticism about the process, including a fear of not being believed; and a general mistrust of the system reinforced by cultural stereotypes and perceived stigma (Levers, 2001). Sayer, et al. (2009) discuss factors that can mitigate an individual's reluctance to engage in treatment, including a solid social network of support coupled with recognition and acceptance of a problem for which there is competent help in a system perceived as trustworthy.

These barriers to engaging in self-reflection–which is the foundation for identifying purpose–are not unique to survivors of trauma. For graduate counselor education students, lack of professional purpose may exacerbate predictable levels of anxiety and fear about undertaking work with clients. During the counseling session, the graduate counselor education student may be unprepared and might experience countertransference, burnout, fatigue, re-traumatization (Owens, 2011; Ventura, 2010) and other stress indicators. During supervision, the graduate counselor education student may experience unnecessary conflict (Pearson, 2000).

Upon encountering the demands of the profession, the novice counselor can experience heightened emotions of anxiety and fear that move the focus of attention to self and away from the client. Skovholt and Ronnestad (2003) discuss a counselor whose anxiety was so great that he could not hear a word the client said, and became speechless as his fear persisted. Intense

emotions that can lead to feelings of incompetence, inadequacy and burnout can be mitigated, however. Intentionality becomes figure for novice counselors when they are provided the opportunity to discuss their professional purpose, their reasons for choosing to work with a population, and what that choice means to them. Any potential corollaries between issues the novice counselor and client(s) share may then be explored.

This study explores whether or not having sense of professional purpose can alleviate issues in supervision and ward off some common occurrences such as burnout, fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, and other symptoms of severe stress as described in Ventura (2010) and Owens (2011). Compassion fatigue, a form of burnout, is described as a reduction in a counselor's ability to bear the suffering of others (Adams, Boscarino & Figley, 2006; Figley, 2002; Ventura, 2010). Compassion fatigue might manifest in counseling sessions where, for example, a counselor is unable to ask the questions necessary to process the client's trauma because it would be too painful to hear the responses. Clients' needs cannot be met in such situations and they may be re-traumatized as a result; the counselor will most likely experience feelings of inadequacy when the impact on the client becomes evident (Adams et al., 2006; Figley, 2002). McMullen and Krantz (1998) researched burnout and found a relationship between burnout and the effects of learned helplessness and low self-esteem. Neuman and Gamble (1995) discuss the literature on stress and burnout in counselors, who are in a role that is inherently isolated and lonely due to issues of confidentiality and the daunting task of explaining the nature of the work to others. Burnout can have a cascading effect: clients prematurely terminating counseling sessions, counselors leaving the field, etc. (Adams et al., 2006; Ventura, 2010).

A novice counselor's articulation of professional purpose could be evidence of an examination of self, leading to insight, self-understanding, and self-acceptance that could empower the novice counselor in the performance of his or her professional duties. Self-reflection can take place in formal counseling sessions or in informal settings. In either case, a novice counselor who receives support, guidance, and direction from an adult professional is more likely to transition into the field with a degree of ease and self-confidence (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003). This process is consistent with the philosophy of Vygotsky, who theorized that learners move from the unknown to the known in a "Zone of Proximal Development." They can go much further in the learning process with competent assistance (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003).

Professional Purpose as it Relates to the Supervisory Relationship

Professional support is generally made available to counselors during clinical supervision. Conflict may arise in the supervisory relationship when the supervisor discusses "blind spots" or touches upon matters related to ethical transgressions on the part of the supervisee (Pearson, 2000). The relationship may also be strained by the absence of conflict, if this is due to fear and unwillingness to confront an important issue. Pearson (2000) suggests that supervisor and supervisee form an alliance in the Rogerian style, in which the supervisor offers affirmation and empathy from a non-judgmental stance. The relationship may suffer, otherwise, especially if a mistrustful supervisee is reluctant to disclose significant issues, is resistant to the supervisor's suggestions, or tends to engage in power struggles.

Countertransference is a phenomenon first described in the theory of psychoanalysis developed by Freud. According to Collins and Long (2003), it is an unconscious defense mechanism in which the counselor's response to the client is primarily derived from the

counselor's own unresolved, painful life experiences. Countertransference also can occur when the counselor absorbs traumatic feelings being explored by the client (Collins & Long, 2003; Figley, 2002). Figley (2002) characterizes this as secondary traumatic stress, which should be acknowledged during supervision and processed during self-care so the counselor can meet the client's needs and attend to his or her own in the appropriate setting (Collins & Long, 2003).

According to Gazzola and Theriault (2007), sessions should be structured with the supervisee's anxiety in mind, and should be designed to meet the supervisee's emotional and developmental needs. They recommend the Rogerian style in sessions but warn supervisors against the temptation to revert to a counseling role. While their study found no correlation between being a good supervisor and being a good clinician, a clinician might regress to the more comfortable and familiar counseling role absent a firm grounding in the parameters of proper guidance. Gazzola and Theriault (2007) caution that a default to the counseling role would be detrimental to the supervision relationship, in which the supervisor must take up a more didactic role.

It would appear, therefore, that supervision might not be the appropriate forum for discerning the supervisee's professional purpose, even though the lack of purpose may lead to issues in counseling sessions and in the supervisory relationship. The literature makes a strong case for the argument that the articulation of a professional purpose by graduate counselor education students may be a form of self-care, professional development, or both. If novice counselors should, ideally, embark on their first professional experience with an articulated professional purpose, then a remaining question is whether students should ascertain professional purpose through autonomous self-reflection or be directed in that endeavor by the institution that provides their training.

Counselor Professional Identity and Development

For the purpose of this study only, a graduate counselor education student is defined as a student who is currently in a CACREP accredited Masters program with a focus on school, community, or marriage and family counseling. These students have already completed their practicum requirements and are transitioning into the internship phase of their training. In this section, I focus on the literature pertaining to counselor professional identity and professional development as those concepts relate to the graduate counselor education student. I discuss the lack of precision associated with these concepts, and suggest how attention to the development of professional purpose might result in much-needed clarity in the field: according to the American Counseling Association (ACA), "strengthening identity" is a top concern and goal for the profession (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011).

Generally speaking, professional identity has been defined as "the possession of a core set of values, beliefs, and assumptions about the unique characteristics of one's selected profession that differentiates it from other professions" (Weinrach, Thomas, & Chan, 2001, p. 168). There are numerous definitions of professional identity within the counseling field, all of which have been criticized as insufficient (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Calley & Hawley, 2008; Cashwell, Kleist, & Scofield, 2009). This lack of consensus and uniformity can lead to confusion about roles and responsibilities; foster conflicts related to power and status; lead to widespread acceptance of professional stereotypes (King & Ross, 2003); and result in exclusion from third-party insurance panels (Calley & Hawley, 2008). Ultimately, this confusion means that clients may not receive services, and professional counselors may not earn respectable incomes (Cashwell et al., 2009).

The development of a clear counseling professional identity statement is inherently challenging; the process is recursive and iterative, like writing or counseling itself (Levers, 1997). Some influential professional organizations in the field, such as the American Counseling Association (ACA) and National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC), have not attempted it. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP), which conducts voluntary accreditation of counseling programs, distinguishes professional counselor identity as the possession of relevant knowledge in areas of history and philosophy, roles and functions, advocacy, and ethical standards of professional organization and credentials (CACREP, 2009). As cited in Emerson (2010), Puglia stated that CACREP's definition is incomplete, as it does not include professional pride and professional engagement. Professional pride refers to the positive feelings one has in relation to one's chosen profession, and infusion of this positivity and respect for the profession in discourse with others (Emerson, 2010). Professional engagement refers to involvement with professional organizations and/or engagement in advocacy on behalf of the profession (Emerson, 2010).

The literature is unclear about whether the development of a sense of professional identity should be part of the academic training process. CACREP (2009) provides no guidance on how the profession most effectively can disseminate the definition of counselor professional identity, on how the definition should be presented (Patterson & Levitt, 2011), and on whether the definition should be taught as part of a counselor's training. In fact, Nelson and Neufeld (1998) found that while most research on student preparation focused on teaching psychological concepts, such as client conceptualization, theoretical approaches, and specific issues which may emerge during session, there is very little research that examines the process by which classes are intentionally delivered to meet students' developmental needs (Patterson & Levitt, 2011).

According to Fur and Carroll (2003), "overlooking these needs and issues can have significant implications for both counselors and the clients they serve" (p. 39).

Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) examined themes during counselor development, finding that the major theme was "professional development is growth toward professional individuation" (p. 507). As a counselor develops as a professional, a philosophical orientation toward the client emerges from information the counselor discovers as he or she becomes more aware of the deeper self, values, and beliefs. The findings suggested that the counselor's professional development depends on a personal movement away from reliance on external authority and toward reliance on internal authority, and that this process continues long after completion of formal studies. "A central element that distinguishes development from stagnation or impairment is the presence or absence of the practitioner's own ongoing internalized developmental processes" (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992, p. 514). Similarly, Samuel T. Gladding stated, "without professional commitment and development, staleness, meaninglessness, and stagnation may result" (as cited in Haight & Shaughnessy, 2006, p. 7). The distinction between the professional and personal self blurs, as self-knowledge supports professional identity and functioning (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992).

This investigation raises important questions about the role and importance of self-awareness in the development of a counselor's professional identity. It could be argued that one cannot fully commit to a profession without a clear understanding of its distinguishing elements. Full commitment to the field also implies that the counselor recognizes his or her aptitude for the work, the contribution he or she can make to others, and the personal benefits he or she will gain from joining the profession. These components of professional identity coincide with the definition of purpose as described earlier in this Chapter.

Furr and Carroll (2003) identify critical incidents, which lead to students' development as counselors, and describe ways in which a student develops identity during the master's degree program. A critical incident was defined as a positive or negative experience recognized by the student as significant and influential in his or her development as a counselor. The main contributor was experiential learning, which can be captured in counseling techniques class, personal counseling, high-ropes course, personal growth groups, and other similar forums (Furr & Carroll, 2003).

This study suggests that development of professional purpose and, by extension, development of professional identity, may have ethical implications for the novice counselor. Although the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) does not define counselor identity, it echoes that part of the CACREP definition that concerns adherence to ethical standards of professional organizations and credentials. The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) discusses the importance of "avoiding harm and imposing values." If, as this study suggests, graduate counseling education students who cannot articulate a professional purpose as it relates to their selection of a client population have a difficult experience with clients and/or in supervision, there is potential for harm to the client. This could be an argument for more clearly defining professional counselor identity and incorporating self-reflection and discussion on professional purpose early in a counselor's training. Furthermore, this may be an argument for more intentional teaching techniques: instructors must model the behaviors they wish their students to demonstrate with clients. These suggestions and other findings that support them will be discussed in greater detail below in Chapter V.

Theoretical Framework

This section reviews the relevant literature concerning the three theoretical frameworks that inform this investigation: the constructs of purpose, Gestalt Theory, and van Manen's existential phenomenologically-oriented theory. I employed a Gestalt approach when I taught and supervised graduate counselor education students and first questioned the process by which such students select a client population for their practicum experience. Then, as in this study, the constructs of figure and ground played a prominent role in identifying factors that seemed to influence that selection. van Manen's existential phenomenologically-oriented framework was included as the third methodology, because so little is known about this topic. However, during data analysis it became apparent that the methodologies overlap to such a degree that van Manen's framework was somewhat redundant, for purposes of the study, and did not significantly add to its richness.

These theoretical frameworks serve a specific purpose in this study, but their use does not imply that they are the only possible approaches to this topic, or that they should always be applied in situations related to counseling. While I favor the humanistic-existential paradigm, research shows that all theoretical orientations have utility and purpose; the Gestalt approach was one of several I used as a supervisor. Hansen (2014) discusses the various psychotherapy orientations and a meta-analysis outcome finding that none was significantly more effective than the others (Smith & Glass, 1977). This finding has been consistently verified throughout decades of research (Wampold, 2001). According to Lambert and Barley (2001), the quality of the counseling relationship (warmth, empathy, and acceptance) is the most significant factor that has been correlated with positive client outcomes, and not the types of specialized treatment interventions employed in counseling.

Gestalt Theory

Gestalt therapy emerged in the 1950s in the work of Fritz Perls, and was heavily influenced and popularized by his colleagues, most notably Laura (Posner) Perls and Kurt Goldstein (Corey, 2009; Hatcher & Himelstein, 1976). Like many practitioners of his time, Perls infused the theoretical framework of psychoanalysis with his own principles. He grew up in a lower middle class German Jewish family in Berlin. After a childhood that has been described as "challenging" (he failed 7th grade twice before tangling with authorities and being expelled from school), Perls earned a doctoral degree in medicine with a specialization in psychiatry. He developed Gestalt therapy as a response to his experiences as a soldier in the German army during World War I (Corey, 2009; Hatcher & Himelstein, 1976) in much the same way that Viktor Frankl would develop his theories about the meaning of life years later, after enduring the atrocities of World War II.

Gestalt is a German word with no exact English equivalent (Perls, 1973). It is generally used to describe an organized "whole" that is greater than the sum of its parts and "cannot be separated from its parts without losing its essence" (Corey, 2009, p 201). The "gestalt" of a molecule of water consists of a certain number of bound hydrogen and oxygen atoms; if the atoms are pried apart the end product will be hydrogen and oxygen gases, not water. Similarly, a human being's essence can be understood only within the context of his or her existence. Gestalt theory is existential (grounded in the belief that people are in a perpetual process of becoming and rediscovering themselves) and phenomenological (based on an individual's perceptions of experience) (Hatcher & Himelstein, 1976). Gestalt theory is concerned with process rather than with content, which is consistent with its foundational premise that individuals must be understood in the context of their ongoing relationship with the environment.

The primary goal of the Gestalt approach is to heighten the individual's awareness of "what they are doing and how they are doing it" (Corey, 2009; Hatcher & Himelstein, 1976; Polster & Polster, 1973) so that change will occur. Gestalt therapy examines thoughts, behaviors, and emotions without giving any one more weight; the role of the therapist is to discern and facilitate the client's discovery of inconsistencies across the three areas. The Gestalt assumption is that individuals have the capacity to self-regulate their behavior. Just as a thirsty individual will seek something to drink, an individual will attempt to get what he or she needs from the environment. The Gestalt experience begins with a want or need that can be satisfied from the environment. The totality of the Gestalt experience consists of a six-step process or cycle, as illustrated in this example of a common incident:

1. Sensation: an individual experiences a sensation, knows that something is occurring, but is not yet sure what it is.

2. Awareness: the individual may not do anything about it, but he or she identifies and is aware of the sensation as hunger.

3. Excitement/anxiety or mobilization of energy: the individual has some energy around this experience of hunger. The individual is thinking about getting an apple to satisfy the hunger.

4. Action: the individual takes some action to address this experience. The individual goes to the kitchen and selects an apple from a bowl on the counter.

5. Contact: the individual makes contact with the environment. The individual takes a bite out of the apple.

6. Integration: the apple has been eaten.

7. Withdrawal: the individual completes the gestalt and moves on to another experience.

An individual may become stuck in any stage of this experiential cycle, which makes for an incomplete gestalt or "unfinished business." Usually the individual is unaware of unfinished business; until awareness is achieved and the unfinished business is processed, the individual will continuously play out the unfinished themes in less healthy ways (Hatcher & Himelstein, 1976; Polster & Polster, 1973). An individual may adapt to the experience of unfinished business by employing "interruptions to contact" which are much like Freudian defense mechanisms:

1. Introjection: an individual uncritically accepts and internalizes an idea from the environment. Such ideas manifest as "shoulds and musts." For example, I "should" honor and respect my parents, even though their behavior makes me angry or violates a boundary. I "must" get straight As in school or I will be a failure.

2. Projection: an individual disowns parts of self and attributes them to someone else or to the environment; put another way, the individual is looking into a mirror but thinks he or she is looking through a window. For example, individuals who struggle with self-loathing may believe that others dislike them even when there is no indication that this is true. Unfortunately, an individual may behave toward others in a manner that is consistent with the projection, which then becomes fact.

3. Retroflection: the individual keeps to the self what is actually intended for the environment, and closes down around it ("do not talk, do not feel, do not trust"). Depression or psychosomatic complaints are often due to retroflection, which may also be signified by physical mannerisms: for example, someone may attempt to manage emotions by covering her mouth with her hands, or by folding her arms across her heart.

4. Deflection: an individual takes action designed to divert attention away from self. This can take many forms, from laughing inappropriately to watching escapist entertainment, from gossiping to intellectualizing.

5. Confluence: an individual has an enmeshed connection with another person that blurs the boundaries between self and environment. Neither party to a confluent relationship stands on an independent footing; in effect there is no "I" in the context of the relationship, only "we."

The Gestalt approach is non-judgmental; individuals interrupt contact for a reason, even if they are unaware of their own motivation. Interruptions to contact therefore have utility, and it is important to discover what they do for the individual, what they protect the individual from, and what they keep the individual from experiencing (Polster & Polster, 1973). This inquiry should not be confused with an attempt to determine why individuals behave as they do, or to drill down to the root causes of behaviors. The Gestalt practitioner is not particularly interested in these questions, because they come from only one aspect of the individual's experience or gestalt. Gestalt therapy is concerned with the "what" and the "how" that lead to a greater understanding of an individual's process, which, in turn, leads to awareness (Hatcher & Himelstein, 1976; Polster & Polster, 1973).

Gestalt principles–particularly figure, ground (Polster & Polster, 1973) and attention to a subject's experience rather than an intellectualized version of that experience–provide a theoretical framework for interpreting the data in this study. A graduate counselor education student's response to a direct question about his or her process of population selection identifies the perceived figural rationale for that selection. Other data relating to supervision and responses about the totality of the practicum experience identify the unperceived rationale outside the

counselor's awareness, or ground. Both aspects of the counselor's experience are important to the data analysis because the study is designed to explore the impact of self-awareness, as evidenced by a clear established purpose, on the practicum experience. The study inquires into the possibility that a graduate counselor education student's decision to work with a particular client population may be influenced by issues of which the counselor is unaware, and which only certain types of clients might be expected to present to a significant degree, as much as by the counselor's proffered explanation for the choice.

van Manen's Four Lived Existentials

van Manen (1990) believes that the emphasis in phenomenological research is always on the meaning of the lived experience, and that it is methodologically correct to "borrow" the experiences of others, because they allow us to become "in-formed." van Manen (1990) discusses the use of personal experience as a logical starting point for phenomenological research, on the grounds that others may also experience what one person has experienced. This was, in fact, the impetus for my research study. I observed that my supervisees seemed to have gravitated toward populations that mirrored their own issues, unaware of either this linkage or of the difficulties that would be likely to emerge as a consequence of their choice. I wondered how commonly this occurs, and whether the consequences are serious enough to warrant preventative measures.

van Manen (1990) identifies four discrete aspects of experience that, in the aggregate, capture the essence of the subjective lived experience of the other. These "lived existentials" are lived space (spatiality); lived body (corporeality); lived time (temporality); and lived human relations. The lived existentials provide the theoretical framework for understanding the conceptual themes that will emerge during the interview process. Ventura (2010) and Owens

(2011) used this framework in their studies, which, like this study, investigate the impact of role readiness on successful outcomes.

Each lived existential expresses a distinct subjective aspect of experience:

1. *Lived space* is felt space. It is what we feel in relation to the space we are in. For example, a person standing on an ocean shore may feel small and insignificant; in familiar surroundings at home, that person may feel safe and peaceful. Felt space is our subjective interpretation of the interplay between our environment and ourselves. In a very real sense, we become the space we inhabit.

2. *Lived body* refers to the fact that we exist in the world through our bodies. We often purposefully use our bodies to reveal our thoughts and feelings. We also try to use our bodies to conceal, and often are unaware that the body is expressing our thoughts and feelings anyway, outside our awareness. For example, a counselor may, without realizing it, react to a client's story of trauma with a shocked or disgusted expression. A client may claim to be at ease but be unaware that he is nervously clicking a ballpoint pen he holds in his hand.

3. *Lived time* refers to the perception of how time passes. For example, time seems to speed up when we are enjoying ourselves, and slow down when we are bored or unhappy. A client might feel that time has stood still since the loss of a loved one. The same client might describe his college experience as the best time of his life, and feel like those years went by in an instant.

4. *Lived relation* is the subjective view of what it feels like to be in the presence of others. Just as lived space involves the interplay between one's self and the spacial environment, lived relation involves the interplay between one's self and

others who add their own lived experience to the environment. "As we meet the other, we approach the other in a corporeal way: through a handshake or by gaining an impression of the other in the way that he or she is physically present to us" (van Manen, 1990, p. 104-105). Lived experience can have implications in counseling sessions. For instance, a counselor who struggles with substance abuse may lack the capacity to tend to the needs of an addicted client, setting the stage for issues of countertransference.

A Pedagogical Issue

As with the importance of self-awareness, an argument may be made for insuring the preparedness of counselors in other important ways. Although effective counseling requires effective use of the self (Rogers, 1961), it appears unclear whether or not counselor education programs mainly focus on theory and technique, and do not harness the development of the students' capacity for reflective thinking and self-awareness. The pedagogy of counselor education is a relatively new area of inquiry and there are few data that suggest best practices for incorporating students' personal development, including the development of the capacity for reflective thinking, into academic training programs (Ventura, 2010). In fact, the teaching profession as a whole has only recently begun to reexamine its long-accepted models of pedagogy.

Drawing on insights he developed while teaching illiterate Brazilian adults, Paulo Freire (2011) offers a more contemporary view of teaching. He characterizes the conventional westernized way of teaching as "the banking concept of education," in which a teacher deposits facts and figures into students' heads and then withdraws the material in tests and assignments. Freire proposed a more constructivist alternative pedagogy that elevates the role of the student

and casts the teacher in the role of facilitator. This model gives the student maximum opportunity to bring forth his or her own potentials and capabilities. The student begins by formulating some sort of idea or hypothesis, which he or she examines, tests, applies, and modifies until reaching a conclusion. The teacher provides guidance, acts with humility, and liberates the students to pursue their own learning (Freire, 2011).

Nelson and Neufeldt (1998) suggest similar best practices for counselor educators. In addition to incorporating the Rogerian model in the classroom and counseling sessions, they recommend the constructivist method for teaching novice counselors how to think reflectively: the student is elevated to the role of expert and the professor becomes a facilitator rather than a leader. As issues are discussed in class, the students explore potential explanations and available options; as they engage in their own creative problem solving, students learn to struggle with what is.

"What is" in a counseling session repeatedly exposes the counselor to a client's deeply painful and complex issues and experiences. The counselor must be present to the client, and at the same time, develop protective factors against burnout. Farber and Heifetz (1982) discuss how burnout impairs the delivery of mental health services, in addition to debilitating the counselors who provide them. Burned-out professionals may become cynical about their clients, blame clients for creating their own difficulties, or label them in derogatory terms. The emotional fallout for clients can lead to physical manifestations such as insomnia, ulcers, and headaches which, in turn, can lead to an increase in family conflict (Farber & Heifetz, 1982). Farber and Heifetz (1982) found that burnout was attributed to the non-reciprocated attentiveness, giving, and responsibility demanded by the therapeutic relationship. They suggest that this issue should

be addressed in graduate training programs, which burden students with unrealistic expectations by failing to prepare them for inevitable disappointments (Farber & Heifetz, 1982).

According to Seaman and Rheinhold, (2013) a major premise within experiential education is that experience is the initial phase of learning, but is not sufficient to obtain new knowledge unless accompanied by reflection. Reflection is a process by which an individual's experience is recaptured for further thought and evaluation; it is a critical element of learning. This research strongly supports the notion that an individual cannot learn from an experience without reflecting on it (Seaman & Rheinhold, 2013).

Griffith and Frieden (2000), discuss ways to encourage reflective thinking in novice counselors, such as Socratic questioning, journal writing, Interpersonal Process Recall, and reflecting teams. For maximum benefit, they suggest that these methods be incorporated as an active ongoing process throughout the program. They believe that the capacity to reflect prepares the counselor to deal with myriad unexpected developments in sessions; memorized responses, by contrast, can be counterintuitive in sessions.

Roach and Young (2007) found that incorporating a wellness program for counseling students was critical for the counselor student and equally critical for effective counseling. A wellness model "advocates self-care; self-awareness; and personal development on one's physical, mental, and spiritual life" (p. 30). Due to the inherent stress associated with the profession, it is understood that its demands can be taxing and link to burnout, leading to a less than productive counseling session. The inclusion of a wellness program in the course of study might reduce these stress factors; participating students may enhance their personal growth and development, and experience more satisfaction (Roach & Young, 2007).

Nagata (2004) promotes self-reflexivity and describes it as the "on-going conversation with your whole self about what you are experiencing as you experience it" (p. 139). Nagata (2004) makes the distinction between self-reflexivity and self-reflection in that self-reflexivity occurs in the moment, while self-reflection occurs after the moment has passed. Being self-reflexive in the moment enhances the quality of relationships and promotes greater self-awareness.

As previously mentioned, Fur and Carroll (2003) researched 'critical incidents,' defined as "a positive or negative experience recognized by the student as significant because of its influence on the student's development as a counselor" (p. 483), to inform faculty on how coursework can better be structured to prepare students for success. The core theme of this qualitative study was experiential learning. Students reported that being in the role of the therapist and client was the most beneficial of the studied activities. They moved from role-playing to dealing with actual issues and, although this raised legitimate concern for the faculty, many students praised the process for teaching them to trust, take risks, self-disclose, and gain insight into the dynamics of an actual counseling session. Students experienced an awareness of their personal issues and the influence they had on the sessions. They recognized that the private counseling they received was critical to their development as professional counselors (Fur & Carroll, 2003). Other personal growth development activities included high-ropes courses, personal growth groups, spelunking, and spending a night in a homeless shelter; the study was inconclusive as to whether such activities should be required or merely encouraged.

Summary

It appears that there is sufficient research on the generalized notion of purpose and its positive impact on the individual to suggest its worthiness. Having a purpose has been associated with positive affect, hope, and optimism (Brassai et al., 2011; Burrow & Hill, 2011; King et al., 2006), psychological well-being (Ryff et al., 2004; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Kashdan & Steger, 2007), eudaimonia (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryff et al., 2004; Ryff & Singer, 1998) and motivation (Damon, 2008; Frankl, 1984). Just as purpose correlates with positive physical, social, and psychological well-being, low levels of purpose have been correlated with drug involvement and risky and antisocial behaviors (as cited in Damon et al., 2003). An articulated professional purpose may be a predictor of a graduate counselor education student's success in his or her first practical experience. The inability to articulate a professional purpose may amount to a form of unpreparedness, similar to that found in the research studies of Ventura (2009) and Owens (2011) that can result in burnout, secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, and other symptoms of severe stress. Although the literature on this topic is limited, this study builds on the few before it that have inquired into the meaning of professional preparation; what it should include; when and where it should occur; and who should be responsible for insuring that it does.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

The purpose of this Chapter is to articulate the methodology used in this investigative study, to justify the use of that methodology, and to discuss the theoretical lens through which data were analyzed. This Chapter describes the Gestalt theoretical approach, and van Manen's Existential phenomenologically-oriented philosophy. It discusses the research design, purposeful sampling, method and procedures, precautions taken to insure the trustworthiness of the research, and the manner in which data were collected. The Chapter concludes with an account of the limitations and delimitations of this inquiry, followed by a summary.

The Philosophy Guiding this Research

This qualitative research examines graduate counselor education students at a particular point in their professional development; it asks how graduate counselor education students articulate a sense of professional purpose as it relates to the process by which they select a population with which to work. The study is phenomenological in orientation: that is, it focuses on the graduate counselor education students' lived experiences and their own interpretations of those experiences. A phenomenological study assumes that participants share one or more essence, or indispensable quality (Patton, 2002). As this research is qualitative, it interprets the meaning of participants' subjective world-view as expressed through their own words, rather than through measurement by numbers.

Qualitative/Phenomenological Research

Scholarly research can be either quantitative (logical positivism) or qualitative (including existential, phenomenological, and phenomenologically-oriented inquiry). These two paradigms are distinct, and each has inherent unique qualities. While one is not necessarily better than the other, one may be more suited than the other for a certain type of study (Patton, 2002). In this

section, I justify the selection, appropriateness, and usefulness of qualitative research for this study.

Quantitative studies provide evidence for or against a hypothesis by ascertaining findings or drawing conclusions on the basis of the mathematical measurement of key variables. Quantitative studies seek to determine causes, and to result in generalized findings that will support predictions about how those variables will affect future conditions or events (Golafshani, 2003). Because accurate measurement is essential in quantitative research, the study's reliability and validity depends upon the soundness and integrity of the research instrument. Quantitative research measures the extent to which the presence or absence of previously identified variables affects outcomes. In simpler terms, qualitative research proves or disproves what a researcher suspects may happen under certain conditions, based on what is already known about a situation or population.

Qualitative research illuminates phenomena about which there is little existing information; it assumes no *a priori* knowledge (Levers, et al., 2008). Qualitative research allows for the production of knowledge about a previously unknown phenomenon (Levers et al., 2008) and seeks to understand and extrapolate ways in which this knowledge might apply to similar situations. At the conclusion of a qualitative study, researchers may identify variables, generate hypotheses, suggest further research questions, and formulate potentially beneficial recommendations. Patton (2002) captures the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research in this way:

If you want to know how much people weigh, use a scale. If you want to know if they're obese, measure body fat in relation to height and weight and compare the results to population norms. If you want to know what their weight means to them, how it affects

them, how they think about it, and what they do about it, you need to ask them questions, find out about their experiences, and hear their stories. (p. 13)

Put another way, qualitative research develops insight into what happens, how it happens, and why it happens; its primary intention is not to measure, but it can suggest variables that might be measured at another time. Qualitative research findings emerge from data collection methods such as in-depth open-ended interviews, direct observation, and action research (Patton, 2002). Because the researcher is responsible for interpreting and analyzing the data he or she functions as the research "instrument". Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain why humans are the "instrument of choice" for qualitative studies. Humans have the capacity to be in tune with environmental nuances that may reveal critical information. Humans can interact with the situation and can simultaneously collect information at multiple levels. Humans can perceive situations holistically; they can process data as soon as it becomes available; they can provide immediate feedback and request verification of data; and they can explore atypical or unexpected responses.

The subject of purpose has been of interest since ancient times. More recently its definition has been refined and its effects have been measured with increasing precision. However, we still know very little about how people generally understand the workings of purpose in their lives. We know less about how purpose might affect routine yet important decisions people make in their professional lives; we know still less about how purpose influences decisions made by graduate counselor education students during the course of their professional educational training. This study, then, seeks to contribute to the understanding of these phenomena and to identify variables for further study.

Phenomenologic Orientation

The philosophical field of phenomenology originated in the early 1700s and came into prominence with the work of Husserl (Levers et al., 2008). Phenomenology is the study of the lived experience—what people experience, and how they experience it—which offers its audience a "deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). It is based on the notion that the conscious mind creates an individual's worldview based on subjective perceptions. Unlike quantitative approaches, phenomenology does not seek to explain or control events; instead, it attends to the potential array of plausible insights that might bring us closer to the truth of an individual's reality. This truth, in turn, provides us with richer understanding of the world we live in and perhaps suggests a direction for further action that might bring about improvement.

This study employs a phenomenological framework; it inquires into the lived experience of the graduate counselor education student, at a particular point in his or her professional life, through the construct of purpose. Themes emerge as the novice counselors' stories unfold; these themes will lead to a better understanding of how these students make important professional decisions and perhaps suggest what might be done more effectively to support them in their professional development.

The Theoretical Lens

The theoretical lens employed in this research includes the constructs of purpose, Gestalt concepts, particularly figure and ground, and van Manen's existential phenomenologically-oriented theory. The use of Gestalt constructs is appropriate because I was using this approach when this research question first occurred to me as a novice supervisor. As I worked with graduate counselor education students, I became aware of some corollaries between the client

and supervisee that Polster and Polster (1973) described as 'unfinished business.' The Gestalt theoretical lens identifies unfinished business by examining what is figure and what is ground in an individual's experience. van Manen's existential phenomenologically-oriented theory is used to capture rich data, which cannot be captured through numbers in a quantitative study, on a topic that has not yet been explored.

Gestalt Perspective

Gestalt is a German word with no exact English equivalent (Perls, 1973). It is generally used to describe an organized "whole" that is greater than the sum of its parts and "cannot be separated from its parts without losing its essence" (Corey, 2009, p 201). The "gestalt" of a molecule of water consists of a set number of bound hydrogen and oxygen atoms; if the atoms are pried apart the end product will be hydrogen and oxygen gases, not water. Similarly, a human being's essence can be understood only within the context of his or her existence. Gestalt theory is existential (grounded in the belief that people are in a perpetual process of becoming and rediscovering themselves) and phenomenological (based on an individual's perceptions of experience) (Hatcher & Himelstein, 1976). It is concerned with process rather than with content, due to its premise that individuals must be understood in the context of their ongoing relationship with the environment.

The primary goal of the Gestalt approach is to heighten the individual's awareness of "what they are doing and how they are doing it" (Corey, 2009; Hatcher & Himelstein, 1976; Polster & Polster, 1973) so that change will occur. Gestalt therapy examines thoughts, behaviors, and emotions without favoring one over the others; the role of the therapist is to discern and facilitate the client's discovery of inconsistencies across the three areas. The Gestalt assumption is that individuals have the capacity to self-regulate their behavior. Just as a thirsty individual

will get something to drink, an individual will attempt to get what he or she needs from the environment. The Gestalt experience begins with a want or need that can be satisfied from the environment. The totality of the Gestalt experience consists of a six-step process, as illustrated in this breakdown of a simple incident:

1. Sensation: an individual has an experience and knows that something is going on, but is not yet sure what it is.

2. Awareness: the individual may not do anything about it, but he or she identifies and is aware of the sensation as hunger.

3. Excitement/anxiety or mobilization of energy: the individual has some energy around this experience of hunger. The individual is thinking about getting an apple to satisfy the hunger.

4. Action: the individual takes some action to address this experience. The individual may get up and get an apple.

5. Contact: the individual makes contact with the environment. The individual takes a bite out of the apple.

6. Integration: the apple has been eaten.

7. Withdrawal: the individual completes the gestalt and moves on to another experience.

An individual may become stuck in any stage of this experiential cycle, which makes for an incomplete Gestalt or "unfinished business." Usually the individual is unaware of unfinished business; until awareness is achieved and the unfinished business is processed, the individual will continuously play out the unfinished themes in less healthy ways (Hatcher & Himelstein, 1976; Polster & Polster, 1973). An individual may adapt to the experience of unfinished business by employing "interruptions to contact" which are much like Freudian defense mechanisms:

1. Introjection: an individual uncritically accepts and internalizes an idea from the environment. Such ideas manifest as "shoulds and musts". For example, I "should" honor and respect my parents, even though their behavior makes me angry or violates a boundary. I "must" get straight As in school or I will be a failure.

2. Projection: an individual disowns parts of self and attributes them to someone else or to the environment; the individual is looking into a mirror but thinks he or she is looking through a window. Individuals who struggle with self-loathing, for example, may believe that others dislike them even when there is no indication that this is true. Unfortunately, an individual may behave toward others in a manner that is consistent with the projection, which then becomes fact.

3. Retroflection: the individual keeps to the self what is actually intended for the environment, and closes down around it ("do not talk, do not feel, do not trust"). Depression or psychosomatic complaints are often due to retroflection, which may also be signified by physical mannerisms: for example, someone may attempt to manage emotions by covering her mouth with her hands, or by folding her arms across her heart.

4. Deflection: an individual takes action designed to divert attention away from self. This can take many forms, from laughing inappropriately to watching escapist entertainment, from gossiping to intellectualizing.

5. Confluence: an individual has an enmeshed connection with another person that blurs the boundaries between self and environment. Neither party to a confluent relationship stands on an independent footing; in effect there is no "I" in the context of the relationship, only "we."

The Gestalt approach is non-judgmental; individuals interrupt contact for a reason, even if they are unaware of their own motivation. Interruptions to contact therefore have utility, and it is important to discover what they do for the individual, what they protect the individual from, and what they keep the individual from experiencing (Polster & Polster, 1973). This inquiry should not be confused with an attempt to determine why individuals behave as they do, or to drill down to the root causes of behaviors. The Gestalt practitioner is not particularly interested in these questions, because they come from only one aspect of the individual's experience or gestalt. Gestalt therapy is concerned with the "what" and "how" that leads to a greater understanding of an individual's process, which, in turn, leads to awareness (Hatcher & Himelstein, 1976; Polster & Polster, 1973).

Gestalt theory is comprised of numerous concepts and terms; for purposes of this study the most relevant and important of these are "figure" and "ground." The figure-versus-ground construct is a "field-theoretical approach to understand and investigate how we (as organisms) create meaning through processes of forming and dissolving gestalts" (Tonnesvang, Sommer, Hammink, & Sonne, 2010). "Figure" appears in an individual's awareness as a solid, well-defined aspect of experience; "ground" is the part of experience that is receding, less distinct, and out of awareness (Polster & Polster, 1973). Figure and ground are central to data collection and interpretation in this study. During data collection, graduate counselor education students were asked to discuss how they decided to work with a particular population; their responses identified the perceived figural rationale for that choice. Data concerning ground was ascertained primarily from respondents' answers to questions about the totality of their experience, inasmuch as ground exists outside of awareness. This data was examined for emerging themes, including

72

the ways in which ground affects the graduate counselor education student's relationship with clients and the progress of supervision.

The Four Lived Existentials

van Manen (1990) believes that the emphasis in phenomenological research is always on the meaning of the lived experience, and that it is methodologically correct to "borrow" the experiences of others, which allow us to become "in-formed." van Manen (1990) discusses the use of personal experience as a logical starting point for phenomenological research, on the grounds that what one person experiences may also be experienced by others. van Manen (1990) identifies four discrete aspects of experience that, in the aggregate, capture the essence of the lived experience of the other. Each lived existential expresses a distinct subjective aspect of experience:

1. *Lived space* is felt space. It is what we feel in relation to the space we are in. For example, a person standing on an ocean shore may feel small and insignificant; in familiar surroundings at home, that person may feel safe and peaceful. Felt space is our subjective interpretation of the interplay between our environment and our selves. In a very real sense, we become the space we inhabit.

2. *Lived body* refers to the fact that we exist in the world through our bodies. We often purposefully use our bodies to reveal our thoughts and feelings. We also try to use our bodies to conceal, and often are unaware that the body is expressing our thoughts and feelings anyway, outside our awareness. For example, a counselor may, without realizing it, react to a client's story of trauma with a shocked or disgusted expression. A client may claim to be at ease but be unaware that he is nervously clicking a ballpoint pen with one hand.

3. *Lived time* refers to the perception of how time passes. For example, time seems to speed up when we are enjoying ourselves, and slow down when we are bored or unhappy. A client might feel that time has stood still since the loss of a loved one. The same client might describe his college experience as the best time of his life, and feel like those years went by in an instant.

4. *Lived relation* is the subjective view of what it feels like to be in the presence of others. Just as lived space involves the interplay between one's self and the spacial environment, lived relation involves the interplay between one's self and others who add their own lived experience to the environment. "As we meet the other, we approach the other in a corporeal way: through a handshake or by gaining an impression of the other in the way that he or she is physically present to us" (van Manen, 1990, p. 104-105). Lived experience can have implications in counseling sessions. For instance, a counselor who struggles with substance abuse may lack the capacity to tend to the needs of an addicted client, setting the stage for issues of counter-transference.

The Research Design

The process by which graduate counselor education students select a client population has not been studied; this research explores whether a graduate counselor education student's ability to articulate a professional purpose as it relates to the selection of a population with which to work can better prepare him or her for the demands of the practicum experience.

The study investigates the lived experience of graduate counselor education students to explore whether the development of a professional purpose can better prepare them for their first professional experience. The novice counselor's lived experience of the practicum may indicate

74

whether a pattern of clinical resonance, as defined in this study, is predictable, simple happenstance, as described by Krumboltz (2009), or due to some other as yet unknown phenomenon. The study discusses emerging themes in counseling and supervision; raises questions about whether the themes result from this pattern; considers what the implications may be for the field, in terms of professional preparation and development; and proposes areas for further study.

As noted above in this Chapter, the researcher is the "instrument" through which qualitative data are collected and qualitative findings are suggested. The skills and rigor of the individual conducting the interviews or research provide the basis for the study's trustworthiness and credibility (Patton, 2002). I am a licensed professional counselor (LPC), a nationally certified counselor (NCC), and an approved clinical supervisor (ACS). I am a Gestalt and trauma-certified practitioner, and have been trained effectively to conduct motivational interviews. Based on my skills, I was able to determine whether a participant was experiencing any distress during the interview and, if so, I possessed the confidence and proficiency to stop the interview, check in with the participant to assess his or her needs, and determine whether the interview should proceed with the participant's permission. Consistent application of my skills, and expertise, together with the safeguard protocols discussed in the next sections, ensured the validity of the study.

Sample

This study employed purposeful sampling, in which the participants who were selected provided the greatest wealth of information with regard to the issues under investigation (Patton, 2002). Because there are no rules governing sample size, interviews can be discontinued once it appears that saturation has been reached. This occurred after eight interviews were conducted.

Study participants were graduate counselor education students who met all of the following criteria:

1. Had completed practicum experience from CACREP Counseling Program.

2. Were willing to participate in the interview and review process.

3. Were willing to disclose personal experiences to the researcher.

4. Had some confederate (in a laboratory counseling course) or professional counseling, in any.

First, I gained the permission from the department heads of counseling from a CACREP graduate counseling education department in the Western PA region to gather my sample of post-practicum students. Second, I asked permission from the individual professors to speak in class to the post-practicum students. Then, I explained my study to the class, and asked for volunteers. The gender, ethnicity, and age of participants were not considerations.

Method and Procedures

Interviewing is the most commonly used qualitative research method (Levers, 2009); it facilitates a deeper, more detailed understanding of the participant based on his or her own words, which could not be captured through preselected items on a questionnaire (Patton, 2002). An interview involves close contact with the subject and his or her experiences. While Patton (2002) believes that there is no universal prescription for contact that is neither too close nor too distant, he suggests that "empathic neutrality" (p. 50) is the proper stance for valid data collection in interviews. Empathetic neutrality is a middle ground, not close enough to cloud judgment but not distant enough to cloud understanding.

Data was collected during in-depth, open-ended interviews, consisting of a set of pre-determined questions with time and opportunity allowed for further elaboration or clarification as

needed. After an initial review of informed consent forms and a discussion of the parameters of the interview process, participants understood that they were free to terminate the interview at any point. Interviews were semi-structured, open-ended, and approximately 45 – 60 minutes in duration. Interviews were digitally recorded for later transcription and coding. Participants were assigned a code to be used in the reporting of the data to preserve the confidentiality of their responses. The data remains secured in a locked file cabinet at the Investigator's residence.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The credibility or trustworthiness of the study was ensured by use of triangulation methods. Patton (2002) discusses four types of triangulation (data, investigation, theory, and methodology), which were employed in this research. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, I engaged in participant review: after transcribing the data, I asked each participant to review the transcript of their interview for accuracy and asked whether it should be sent by email, a sealed hand-delivered envelope, or certified mail. Per their stated preferences, I emailed 7 transcripts and sent one by certified mail. Each participant responded within approximately one week. Only one made changes to the transcript, to clarify his interview responses rather than to correct errors. The remaining 7 participants confirmed that the transcripts were accurate. To minimize researcher bias, I kept a reflective journal in which I documented my personal reactions during the interview process, recording my answers to the following questions immediately after each interview:

1. How was this experience for me?

2. What did I learn from this participant?

3. How did I experience the participant during the interview?

4. What did I not observe about the participant?

5. How were the questions received?

6. Did I meet the objectives of the interview?

7. What did I learn from this experience?

I also kept field notes and recordings of my personal observations during the interview process and debriefed regularly with my advisor. The constructs of purpose, Gestalt theory, and van Manen's lived experience framework provided theory triangulation with regard to the interview data. Patton (2002) discusses the essential nature of this reflexivity, noting that it is critical "to understand an ongoing examination of what I know and how I know it, to have an ongoing conversation about the experience while simultaneously living in the moment" (as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 65).

Data Collection

Once I gained IRB approval, I proceeded with the investigation. I obtained the consents, and then scheduled appointments of approximately 45 – 60 minutes' duration with the participants at their convenience. The primary data source was digitally recorded interviews with graduate counselor education students who have completed the practicum experience. Consistent with accepted practices for data triangulation, I incorporated data collected from a variety of sources including digital recordings and transcriptions, and field notes. To maintain my self-reflexivity, I also kept a self-reflection journal, and notes from meetings with my dissertation chair.

Research Questions

This study explores the lived experience of the graduate counselor education student as it relates to the process of selecting a population with which to work during the practicum placement. The guiding question of this inquiry is:

1. What are the lived experiences of graduate counselor education students in selecting the clinical population for their practicum experience?

Subsidiary questions that assist in capturing the totality of the lived experience of the graduate counselor education student and the process of population selection include the following:

1. How do graduate counselor education students articulate a sense of professional purpose as it relates to the population selection from which to work?

2. How might the collected data speak to the need for changes in graduate counselor education programs?

Protocol for Semi-Structured Interviews

Patton (2002) recommends that interview questions be clear and concise; double-barreled questions may confuse the participant and yield ambiguous data. Sequential questioning is encouraged, although not required, in order to establish a graduated level of difficulty that progresses from easy to difficult questions and from content to process oriented topics (Patton, 2002). I conducted a pre-test with my colleagues to ensure questions conform to the five essentials described by Berg (2007):

1. Are all questions necessary for the research?

2. Do questions elicit anticipated responses?

3. Is the question language meaningful to the respondents?

4. Are there problems with the way questions are framed? (For example, double-barreled or vague?)

5. Does the interview motivate the participants to participate?

Feedback from colleagues was used to make appropriate changes to the questions included in this study.

One-on-one interviews were audio recorded for later transcription. Open-ended questions (See Appendix A) facilitated the discussion and illuminated the lived experience of the graduate counselor education student.

Data Analysis

As described by Berg (2007), a qualitative study is an on-going and recursive process. After interviews were completed and transcribed, I carefully analyzed the data and coded the emerging themes. The identified themes were supported by a variety of resources including a review of the literature on the constructs of purpose, Gestalt Theory, and van Manen's lived existentials. I repeatedly reviewed the data for accuracy in content, coding, and themes. I moved ahead to the next step of the study when I was confident that I had exhausted this process.

Limitations to the Study

1. Results may not be generalizable beyond the specific population from which the sample was drawn, due to the small size of the sample and the small geographical area it represents.

2. Participant demographics may be too specific (all females, all Caucasian or African American, or all in Western PA region) for general application.

3. Sample participants may not have been candid in their responses.

4. Sample participants' recall of past events may have been inaccurate, either because of selective memory or because of the distortions of time.

5. The totality of the experience cannot be captured on an audio recording.

Summary

This is a phenomenologically-oriented qualitative inquiry based on the multidimensional framework of purpose. I also apply a Gestalt approach, using the concepts of figure and ground to explore and understand the lived experience of graduate counselor education students and their process of selecting a population with which to work. van Manen's Lived Existentials provided supplementary data. Semi-structured interviews with participants were the main data source, augmented by reflective journals, field notes, and debriefing sessions with the dissertation chair. I employed triangulation methods to ensure the integrity of the study and make recommendations for further inquiry based on my findings.

As demonstrated in Chapter IV, the data that were compiled during the interviews, followed by coding consistent with the methodology incorporated within this investigation. Chapter V discusses the findings and their implications for the profession, followed by suggestions to the profession and for further research.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This qualitative research explores the ways in which a graduate counselor education student's ability to articulate a professional purpose might affect the practicum experience. The study investigates whether students demonstrate that they have a professional purpose, defined as a "stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self" (Damon, 2008, p. 33). The study asks how a professional purpose, or the lack of one, factors into the first significant professional decision a novice counselor makes: the selection of a population with which to work during the practicum experience. The study also inquires into whether the presence or absence of a professional purpose affects the student's ability effectively to perform during the practicum. This study, then, inquires into the graduate counselor education student's practicum experience in relation to the self, the client, and the supervisory relationship.

A clear professional purpose presupposes self-awareness, as established in the literature and confirmed by my experience as a clinical supervisor. I worked with students who inadvertently selected a practicum population with issues that mirrored their own, and who struggled in their work with these clients. I pursued this research in order more fully to understand whether prior awareness might result in a better experience for practicum students and their clients. If so, it might be argued that graduate counselor education programs could better prepare entry-level counselors by actively developing students' capacity for self-awareness.

This chapter focuses on the data collected and its analysis. As described by Berg (2007), a qualitative study is an on-going and recursive process. The qualitative analysis in this study incorporates the characteristics of professional purpose, Gestalt therapy principles, and van

Manen's lived existentials. This chapter provides a case-by-case analysis of data collected from the eight study participants during individual one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The data are also captured in tables that highlight and summarize common themes that emerged during the interviews. I include a brief synopsis of my personal experiences in relation to this study as well. A summation of the findings and their interpretation can be found in Chapter V.

In this study, I interviewed eight post-practicum students from Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) graduate counseling programs who were willing to discuss their practicum experiences with me. These interviews were audio recorded, and later transcribed. Names were redacted for confidentiality purposes. The transcriptions were returned to the students for verification and corrections. Only one student requested modifications to the interview transcript. These modifications were made to clarify what had been transcribed, and not to correct it.

Seven females and one male participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 24 to 30 years old, and all were engaged in their last year of graduate studies. Four of the participants had engaged in some form of personal counseling. The other four either had less than one year or no personal counseling. Five of the participants were enrolled in a Community Counseling program, and three were in a School Counseling program. Table 1 illustrates the demographics of the participants.

The criteria for participation in the study were modified, with IRB approval, after interviews began. A requirement that participants should have three years or less experience in the counseling profession was eliminated, because it was irrelevant to the study; criteria concerning participants' prior engagement in counseling was redefined to include both confederate (in a laboratory counseling course) or professional counseling, if any. In addition,

participants who had more than one year of professional counseling were included in the study, because data from these participants would add richness and depth to the research findings.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Sex	Age	Race	Place in Program	Concentration	X > 1 year counseling prior to practicum
1	F	30	W	Last Year	School Counseling	No
2	F	25	W	Last Semester	Community Counseling	Yes
3	F	27	W	Last Year	School Counseling	No
4	F	30	W	Last Year	Community Counseling	Yes
5	F	24	B	Last semester	Community Counseling	No
6	F	24	W	Last semester	School Counseling	No
7	F	29	W	Last semester	Community Counseling	Yes
8	M	29	W	Last Year	Community Counseling	Yes

Individual Participant Interviews

In this section, I discuss the presuppositions that inform this research, and identify, interpret, and evaluate themes that emerged from the data. This section concludes with a summation of the research analysis.

As described by Berg (2007), a qualitative study is an on-going and recursive process in which the data are carefully analyzed and coded for emerging themes. In this study, data were collected in semi-structured interviews in which participants were asked a set of predetermined questions. Participants knew that the interview would focus on their practicum experience, but did not know what questions would be asked. As needed, the interview occasionally deviated from the scripted questions in order to clarify a response or to gain a better understanding of the student's experience. The average interview length was approximately 45 to 60 minutes; one lasted approximately 110 minutes. The identified themes that emerged from the data were supported by a variety of resources, including a review of the literature on the multi-dimensional meaning of professional purpose, Gestalt Theory, and van Manen's lived existentials. I repeatedly reviewed the data for accuracy in content, coding, and themes.

After the data were collected, the interviews were transcribed and returned to the participants for verification. Only one participant made corrections, to add clarity and facilitate understanding, and not to correct the responses as recorded. For additional verification of research, and to maintain my self-reflexivity, I kept personal field notes, a self-reflection journal, and notes from meetings with my dissertation chair.

Presuppositions

This study first presupposes that a student who has an established professional purpose will have a practicum experience that is different from the experience of a student who does not.

This presupposition is based on the fact that students with an established professional purpose will also have some awareness of themselves in relation to the population they select for the practicum experience. This awareness would lead the student to a better grasp of the dynamics that occur within a session, thus allowing for professional and personal growth. Self-awareness would also help the student detect countertransference if it occurs in the counseling sessions. Self-awareness can have a significant impact on a counselor's effectiveness. Carl Jung specifically suggested that "in the process of psychotherapy there is often a significant relationship between the patient's problem and the therapist's own struggles" (as cited in Roehlke, 1988, p. 133). Bolen (as cited in Roehlke, 1988) also described the counseling process as a synchronous opportunity for the therapist to encounter aspects of himself as he sits with his clients. If conducted with awareness and proper timing, the counseling session is an opportunity for both client and therapist to move toward resolution (Roehlke, 1988). It seems likely, then, that a practicum student who has little or no self-awareness may be less effective, and might actually do harm. That student may be less able to tend to the client, and may re-traumatize the client as a result; depending on the issue, the practicum student might also become re-traumatized. The consequences of a lack of self-awareness may carry over into the supervision relationship, making it more conflicted even if the supervisor is skilled in that role.

Second, the study presupposes that the population a graduate counselor education student selects for the practicum may mirror the student's own issues, whether or not the student can articulate an established professional purpose. This presupposition is distinct from projection on the part of the student at the time of population selection; if projection were to occur, it would occur between counselor and client during the counseling session. Rather, this study inquires into the experience of students who are drawn to a population that presents an issue the student and

potential client share, and that the student has not resolved, or of which the student may be unaware. This study looks at whether the student has selected a population that is likely to present issues that resonate with the student, whether this dynamic leads to predictable behavioral patterns, and whether the ability to articulate a professional purpose mitigates the effects of these patterns in any way.

To date, there have been no studies on the process by which practicum students select a population with which to work, or on whether unresolved issues that are common to student and client affect that selection. It seems likely, however, that a practicum student might be attracted to conditions that could lead to his or her own healing, in a manner somewhat analogous to sympathetic resonance. Sympathetic resonance occurs in the physical world between similar stringed or vibrating instruments, or other elements with a harmonic likeness. For example, when a tuning fork is struck, placed on a box beside a second similar tuning fork mounted on the box, and then muted, the second tuning fork will be emit the same note even though it has not been struck. Strings will respond to the external vibration of a tuning fork within certain ranges; this is the simple science behind the art of tuning a piano. In a similar manner, a novice counselor might be attracted to conditions that could lead to his or her own healing. The counseling field could benefit from identifying this pattern, if it exists, and proactively addressing it to lessen the impact on the student, the client, and the supervisory relationship.

Participant Interview Analysis

The aforementioned presuppositions informed this research. To ensure that my own bias and prejudices would not influence the study, I kept a reflective journal, made field notes, and had several meetings with my dissertation chair while conducting the research. I reread the interviews during the coding process and listened to the tapes again when assigning themes that

emerged across the eight interviews. I created charts that plotted these themes in each interview as they related to an established professional purpose, Gestalt therapy principles, and van Manen's lived existentials. The study reached saturation by the eighth interview.

Each participant analysis is immediately followed by a table that provides an overview of the practicum student's experience in its entirety. The tables list, define, and analyze specific phrases and themes, and are organized in the following categories or domains:

1.) The Process of Population Selection

2.) Meaningfulness of Population Selection

3.) Clinical Resonance

4.) The Role of Supervision

5.) The Role of Counseling

6.) The Role of Professional Purpose

7.) Gestalt (figure/ground)

8.) The Four Lived Existentials

9.) Units of Meaning (For those phases of significance that do not fall into the other categories).

A summary of findings can be found in Chapter V, along with recommendations for future research.

<div align="center">**Findings: Case-by-Case Analysis**</div>

The eight participants in this study attend several CACREP-accredited universities in Western Pennsylvania. They were interviewed according to a consistent process that followed a set format. Days before the scheduled interview, a private room was secured for the interview at the participant's campus, and the location was communicated to the student. Some demographic

information was obtained at the start of the interview; email addresses were confirmed; and permissions were obtained to contact the student by hand delivery, certified mail or e-mail for transcript verification. All but one student requested that transcripts be sent by e-mail; one requested transmission by certified mail. Each student was reminded of the parameters of the interview, as outlined in the consent form, and of the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The interview was semi-structured around a set of established questions, but had a flexible format to allow for additional questions if they were needed for clarification or a better understanding of the experience being described. The interviews were approximately 45 to 60 minutes in length, with the exception of one, which lasted for approximately 110 minutes.

It should be noted that the analysis that follows is not intended as commentary on any participant's worth, integrity, intelligence, good intentions, or latent capacity to become an excellent therapist. All participants exhibited these qualities. Rather, this analysis raises concerns that speak to the quality of the professional preparation participants have received, and the potential value of including the development of professional purpose in the curriculum for graduate counselor education students.

It is equally important to note that the data derived from the participants are solely based on their perceptions of their experiences. This study is not intended to indict any program, nor does it intend to treat the data in a lighthearted fashion. Instead, it speaks to the preparedness of the participants, which lends itself to the suggestions concerning the need for changes in counselor education programs.

Participant #1

Participant #1 is a 30-year-old Caucasian female who is completing the last year of a School Counseling program. She has had no personal counseling experience, other than what has

been available to her in the classroom environment. Her interview continued for about 45 minutes, including preliminary housekeeping matters, and proceeded along the set list of questions with some additional questions that solicited more detail or clarification.

Process of Population Selection

Participant #1 conducted her practicum experience at a public elementary school where the population is comprised of students from all socio-economic backgrounds. She reported that the "population selected her", and not the reverse. She stated the following:

I don't know if I so much chose it as it chose me because a lot of the schools that were closer to where I live --- I was mainly trying to get close to home so I didn't have to drive so far away but technically, the high school, the elementary was the only one that would take practicum student so I had to go pretty far away…

In other words, Participant #1's first choice would have been the high school near her home; however, the only available site was the elementary school quite a distance away. Thus, it appears that, at least initially, the length of the student's commute was what mattered most to her in selecting a practicum site. However, it also appears that this was not a compelling concern; she did "go pretty far away" even though this was not her preference.

Her site selection process and site preference seem reasonable; anyone would prefer to save time, fuel, and vehicle wear with a shorter drive. That is precisely why the selection appears to exhibit a lack of intentionality: if anyone would state this preference, it has no real personal meaning. The statement may also show a lack of professional purpose, in that the characteristics of the potential clients at the site appear not to matter; it implies that one practicum school site is as good as another. Finally, the explanation may demonstrate a lack of self-awareness in that Participant #1 seemed not to appreciate its superficial nature or that her preference was an

expression of figure: that is, of what she was aware of at the time of site selection. This raises a question about what was ground: the less distinct and obvious information of which she was unaware, and which appeared to become more apparent as her story unfolded. This study also asks how the subtle currents of ground affected her experience: if her young clients presented issues that mirrored the Participant's own, there may be implications for the student, the counseling session and the supervisory relationship.

Meaningfulness of Population Selection

When Participant #1 was asked why it is important for counselors to work with elementary school students, she responded that these children need an advocate, someone who will listen to what they want and need. She stated:

So I think being a counselor and working with those kids, getting them to tell you, getting them to see that people listen to them and what you hear, you advocate for them and you help them in the ways they are telling you, not you thinking that's what they need.

In Participant #1's experience, teachers and school personnel are not the only ones who do not listen, and who therefore do not give children what they actually need. She believes that elementary school counselors must advocate for their clients because their parents often do not listen to them, either. She stated, "…young kids aren't heard too much." Participant #1 has consciously developed her listening skills ("I'm good at it, but I like to work harder to be better at it") and realizes that each client is unique ("You can't be proficient in children, I feel like they always give you a challenge and it depends on the child."). In her view, this skill is what counselors of children need most. "Listening," she said, "is key."

Listening–the need for it, the lack of it, its importance for children – appeared to be an important theme for Participant #1, who repeatedly mentioned it. Participant #1 appears to

91

understand and appreciate the negative outcomes that occur when people are not heard. This raises the question of whether her understanding comes from personal experience as well as professional observations and, if so, whether she is aware of this connection.

Clinical Resonance

When asked whether her practicum population resonated with her, Participant #1 harkened back to her previous work as a schoolteacher. She stated:

> Yeah. When I was a teacher and I worked with the children with disabilities. I, as the teacher, could keep advocating until I was blue in the face for those children, to get them what they should have or what they should need and it aggravated me when I was a teacher that no one would listen to me, no one would help them, nobody cared in the higher-up positions or generally didn't understand --- which happens a lot. I feel like for me, emotionally, this population is a big group to advocate for a lot of as much as possible just because some people just don't understand or care.

Her response is revealing on several levels. First, she was cut by the perceived indifference of school administrators because she so clearly saw the needs of her students with disabilities. She was their passionate advocate, and felt that she understood and cared about her students in a way that others–especially decision-makers–did not. In the face of this indifference, she felt helpless to carry out her professional role. She expresses pain and indignation on behalf of her students but not on behalf of herself, even though it was she who talked, "until I was blue in the face," and no one listened. She was not heard, but she does not distinguish her personal frustration at not being heard from her professional disappointment of failing to achieve results for her students.

"I was a teacher," she said, "and no one would listen to me." She implies that she was dismissed as a professional, and that her expertise was discounted. This "aggravated" her, in large part because when she was not heard she could not fulfill her own professional responsibilities. Her affect was intense while sharing this recollection. Although this thread was not specifically pursued with further interview questions, the theme of listening informed so much of the interview that "not being heard" could likely be a personal, as well as a professional, issue for Participant #1. She did not, however, volunteer examples from her personal life or demonstrate awareness of a possible connection.

Skill Set

In addition to developing their listening skills, Participant #1 believes that counselors of elementary school students must develop patience, decoding skills ("…sort of an understanding of their level of interests…") and the ability to speak at the child's level ("not using big words.") Participant #1 modestly owns her skill set and feels prepared to work with this population. She stated, "People tell me I'm extremely good at it, but I think everything's a work in progress." Continuous improvement is necessary because all children are different and each presents a challenge ("You can't be proficient in children.").

Participant #1's assessment of the skills a counselor needs in order effectively to work with children talks around the most critical component of the counseling process, the quality of the counseling relationship (Hansen, 2014). Therapists need to cultivate three basic characteristics to achieve a quality relationship with their clients: empathic understanding, acceptance of the client, and congruence (Rogers, 1961). Participant #1 knows, through training or personal experience, that certain behaviors work with children: listening, speaking at their level, addressing their interests, etc. Her goal is "getting them to tell you" what they think, feel,

93

and need. However, clients of any age more readily disclose when they feel safe in a relationship of connection and trust. While Participants #1 identified strategies for making that kind of connection, she did not specifically identify the relationship itself as necessary for effective counseling.

The Role of Supervision

Participant #1 stated that supervision was "very helpful," but further indicated that supervision was helpful primarily because it validated what she already thought and knew. She stated, "Most of the things [covered in supervision] I already knew… I didn't really learn anything, it just showed me that I am those things [patient and a good listener]." When asked whether supervision helped her personal growth, she indicated that it did not ("Not that I can think of."). Participant #1's unfolding responses show an interesting pattern: a sensitivity to the issue of being heard, and an awareness of the need constantly to improve listening skills and speak to clients on their level so they can "tell you what they need"; these strategies enable a counselor (or a teacher) to discharge their professional responsibilities. The end game for a counselor appears to be competence, not growth; this is evidenced by Participant #1's evaluation of supervision as "very helpful" despite the fact that she learned nothing new. This juxtaposition might be due to loose integration of academic training, resulting in shallow expectations concerning supervision; the actual quality of supervision; and/or something else: if Participant #1 is influenced by a gestalt "ground" in which she has unresolved issues around being heard, she would bring those issues to the supervisory relationship. She would be less likely to reveal her difficulties in counseling sessions, accustomed as she is to having her requests and feedback fall on the deaf ears of those "in the higher up positions". In that case, she would be more likely to seek, and be satisfied by, reassurances that she was already doing everything right.

Participant #1 has never participated in personal counseling and does not believe that graduate counselor education programs should require it: "I guess a lot of the class work is counseling, so having other people counsel you, like professionals or anything, I don't think they would necessarily get anything out of you that class work hasn't." This is an interesting response, coming from a novice counseling professional: it fails to account for the fact that other students are peers, not counselors or clients; the peer relationship cannot be the same as that between client and counselor, even when peers simulate the counseling relationship in role-plays and other classroom activities. Playing a role is not the same as actually inhabiting it, and having more at stake than classroom performance. An authentic experience of what counseling is like can be achieved only by engagement in the personal journey of self-care. This experience itself can develop empathy for the client.

According to Carl Rogers (1961) empathic understanding is one of the significant traits a counselor possesses to engage the client for change. For this empathic understanding to occur, the counselor must have some insight into the client (Rogers, 1961), which requires insight into the self (Polster & Polster, 1973). Participant #1 described her ADHD clients as "off their rockers"; "they were crazy," and "bouncing off the walls". These characterizations evidence a lack of empathy, even after allowing for hyperbolic or colloquial speech. However, the appearance of a lack of empathy is consistent with Participant #1's other responses: while she appears to care very much about addressing her clients' needs, supervision did not improve her ability to "see" them without judgment. This may be due to the quality of supervision. However, the supervisor's role is didactic, not therapeutic (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). Supervision can result in personal growth only if the supervisee has the capacity to express her needs and take in

the supervisor's instruction. Personal and professional growth is less likely to occur during supervision when a supervisee's capacity to learn is limited by issues of which she is unaware, and which could have been brought to awareness in personal counseling.

The Role of Professional Purpose

Participant #1 defined professional purpose as, "Goal or career." She stated that purpose includes "motivation, knowing and understanding your goals." She believes that she has established a professional purpose, according to that definition. Participant #1 recalled that there had been "some" discussion about professional purpose in her classroom:

> Probably something along the lines of what you're comfortable with, like maybe age-wise. We've had that discussion. The age group you want to work with. Professional purpose --- if you're uncomfortable with a certain --- you're uncomfortable with drugs or you're uncomfortable with a situation somebody's in or they have different beliefs than you and you're not comfortable with talking about that with them because you're just going to impose your own beliefs, then don't work with them. So just know yourself and know your limitations of the population you can work with.

Said another way, "professional purpose" involves a determination of best fit: it would be inadvisable to work with clients whose activities or circumstances evoke discomfort or strong opinions in the counselor, because that would interfere with the counselor's ability to achieve the professional goal. This is a rather proscriptive statement, and may refer to a class discussion about an important concern in counseling, but probably does not refer to a class discussion designed to illuminate the need for a "professional purpose" as defined in this study. However, it is telling that Participant #1 remembers the discussion this way. Her previous responses indicate her desire to be effective in her job without having to ask for help from others who may not

96

listen. Her goal, then, is to work with clients whose circumstances are more likely to give her this latitude: for example, children in an "average" elementary school whose needs she can satisfy once she identifies them, rather than clients with complex needs that she cannot address by herself.

Two things seem evident when Participant #1's purpose, as extrapolated from her responses, is cross-walked against the definition of professional purpose in this study. First, she has set goals that will allow her to use her skills to help others. Second, these goals are somewhat limited. In fact, they "chose" Participant #1 in a manner similar to the way in which she said her practicum population "chose" her: they are the goals that make the most sense under the circumstances. There is justifiable satisfaction in achieving these goals, but not much risk.

This is not to argue that "professional purpose" must present vast global challenges. It must, however, offer the potential for personal meaning. Meaning is a function of awareness; awareness in this context implies personal growth, incrementally achieved as the individual strives to accomplish goals directed at a greater purpose. Participant #1 may be on her way to developing a professional purpose, as evidenced by her ability to identify certain professional goals or milestones. However, she does not yet distinguish these goals from a larger purpose. Her goals lack depth that might have been more fully cultivated in the classroom and through personal counseling.

Gestalt (Figure/Ground)

Participant #1 appears to lack an established professional purpose as defined in this study. Her responses evidence a lack of self-awareness and hint at issues obscured by what is figure for her–that is, a focus on goals that are more readily achievable and that she can accomplish without calling for the attention of others who don't listen. Such professional goals may be

attainable, if somewhat limited; Participant #1's description of her practicum experience,

including supervision, hint at those limits. Ground is also very powerful; if Participant #1 has

unresolved issues with listening/seeing and being heard/seen, these issues will not abate.

Engaging in personal counseling could support her in developing self-awareness, but she has not

yet participated in counseling and does not see the need to do so. It is possible that ground has

drawn a well-defended circle around Participant #1: her lack of interest in personal counseling

may be linked to issues she may have with being heard and seen. Without personal counseling,

these issues will remain as ground and, perhaps, continue to exert an influence on her

professional attainment.

Table 2

Topic: Participant #1 Professional Purpose (School Counseling Program)

Analytical Categories	Quotations of Significance
1. **The Process of Population Selection**	
Intentionality	*N/A*
Lack of intentionality	…I don't know if I so much chose it as it chose me…
2. **Meaningfulness of Population Selection**	I feel it's important, little young kids aren't heard too much…
3. **Clinical Resonance**	Yeah. When I was a teacher and I worked with the children with disabilities. I, as the teacher, could keep advocating until I was blue in the face for those children, to get them what they should have or what they should need and it aggravated me when I was a teacher that no one would listen to me…
4. **Role of Supervision**	Yeah, it was very helpful…one way to get feedback on what I did if it was good, or not so good.

… I didn't really learn anything, it just showed me that I am those things (patient and a good listener.) Moreover, as a person, she learned nothing, and stated, "Not that I can think of.

5. The Counseling Experience

Participant #1 has never engaged in personal counseling outside of class, nor does she think graduate school should require counseling for their students: "I guess a lot of the class work is counseling, so having other people counsel you, like professionals or anything, I don't think they would necessarily get anything out of you that class work hasn't."

6. Role of Professional Purpose

"Goal and career, goal in where you want to be and get there, hopefully," and it includes "Motivation; knowing and understanding your goals.

7. Gestalt:
- *Figure*

In choosing a population, "…I don't know if I so much chose it as it chose me…"

The supervision experience, what was learned as a counselor: "I didn't really learn anything…"

The supervision experience, what was learned as a person: "Not that I can think of."

- *Ground*

N/A

8. FOUR LIVED EXISTENTIALS
- *Lived Body*

I, as the teacher, could keep advocating until I was blue in the face…

	…maybe empathy, a little bit
	…giving them food made me at least feel a little better that it was going to go through that community
• *Lived Relation*	… a little bit of sadness toward their situation.
• *Lived Space*	Going in the classroom and feeling like I disrupted the class when I was asking for students.
• *Lived Time*	N/A

| **9. Units of Meaning** | N/A |

Recommendations

Participant #1 noted that graduate counselor education programs have a limited selection of courses that specifically deal with the issues of children, "because not all counselors are doing school, or not all counselors are doing young children." She suggested that play therapy class might include opportunities for hands-on experience and interaction with young children, and for observing their behaviors, attitudes, and communication styles. She would also advise other novice counselors to integrate and customize what they've been taught, rather than blindly apply formulaic interventions in every situation ("Don't…go for the bland question…[use] that question in a more productive way to fit your style that isn't so rigid."). At the close of the interview, Participant #1 explained her preference for a practice in the school setting, echoing her previously stated inclination for contained, manageable client engagements and expressing concern that counselors in the addiction and trauma fields often lack the necessary skills to deal with clients' inability to change. She implied that graduate programs might provide more direct

opportunities for students to develop the skills they need to avoid discouragement, burn out, and denial in the face of persistent client resistance.

Participant #2

Participant #2 is a 25-year-old Caucasian female in her last semester of the graduate Community Counseling Program. She has attended personal counseling at several points in her life, most recently during her practicum year. Her interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, and followed the prescribed format. After discussing the parameters of the study and reviewing the consent form, Participant #2 indicated that she understood and wanted to proceed with the interview.

The Process of Population Selection

Participant #2 performed her practicum at an outpatient drug and alcohol treatment [D/A] community agency. She first characterized her practicum population selection as random, and out of her control: "The way I chose my population was really that the D/A program was the first place that I got for practicum…" Like Participant #1, she stated, "It was a convenience thing, too…" When presented with this placement opportunity, however, she realized that it could pose challenges for her:

> I really self-reflected to make sure that that was a population I felt comfortable
>
> working with, and my dad's an alcoholic so I didn't know how that was going
>
> to be…I self-reflected, because when you work with something that is very
>
> personal, you have to make sure that you don't go in with any biases, and that
>
> it's going to affect the work that you do…

In other words, Participant #2 realized that she might be uncomfortable working with those who struggle with addiction because of her personal experiences as the child of an alcoholic, and that

101

she might bring biases to the work that could affect her performance. She does not say what those biases might be, although later she mentioned that when her father entered treatment "I was very happy *despite what he had ever done when he was drinking*. For him to seek help, it was really important." (Italics added.)

Although Participant #2 was aware that her practicum clients could stir feelings she has about her father, she also saw her own personal experience with those who struggle with addiction as a plus:

I was able to build a lot of rapport with the clients because I understood a sense,

what their family was going through. In speaking with my dad and him making

amends with me using the 12 Steps, I really had an understanding how difficult

it is and what it feels for family members to see their family member getting better

and just encourage them, *no matter how they feel*. (Italics added.)

Upon reflection, Participant #2 decided to engage in this practicum as a growth opportunity, "a process of pushing myself and putting me out of my comfort zone to make sure that I grow and that I don't stay with what I'm familiar with." However, she felt quite familiar with the feelings family members experience during their loved one's recovery. She alluded to some ambivalence in those feelings, but her figural stance appears to be informed by compassion for both the user and the family, and she is aware of the complex dynamics between them. She finally selected this population for two reasons, both related to struggle and discomfort: she wanted to go beyond her comfort zone, and she wanted to help by applying the relevant insights she has developed about alcohol-involved families from her own experience.

Despite Participant #2's thoughtful appraisal of her practicum population, it appears that certain aspects of this selection were outside of her awareness. She does not consume illegal

substances like her father and her clients, so she does not struggle with addiction. She has more in common with her clients' families. She mentions that she knows "how difficult it is" for her clients (and for her father) to enter treatment, although she does not explain what those difficulties are, or seem to understand that by entering treatment her clients are "pushing themselves" outside their comfort zone in much the same way that she intended her practicum to push her toward personal and professional growth. Later in the interview, she mentions that her clients "benefitted in the end" by "pushing themselves to participate," so that she would have a good practicum experience. For the most part, however, she seems unaware that her clients are testing their limits, too, and her strong identification with her clients' families may have implications for the counseling session, where she "just shared knowledge with people about the other family members' side." Her figural awareness, then, may be somewhat shallow even though she selected her population with some intentionality and in a manner consistent with acting on a professional purpose (Damon, 2008).

Meaningfulness of Population Selection

When asked why it is important to work with this population, Participant #2 stated:

I think it's important because so many people had the same feeling that I did,

that they don't know how they feel with that population. But after I started there, it

was just – they are so eager to learn and change and if you just give them the chance

so that's really – they just need someone to listen and to be there for them, and I

think that's why it's so important to work with them.

This response is interesting on several levels. First, it is unclear how Participant #2 knows that her feelings about working with those who struggle with addiction were shared by "so many people." While she might have discussed this question with her fellow students, her

103

generalization might also be an attribution error made to help her reconcile her own initial misgivings. Second, Participant #2's surprise and even pleasure at discovering that her clients wanted to learn and change seems consistent with her realization that her preconceived notions of "what an addict looks like and where they come from" were narrow and inaccurate. On the other hand, she gives no details on how her clients may have learned and changed, other than to say, "a lot of clients that I worked with successfully graduated…" She worked very hard on her group facilitation skills and "I would go home and I'd research activities, put them together" because her clients "were so open to doing activities" and "the D/A program would let me do them. That was positive feedback too so it was a good experience." In summing up her practicum, Participant #2 said that she "learned a lot. I learned more than I ever thought I would." It is interesting that Participant #2 describes her clients in the same terms she uses to describe herself: wanting to learn, grow and change.

It is also interesting that Participant #2 characterizes her clients as needing "someone to listen and be there for them…" In discussing the skills a counselor must develop in order to help this population, she repeats, "It's more of just listening, being able to actually listen and reflect on what they're saying, give it back to them because I think a lot of it is that no one ever listens to them." Unlike Participant #1, she did not relate incidents in which she herself had not been heard, but it seems possible that in her childhood home Participant #2 experienced the marginalization and loneliness typically associated with children of alcoholics. While it may be true that "no one ever listens" to her clients, Participant #2 may again be describing them in terms that she could also apply to herself.

Clinical Resonance

Because Participant #2 did not divulge many details from her experience with her father's alcoholism, it is difficult to determine the extent to which ground includes issues and influences arising from that part of her past. Several things do seem clear, however. Participant #2 affirmed that the practicum population resonated with her: "Very much so because of my dad. Growing up with someone who struggled with alcoholism, I did feel that there was a certain spot in my heart that I really liked this population." In other words, there is a way in which she sees her father in her clients or, at least, sees their humanity as she may have come to see his. Still, she makes oblique reference to the conflicting emotions children of addicts often experience when she remembers her desire to support his recovery "despite what he had ever done when he was drinking." Her desire to help her clients may in some measure reflect her desire, as a child, to help her father. She enlarged her practicum experience by researching techniques, creating activities, designing specific interventions, and perhaps doing more than anyone expected her to do ("My site…really gave me free rein to run as many groups and do as many activities as I wanted and to do individual sessions without somebody having to sit in the room with me and supervise me…") If she had it to do over, she would have "pushed myself more the beginning days." She was very responsible, and yet, somewhat unsure of herself and driven to prove her value. Her description of her dynamic with her clients, while a bit deliberately self-deprecating, may reveal that she took good care of them but wanted them to value and take care of her as well:

> The population was very open to helping me and they knew I was a practicum
>
> student and so they did as much as they could and I think it pushed them to work
>
> because they wanted to make sure that I got my experience so they benefited in
>
> the end for them pushing themselves and make sure I didn't go home crying because

I didn't do anything.

Whether or not her clients actually cared about Participant #2's well-being, or wanted to protect her and keep her from "crying," it seems important to her that they–on their own or as her father's proxy–should do so.

Skill Set

The skills that Participant #2 identifies as necessary for working with this population are the same qualities, save for empathic understanding, that Carl Rogers (1961) identifies as necessary for establishing a good therapeutic relationship that allows for change: listening, reflecting, being open-minded, and being non-judgmental. Participant #2 says that she successfully attained these skills: "I think I did. I built a lot of rapport with everyone in there and I got positive feedback from both clients and the individuals that worked there." Many of her clients "successfully graduated which I don't assume it was all my doing, it was a lot on their part but it was reassuring that I learned something while I was there that really helped them…" She knew she had succeeded because others told her she was doing well; she found additional evidence of her success in the apparent results of her work. That was "very validating…We're taught that you can learn skills and still not get that validation from a client, just because it might have not been exactly what they need but to experience validation–I helped somebody. Even if it's not perfect what I learned in school, it was something that helped them." This validation carries meaning for Participant #2. Whether or not the link between meaning and validation reflects a need for external approval, having the skills to carry out work that has personal meaning is an aspect of professional purpose (Damon, 2008), and should increase the likelihood of a successful practicum experience.

The Role of Supervision

Because Participant #2 did not receive direct supervision from the counselor who was technically responsible for providing it, she "really had to rely on the other counselors that worked there." That was ultimately a better arrangement, in her view: her designated supervisor "wasn't there often and wasn't very present and being involved but the other counselors really did." Ad hoc supervision from the counselor with whom she worked "was very helpful. In class, when they would tell you get supervision, supervision, supervision and I'd be like–okay. I didn't think much of it but getting out into working, especially with that population, supervision is big…" To her credit, Participant #2 does not dwell on her designated supervisor's failure to provide the expected service, even though that "is supposed to be the one that gives you supervision;" it seems consistent with Participant #2's resourcefulness and desire for support from those around her that she would turn to the counselor who worked alongside her.

"Supervision was very helpful" for Participant #2, "because I think experience plays a lot into working with that population. The more experience you have with them, the easier it becomes. The more things you know that make them comfortable, supervision really helped with being more comfortable with that population." Although Participant #2 clearly identified other areas of professional and personal learning from her practicum during her interview, her emphasis on the importance of "comfort" here is interesting. The themes of comfort and discomfort are prominent for Participant #2. She wanted her practicum to take her "out of my comfort zone;" she grew up "with someone who struggled with alcoholism;" she was uncomfortable with silence; uncomfortable with disruptive clients; uncomfortable in group settings, and, until near the end of her practicum, uncomfortable with her skills. It is perhaps interesting that she found value in supervision because it helped her to become more comfortable

with this population and taught her "things…that make them comfortable…" Of course, counselors must create a safe space for their clients; it may be, however, that Participant #2 sees her role as more than that, in a manner consistent with her needs–perhaps an aspect of ground–to care and be cared for.

Participant #2 recalled that supervision, "and talking with other practicum students or internship students that were there," helped her more successfully deal with three challenges: silence during sessions, disruptive clients, and resistant clients. Participant #2 describes herself as "a very shy and reserved person in big groups." At first she "took it personally, that there was something about me and how I approached individual sessions" when clients were resistant or didn't speak. She became frightened after witnessing an explosive confrontation between an intern and a disruptive client: "I was very nervous of how I would handle it if someone confronted me because I thought they were going to be really mean or rude or make me cry and run out of the room. I just didn't know what was going to happen…that was a skill that I had to build…being confident that no matter what I said, it's not a reflection on how they feel about me, it's how they feel about themselves." By testing herself and her clients "little by little," Participant #2 began to see that her anxieties about what might happen, and her attempts to avoid her own discomfort, were actually a form of resistance: "slowly, I dropped all of those and I just tried to push myself into–because I finally viewed myself as being resistant to furthering myself and putting myself out there."

Although she would have liked her coursework to focus more on addiction counseling and hands-on experience, Participant #2 felt that she had received adequate preparation to counsel this population–"I was very prepared technique-wise and how to hold myself in a counseling session"–but her growth in confidence during her practicum primarily came from two

sources: her openness to breaking up her preconceived notions about this population ("they are a different population than you would get in a normal setting but they're just as receptive to any technique…that I learned…and even going outside the box and throwing in my own viewpoints as to what would be helpful") and her willingness to reach out to other, more experienced counselors for advice ("my supervisor for my group at school works with the same population so she was really able to give me insight"). In both instances, "supervision was a big part of me being comfortable sitting across from that client." Positive feedback also helped her to break up her preconceived notions about herself, so she could see that, in fact, "I was able to stand on my own two feet and be very capable…more than I thought I ever would."

The Role of Counseling

Participant #2 has engaged in personal counseling at various times for issues related to panic and anxiety, and was in counseling during her practicum. "I tell people all the time I go to counseling, it's very helpful. It's just like supervision. You really learn stuff about yourself going to counseling…" She believes counseling should be required by graduate education counseling programs, because when:

> …counseling other individuals, a lot of your own experiences get dragged out of the mud…I found a lot of feelings of my own past experience got brought up by hearing other people's stories, especially my dad's an alcoholic so I would get emotional sometimes because it would hit my heart…

She added that others in her cohort reported similar experiences.

In addition to counseling, Participant #2 sees value for counselors in continuing learning and self-care, which she defines as any relaxing activity that takes "your mind out of that situation" and allows "focus on something else." Self-care "helps you maintain sanity and peace

109

of mind." Counselors can burn out, otherwise, because "if you can't take care of yourself and

you aren't in a right space to provide counseling services, it's a struggle."

The Role of Professional Purpose

Initially, Participant #2 described her professional purpose as "helping others."

Generally, she says that professional purpose is a "drive to help others" and to "expand your

knowledge and expand your skills" while "also integrating others into what you're doing and

how to help other people grow [so that they can also realize their] purpose." Purpose includes

meaning, and "that meaning can change;" it's "an action you have to take personally or that you

feel you need to because of the meaning behind it." She summed up her own professional

purpose in this way:

> …to really change other people's lives by providing them with services that
>
> encourage them to want to change and for them to build self-efficacy and self-
>
> esteem and feel like they have the power and they know what those skills are that
>
> they have and that they are able to use.

Participant #2 has a demonstrated ability to articulate a professional purpose that includes the

elements of purpose proposed by Damon (2008). She is very self-aware of the issues that could

have interfered with the success of her practicum experience, but ultimately did not. Her

awareness of these issues made it possible for her to work on them in supervision. Counseling

helps her to see some of the parallels between her clients and herself: "I just get very nervous…I

work on that in counseling because every day I ask clients to push outside of their boundaries

using the tools and things that I can help them with so I feel very comfortable with going to

counseling myself." Participant #2 has a sense that her professional purpose sets the same goals

for her clients–embracing change and developing self-efficacy–that she sets for herself.

Gestalt (figure/ground)

Participant #2 selected her practicum population with intentionality and awareness of the impact that her personal history as the daughter of an alcoholic could have on her experience. While that history was figural for her, other issues appeared during the practicum that would be considered ground. These issues could be related to her own emotional journey in dealing with her father's addiction; to her desire to support his healing; to her ambivalence about him in his parenting role; and to anxiety about her own abilities, especially her ability to be helpful and to effectively interact with others.

For example, Participant #2 "found a lot of my feelings of my own past experience got brought up by hearing other people's stories…It would hit me hard because I was, yeah, I know how that feels." Although she had reflected on the possibility that working with those who struggle with addiction might stir up issues from her own past, it seems that she did not fully distinguished her experience as a family member from the client's experience as struggling with addiction. She reports that sharing her past experiences with clients appeared to have value. However, it is interesting that the insights and positives she reports about her clients describe them primarily as conforming to conventional norms of politeness and decency–they apologized for small transgressions in group, wanted to help her because she was a student, etc.–and do not explore the nature of their disorder or their progress in treatment. Participant #2 described these behaviors as examples of how she came to realize, and break out of, her preconceived notions of what her clients were really like: for instance, she was intimidated at first, knowing that some clients had criminal backgrounds. Although she mentioned several times that "this population" is different from others, her discovery of the ways in which these clients are the same–like her, in fact–seems very important.

111

This leveling tendency may speak to needs stemming from ground that result in Participant #2's "drive to help," her fear that she cannot help, and her anxiety about the judgments of others. These themes may have informed her descriptions of several instances when she felt "stuck" during her practicum. She was uncomfortable with silence in sessions, because she thought it meant she wasn't properly doing her job. She "took it personally" when clients were resistant or guarded, until she learned techniques for establishing trust and rapport. She became frustrated with a client who spoke only about safe topics, because "I don't know where to go with this. I don't know what to do." When clients were "just sitting there," Participant #2 worried that she was doing something wrong: she thought, "that there was something about me and how I approached individual sessions…I also thought…are they judging me? Do they think I'm doing horrible? Is my hair out of place?"

Ground is always present, and the identification of potential ground issues is in no way meant to diminish Participant #2's awareness, ability, and positive experience during her practicum. In fact, she appears to have tackled her challenges with awareness and courage. Her ground issues appear to be less controlling the more she develops her skills and self-confidence. As her confidence grows, she is better able to take her attention off of herself and is better able to "see" her clients. For instance, when first confronted with a resistant client "I thought it was just my way that I doing a counseling session was just not working or that I wasn't helping. That was a big thing that I wasn't helping. I eventually learned that resistance usually meant that there was something big going on that they didn't want to share…" Arguably, Participant #2 became a better therapist–and better able to act in a manner consistent with her professional purpose–when she became able to shift her awareness toward her client and away from herself.

Units of Meaning

Countertransference

Participant #2 detected issues of countertransference that occurred during sessions: "I found a lot of feelings of my own past experience got brought up by hearing other people's stories, especially my dad's an alcoholic, so I would get emotional sometimes. It would hit my heart because I was, yeah, I know how that feels."

Projection.

Participant #2 discussed her experience of projection:

> My first couple of sessions, if there was silence, if they weren't talking, I tried to fill the space talking… First, I took it personally, that there was something about me and how I approached individual sessions… I also thought that they were judging me while they were just sitting there…Are they judging me? Do they think I'm doing horrible? Is my hair out of place?

Anxiety

Participant #2 describes her anxiety during her practicum experience. She stated, "Working with addicts, it really pushed my boundaries." "I got put into a group to run, and that was just very nerve-wracking. …and very overwhelming."

Table 3

Topic: Participant #2 Professional Purpose (Community Counseling Program)

Analytical Categories	Quotations of Significance
1. Process of Population Selection	
• *Intentionality*	N/A
• *Lack of Intentionality*	…it was the first place I got for practicum.

really self-reflected to make sure that that was a population I felt comfortable working with, and my dad's an alcoholic…

2. **Meaningfulness of Population Selection**

"They just need someone to listen, and to be there for them…" She added, "It was a convenience…" and she wanted to challenge herself, "…working with addicts, it really pushed my boundaries…" (Referring to her personal exposure to addiction.)

3. **Clinical Resonance**

Growing up with someone who struggled with alcoholism, I did feel that there was a certain spot in my heart that I really liked this population.

She affirmed the population selection had resonated with her, "Very much so, because of my dad. Growing up with someone who struggled with alcoholism, I did feel that there was a certain spot in my heart that I really liked this population."

4. **Skill Set**

To be reflective, being an active listener, open-minded, non-judgmental, and open-mindedness.

5. **The Role of Supervision**

it was very helpful…

…supervision really helped me being comfortable with that population.

In the beginning, I struggled with it (group activities) because I had a preconceived notion about myself, that I wasn't comfortable in group settings, but the further along I got, I learned that I was comfortable in group…

	Supervision was a big part of me being comfortable sitting across from that client.
6. The Role of Counseling	I tell people all the time I go to counseling, it's very helpful.
	I am big proponent of saying yes (graduate education counseling programs) should require counseling for their students.
	I found a lot of feelings of my own past experiences got brought up by hearing other people's stories…I would get so emotional sometimes because it would hit my heart.
	In talking with other people and my cohort, they did have the same experience where things they thought they had dealt with got brought back to them while giving counseling.
7. The Role of Professional Purpose	I think of purpose as a meaningful reason. There's meaning attached to what that action is.
	having a professional purpose " …is your drive to help others, and your drive to expand your knowledge and expand your skills…"
8. Gestalt 　• *Figure*	I really self-reflected to make sure that that was a population I felt comfortable working with, and my dad's an alcoholic…
	She later added, "I self-reflected, because when you work with something that is very personal, you have to make sure that you don't go in with any biases, and that it's going

to affect the work that you do…

- *Ground*

I found a lot of my feelings of my own past experience got brought up by hearing other people's stories…It would hit me hard because I was, yeah, I know how that feels.

My first couple of sessions, if there was silence, if they weren't talking, I tried to fill the space talking…

First, I took it personally, that there was something about me and how I approached individual sessions…I also thought that they were judging me while they were just sitting there…Are they judging me? Do they think I'm doing horrible? Is my hair out of place?

I thought that they were going to be really mean or rude or make me cry and run out of the room. She stated, "It pushed me out of my boundaries a lot. I learned a lot. I learned more than I ever thought I would."

9. FOUR LIVED EXISTENTIALS

- *Lived Body*

I'm comfortable around other individuals with just general mental illness, but working with addicts, it really pushed my boundaries… I did feel that there was a certain spot in my heart… I really liked this population.

"It pushed me out of my boundaries a lot. I am typically a very shy person…" She added that she

became comfortable being in groups and confronting group members about their behaviors toward the end of her practicum.

- *Lived Relation*

I also thought they were judging me while they were just sitting there, just because they would look at me, like they would make eye contact with me and they wouldn't stare off and so I was like, well what are the thinking? Are they judging me? Do they think I'm doing horrible? So, I would always be worried about what they were thinking while they were sitting and if it was negative about me.

Knowing that everyone was different, that really opened my mind, and I felt I need to make sure that I don't put everyone in the same box.

- *Lived Space*

It (practicum experience) pushed me out of my boundaries a lot.

(I would) cry and run out of the room

I'm sitting here and there's somebody that was charged with a criminal act sitting across from me, so it was intimidating.

there were clients there that had criminal backgrounds and things like that so I was nervous about that, what's going to happen, very unsure as to whether I would feel comfortable continuing to sit across from them

	Supervision was a big part of me being comfortable sitting across from that client.
• *Lived Time*	N/A

10. Units of Meaning

• *Countertransference*	I found a lot of feelings of my own past experience got brought up by hearing other people's stories, especially my dad's an alcoholic, so I would get emotional sometimes. It would hit my heart because I was, yeah, I know how that feels.
• *Projection*	My first couple of sessions, if there was silence, if they weren't talking, I tried to fill the space talking… First, I took it personally, that there was something about me and how I approached individual sessions… I also thought that they were judging me while they were just sitting there…Are they judging me? Do they think I'm doing horrible? Is my hair out of place?
• *Anxiety*	Working with addicts, it really pushed my boundaries.

I got put into a group to run, and that was just very nerve-wracking. …and very overwhelming. |

Recommendations

Participant #2 is a "big proponent" of the idea that counseling should be a part of graduate counselor education training, both on the basis of her own experience and the experiences of others in her cohort. She feels that continued professional development is also essential, as is self-care. Although she did not describe these aspects of counselor development as duties or responsibilities, this characterization would be consistent with Participant #2's continuing drive for self-improvement and her quest for meaning as articulated in her professional purpose.

Participant #3

Participant #3 is a 27-year-old Caucasian female who is in the last year of a Graduate School Counseling Program. She completed her practicum experience at an inner city public high school where the student population is predominantly African-American. She had less than one year of personal counseling during her first year of graduate school, and was considering returning to counseling at the time of her interview, because of "…just being in my internship and everything else that's going on in my life." This interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and adhered to the standard format, with a set of predetermined questions followed by some additional questions for clarification or a better understanding of the experience being described. We discussed the parameters of the relationship and revisited the consent form. Participant #3 indicated that she understood, and agreed to proceed with the interview.

Process of Population Selection

Participant #3 tapped her personal network to obtain her practicum placement at inner city public high school: "It really kind of wasn't like me picking a population, it was more I knew someone from the inner city public high school system." She was motivated to ensure a

placement somewhere, and not specifically to work with high school students. As she explained, "I really didn't focus on the population that I was working with." This practical strategy probably saved Participant #3 some time and trouble on the front end, given the fact that graduate schools typically provide students with very little guidance or assistance in securing a practicum placement. Although obtaining the placement may have been relatively easy, however, the practicum experience itself was not.

Participant #3's awareness during the selection process was focused on who, rather than what, she knew. She was somewhat aware of the types of issues her counseling clients might present, and their probable severity, but she did not consider this in advance. Participant #3 did not know what to expect at her practicum site until she got there, and the level of violence and drug use at the school shocked her. She consistently described her experience as beyond anything she had ever imagined, and her reaction as one of shocked disbelief, followed by confirmation that events really were as they appeared, then confusion about what to do: "I always heard stories and I'm like okay, is this real life? Some people would tell stories and I'd just be like I don't know, I don't know if it's really that bad…but it is pretty bad…[with] more violence than I ever could imagine." She later added, "I never imagined it would be that bad." She felt unprepared to counsel this population, and the administration's policies with regard to drugs and violence did not provide much support or direction. With regard to rampant marijuana use, she said, "…they just don't really want to do anything about it because they just can't keep suspending the students…" When violence erupted at the high school, counselors were instructed to retreat to the counselors' suite and "let the security guards deal with it."

Participant #3 did not consider, nor was she asked to consider, the practicum environment, the issues and characteristics of her population, her own history, or her skills set, in

120

order to determine if the placement would be a good fit. Her population selection did not reveal an established professional purpose as described by Damon (2008). Participant #3's selection of her practicum site was informed by a lack of intentionality, naïveté, and a sincere but vague desire to help. These were figure; her experience during the practicum, as described below in this analysis, was ground material.

Meaningfulness of Population Selection

Participant #3 worked with elementary students during her internship, and she preferred them to the inner city high school students at her practicum site. Elementary students "…just seem innocent and cute and I love being around them…only a few [elementary] students…are violent [or] bad but then once you get to inner city public high school…only a few students care about the school and are happy." It was easier for her to "figure out" the elementary students, who don't have "their minds already made up" like high school students do. She felt that it was important to "start stuff at the elementary level because…you can nip the problem in the bud…" Participant #3's feeling that she could make the most difference with students who have no real problems yet seems consistent with the apparent "shortcut" she took to find her practicum placement. However, when she recounted her experience with a difficult, violent 5th grade student, she showed sensitivity to his dysfunctional home situation and a growing sense of the systemic origins of his and other students' issues:

> I guess maybe I've been thinking about systems a lot. It seem like in inner city
> public high school, the violent kids all hang out [together] and they come from
> bad homes…You know you'll never get a hold of their parents, so kind of seeing
> the connection between everything [helped me understand them better].

It is important to note that Participant #3 had these insights after her practicum, not during or before it. In hindsight, she resolved "…to make a program or something or just get the awareness out there that drugs are bad." As she revealed next, she knows that drugs are bad because they have caused bad things to happen to important people in her life. The point at which she became aware that she wanted to pursue an anti-drug message is unclear, and while her desire seems sincere, her goal seems somewhat superficial. It resonates in some ways with the overarching narrative of her interview, in which she struggles to make sense of what is happening, and what to do about it.

Clinical Resonance

Participant #3's practicum may have recreated unfinished business from her past, as described by Polster and Polster (1973). When asked if she had any previous personal experiences with violence or drugs, Participant #3 replied, "Yeah, my sister overdosed on ecstasy, so she almost died from that, and I think…whenever I do graduate, I would want to do something to stop the drugs." She continued, "My friend was killed because her boyfriend was all messed up off of heroin. Where I grew up out in the city, it's not like the greatest neighborhood, like pills were around a lot." She revealed that, "When I was little…I was in a relationship where my boyfriend was on pills…I kind of just want to stop it or at least get my sister's story out there." It is interesting that Participant #3 was not a stranger to violence or drug use, yet she seemed to struggle to discern what was real with regard to them in much the same way she described her struggle to understand what was happening during her practicum:

> [My sister] swears that she only took ecstasy once and you know how they say it
>
> can kill you sometimes the first time you take it?...I feel like sometimes when you
>
> hear those stories, you're like, I don't know if I believe that's true but I believe my

sister and it almost did kill her, so—

Participant #3 has had personal experiences very similar to those of her clients, yet in describing that population she "…never imagined it would be that bad." She later added,

I always heard stories and I'm like okay, is this real life? Some people would tell stories and I'd just be like I don't know, I don't if it's really that bad. Maybe people are just exaggerating, but it is pretty bad, so I think that's why we need to target those populations.

Taken together, these statements have several implications: first, they support the notion that Participant #3's past experiences resonated with those of her practicum population; and second, they demonstrate that she was unaware of the resonance, at least in terms of what she might expect from her practicum population. These factors certainly contributed to her feelings of confusion and unpreparedness, and would have made her less able to detect issues of countertransference or re-traumatization in counseling sessions. The degree to which Participant #3's practicum experience resulted in personal or professional growth and development is unclear, even though she reiterated that afterward she understood more about counseling and "loved what I was doing…" Her lack of awareness was apparent from the start of the practicum process. This critical component of professional purpose is also a gauge of the likelihood of success in the practicum experience. It may be part of the reason why at times Participant #3 was no match for the overwhelming array of issues with which she was confronted in the unpredictable, problematic environment of her practicum.

Skill Set

Participant #3 identified patience, empathy, listening, understanding, non-judgmental stance, and the ability to multitask as the skills needed to work with this population. She

perceived herself as still working on honing these skills. For example, she stated, "The multitasking, I could do better," and added, "Yeah, I think about—I'm really good with talking, I'm not really afraid to ask questions or anything." Although Participant #3 identified a skill set that aligns with the Rogerian Model (Rogers, 1961), it appears that she lacked a clear, practical understanding of those skills or how to assimilate them into sessions. For instance, being articulate and engaged is not the same as expressing empathy and understanding. Participant #3 did not appear to see these as separate skills. She stated, "I definitely got better with the empathy…in the beginning, I was just like, wow. And then as the student's story unfolded, I understood more." Some of Participant #3's imprecision may simply be due to her habitual way of speaking; it does appear that she learned about the necessary skills through trial and error during her practicum, even if she could not clearly distinguish the skills in the moment. In hindsight, she realized that "Before [the practicum] I was timid to go up and talk to people…I was a little shy before…" She was candid about her initial anxiety and fear of making a mistake, and realized that she was "…more trying to solve everyone's problems and give advice…" and, in the beginning, "…trying to do everything" for the students in an attempt to build rapport. She later realized, "…you don't want to do that." Participant #3 found that she judged the students at first: "It was geared toward the violence. I think it was more like why is this person being violent, do you know what I mean? They're messed up. Why are they being such a jerk…but now I realize violence is kind of like a learned behavior." Participant #3 was "stuck a lot" and "didn't know where to go" when her students came to her with "something major…I could handle, 'Oh this girl said this about me and I can't stand her,' or 'Oh, my boyfriend broke up with me and he's such a jerk, but if a major thing – honestly, I kind of felt bad and was caught up in my own emotions." Because she was "in my head a lot" it was difficult for Participant #3 to

124

see her clients, or to "know where to go with it." During several particularly charged encounters with clients she simply left the room. This is not to suggest that she did not learn from these experiences. However, this learning did not come easily and appears to be consistent with Participant #3's struggle to be in the moment, assimilate her theoretical knowledge, and act with awareness in sessions.

The Role of Supervision

Participant #3 revealed that supervision helped her deal with her anxious moments, and that her school supervisor "…really opened my eyes and enlightened me to a lot of things." Participant #3 initially blamed herself when students seemed uninterested in her college readiness group, and then came to accept that "some people just are not going to change, I guess." Her supervisor helped her see that neither she nor the students were necessarily at fault. Her school supervisor "had a lot of experience with that population and he was actually the one who made me realize, like he said some of these kids don't even know where they're getting their next meal from, so you can't expect them to be ready to go to class and do good, you know?"

Participant #3 learned that giving advice is not therapy, and that "fixing everything" for the client is enabling rather than empowering. Participant #3 gained some clarity about what it meant to be an advocate for the students. She learned assertiveness skills, and enjoyed assisting the students as part of a team. Participant #3 moved from judgment toward acceptance: "There were a lot of situations where I caught myself judging…there's no reason to judge, because I don't know what's going on." Perhaps Participant #3's difficulty in processing her experience and emotions, especially around violence, were related to lingering issues around the violent death of her friend. She demonstrated growth and maturity in her nascent understanding of the

complexity of violent behaviors. It is likely that her practicum experience would have been more successful, however, if she had been more self-aware. Although the practicum is intended to give inexperienced counselors an opportunity to learn by doing, a lack of experience need not be synonymous with a lack of self-awareness. This raises the interesting question of how much awareness is "enough" to ensure that novice counselors can effectively serve their practicum clients and maximize the potential for learning during the practicum.

Although Participant #3 speculated that, "…both of my supervisors are really, really awesome but I feel like if you didn't have good supervision, you could still figure it out [as long as you had] someone to talk to," it appears that supervision was a key factor in her generally positive assessment of her practicum experience, despite her occasional discomfort, sadness, and confusion.

The Role of Counseling

After the violent drug-related death of her friend, Participant #3 had been to counseling "off and on throughout all of graduate school." It would sometimes take only a few sessions with the same therapist for Participant #3 to "feel better," and she intended to return to counseling soon because of "my internship and everything else that's going on in my life." While she believes that counseling is helpful, she did not agree that counseling should be required for graduate counselor education students. She felt it would be "a good idea for it to be an option…" However, she did not "really think that you should ever force anyone into counseling, and if they would require it, I feel like we shouldn't have to go do it ourselves," most likely due to the cost, which previously had been a deterrent to her.

126

The Role of Professional Purpose

      For Participant #3, "Purpose is your meaning…what do you want to do with your life and how is it a good thing. I think your purpose needs to be kind altruistic in nature, where you're giving back." Participant #3 described purpose in general as "kind of like spirituality," and her own purpose as: "I feel like I'm here to help God out and help people see the world is a good place…I think everyone's purpose is what is going to bring them peace too. " She added, "Your purpose is going to bring you peace…because you're doing what you're meant to be doing, and you're happy at doing it and you're helping other people while you're doing it." Purpose "is unique to you…I feel like no one can tell you what your purpose is except yourself." This description is consistent with the way she described herself, in connection with her counseling work, earlier in the interview: "…I talk to my mom about [my clients] too and she's just, you can't change the world and I kind of – I'm a little hard-headed, I want to change the world…" Purpose and professional purpose should "tie together. But your professional purpose, I think, I guess giving back to the world…How do you give back?" Her own professional purpose is "to help the kids."

      As she admitted at the start of the interview, however, Participant #3 did not actively seek to work with children or adolescents during her practicum. It seems likely that she may have identified this purpose during or after her practicum experience, or perhaps that she simply always wants to "save the world" wherever she happens to be. In either case, Participant #3 did not articulate her professional purpose in terms that align with the definition proposed by Damon (2008), and which informs this research. According to Damon (2008), purpose includes having a goal that benefits others and also has personal meaning, along with the skills needed to accomplish the goal. Although Participant #3 has now established a goal that loosely fits the

criteria, and can identify the necessary skills, it appears that during her practicum she had difficulty distinguishing those skills and assimilating them in practice. Participant #3's goal seems aspirational rather than intentional, and to derive from a diffuse kindness and caring rather than from focused awareness.

Gestalt (Figure/Ground)

The ease with which Participant #3 might secure a practicum placement through her personal contacts was figure for her during the selection of her practicum population. As she described the process, "I knew someone from the inner city public high school system, so I got in…" She was jarred by the violence and drug use at the practicum site, but did not appear to connect the practicum environment with her own previous experiences until she was asked during the interview whether the population resonated with her in any way. She recounted that her sister almost died from an overdose, that a heroin addict murdered her friend, that her previous boyfriend "was on pills," and that she lived in an area where drug abuse was common. She recounted these incidents in a matter of fact manner; however, she may not have anticipated the impact that this unfinished business could have during the practicum experience.

It appears that Participant #3 has had to deal with several traumatic events in her life, and that she has not sufficiently processed them. This may account for her reaction to drugs and violence at her practicum site. When sitting with a difficult client, she stated:

> I just really tried to focus on what did I feel. I felt like I loved what I was doing.
> I felt like I was doing – I know that I can do it but I felt anxiety and I was a lot in
> my head and I got stuck a lot. In my head, I'd feel like, okay. I was trying to think
> of techniques and trying to apply all of that into it and sometimes I would just get

stuck or if they would say something – like, my one girl, she had Tourette's and whenever she started crying in front of me, I don't feel like I was prepared for that…

According to Participant #3, she often felt bad, sad, stuck, panicked, and confused with clients. She walked out during several sessions because she "was stuck and didn't know what to do." Each of these incidents involved students who were emotionally wounded, drug-involved, potentially violent, or dealing with significant loss. Her focus at those times was on herself, and her response pattern (shock, disbelief, confirmation of what had just been said or what was happening, confusion, interruption of contact) indicates that she was unable to see her clients and, therefore, unable to counsel them.

Her college readiness group was a striking example of her inability to see and connect with her clients. She was anxious and sad when "it wasn't working…I thought I was going to be okay, let's go to college, and they would be okay. Or let's at least come to class, let's do something…" Her supervisor pointed out that the students' lack of engagement had generational and systemic roots, and that she should separate her clients' decisions from her view of herself. This instruction "really opened my eyes," and made her students and their circumstances more figural. Participant #3 primarily managed her anxiety by shifting her attention from herself to her students, and while she was often uncomfortable, she sometimes "…felt proud…" when her clients responded in small positive ways. In summing up her practicum as "an awesome experience," Participant #3 was most aware of what she learned, not what she accomplished. This observation does not minimize the value of her experience, which was very rich despite the probably depth of the ground material she brought to it.

Units of Meanings

Anxiety

Participant #3 discussed how she experienced anxiety during her practicum experience. She stated, "I was really anxious at first, but it made me realize that I love what I was doing." She added, "In the beginning, I was worried that I was going to make a mistake…and, really anxious and nervous, but it turned out to be an awesome experience." During one particular session, she recalled, "I felt anxiety and I was a lot in my head, and I got stuck."

Codependency

Participant #3 appears to have struggled with issues of co-dependency in sessions. She stated, "I was more trying to solve everyone's problem and give advice…I would want to fix everything for everyone." She added, "In the beginning, I was just doing so much for them because I wanted to develop a good relationship with them and build a rapport and everything, but it kind of let some students take advantage of me." With a specific client, "[The student] was crying in front of me, and honestly, I didn't know what to do, and I just wanted to make her feel better." At another point in the interview, she recalled, "I would just want to fix everything for everyone. Then I realized that you don't want to do that."

Re-traumatization

Participant #3 appears to have experienced re-traumatization with her clients, and to have been unable to see them, or tend to them, as a result. She stated, "I kind of felt bad and was caught up in my own emotions, I think. And, I just got caught up in that and just didn't really know where to go with it."

130

Judgment

Participant #3 appears to have had some residual effects from her past experiences with the damaging effects of violence and drug abuse. She stated:

There were a lot situations where I caught myself judging a little bit, and I'm like, okay, there's no reason to judge, because I don't know what's going on. That's something that I'm working on, even in my internship today.

Participant #3 was made aware of her judgments during supervision, and displayed willingness to learn and the courage to behave in a different manner. However, it does not appear that she made the connection between her previous experiences and her struggles during her practicum. It seems likely that much still remains in ground.

Denial

In describing conditions at the inner city high school, Participant #3 seemed consistently to question the evidence of her senses. She stated, "So many kids come in smelling like weed. I never imagined it would be that bad. I always heard stories and I'm like okay, if this real life?" She added, "Some people would tell stories and I'd just be like I don't know if it's really that bad. Maybe people are just exaggerating, but it is pretty bad, so I think that's why we need to target those populations." Although it is possible that Participant #3 was exaggerating her dismay to emphasize the depth of the problem, it is more likely that her initial response to the facts was a manifestation of denial, especially given her references to what she had heard from others. This appears to have carried over into sessions, where she seemed unable to hear what her clients were saying over her own consternation and confusion.

Table 4

Topic: Participant #3 Professional Purpose (School Counseling Program)

Analytical Categories	Quotations of Significance
1. Process of Population Selection	
• *Intentionality*	N/A
• *Lack of Intentionality*	It really kind of wasn't like me picking a population, it was more I knew someone from the inner city public schools system. …I knew the teacher there, and he got me in…
2. Meaningfulness of Population Selection	…Because I feel you can stop the problems (violence and drugs) earlier.
3. Clinical Resonance	Yeah, my sister overdosed on ecstasy, so she almost died from that…I would want to do something to stop the drugs. My friend was killed because her boyfriend was all messed up on heroin. I was in a relationship where my boyfriend was on pills… I grew up in the city, in a neighborhood, where pills were around a lot.
4. Skill Set	Patience, empathy, understanding, listening, and multi-tasking.

5. The Role of Supervision

I had a great supervisor last year, a university supervisor and then my supervisor at school. The school supervisor had a lot of experience and just being able to talk to him about everything….he really opened my eyes and enlightened me to a lot of things.

6. The Role of Counseling

I think it helps, but I don't think that they (Graduate School) should force us(students) into doing it…If they did require it, I feel like they should provide someone.

7. Role of Professional Purpose

Your purpose is going to bring you peace too, because you're doing what you're meant to be doing, and you're happy at doing it, and you're helping other people while you're doing it.

Professional purpose is something positive, the thing that is going to make you happy. I think it's unique to you to—I feel like no one can tell you what your purpose is except yourself.

8. Gestalt
- *Figure*

In reference to population selection: *"It really kind of wasn't me picking a population, it was more I knew someone from the inner city public school system."*

I was more trying to solve everyone's problem and give advice…I would want to fix everything for everyone.

| | There were a lot situations where I caught myself judging a little bit, and I'm like, okay, there's no reason to judge, because I don't know what's going on. That's something that I'm working, even in my internship today. |

- *Ground*   N/A

11. FOUR LIVED EXISTENTIALS

- *Lived Body*

I was really anxious at first, but it made me realize that I love what I was doing.

In the beginning, I was worried that I was going to make a mistake…and, really anxious and nervous, but it turned out to be an awesome experience.

I felt anxiety and I was a lot in my head, and I got stuck

- *Lived Relation*

I did a college readiness group and some of them just dropped out of the group, and they wouldn't come. I would try, I'd try to talk to them in class and it made me sad. I'm like, oh what am I doing wrong?

I kind of got panicked but then I just realized it's better to say I don't know the answer, I'll find out for you.

- *Lived Space*

She was just crying in front of me, and honestly I didn't know what to do, and I just wanted to make her feel better. I felt all kinds of different things…

Another kid told me that he has dreams about sexually being abusive, and raping his girlfriend. And sometimes, when he sees her now, it's like starting to become real life to him. I just kind of got up and walked away from the situation, and walked out of the room, because I was like---red flag---I don't know what to do in this situation at all.

Lived Time

In the beginning, I was worried that I was going to make a mistake…and, really anxious and nervous, but it turned out to be an awesome experience.

In the beginning, I was just doing so much for them because I wanted to develop a good relationship with them and build a rapport

12. Units of Meaning
- *Co-dependency*

I was more trying to solve everyone's problem and give advice…I would want to fix everything for everyone.

In the beginning, I was just doing so much for them because I wanted to develop a good relationship with them and build a rapport and everything, but it kind of let some students take advantage of me.

She (student) was crying in front of me, and honestly, I didn't know what to do, and I just wanted to make her feel better.

- *Re-traumatization*

I kind of felt bad and was caught up in my own emotions, I think. And, I just got caught up in that and just didn't really know where to go with it.

135

• *Judgment Issues*	There were a lot situations where I caught myself judging a little bit, and I'm like, okay, there's no reason to judge, because I don't know what's going on. That's something that I'm working, even in my internship today.

Recommendations

Participant #3 would advise novice counselors to "be open-minded. Be ready to work… you really need to have your heart in it and make sure that it's definitely what you want to do." She believes that classroom instruction should include more hands-on, interactive activities, although she describes her learning style as tactile rather than visual or auditory.

Participant #4

Participant #4 is a thirty-year-old Caucasian female who is in the last year of the graduate counseling education program, and in the Community Counseling program. She completed her practicum at an agency where she provided court ordered in-home counseling to families who had been identified as at high risk of losing their children to foster care. She engaged in personal counseling prior to and during her practicum experience. This interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, and proceeded according to the usual format, which utilized a set of predetermined questions followed by additional questions as needed for clarification or better understanding of the experience. We discussed the parameters of the relationship and revisited the consent form. Participant #4 understood, and agreed to proceed with the interview.

Process of Population Selection

Participant #4 conducted her practicum at the agency where she is employed in the foster care and adoption unit, working with and licensing foster care families in a supervisory capacity. Her agency has multiple programs, so she took the opportunity to work in a different unit during her practicum, "to have some additional experience than what I typically do but [also] to make it as easy as I could to fit into my life." In her usual work, Participant #4 works with foster families who provide transitional care for children who have been removed from their biological families. In the practicum, she provided in-home counseling, parenting, and skill-building for parents whose children were in foster care, so that they might be able to be reunified with their child. Working with this population gave her the chance "to see that side of things."

When she selected this client population, Participants #4 primarily saw it as a matter of convenience. Because that is still true for her, it appears that convenience was figural to her in the selection process. However, she also described how passionately she felt at the time about the importance of attachment and its effect on the growth and development of children from birth to age 5. Although it is not clear whether her strong belief in working "the earlier the better" with these families informed her decision to work with at-risk parents, her clear articulation of this personal concern suggests that it may have had an influence, if only in ground. This would be consistent with a pattern Participant #4 exhibited throughout her interview. Because she values a viewpoint that encompasses multiple perspectives, and cultivates "the ability to constantly put yourself in check and be evaluating yourself and how you see the world," she has awareness of the ways in which her learning has expanded along "a continuum." So while she may not have selected her practicum population with precise intentionality, it could be argued that her selection

eventually had meaning. However, the implications for her, the counseling session, and the supervisory relationship may have been less significant during her practicum.

Meaningfulness of Population Selection

Participant #4 has had significant professional work experience with biological and foster families, and with the issues that affect young children in the child welfare system. Perhaps because of this, she clearly and easily explained the importance of working with her practicum population: "…being able to work with our parents as soon as kids get on the radar of professionals and child welfare is super important, because it can change how those children grow and develop." This is the somewhat technical response of a child welfare professional who has seen the effects of separation on children at close range. Later in the interview, Participant #4 revealed the ways in which these effects may have been of personal importance.

Clinical Resonance

When asked if her practicum population resonated with her, Participant #4 first described her affinity with her clients as professional rather than personal. She explained that the population now "resonated" with her in the sense that "now I do have more of a sensitivity to biological families and their struggles and trying to meet people where they're at, and understanding that love and good intentions and safety are very different things." Participant #4 characterized this as an internalized understanding: "I think that it's evolved to become a personal piece of my life. Yes, now it [the population] does [resonate]. Initially, it did not." As she continued, however, she described several ways in which her practicum population mirrored some features of her own life at that time. She described the population as "highly resistant clients" who sometimes called for "tough love...because you need to be a little bit

confrontational sometimes when people aren't doing what they need to do." Participant #4 had a

similar experience during her practicum, when she sought personal counseling:

> It's funny, initially. I [began seeing a different counselor] in January…She was
>
> more of a confrontational kind of counselor and I didn't like her but she was saying
>
> things that I needed to hear and I wasn't ready to hear and I never went back…

Participant #4 returned to the counselor a month and half later, announcing, "when I walked in,

'I wasn't ready to hear what you had to say.' Because there were things I had to face that I was

in denial about." She described her renewed relationship with the counselor as "wonderful" once

she realized that "I need to go. I need to figure this out."

This account is interesting for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that Participant #4 had

the self-awareness to bring "the things [she] had to face" from ground to figure. But although she

recognized that she herself had been a resistant client, she did not draw the parallel between her

own resistance to counseling and that of her resistant clients. This could be due in part to the fact

that she moved through her process fairly quickly, unlike her clients, whose resistance and

mistrust of the system are more entrenched.

Participant #4 did reveal that her personal struggles led to greater empathy toward her

clients. During her practicum:

> my daughter's father and I split for good…I was with him for eight years and now he
>
> doesn't have any interaction with her and so it's very interesting because now I can see
>
> how people get into situations because I, myself, have a child to a man that is very much
>
> like the families I worked with…anybody can be in those positions."

Participant #4's former partner was someone who abused alcohol, and her experience as an

enabler helped her more incisively to deal with her clients' behaviors and "be a professional and

to try not to enable a behavior because your emotions make you feel bad for somebody's situation." However, she did feel an urgency for her client parents that, perhaps, they could not get in touch with themselves: "…regardless of what happens with children, biological family connections are extremely important, and you need to understand where you come from to be able to grow in this world in any capacity and I truly, truly believe that."

On the one hand, Participant #4 appears to have an understanding from her professional experience that some continuity of the biological family unit is essential to the child's well-being. On the other hand, she does not appear to acknowledge personal concern over the fact that her former partner currently has no interaction with their daughter. This may demonstrate resistance, or may be due to the constraints of the interview process. The parallel and the issue it presents occur, as figure or as ground, in either case.

Participant #4 sought counseling during her separation with her partner because "there were a lot of emotions going on, and so I still needed to continue to do practicum, do school, do my job, take care of my daughter…" She felt she needed "to take control of the whole family to make sure nothing fell apart [while also managing] 12 people," and yet she "was just feeling completely overwhelmed and out of control with my own life…" Weekly counseling gave her an opportunity to "understand what was work, what was my personal life, what was the practicum…Just to kind of have somebody else to reflect that back on was extremely helpful during that process." Participant #4 later implied that she wanted to provide the same support to her clients, although she did not appear to acknowledge the parallel with herself. However, she said that she had few opportunities to tackle big issues with this resistant population in the short duration of the practicum.

The instrument that a counselor uses is the self, and counselors bring their histories, relationships, and triggers to the counseling session. If this happens outside the counselor's awareness, the counseling session may suffer. Participant #4 appears intuitively to have understood this; although she sought counseling for her own benefit, this was also an act of professional responsibility in light of the ways in which her own circumstances mirrored those of her clients. In addition, Participant #4 is aware that her clients presented some issues that more clearly resonated with her former partner. When asked what she would do differently, based on what she had learned during her practicum, she responded:

> I think I would push myself…and try and work in drug and alcohol because it's
> something that is very, very hard for me to understand…After being with an alcoholic…I
> have so many personal things that it is hard to watch somebody destroy your own life and
> destroy your child's life and then be very objective when you're looking through that."

Although some of her practicum clients were abusing drugs and alcohol, that was not the focus of her work with them. She has realized that addiction is "still something that I need to continue to work through, that personal piece…this will be always part of my experience of who I am as a human being now, and if I want to continue to work in this population, I have to constantly be revisiting it." Participant #4's aspirations in this regard are personal as well as professional. She knows that she is drawn to explore substance abuse disorder because of her ambivalence toward her former partner, and her desire to develop a more global empathy. She appears to be aware that her personal experience has left her with emotions and issues that may linger in ground. She may be less aware of the parallel between herself and her clients: "I just think that for some of these parents, that there needs to be a lot of work to really get to the core of what's happening and that takes a long time…"

141

Skill Set

Participant #4 identified two skills that she considers critical effectively to work with her practicum population: "the most crucial is the ability to constantly put yourself in check, and be evaluating yourself and how you see the world, and understanding what your expectations of life are, and where other people are." Although Participant #4 describes herself as very self-aware, she is also conscious of the push-pull between awareness and "setting my agenda" with clients. In addition to self-reflection and evaluation, she feels that flexibility is key. She thinks of flexibility as a willingness to adjust expectations and patiently build trust "because there is no trust for the system in general so you walk in with a barrier that's created by a court system prior to them even seeing your face…" These proposed skills are legitimate, given the challenges this population presents, but they also contain aspects of control, an issue that Participant #4 has struggled to manage and which has been both figure and ground for her.

While an effective counselor may require other skills as well–for example, the skills articulated in the Rogerian Model (Rogers, 1961)–Participant #4 appears to have interpreted this interview question narrowly, identifying skills that she feels are of particular value with highly resistant populations from her own experience. However, skills such as empathy, maintaining a nonjudgmental stance, and sincerity are equally important when working with highly resistant clients. This selective response may be another example of Participant #4's tendency to characterize her learning as a constantly evolving continuum, borne of professional and personal experience and "molded into one destiny."

The Role of Supervision

Participant #4 found her site and university supervision to be extremely helpful in dealing with her most challenging clients. She was exposed to and reviewed the Prochaska and

DiClemente Transtheoretical Model of Change (cited in Miller & Moyers, 2006) in these sessions, and group sessions reinforced for her the need for "that flexibility, I think comes back into keeping yourself in check because you think, oh, I didn't think about it but why didn't I think about it like that? Was it because it was something I was believing? It just all kind of translates together into that constant, constant looking at everything." Supervision appeared to had given Participant #4 a safe space to own her mistakes and even laugh about them: she recalled a counseling session when she prematurely asked a client "the miracle question" and was stymied by her client's response ("That's when I learned that this is not a rapport-building question."). In general, supervision contributed to Participant #4's positive practicum experience of increased confidence and competence. It helped her manage her anxiety, and her issues with control. She is candid, however, in admitting that the most significant contributors to the success of her practicum were her professional work experience and her maturity as a "seasoned" older student. For that reason, she believes that students should "take a break" to gain work experience in the interval between undergraduate and graduate school.

The Role of Counseling

Participant #4 is a strong advocate for counseling ("I think everybody should go to counseling") and believes that "anybody in the helping field needs to [engage in personal counseling]." This is particularly true because counselors' role in society forces them to assume an authoritative stance, even in their personal lives: "people are just kind of drawn to you for help so it's almost like you're getting it everywhere but you don't get that break, and so it's good to have that…neutral person just to let all that out." Likewise, graduate counselor education programs should "absolutely" require that their students engage in counseling.

The Role of Professional Purpose

Participant #4 equated purpose with the maxim, "Being the change you want to see in the world." She described professional purpose as "understanding what direction you want to go into…understanding what suits you best as you evolve between professional and educational experiences." Participant #4 believes that purpose includes "constant education, self-awareness, uncomfortable experiences that create professional growth." When asked to articulate her own professional purpose, however, Participant #4 again used the term "continuum," this time of undefined immediate and long-term goals, the former being "more clear to me right now than what lies ahead down the road…" While her immediate goals may be related to her passion and expertise around families and attachment, this was not clearly expressed. It may be that her view of "purpose" is more closely associated with "motivation," as when she volunteered to explain why she chose to enter the field of counseling: "…as I've grown professionally and educationally, now I really realize the niche that is out there for kids and their families that have some lack of understanding in attachment issues, and so I really want to focus on that population…" If this is indeed Participant #4's professional purpose, she has expressed it in terms consistent with Damon's definition (Damon, 2008).

Gestalt (Figure/Ground)

Participant #4's professed reason for selecting her practicum population was its convenience, even though she was somewhat aware of parallels between her experience and that of her clients. She described these court ordered clients as "highly resistant." At the onset of Participant's #4 practicum experience, she and her daughter's father, who abuses alcohol, were separating; he no longer has contact with their daughter. She stated, "I can see how people get into situations because I, myself have a child to a man that is very much like the families I

worked with." Participant #4's lack of clarity around her intention in selecting her practicum

population likely led her to clients who mirrored her own issues. Although convenience was

initially figure for her, the awareness she cultivated in personal counseling may have brought her

issues from ground to figure. Certainly, ground issues seemed to move to figure during her

practicum experience when Participant #4 realized that she brings herself, as she is, into the

counseling session.

She described her personal counseling experience as initially resistant: "I didn't like [the

counselor], but she was saying things that I needed to hear…about a month and half later…I

went back." Although she does not seem to realize the parallel, Participant #4 describes herself

the way she describes her clients: "highly resistant" and "in denial." Interestingly, Participant

#4's biggest challenge was working with clients that were court ordered. In contrast to her foster

families, "they (practicum families) did not want to work with you." While Participant #4 found

personal counseling helpful, her description of its benefits borders on intellectualizing:

> I just think that there is so much value into verbalizing out loud what you're experiencing
>
> in your head, and having somebody to reflect it back to you…You're more clear to know
>
> what direction you're going in by bouncing it off of somebody.

Her emphasis here may be echoed in another description of her own work with a client:

"…initially walking in, I think I was probably in my mind, I was not being fair as I probably

should have been." Participant #4 considers it a liability that she has "a tendency to talk a lot…"

In conversations with her therapist, she has associated her discomfort with silence with "a lack of

control, for some weird reason." Participant #4 admitted that she needed therapy during this time

to distinguish what was happening in her personal and professional worlds; ultimately, however,

they formed a continuum of "multiple experiences that have molded into one destiny for my life."

Other ground material emerged later in the interview. A client whose daughter was in foster care due to allegations of sexual abuse, and who was in denial about her boyfriend's guilt, triggered issues for Participant #4: "keeping my own perspective as a mom was challenging…to take my own personal feelings out of that." Participant #4 aspires to the crucial skills of self-awareness and flexibility and, although she has attained these skills to some degree, she maintains that "it's a continuum…constant room for professional development." She admitted, "I don't think I was very mindful of that as I started the process. That [self-awareness] definitely was an evolution throughout."

Units of Meaning

Resistance

During her practicum, Participant #4 worked with "families that are at risk of losing their children in foster care and they're all court ordered…" Her own family was breaking up at the time and, while the parallel is not quite as plain to her as it could have been, she "can see how people get into situations because I, myself have a child to a man that is very much like the families that I worked with." Although she worked through her own resistance to counseling, it is less clear whether she could effectively "see" her most resistant clients. At her supervisor's suggestion, she focused on building rapport and "small things" rather than "the big picture." Nonetheless, she felt like "we didn't do substantial work" and indulged in a brief fantasy about what it would be like to work "with somebody that truly is a voluntary client, how different that experience would be. Regardless of who it is, court ordered or not…you have to meet them

146

where they're at but in order for change to happen, there has to be a reciprocation, no matter how good your rapport is."

Participant #4 demonstrated a commitment to self-awareness, but was honest about her own struggles with feeling overwhelmed, out of control, and "in [her head]." She realized that she had been a resistant client, telling her counselor, "I wasn't ready to hear what you had to say. Because there were things that I had to face that I was in denial about." While she insists that "biological family connections are extremely important and you need to understand where you come from to able to grow in this world," she does not appear to see the link between her clients' family situation and her own. She acknowledges her ties to her former partner, for whom she lacks empathy and understanding, saying that she would like to "push herself" to work in drug and alcohol. While her desire for understanding may be an opportunity for growth, it also seems likely that it comes from self-criticism and attention on the other, as opposed to her own experience of the relationship.

Co-dependency

Participant #4 alludes to the fine line between empathizing with a client and "the real things that you need to try to work on for people to keep their children safe." "Your emotions make you feel bad for somebody's situation," she said later, "So it's just that constant keeping yourself in check as you're working through that." Here she admitted her constant struggle throughout, how she 'feels bad for another' in situations, a characteristic of co-dependency.

Enabling

Participant #4 discussed how her own experience as an enabler had the potential to affect her work with her practicum population:

Understanding how not to enable because I—in my personal experience did enable a

behavior in my own family and then to be a professional and to try not to enable a

behavior because your emotions make you feel bad for somebody's situation.

Table 5

Topic: Participant #4 Professional Purpose (Community Counseling Program)

Analytical Categories	Quotations of Significance
1. **Process of Population Selection**	
• *Intentionality*	N/A
• *Lack of Intentionality*	it was more out of convenience
2. **Meaningfulness of Population Selection**	being able to work with our parents as soon as kids get on the radar of professionals and child welfare is super important, because it can change how those children grow and develop
3. **Clinical Resonance**	I don't think it's necessarily personal. I think that it's been through my professional experience over the years.
	I was dealing with my daughter's father, who is an alcoholic, and I lived with him and my daughter—I was with him for eight years and now he does not have any interaction with her. So, it's very interesting because now I can see how people get into situations, because I myself, have a child to a man that is very much like the families that I worked with
	I really did take time and went to counseling weekly, just to keep myself in check and to work through that and to work through and

understand what was work, what was my personal life, what was the practicum…Just to kind of have somebody else to reflect that back on was extremely helpful during that process

I didn't like but she was saying things that I needed to hear and I wasn't ready to hear, and I never went back to her. It was about a month and half ago, I was like you know what, I am in a different spot, and then I went back to her…

Participant #4 admitted to her counselor, "I wasn't ready to hear what you had to say. Because there were things that I had to face that I was in denial about it."

4. **Skill Set**

The most crucial (skill) is the ability to constantly put yourself in check, and be evaluating yourself and how you see the world and understanding what your expectations of life are, and where other peoples are.

Another skill is being flexible, "as a younger professional, I would typically set my agenda and try to push that onto who I was working with…"

5. **The Role of Supervision**

supervision was helpful, both at site and at the University.

(Universities supervisors) didn't have a good understanding of the neurobiological effects on brain development and what can happen when kids are unattached.

6. The Role of Counseling	Had engaged in her own counseling prior to and again during her practicum experience.
	I think everybody should got to counseling.
7. Role of Professional Purpose	Being the change you want to see in the world.
	understanding what direction you want to go into…understanding what suits you best as you evolve between professional and educational experiences.
	constant education, self-awareness, uncomfortable experiences that create professional growth.
8. Gestalt	
a. Figure	
	it was more out of convenience
	I really did take time and went to counseling weekly, just to keep myself in check and to work through that and to work through and understand what was work, what was my personal life, what was the practicum…Just to kind of have somebody else to reflect that back on was extremely helpful during that process
b. Ground	
	I was dealing with my daughter's father, who is an alcoholic, and I lived with him and my daughter—I was with him for eight years and now he does not have any interaction

with her. So, it's very interesting because now I can see how people get into situations, because I myself, have a child to a man that is very much like the families that I worked with

13. FOUR LIVED EXISTENTIALS

- *Lived Body*

  I was feeling completely overwhelmed and out of control with my own life

- *Lived Relation*

  it was also very challenging to direct her in any sort of way…

  keeping my own perspective as a mom was challenging

  If I would ever think that it was a possibility, I would not choose to be with this person, and…that was challenging for me to take my own personal feelings out of that.

- *Lived Space*

  There's a barrier as you walk in the door, they already don't want you to be there.

- *Lived Time*

  N/A

14. Units of Meaning

- *Resistance*

  I wasn't ready to hear what you had to say. Because there were things that I had to face that I was in denial about

  I never went back and then about a month and half later, I was in a different spot

- *Co-dependency*   …because your emotions make you
                                     feel bad for somebody's situation.

                                     So it's just that constant keeping
                                     yourself in check as you're working
                                     through that.

- *Enabling*   Understanding how not to enable
                                     because I—in my personal
                                     experience did enable a behavior in
                                     my own family and then to be a
                                     professional and to try not to enable
                                     a behavior because your emotions
                                     make you feel bad for somebody's
                                     situation.

Recommendations

While Participant #4 believes that the education she received was helpful, she "was

shocked at the lack of education on child welfare and trauma in general…" She added, "…there

are not a lot of competent individuals in attachment and in childhood trauma as it relates to foster

care and multiple placements…" She noticed that the doctoral student providing her university

supervision "didn't have a good understanding of the neurobiological effects on brain

development and what can happen when kids are unattached…" While she was pleased that a

course on trauma has been added to the graduate curriculum, she believes the program should

also include instruction on the child welfare system. She also firmly believes that counseling

should be mandatory for graduate counselor education students, and that they should have some

professional work experience with their intended population prior to graduate school.

Participant #5

Participant #5 is a 25-year-old African American female who is in her last semester of the

graduate counselor education program in the Community Counseling Program. She has never

engaged in personal counseling. Participant #5 performed her practicum at an agency that provides counseling services for mothers and expectant mothers. This interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and followed the established format, consisting of a set of predetermined questions supplemented by additional questions as needed for clarification or better understanding. We discussed the parameters of the study and revisited the consent form. Participant #5 indicated that she understood, and agreed to continue with the interview.

The Process of Population Selection

Participant #5 selected her practicum site after the site she had initially secured became unavailable. As she describes it, she was more concerned with simply finding a placement than with the types of clients she might see. She stated, "There's a list on the blackboard for all master's counseling students with different sites, so I just called around." She added, "So, it just happened to be that that was the one that came into place." She described the population as, "…primarily women who are moms or expecting to be moms…A lot of the clients…are abortion-minded and they come in there maybe unsure what to do…" Her counseling services were aimed at "helping them come to a decision or at least being okay with whatever decision they make." She indicated that some of her clients had already opted for abortion, and had come to the agency for post-abortion counseling.

Participant #5's site selection process was not out of the ordinary. Some graduate schools typically provide students with lists of possible practicum sites, and it is the student's responsibility to initiate contact and pursue a placement. These same schools do not monitor the process or question the student's site selection, and it does not appear that Participant #5 discussed her selection with an advisor or faculty member. If a student selects a practicum population with no intentionality, as Participant #5 did, he or she may be unprepared for issues

153

that may arise in counseling sessions. How the student responds to these issues, including the ways in which the student communicates these issues during supervision, may reveal a lack of self-awareness. This lack of awareness, in turn, may be reflected in whether the student can articulate a professional purpose as defined in this study. Participant #5's figural understanding of her population selection was that "…that's the first place that got back to me…" What was ground would likely emerge in her counseling sessions at the site.

Meaningfulness of Population Selection

When asked why it was important to her to work with her practicum population, Participant #5 seemed unclear about to whom the question pertained. She responded, "With women?" and then continued, " I think it's important because I can relate to what they're going through, maybe not based on their experiences, but as a woman." Although the question did not directly ask what, if anything, Participant #5 might have in common with her practicum clients, that was her interpretation. She could identify no commonality other than gender. However, she added, "One day I hope to be a mom so it's something I learned from them as well with the stories that they shared so being able to relate to them, that was important for me." Participant #5 acknowledged the value of being about to relate to her clients. However, it also appears that the practicum's meaningfulness hinged on whether the experience was useful, important or relevant to her, rather than on what needs the population had and whether she could address them. This tendency toward self-reference was echoed later, in her description of what she learned about herself as a person during her practicum:

> I was grateful for myself and where I am in life. Especially when I met with girls that were in crisis that were my age or younger and the decisions they made that brought them to where they were. It just made me more grateful.

While this response may have been a reflection of Participant #5's literal interpretation of the question, it implies a distancing from the other, and possibly a denial of self: a characterization of herself as completely different from her clients, and a failure to recognize aspects of self in the other. This distancing seems to be part of a larger pattern of judgment and ambiguity about her clients that might have limited her opportunities for growth and development. With distance came a lack of engagement with her clients, and the conclusion that "If anything, I just didn't feel challenged enough [during the practicum]."

Participant #5 also learned "that I tend to feel bad for people easily. I don't necessarily express that to them but sometimes I just noticed that I feel so bad for a person when they don't really feel that bad for themselves…I care so much." Participant #5 was also surprised to find that she was "a better listener than I thought I was." It seems likely that Participant #5's "caring" feelings may have been less an expression of true empathy than of dismay at her clients' choices. Likewise, Participant #5's listening seems more passive than active, as evidenced by her description of her frustration and disappointment when certain clients were unwilling or unable to engage with her in planning for their futures. She describes her clients' vulnerability: "A lot of them don't feel like they're good enough to be moms…so [my role was] just encouraging them and listening to them, and letting them know that they can if they want to." When some clients could not join her where she was, however, Participant #5 had difficulty meeting them where they were: "I can't make them set goals if they're not willing to…you can't work harder than the client."

Although Participant #5 recognized that she had judgments about some of her clients, she did not appear to consider the extent to which her judgments colored her experience. Aspects of herself in ground material remained in ground. This appears to have been reinforced in

supervision, which she described as "helpful." It appears, however, that supervision was

primarily helpful because Participant #5 interpreted her supervisor's feedback as validation of

her own position, and not as a suggested strategy for connecting with her client:

> The client wasn't willing to do any work…so I just felt stuck. It was like, what else
>
> do I do now? Where else do I go from here? Eventually, the session was cut short and
>
> I just explained to the client that whenever they were willing to address the situation
>
> we could work on that, but I wasn't going to make them if they weren't ready…
>
> [I] talked to my supervisor about it and she agreed…"

Dealing with resistance is less about dealing with content than about processing what is

occurring with the client in the moment. Perhaps Participant #5's resistant clients could have

benefitted from motivational interviewing; a discussion about the challenges they were facing

simply in coming to a session; or acknowledgement of their own mixed feelings about their

pregnancies. Participant #5's supervisor may have suggested these and other ways that

Participant #5 could have engaged her clients; however, the most important learning for

Participant #5 was that her initial instincts had been correct. This appears to be part of a pattern

of a lack of self-awareness, an inability to meet her clients in the moment, and, consequently, as

assessment that the practicum "wasn't too challenging."

Clinical Resonance

Participant #5 maintained that there was no resonance between her and her practicum

clients other than "…just being able to relate to them as a woman." She later added:

> There were some clients that came that were around my age, maybe younger, still in
>
> school and trying to balance school and being a mom, a single mom, and I could just
>
> put myself in their shoes and imagine how I would feel if I was trying to balance

156

school here and being a mom so just—empathizing with them.

Participant #5 acknowledged that her empathy was tested by her judgments about her clients' choices. She perceived her task as, "Just supporting them and accepting them…I won't necessarily agree with the choices that they've made but not judging them and just accepting them for who they are and what they've done regardless of whether I agree with it or not." But although it "never came out to any client, sometimes I would think, really? Why did you do that…but I never brought that out to a client. [I had to be] conscious of my thinking whenever I was working with certain clients." The most striking example was a client who had had "about six" abortions for reasons Participant #5 characterized as "selfish…just because she wanted to."

It appears that Participant #5 accepted this client's somewhat glib explanation at face value, in the same way she accepted why some of her other clients resisted planning for the future: "A lot of them didn't want to try…to change or try to move on from the past. Whatever they had experienced, they weren't willing to try." She understood that these women were trapped in generational patterns of abuse and abandonment, but found it challenging that they were "not seeing a positive in a situation or not feeling like they were good enough to do anything…A lot of them felt like, okay, if I have this baby, that's the end of my life. I can't do anything else so not wanting to try…" As described by Participant #5, many of these clients presented classic symptoms of clinical depression, including helplessness, hopelessness, and perhaps reckless behavior. While it may have been outside the scope of her practicum task to delve into these feelings, Participant #5 maintained her distance while trying to steer clients away from their pain: "What they had negative, I would try to turn into a positive, so if someone said, 'I feel hopeless' I would ask is there anything in your life right now that gives you hope, so they can at least see that there's something there that they can look to for that motivation."

Participant #5 encouraged her clients to accept the reality of their situation: "…helping them understand, okay, you're in this situation, you can't take it back, what can you do to move on?" This was helpful to some clients, who "were open and actually took the time to think about what else they could do to make themselves feel better." But "some just didn't see the point…they didn't want to work toward the future, they wanted to just focus on now…" Participant #5 had expected to encounter resistance with certain clients, "regardless of [where my practicum] was…[but] it was a lot more challenging than I thought it was going to be for certain clients."

Participant #5 tried "…to at some point have the client see what I see but it just wasn't working." She was unaware of her own resistance to clients who would or could not "move forward." Her resistance may have been rooted in her judgments about her clients' predicament, as evidenced by her sense of gratitude and relief when she compared her life to theirs, or may have been due to something else. But when confronted with clients who resisted her goal-setting sessions ("…no matter what I said or tried to explain, she just had this, I'm not going to work toward anything right now"), she stopped, too:

At some point, I felt that I was working harder than they were willing to work.

So I had to become aware of that and try to not work as hard. Not give up on

them, because that wasn't what I wanted to do but, again…I was working harder

than they were and I had to stop myself.

Like her resistant clients, Participant #5 felt that there was no point in trying, given the situation. Interestingly, her reaction to the standoff was that she "…felt bad for a lot of them. They didn't really seem to feel bad for themselves but I just felt bad about their situation. Some, that's what they knew so it was normal to them…I cared a lot more than I probably thought I

would." Her regrets on behalf of her clients may have been genuine or may have been a projection of her own feelings about what might be perceived as her failure. However, it appears that she did not question her own skill in dealing with their resistance.

Skill Set

Participant #5 stated that listening, encouragement, working through shame, and "supporting and accepting them" were needed skills in working with this population:

A lot of them don't feel like they're good enough to be moms, or good enough

to take on that role and raise a child, so just encouraging them and listening to

them and letting them know that they can if they want to.

Participant #5 believed that she has attained these skills, and felt prepared to work with her practicum population: "If anything, I just didn't feel challenged enough." When describing her resistant clients later in the interview, however, she admitted that, "Certain things I wasn't prepared for and that's part of why I had to talk to my supervisor, because it was a lot more challenging than I thought it was going to be for certain clients." Participant #5's tendency to overstate her own level of competence in the face of professional challenges that could be expected during a practicum is evident in her earnest use of clichés ("I still believe that I can't put in more work that the client…you can't save everyone"). It surfaced again near the end of the interview when she made a point of explaining why her practicum supervisor was wrong when she told Participant #5 that she was "too challenging…she said it would be better if I was non-direct when working with my clients. I don't know if that makes sense."

Participant #5 does not appear to have recognized the magnitude of the issues her clients were facing, or the skills required for working with issues of resistance, grief, loss, and trauma. This may have been due to her focus on the goal-setting aspect of her practicum task. But it is

159

unclear whether her practicum significantly advanced her attainment of those important skills. For example, she recognized that she "was asking a lot of closed-ended questions, so I have to ask more open-ended questions." This is just one of the techniques commonly used in working with resistant clients; there are many more that Participant #5 could have employed, such as the Transtheoretical Model for change developed by Prochaska and DiClemente (Miller & Moyers, 2006).

The Role of Supervision

As already noted, Participant #5's assessment of the helpfulness of supervision appears to have depended on the degree to which her supervisor's guidance validated the correctness of what Participant #5 did or did not do in sessions. The interview data does not indicate that supervision was, in fact, particularly helpful to Participant #5's professional development. Participant #5 did not completely understand the skill set she needed to work with this population, or how to assimilate those skills into practice. This practicum experience seems to have failed due to her lack of insight into herself as a person and novice counselor. Supervision may actually have included more constructive feedback than Participant #5 divulged; otherwise, it seems possible that the supervisor "stopped" in the face of Participant #5's resistance in much the same way that Participant #5 stopped trying with her clients. Given Participant #5's lack of awareness, however, it may be that she did not or could not hear her supervisor's suggestions. Participant #5 stated that she "…just talked with my supervisor about it and she agreed not pushing the client but waiting until they were ready to talk." This is not license to stop; it is a caution against pushing too hard and an acknowledgement that process, and not talk, is the focus in client-centered therapies. A competent counselor might be curious about the challenges clients experience in simply coming for a session, or might look for important non-verbal cues from

clients. If this advice was given, Participant #5 did not take it. The reasons why remained in ground, while the justification ("I can't work harder than the client") remained figural.

The Role of Counseling

Participant #5 had not engaged in any counseling prior to her practicum experience. She stated, "I would not have any trouble seeking counseling if I needed to...I think it can be helpful to actually be in the client's position and see…I just haven't needed it." Not surprisingly, Participant #5 does not believe that counseling should be required for graduate counselor education students: "I think it can be encouraged but I don't know. I just think of it if someone is not comfortable or someone doesn't really have anything going on where they need to seek a counselor, it may not be legit." She added, "…I wouldn't even know what to talk about because I wouldn't think that I needed counseling."

Although Participant #5 did not explain the circumstances under which someone "needs" counseling, her philosophy appears to be that counseling is only for those in crisis. It is not clear whether she developed that view on her own, or whether it reflects her school's instruction on the purpose of counseling and who is an appropriate counseling client. It is, however, interesting that Participant #5 does not view counseling as an important pathway to self-awareness, or view self-awareness as an important goal.

The Role of Professional Purpose

Participant #5 defined purpose as, "…the reason why I'm here, or what I'm here to do on earth…" She defined professional purpose as, "…as a professional, what are you there to do?" She added, "…what is your job? What is your purpose when working with a client? What are you expected to do?" Her definition of purpose includes the other:

I think other people come into consideration when you think of purpose, because

your purpose doesn't just benefit you. As a counselor, you're working with a client, what's your purpose with that client? It's more of the client and not more of you. According to Participant #5, purpose includes an understanding of why one does one's work, and who one is as a person. The nature of professional purpose and its relationship to population selection was never discussed in any of Participant #5's classes, but she believes that she has a professional purpose as a counselor. She stated, "My purpose, I believe, is to help people, to encourage them and to empower them." She added that her purpose is "to help the client identify their strengths and their skills and use them in life." She believes that professional purpose aligns with "the code of ethics as a counselor. I can kind of use that to define what my purpose is…what I'm expected to do, what I can't do, what I can do."

Participant #5 does not define her professional purpose in the terms set forth by Damon (2008), which include a goal that has personal meaning for the individual, benefits the world beyond the individual, and requires a set of skills that the individual possesses. Participant #5 derived little personal meaning from her population selection, and lacked the skills needed to work with highly resistant populations. She showed little self-awareness, which is consistent with her attitude toward personal counseling. Her practicum experience was disappointing; by her own account, she did not learn very much. It is interesting to note, however, that in her subsequent internship at a drug and alcohol treatment facility "…my site is totally different now and it's a whole new experience."

Gestalt Figure/Ground

It appeared that Participant #5 had only a superficial awareness of figure. For example, the only similarities she could see between herself and her practicum clients were in the areas of gender, age, potential for motherhood, and the pressures of balancing school with other

162

responsibilities. What she learned about herself during the practicum experience was also superficial: she "cared so much" and was grateful that her life is so different from the lives of her clients. As a counselor, she learned not to ask so many closed-ended questions and realized that she was a better listener than she thought she was. It appears that little ground material surfaced during the practicum, either in sessions or in supervision. Although Participant #5 found supervision to be helpful, its value appears to have been limited. The supervisor may have attempted to stop Participant #5 from pushing her clients too hard; however, Participant #5 understood that she should "wait." Participant #5 would find counseling helpful if she needed it, but she never has. If her graduate counselor education program required counseling, "…I don't think that's going to be a real experience. At least for me, if I was forced to, I wouldn't even know what to talk about because I wouldn't think that I needed counseling." Whether or not Participant #5 "needs" counseling, as she defines it, her lack of interest seems a missed opportunity for developing the self-awareness that would enhance her learning and professional development.

Table 6

Topic: Participant #5 Professional Purpose (Community Counseling Program)

Analytical Categories	Quotations of Significance
1. Process of Population Selection	
• *Intentionality*	N/A
• *Lack of Intentionality*	There's a list on the blackboard for all master's counseling students with different sites, so I just called around.
	So, it just happened to be that that was the one that came into place.
2. Meaningfulness of Population Selection	I can relate to what they're going

through, maybe not based on their experiences, but as a woman.

One day I hope to be a mom so it's something I learned from them as well with the stories that they shared so being able to relate to them, that was important for me

3. Clinical Resonance

Denied

4. Skill Set

A lot of them don't feel like they're good enough to be moms, or good enough to take on that role and raise a child, so just encouraging them and listening to them and letting them know that they can if they want to.

Just supporting them and accepting them.

5. The Role of Supervision

She (supervisor) agreed not pushing the client, but waiting until they were ready to talk.

I still believe that I can't put in more work than the clients wants to put in.

6. The Role of Counseling

I think it's helpful, if would be if a situation came where I needed counseling

I think it can be encouraged but I don't know. I just think of it if someone is not comfortable or someone doesn't really have anything going on where they need to seek a counselor, it may not be legit.

…I wouldn't even know what to talk about because I wouldn't think that I needed counseling.

7. Role of Professional Purpose

…the reason why I'm here, or what I'm here to do on earth…

what is your job…your purpose when working with client...what are you expected to do

it includes understanding…why you're there to do what you're doing, And, understanding who you are as a person too

8. Gestalt
  - *Figure*

I did my practicum working with primarily women who are moms or expecting to be moms.

 A lot of them are abortion minded

  - *Ground*

N/A

1. FOUR LIVED EXISTENTIALS
  - *Lived Body*

could just put myself in their shoes and imagine how I would feel if I was trying to balance school here and being a mom, so that just empathizing with them

There was a client who had about six abortions and her reasons were not necessarily—her reasons were selfish as to why she had those abortions and I just was upset about that because you know, she didn't

		have any legit reason why she wanted to have an abortion, it's just because she wanted to
•	*Lived Relation*	At some point, I felt that I was working harder than they were willing to work, so I had to become aware of that and try to not work as hard
		…I noticed at some point I was working harder than they were and I had to stop myself
		The client wasn't willing to do any work, so I spent maybe the first 20 minutes of the session trying to get them to do the work or encouraging them to do work so we can make some progress, and they weren't willing to so I just felt stuck.
•	*Lived Space*	N/A
•	*Lived Time*	N/A

Recommendations

Participant #5 recognized that a counselor's learning is a continuous process. She would caution counselors entering the profession, "Just understand that you learn as you counsel people…The book stuff doesn't always work when you're actually in the situation working with clients. I noticed that! It's like, oh, this isn't what I learned, but okay. I like that…experience is the best teacher." Participant #5 concluded by saying, "If you need counseling, go seek counseling, definitely. It can be helpful. Not just for the person as a counselor, but the person as an individual…so, whatever they're going through, they can work through."

Participant #6

Participant #6 is a 24-year-old Caucasian female student in her last semester of a School

Counseling Graduate Program. Participant #6 performed her practicum at a public elementary

school located outside the Pittsburgh area. She had not engaged in personal counseling prior to

her practicum experience. The interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and followed the

standard format, consisting of a set of predetermined questions with additional questions as

needed for clarification. We discussed the parameters of the interview and the consent form.

Participant #6 indicated that she understood and agreed to proceed with the interview.

Process of Population Selection

Participant #6 had done her undergraduate practicum at a high school, so she "…was

leaning toward elementary level" for her graduate practicum to round out her training as a K-12

counselor. She "…needed somewhere that was closer to my work so I chose (that section) of the

city, and I went to the elementary school." She focused on older elementary students (4th-6th

grade) because the 4th-6th grade counselor, who "…was the only one that really got back to me"

and who would be her supervisor, was on site at times that fit with her schedule. Although

matters of scheduling and convenience seemed paramount to the process of population selection,

Participant #6 added that she was "…also interested in that population. I felt like they might need

more help than many K through 3 might need…[because they might have] a better understanding

of family issues going on and they might have more problems socially…they're learning that

they don't need to be friends with everybody…"

Participant #6 primarily selected her practicum population to fulfill a school requirement,

to integrate with her schedule, and to be close to her work location. These admittedly practical

considerations outweighed concerns about the potential characteristics and qualities of 4th-6th

graders. Participant #6 had some sense of the issues that she might expect to find with this population, but she did not select this client group with intentionality or awareness. Convenience was figure for Participant #6; what remained in ground would unfold during the counseling sessions.

Meaningfulness of Population Selection

In addition to the practical considerations that informed her population selection, Participant #6 "…has a heart for kids." Although she realizes that adults also need support, her "…heart goes out to kids who need to be seeing a counselor on a daily basis, that need help understanding social issues and family issues and everything, so it's important for me to help kids in general but that population too." Participant #6 spoke with a clear yet nonspecific passion for her practicum population, which she echoed later in the interview when she stated, "I love school counseling. It's what I want to do. I can't really imagine myself doing anything else." She would tell other novice counselors that they'll "…hear a lot of bad stories that will break your heart but there's so much good that comes of it [counseling]."

Participant #6 appeared to find great satisfaction or meaning in working with elementary students. However, she did not articulate that meaning in terms that would distinguish this population from any other that needs counseling support, or explain why she felt such affinity for children in this age group. This lack of precision could be a function of a lack of awareness, signifying a lack of professional purpose; certainly, there were ground issues in play that came to the forefront as the interview continued.

Clinical Resonance

Participant #6 was candid and thoughtful in describing how her practicum population resonated with her own experience. First, she asked what the interviewer meant by "resonate;" then, she stated:

In elementary school, I kind of had a rough time, I guess, so that would probably be--- yeah. *Four through sixth grade were especially rough for me. I didn't even think about that beforehand, so I guess that might have subconsciously played into the choosing of that. Yeah, I had a lot of bullying when I was that age too, so I guess it did resonate with me. (Italics added)*

Participant #6 explained that her elementary school was very small. Many of the 16 girls in her class of 20 "singled [her] out a lot" and bullied her. She described a particularly shaming incident in which "…they stole notes I had been writing out of my desk and a whole bunch of – that's the one thing I remember the most but it just felt like nobody – not nobody…I did have friends, I promise, but the majority of my class didn't really like me…" Although she has "moved on from that," her recollections are interesting for two reasons: she did not see the parallels between herself and her practicum students until she was asked about them during the interview, and themes of anger, shame, and lack of control continually emerged during her practicum.

Participant #6 had not engaged in personal counseling, but during the interview she recognized the possibility that she had recreated unfinished business from her past, perhaps in order to find resolution as described by Polster and Polster (1973). If this was the case, however, she was unaware of it during her practicum ("I didn't even think about that beforehand"). The issues associated with the elementary school setting remained in ground, resulting in missed

169

opportunities for the client truly to be seen or heard. It seems apparent that graduate counselor education students might be better prepared for the experience, and have a greater chance of success, if they could explore these types of issues before the practicum, rather than being left to discover them months later–or not at all.

Skill Set

Participant #6 identified several skills that she feels are necessary to work with her practicum population, and which she has "Not attained. I'm still working on them and I'll be working on them probably for the rest of my life, but I think that the practicum experience definitely made me realize where I need to work." The first skill is the ability to be "very patient;" the second is the ability to balance discipline and support, including classroom management in a counseling setting. She continued, "I think also trying to decipher what might be behind what kids are saying," and "listening…being calm…laid back, being fun."

Participant #6 described her challenges in recognizing the need for, and developing, these skills during her practicum. Although she was generally patient and kind with her students, she became "…a little frustrated whenever kids would either sass me or they would just ignore what I was trying to say…" It was difficult at times to get the students "focused on what we're supposed to be working on." She recalled conducting a stress class on short notice to a 4th grade class, and how "the kids all wanted to play hangman and as I'm trying to teach them…they're all talking to each other and it kind of fell apart…" She felt embarrassed "because I can't round up a group of 4th graders to pay attention to me." She feared that the teacher observing her was "…going to think I don't know what I'm doing. They're not going to trust me to do this again. They're going to get annoyed because I'm winding up their kids…" She was relieved when a teacher explained that, "she let me flounder for my own benefit, to see what I could do…so it

was nice instead of her yelling over me to make everybody be quiet, she just tried to see what I could do." Interestingly, she somewhat wistfully characterized the 4th graders as being "…so much fun at the same time. I felt like they were – they liked what we were doing, it's just that they had a hard time, they were having so much fun, they would talk to each other about it."

Participant # 6 was alternately drawn to and exasperated by a 6th grade boy who "…always thought he was right…if I tried to work on something with him, he would just completely ignore everything I was saying…" He would abruptly change the subject, and "…he was really angry and a really big liar…" She was disturbed by the lies he told about his mother, who was largely absent from his life but whom he insisted was " 'a doctor, she makes so much money.' I wanted him to open up to me and be like, 'Well, my mom's not around and that makes me sad.' " She did not know how to work with this child's insecurities and fantasies, and saw only that "he lied and tried to make himself look a little better than maybe he was." She "felt stuck with that because I couldn't break it, I couldn't get him to be like, okay, I'm lying." When she heard that he was "going to beat that kid up…" she countered with logic: "I tried to explain to him the consequences…[violence] is not a good strategy…let's work on what are some good strategies. Most of those times he'd be like, I'm never angry. I don't get angry so – I don't know." He would constantly elude her as she tried to draw him out, and yet, she would be pleased and hopeful when he would greet her in the hall ("he would be very kind and say hi to me, ask how I was doing").

Participant #6 appeared to have attributed her challenges to the fact that she is "…not a very assertive person, I guess, and I don't like to yell at kids…[to get their attention]. I don't know how to not be mean yet get them focused on what I'm trying to do with them…" She had lunch with her troubled 6th grade student every day, and yet "I felt stuck…I was trying to help

him but I just felt like he didn't want the help." She had been nervous going into her practicum, despite feeling fairly prepared: "…I felt prepared for counseling in general but having a client not respond to what you're trying to do, I wasn't so much prepared for."

Participant #6's challenges occurred in the same setting in which she had been shamed, bullied, marginalized, and unable to assert herself as a child. She was asked to do a classroom lesson on bullying, for example, because:

> Fourth grade girls were having a lot of friendship issues. That's where the bullying thing came from. I was like, these 4th graders really need something to help them have better social skills, get along better with each other, because it was every day I was there, there was a teacher saying this 4th grader did this to this other girl, so that was one of the issues that kept coming up.

Her struggles during her practicum mirrored many of the same feelings that she must have had years before, in relation to her 4th-6th grade peers at that time: shame that they did not see her for who she was; fear that, in fact, they did; frustration at being overlooked and ignored; preoccupation with self and a corresponding inability deeply to see the other; a fervent wish to belong and be accepted; and a tendency to either blame the other when this did not happen, or claim that the fault was hers because she had not built rapport or provided enough fun activities.

These ground issues affected her practicum in other subtle ways. For example, she did not check with classroom observers to see if her judgments and projections about her failed attempts at classroom management were accurate, and she chafed at how difficult it was to get direct hours during her practicum but did not take action: "I felt like I left her [site supervisor] in complete control of giving me all of my clients and I don't know how I would have changed that but I think I could have been more insistent like, let's talk to this person."

172

Participant #6's practicum experience was informed by many of the same issues inherent in the bullying dynamic and which center on the struggle to get and maintain control in social situations. In that regard, it is poignant that she had her "best" practicum experience when she resolved problems between "two little boys who were having friendship issues. They didn't really understand what friends were…[they would] trip each other, punch each other hurt each other, and they were like, but we're best friends…" Both boys were "extremely creative and I was like, why don't we make our own book about friendship…they had so much fun and they didn't want to stop…"

Participant #6 described herself as "floundering" while attempting to assert her authority in the classroom, a term used by Damon (2008) to describe the consequences of a lack of purpose. In general, her difficulty in asserting herself professionally may stem from her earlier experiences as a victim of bullying. Much like her experience with her troubled 6th grader, her experience with herself is "up and down": she blames him; she blames herself; her attempts to meet him actually seem to shut him down. She appears to be defeated by chattering 6th graders who exclude her and seem to be having all the fun. Although she is modest in her assessment of her skills attainment, she is also somewhat critical ("I'll be working on them probably for the rest of my life.").

As was the case with every other study participant, Participant #6 was unprepared to deal with resistant clients. Because even the most willing client will exhibit resistance at some point, it seems clear that graduate counselor education students should receive more training on techniques for dealing with resistance. Most classroom case studies involve clients who are willing participants in counseling; this material gives students insights only into what to do when counseling proceeds smoothly. As Participant #6 put it, "I am good at like being a patient school

counselor, being a kind school counselor. I got that in the bag, but the patience with maybe some different issues coming up might not be there."

The Role of Supervision

Participant #6 found supervision to be helpful in all areas, including on-site, university individual, and group supervision, because "I really like to talk about what happened in my counseling session and just get another opinion…" When she discussed her most challenging case in supervision:

> Whenever I said I can't, this kid will not budge, they all gave me good suggestions. I can't remember what they were but I felt like they were very useful, especially whenever it's the on-site supervisor and I'm like, this is what he told me. I don't know what to do with that, and they're like, well, here's some background information, his mom's not around. I felt like that was very helpful.

This statement is very interesting for several reasons. First, the child's back story was essential to an understanding of his behavior, especially for an inexperienced counselor who would be more likely to succeed if given the opportunity to discuss the client's issues and plan an approach in advance of sessions. Second, although the information was important for Participant #6 to know, it is not clear whether she was guided to act on it in an appropriate manner. Instead, it appears that this information provoked an agenda in Participant #6: "I think that part of me was trying to get him to admit that he was lying to me…" As she stated elsewhere in the interview, "I felt stuck with that [his untrue statements] because I couldn't break it…" Participant #6 appeared to believe she had failed with her client, because she could not achieve the specific outcome dictated by her struggle for control over his behavior. It seems clear that Participant #6 did not have the skill set to deal with the loneliness, pain, and shame that may

174

have been behind her client's resistance, and that supervision actually was of no help to her in navigating through his process. Supervision may have been "helpful" only in the limited sense that it confirmed Participant #6's suspicions that her client was "a really big liar."

Participant #6's account of her struggles with classroom management and her site supervisor's response raises similar concerns. Participant #6 acknowledged that she felt insecure in the classroom, stating:

> With the classroom management, a lot of embarrassment [came up for me], I guess because the teachers would be sitting in the room and they're professional teachers and I've never taken a teaching class in my life, so that was always pretty embarrassing, because I can't round up a group of 4th graders to pay attention to me.

When the site supervisor explained to Participant #6 that "she let me flounder for my own benefit, to see what I could do and different strategies that might work, and how to change my lesson for the next class…" Participant #6 thought this was "nice, instead of her yelling over me to make everybody be quiet, she just tried to see what I could do."

It is unclear whether, in fact, Participant #6 devised or applied strategies for "the next class," with or without her site supervisor's input; this would have been more likely to occur, however, had the site supervisor stepped in and modeled classroom management techniques as soon as the classroom disruption began to escalate. Although action learning in the name of the teaching experience has its applications, it seems to have been a counterproductive approach in this setting and of little benefit to the students, who effectively bullied Participant #6 for the duration of the class and did not take in her lesson. As Participant #6 put it, "…I don't know if they got anything out of it, but I learned that I need to keep it fun and entertaining while teaching them about how to handle stress and cope with stress." Ultimately, Participant #6 seemed

relieved at the matter of fact way her site supervisor normalized what Participant #6 felt was her inadequacy. This may have helped Participant #6 feel less ashamed, but it is not apparent that she learned anything about classroom management, which continues to be a challenge in her internship:

> The classroom management again, I need to improve that. I think that that's definitely the one thing I learned the most about myself…that I'm not as good at that as I thought I was going to be but I'm definitely working on it and it's getting better.

> The site supervisor's decisions were very likely affected by the fact that she was a novice supervisor. According to Participant #6, "I was her first practicum student ever…so I feel like she was still trying to get her feet on the ground and find out what her role was." Participant #6 appeared to recognize that her site supervisor was not seasoned enough to provide her with proper guidance and supervision. Although Participant #6 did not conclude that her supervisor's inexperience limited her own growth and development, it seems fair to suggest that Participant #6's practicum might have been more successful if her site supervision had been more didactic and less freewheeling.

The Role of Counseling

Participant #6 had never participated in personal counseling, and was deterred by time constraints during periods in her life when she had considered it. She stated:

> I've considered it, definitely in my undergrad. I was very overwhelmed in my junior year just because of all my school work and I had a job and everything and I was – my friends, I had a group of friends in undergrad and then they all started fighting with each other so I felt very stressed about that. So I've considered it, and even grad school, I'm doing much better now but it can't hurt to have counseling and it would be beneficial

176

to receive it if I'm going to do it but it's just the time. I never find time to do it.

This statement is interesting for two reasons. First, it echoes ground themes about the capricious nature of friendship that emerged throughout Participant #6's interview. In addition, it seems consistent with Participant #6's tendency to weather emotional storms alone rather than reach out for support–much like her challenging 6th grader, who clearly wanted to engage with her but did not know how, and of whom she said, "I don't know how to get through to you if you don't want help from me."

Participant #6 sees value in requiring that graduate education counseling students engage in counseling. She stated:

> I think if you're in a graduate program for counseling, then yes. I definitely think that
> would be very beneficial for everybody who's in counseling, to be counseled to see how
> it works and to get that perspective.

This statement implies that Participant #6 appreciates the benefits of counseling from a professional standpoint; she may not recognize the personal growth that counseling may bring about in the counselor, or the impact that personal experience has on the ability effectively to counsel others. This is consistent with Participant #6's failure to connect her own "especially rough" time in grades 4 through 6 with the difficulties she encountered during her practicum.

The Role of Professional Purpose

According to Participant #6, purpose is "…what you're meant to do, where you're supposed to be." She feels that, "I was born and created this personality for the purpose of being a counselor. I feel like that's what I'm supposed to be doing." Professional purpose means, "I'm meant to be in this profession…as well." Professional purpose gives direction to one's broader purpose in life, and is intentional: for example, "I need to be intentional in what I'm doing so

177

those games I'm playing with the kids, there is a purpose to that, trying to get them to open up to be comfortable with me [so I can counsel them]." Participant #6 appears to understand that intentionality has a role in professional purpose, at least with regard to the techniques she employs in sessions with her clients. However, her understanding of professional purpose appears to be less about who she is in relation to her clients, and more about how to "get them" to do what she needs them to do so she can accomplish her intended outcome. This theme emerged elsewhere in the interview, when Participant #6 described her challenges during the practicum with respect to classroom management ("get them to focus, get them to listen") and with the difficult 6th grader ("I couldn't break it, I couldn't get him to be like, okay, I'm lying."). Participant #6 could have met the client at his current functioning level, and attempted to discover the significance of his untrue statements; her focus on controlling their encounters instead, and on steering him to the place where she thought he should be, is consistent with the control issues that appear to be ground material for her.

If professional purpose means exerting a degree of direction and control for Participant #6, it is accompanied by "A sense of comfort in what you're doing, like this is my purpose and I feel very comfortable in what I am choosing to do with my life. I don't have any doubts. I enjoy it." Participant #6 reported that she had achieved this level of certainty, and attributed it to her practicum experience:

> I've learned that I can do this and I really – not that I was questioning before, but I love this. I love school counseling. It's what I want to do. I can't really imagine myself doing anything else…my professional purpose in life is counseling…being the best counselor I can be, always going to trainings, workshops, bettering myself and my skills.

Participant #6 appears to have some grasp of purpose, as defined by Damon (2008), in that she has established a goal that benefits others (counseling), is working to develop the skills needed to accomplish that goal, and has invested the goal with some meaning ("I have a heart for kids…"). However, Participant #6's focus on skills development seems to begin and end with technique. She seems unaware of the importance of the use of self in counseling: for example, she seems to accept her own assessment that she is "not a very assertive person," and proposes to work around this perceived deficit in future by exerting a bit more control ("…a little more insistent on getting more clients doing things by myself…") and through the use of props and techniques, such as attempting to engage bored students with more interactive activities. While these are certainly legitimate strategies, they seem intended to reduce Participant #6's vulnerability and anxiety without addressing their root causes.

It would appear that Participant #6's struggles with her clients' anger, inability to connect, lack of self-regulation, and resistance stem from a lack of self-awareness and run deeper than inexperience or lack of technique. She has a heartfelt affinity for her young clients but finds it difficult to connect with them, possibly because their issues mirror her own. This seems likely, given her somewhat vague understanding of professional purpose and her inability clearly to articulate who she is in relation to her population.

Gestalt (Figure/Ground)

Participant #6 selected her practicum population in order to round out her on-site experience at a convenient location: "it fit into my schedule," and "I needed somewhere that was closer to my work." Practical concerns were figure for Participant #6, and she lacked intentionality or awareness of what she might expect from this population or how these clients might mirror her own issues. Although her passion for the population seems genuine, she was

179

unable to express the basis for it. It was only during the interview that she became aware that there might be a connection between her ground issues, or unfinished business, and her decision to work with 4th-6th grade clients:

> In elementary school, I kind of had a rough time, I guess, so that would probably be -- yeah. Four through sixth grade were especially rough for me, I didn't even think about that beforehand, so I guess that might have played into the choosing of that. Yeah, I had a lot of bullying when I was that age too, so I guess it did resonate with me.

Despite her assertion that "I've moved on from that [experience]," grounds issues related to bullying emerged throughout Participant #6's practicum. She grappled with difficult social dynamics ("Fourth grade girls were having a lot of friendship issues. That's where the bullying thing came in"), control issues ("I can't round up a group of 4th graders to pay attention to me"), and unexpressed anger and frustration ("I found myself getting a little frustrated whenever kids would either sass me or they would just ignore what I was trying to say…"). These ground themes seem to have interfered with Participant #6's ability to claim authority in the classroom and in sessions. Her stance was rather rigid and dualistic: "I don't know how to not be mean, yet get them focused on what I'm trying to do with them so that was challenging," and her perceived failure caused her "a lot of embarrassment" and anxiety about the judgments of her supervisor.

These were stressful situations in which Participant #6 showed courage and resilience. However, that was not her experience; she identified as a victim whose coping strategy was to develop more effective techniques with which to control the situation. This ground material played out during her practicum experience in the manner described by Polster and Polster (1973). It does not appear that Participant #6 was aware of these dynamics or that they were

detected during supervision. As a result, she struggled alongside her clients and her opportunities

for growth and development were limited.

Table 7

Topic: Participant #6 Professional Purpose (School Counseling Program)

Analytical Categories	Quotations of Significance
9. **Process of Population Selection**	
• *Intentionality*	N/A
• *Lack of Intentionality*	Whenever I chose the elementary school, I needed somewhere that was close to my work… (the practicum site) fit into my schedule
10. **Meaningfulness of Population Selection**	Because, I'm getting a degree in K through 12 counseling, and I had done a practicum in my undergraduate in a high school, so I felt I needed more practice at an elementary level, so that was important. I just think it's important to have a better understanding, and to gain experience with younger kids In elementary school, I kind of had a rough time, I guess, so that would probably be yeah. Four through sixth grade were especially rough for me, I didn't even think about that beforehand, so I guess that might have played into the choosing of that. Yeah, I had a lot of bullying when I was that age too, so I guess it did resonate with me
11. **Clinical Resonance**	In elementary school, I kind of had a

rough time, I guess, so that would probably be yeah. Four through sixth grade were especially rough for me, I didn't even think about that beforehand, so I guess that might have played into the choosing of that. Yeah, I had a lot of bullying when I was that age too, so I guess it did resonate with me

12. Skill Set

Patience, balance between discipline and support, listening, being calm, and fun

13. The Role of Supervision

I really like to talk about what happened in my counseling session and just get another opinion so I feel like supervision: all three, the on-site, the university individual and the group supervision were all very helpful…

14. The Role of Counseling

I think if you're in a graduate program for counseling, then yes. I definitely think that would be very beneficial for everybody who's in counseling, to be counseled to see how it works and to get that perspective

15. Role of Professional Purpose

it's what you're meant to do

I was born and created this personality for the purpose of being a counselor.

16. Gestalt
- *Figure*

"(the practicum site) fit into my schedule

Whenever I chose the elementary school, I needed somewhere that was closer to my work…

I felt like they (4th-6th graders) might need more help than many K through 3rd, might need, but later learned that that's not true.

- *Ground*

In elementary school, I kind of had a rough time, I guess, so that would probably be yeah. Four through sixth grade were especially rough for me, I didn't even think about that beforehand, so I guess that might have played into the choosing of that. Yeah, I had a lot of bullying when I was that age too.

I'm not a very assertive person, I guess, and I don't like to yell at kids, so whenever they start getting all crazy and talking to each other, while I'm trying to teach a lesson, I have a really hard time rounding them up…

2. FOUR LIVED EXISTENTIALS
- *Lived Body*

…having a client not respond to what you're trying to do, I wasn't so much prepared for

I found myself getting a little frustrated whenever kids would either sass me, or they would just ignore what I was trying to say

that was kind of a fly-by-the-seat-of-my pants kind of thing.

- *Lived Relation*   …the teacher is going to think I don't know what I'm doing. They're not going to trust me to do this again. They're going to get annoyed because I'm winding up their kids…

                                    that was always pretty embarrassing, because I can't round up a group of 4th graders to pay attention to me

- *Lived Space*   (Description of classroom management)I'm not a very assertive person, I guess, and I don't like to yell at kids, so whenever they start getting all crazy and talking to each other, while I'm trying to teach a lesson, I have a really hard time rounding them up…

- *Lived Time*   N/A

3. **Units of Meaning**   N/A

Recommendations

In keeping with her focus on technique, Participant #6 recommended techniques class, particularly the use of open-ended questions, as "extremely helpful" for novice counselors. Participant #6 also believes that graduate programs should provide more instruction on counseling younger populations (elementary and secondary school students), in addition to play therapy class.

Participant #7

Participant #7 is a 29-year old Caucasian female who is in her last semester of a graduate counselor education program. She is in the Community Counseling Program, and engaged in her

own personal counseling, both before and during her practicum, for more than one year. The interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and followed the usual format, with a set of predetermined questions and additional questions as needed for clarification. We discussed the consent form and the parameters of the interview. Participant #7 indicated that she understood, and agreed to proceed with the interview.

Process of Population Selection

Participant #7 conducted her practicum experience at a community drug and alcohol treatment [D/A] facility to which she was directed by her advisor after a placement at her first choice, a counseling and bereavement center, "kind of fell through…so I needed another placement." Her advisor recommended drug and alcohol counseling as "a good start for any grad student…" and Participant #7 took the opportunity to practice her skills at a D/A location "close… to my house" that "had an opening and took me on the spot."

Participant #7 currently works at a bereavement camp for children, and plans to work in that field after obtaining her degree. She became interested in bereavement when she did an internship at the camp and "read the stories of the kids and what they've gone through and it's just, it just caught me." She has also had "a lot of deaths in my life, specifically suicide deaths. That just makes me curious of how the survivors react, how family and friends…move on. Specifically, with bereavement there's such a stigma around death and death is what we do…I don't think it should be fearful." Although Participant #7 did not say whether she shared the reasons for her preference with her advisor, she was very satisfied with the placement when she discovered the extent to which she could broaden her professional capacity at the community D/A facility and also learn more about the impact of bereavement.

Participant #7 stated that she had also been "affected by someone who was a drug addict or alcoholic" and had also "lost friends to overdoses and things like that." Participant #7's clear desire to work with clients who have bereavement issues was figural during her practicum site search. Although she was candid about her own past experiences with addiction, she did not appreciate the link between addiction and loss, particularly for family members, until after she selected her practicum population and began to work with groups. Her own personal history included ground material that she was able to process with her own therapist during the practicum. Because of this, Participant #7's practicum "…was just amazing. I learned just as much clinically as I did personally." Participant #7's satisfying experience may have been due to a number of factors: the availability of therapy, the quality of supervision, her theoretical competence, and her own maturity. It was not, however, due to the intentionality with which she selected her practicum population. That population was, in effect, selected by her advisor and primarily appealed to Participant #7 because the location was convenient and the site had an opening.

Meaningfulness of Population Selection

Participant #7 initially explained that it was important for her to work with her practicum population because the experience would broaden her professional experience and skills:

> For now, it's important [to work with the practicum population] because so many of the clients I'm going to encounter [in the future] are going to have someone in their family that's affected by drugs and alcohol and with bereavement. It's funny, because I didn't realize, I knew that a lot of people who have an addiction or an issue with abusing drugs and alcohol sometimes have a bereavement issue in their background, but I didn't even notice the extent locally until I started at a D/A program…

186

In other words, the experience had value because substance abuse is so pervasive and treatment focuses on so much more than addiction: "I just hope to get out of it, really, just honing in on my skills with just a wide variety, because it's not just drug and alcohol addiction, there's grief issues, there's marital issues, there's family counseling, there's co-occurring mental disorders: all those sorts of things that I get to experience."

When asked a third time to explain why it was important for her to work with her practicum population, Participant #7 referred to the "personal reasons" for her interest in bereavement issues ("I've had a lot of deaths in my life, specifically suicide deaths…") and also volunteered that she is "a person who is affected by someone who was a drug addict or alcoholic…" Although Participant #7 reported that she derived great personal benefit from confronting ground issues from her past during her practicum, she did not appear consciously to be seeking resolution of these issues until they became figural for her during group sessions with her practicum clients and their families.

Clinical Resonance

When asked if her practicum population resonated with her in any way, Participant #7 responded:

Well, I would have to say most as a person who is affected by someone who was a drug addict or alcoholic, and I got to really see, especially on family night, how other family members would describe things that reminded me of my own time going to Al-Anon for support and things like that, so personal there. And then, you know, I've lost friends to overdoses and things like that.

Participant #7 mentioned that her grandfather struggled with addiction. She spoke at greater length about her former fiancé addiction, and "a horrific night" when "he was supposed

to pick me up from work and didn't show up." He was driving her car, and when she finally

reached him "he was lost because he was so drunk he didn't know where he was." When he

finally arrived in the early hours of the morning:

> his mom and sister and dad were all over my house and he said things to me and to them
>
> that no person should have to hear and it wasn't him, it was this monster. I took it all
>
> personally, I took it all – and if you add those with all these other occurrences of things
>
> that happened, it made me feel like it was my fault…

Participant #7 had attended an Al-Anon meeting "once or twice before for an addictions

class" but had never gone for herself "because I didn't really think I had to." Listening to her

clients and their families:

> I knew a lot about drugs and alcohol before [the practicum] but never really from that
>
> [treatment] side. I learned that [what happened to her fiancé that night] was blackout
>
> drunk, that things happen when you get blackout drunk that don't happen when you're
>
> just, I guess, "normal" drunk. It was like a relief…I realized I had to forgive him for all
>
> this just like these people sitting in the group with me had to do. They had to learn things
>
> like how to set a boundary with that person…it was eye-opening, because I heard things
>
> that other people said that I'm sure [I would have heard at] Al-Anon…but I didn't know
>
> to do that…

Participant #7 had been to counseling before she started grad school, "for personal issues:

anxiety, things like that, and I left successfully, healed everything up and moved on…" It

appears that she did not discuss her relationship with her former fiancé in these sessions, or that

she was in counseling prior to her involvement with him. In either case, she was seeing a gestalt

therapist during her practicum because she wanted to experience that theoretical approach from

the client's point of view, and she "…got to bring that up. This was just uncovered. Oh my gosh! It was hard…but it was so neat because I got to process it…"

Participant #7 saw herself in the family members who attended family night at the D/A program. She recounted that group dynamics were especially challenging on family nights: finding balance among the different personalities, keeping track of everyone in the group, and making sure emotions were "somewhat regulated, even though it's important to get them out." Participant #7 "really love[s] it when there's a lot of emotion…I like exploring that…it's challenging but in a good way." She believed that she maintained an objective stance while having "kind of like a cleansing experience" as she gained insight about her parallel experiences with her former fiancé. "It never affected me while I was there," she stated. "But I'd be lying if I didn't say I wouldn't leave and go home and reflect on it and cry about it, or need to speak to my own therapist, things like that. So on a personal level, it's [the practicum] just been fantastic. On a clinical level, it's been amazing because I've gotten to learn more about family therapy, group therapy, when I was really set on more individual therapy…I'm getting to work on all my skills…" Later in the interview, she repeated that she "got to go through healing processes from a distance, and got to work with my own therapist and again, it didn't affect – there wasn't, like, some huge countertransference while I was there. I wouldn't start crying in sessions or anything, but I got to work through those things personally, which was nice."

Several aspects of her account are interesting. First, it seems significant to her that she was able to process her past and extend forgiveness "from a distance," even though she encouraged her clients and their families to engage with each other, often in personal encounters charged with guilt and blame. Second, although she intentionally reserved "the existential gestalt-type things I'm interested in" for individual sessions rather than groups, she explained

189

that she had not yet read enough about existential modalities to feel comfortable applying them

to a group process, and was limiting herself to continuing an independent study of these theories.

It appears that she felt able to detach from her own emotions during groups, even though group

dynamics must have been potent triggers for her. She did not say whether she utilized

experiential techniques in individual sessions and, by her own account, she held back her use of

self during groups so she could focus on managing the group dynamics. It is impossible to

speculate on how or whether Participant #7's own emotional state affected her performance or

experience during group sessions. However, it seems likely that the "distance" Participant #7

found so navigable in her own therapy acted as a screen for additional ground material. This is

not to suggest that Participant #7's cautious approach to groups was not, as she maintained, due

to a conscientious assessment of her skill level with an unfamiliar theory. It did create an

interesting duality, however, that is at odds with her belief in the importance of "focus on the

group process, what's going on in the moment…"

This suggests that ground issues had an influence on Participant #7's practicum, despite

her competence and professionalism. She did not select her population with awareness that her

potential clients would present issues that were likely to mirror her own, and that group sessions

with family members would recreate unfinished business from her past. She made progress

toward "healing things in my past," as described by Polster and Polster (1973), primarily because

she engaged in counseling. It is unclear whether her practicum would have been such a positive

experience if she had not already been seeing a therapist to satisfy her intellectual curiosity about

experiential approaches, and to experience counseling from the client's perspective.

Skill Set

Participant #7 identified "patience, flexibility, and most important, genuineness" as the skills most necessary for working with her selected population. She expressed some impatience with the established curriculum and work sheets, because clients "often get bored with those things so I really like to focus on the group process, what's going on at the moment. So I feel like that if I'm being genuine with them and seeing what their actual needs are, we can just throw out the work sheet and just have a discussion of what's going on right now. So that's a huge one for me." In addition to empathy and active listening skills, authenticity is key: "…honestly, just being yourself, because at the end of the day, they don't want someone who's a high and mighty therapist, they want someone who's down to earth and can talk to them, and [who they can] just be another human with."

Based on the feedback she received from group session participants, Participant #7 feels that she has made good progress toward successfully attaining those skills. Elsewhere in the interview, she recounted how she was able to build rapport with older blue-collar clients by sharing her previous real-world work experience with them. Because she had worked in business before attending graduate school, she "could just relate to clients on a much larger scale, and that goes back to the authenticity and genuineness, and just being able to make a therapeutic connection" that otherwise might not have been so readily achievable. While she was also "able to talk about things that I might not have experience about," it appears that she gained credibility with clients by sharing common experiences, such as working in an office cubicle or having a particular learning style.

These instances in which Participant #7 brought her own experiences into sessions appear to have increased her comfort level with her work. Overall, her practicum experience bolstered

191

her confidence. Looking back, she "really wouldn't change anything [about the practicum] because we make mistakes for a reason. But I would have liked to have more confidence at the beginning." She did not elaborate on what she considered to have been a "mistake," but did state that she felt stuck at times with "clients that seem to want to change but there's no internal motivation so it's very difficult. Clients who can't seem to get deeper with their emotions and feelings, that could be difficult. Those are probably the two pretty big challenges." These challenges crystallized for her around:

> [t]he relapse rate, 'cause there's a hope and then a patient will either relapse or just not show up… I thought I had a breakthrough in the session before, and then I see that they're not in the next session so I wonder what happened…[with these clients I have to ask myself] were they really doing well? Was I perceiving that right? Or is this just something that naturally happens?

Participant #7 apparently struggled with resistant clients, although she neither characterized them as resistant nor seemed aware of the need for developing specific skills and techniques, such as Motivational Interviewing (Miller & Moyers, 2006), that would be helpful in dealing with resistance in a clinical D/A setting. This may be due to the fact that her academic training focused on clinical mental health rather than drug and alcohol addiction. She may also have been caught unaware in the inherent tension between her desire to "be in the moment" with her clients while, at the same time, steering them toward a future-based outcome, i.e., recovery.

As a novice counselor with no previous D/A experience, she lacked the skills to recognize and successfully negotiate this dichotomy, even though she felt that her academic training "helps us work with any population if you know how to apply it." Although she did not identify this as a skills gap, she described a deficit of sorts, in her "longing for them [clients] to

have life changes that let them be happy. There's always a hope. It's [an experience that is] mixed with the hope and the longing." Participant #7 appears to have worked through many of the themes that informed her relationship with her fiancé, which she identified in counseling ("it made me feel like it was my fault"), and which she observed in her clients' families (blaming, and "a pattern of, did I fail them, did I fail…what did I do?"). She appears to have reconciled her inexperience ("you're never prepared until you really start talking to someone in person") and her belated understanding of her own clinical resonance with the population, and to have focused on the positive aspects of everything she learned during the practicum.

The Role of Supervision

Supervision at the D/A program, along with "guidance from mentors…personal reflection, just talking it out with the patient sometimes…and self-care, constant self-care," helped Participant #7 during her practicum's challenging moments. In keeping with her preference for more authentic, experiential approaches, Participant #7 found site supervision to be more useful than school supervision, which consisted of written, documented case conceptualization and was delivered through individual student presentations rather than discussion in open supervision groups. She "got a lot out of" the formal format, but would have preferred "an open forum so we could all present things and say like, 'Oh, I have that in common too.'" It appears that Participant #7 found the guidance she needed to manage and enrich her practicum on her own ("I learned that my creative side is still active because I came up with a lot of creative [alternatives to work sheets]"), from observing other counselors ("I've really been comparing the way I do things to things to other therapists I work with…"), and from engaging in personal counseling.

Participant #7 engaged in counseling at some time before she started graduate school, "for personal issues; anxiety, things like that…" It is unclear whether she was involved with her former fiancé then, or later. She completed her therapy, and "left successfully, healed everything up and moved on…" She returned to counseling during grad school, motivated by a desire to enhance her professional, rather than personal, effectiveness:

> I really thought it's important to have that [counseling] during this program, but it was mainly because I found a therapist that practices the theoretic orientation I was interested in, which was gestalt, so I got to see that. I really am interested from the client's point of view, what it looked like before. I wanted to practice that, so I mainly went for that, but it helped with a lot of other areas, too.

> When she realized that she was experiencing some of the same issues that came up in

sessions with her clients and their families, she brought them to her own sessions: "Oh my gosh! It was hard and it sucked to go through, but it was so neat because I got to process it. And I was far enough away from it, because it happened less than a handful of years ago, that it was like a safe time to process it all. So it was pretty cool."

Participant #7's journey and her insights with respect to personal counseling are interesting for several reasons. Her first characterization of her progress through therapy implies that she viewed counseling as a linear process, the purpose of which is to "heal everything up." This is a philosophy of counseling that appears to be reinforced by higher education institutions, which frame the value-add of counseling in terms of outcomes to be achieved rather than as a pathway to living with greater awareness and authenticity. The problem-centric view of counseling raises several interesting questions about the counseling field's approach to how and when counseling

should be terminated. Is the individual with the problem capable of accurately assessing whether it has been resolved? Should that determination be made jointly with the therapist? What ethical, moral, and even legal considerations come into play for the counselor, in light of the fact that individuals may terminate counseling at any time?

Participant #7 appears to have modified her formerly problem-centric view of counseling since she reaped such great personal and professional benefits from engaging in therapy during her practicum. She thinks that graduate counselor education programs should require counseling for their students, and would advise novice counselors to:

> …have your own issues taken care of before you try to counsel other people. We're all going to have ongoing issues that never go away, that's normal. But if there's some major things, get those down. Keep in counseling even if you feel you don't need it while you're in your grad school program.

Her view also seems influenced by her desire for an authentic therapeutic style, to the extent that "genuineness" is a function of self-knowledge, and to her capacity for setting healthy boundaries. For example, she would also tell novice counselors to "Make sure that you're actually doing it [entering the field] for the right reasons. Not just because you want to try to fix people…"

The Role of Professional Purpose

Participant #7 described purpose as "the reason, the meaning in our lives. It all goes back to what satisfies us, what nourishes us…once you have a purpose, and you deem it's also going to be your career path, then, finding what part of that career speaks to you." Her professional purpose is her "game plan of where I want to go professionally, so I feel my purpose in general expands to things beyond my career." Although she does not yet have a detailed execution plan,

she has a specific professional goal, to open:

> a bereavement center that [offers] individual counseling, group counseling, complex
>
> bereavement, things that other places in the city don't offer. So I see a clear path and
>
> purpose of what's needed for the community, and that's where I feel my purpose is, is to
>
> make that happen…and to reduce the stigma [associated with things like] bereavement
>
> [and] suicide.

Participant #7 demonstrated many of the attributes of purpose as defined by Damon

(2008) and utilized in this study: She has a goal, the goal has personal meaning, and it benefits

the world beyond the self. Her goal is quite ambitious. She is in the process of developing the

skills she needs to achieve it, but may not yet fully appreciate the level of skill required to work

with deep grief that presents in many different forms; to raise public awareness through

advocacy; and to change individual and cultural perceptions of death and dying. Her instincts

and desires exhibit a respect for, and fidelity to, the human experience: "Specifically with

bereavement, there's such a stigma around death, and death is what we do. I mean, we all die

[but] it's something that's feared, and I don't think it should be fearful. I think it can be a reason

to embrace life." It is unclear, however, whether she has identified all of the skills she will need

to move people to this point.

This is not to denigrate Participant #7's goals in any way, or to suggest that she does not

have the capacity ultimately to achieve them. Certainly, she was open to personal growth

opportunities during her practicum, and developed greater self-awareness even though her

population selection was initially based more on circumstances than clear intention. Although

her passion for her goals seems heartfelt, Participant #7 admitted that "I mean, there's no real – I

don't have a plan for that. I do it every day with things." Interestingly, Participant #7 suggested

at the close of her interview that the chances of a novice counselor's success during practicum could be determined, at least in part, by the counselor's age and ability to draw on a richer pool of life experiences:

> I know it seems almost like a judgment, [I'm not saying] that someone very young couldn't do a good, if not better, job [than] someone older. But I feel like there's certain life experiences I've gained working with people, working with business, that I could just relate to clients on a much larger scale. That goes back to the authenticity and genuineness, and just being able to make a therapeutic connection, as opposed to if I didn't have any of that.

Participant #7's innate intellectual curiosity and emerging self-awareness may eventually lead her to identify and develop the skills she will need to articulate a clear professional purpose and achieve her professional goals, particularly if she continues to heal from her own past. In any event, her practicum experience is an apt demonstration of the persistent resurgence of unfinished business into current relationships, in an attempt to find resolution, as described by Polster and Polster (1973). Although this does not appear to have been the case with Participant #7, persistent unfinished business has the potential to be damaging in a therapeutic setting, especially if the student has not engaged in self-care or is unaware of these dynamics (Roehlke, 1988).

Gestalt (Figure/Ground)

Participant #7 did not select her population with intentionality or awareness of how her practicum clients might present issues that would mirror her own. Her figural concern was bereavement; she was gratified to see the connection between substance abuse and bereavement, because that meant she could fulfill her initial desire in a different setting. Because she did not

197

see the parallels with her past, and was admittedly disconnected from her previous experiences

with her alcoholic grandfather, former fiancé, and friends she'd lost to overdoses, it seems clear

that this was ground material that emerged, at least in part, as figure during the practicum.

Working with clients and their families stirred her own ground issues and made her realize how

much she had needed support during her direct experiences with a loved one's active addiction.

She stated, "I didn't realize so many things about that relationship [referring to her ex-fiancé]

until I started at D/A program." She described the experience as "cleansing," and added, "I'd be

lying if I didn't say I wouldn't leave and go home and reflect on it and cry about it, or need to

speak to my own therapist." This is an eloquent statement about the impact of clinical resonance

and the need for self-care.

Table 8

Topic: Participant #7 Professional Purpose (Community Counseling Program)

Analytical Categories	Quotations of Significance
1. Process of Population Selection	
• *Intentionality*	N/A
• *Lack of Intentionality*	I initially wanted to work with a bereavement agency,…it kind of fell through.
	it was suggested from my advisor to check out D/A counseling, that it was a good start for any grad student to work with that population
2. Meaningfulness of Population Selection	For personal reason**s,** I've had a lot of deaths in my life; specifically suicide deaths that just makes me curious of how the survivors react, how the family and friends and people move on.

3. **Clinical Resonance**

...on family night, other family members would describe things that reminded me of my own time going to Al-Anon for support and things like that, so personal there.

...I've lost friends to overdoses...

4. **Skill Set**

patience, flexibility, and most important, genuineness

empathy, listening, active listening, and just being yourself.

5. The Role of Supervision

more at the site and with my mentors than at school

I got a lot out of it (school supervision), but my preference would be if it was more of an open group supervision.

6. **The Role of Counseling**

have your own issues taken care of before you try to counsel other people

we're all going to have ongoing issues that never go away, that's normal

even if you feel you don't need it while you're in your grad school program.

7. **Role of Professional Purpose**

career path and finding what part of that career speaks to you.

8. **Gestalt**
   a. *Figure*

   I was affected by someone who abused drugs and alcohol.

   I've lost a lot of friends to overdoses

   b. *Ground*

   I didn't even notice the extent (referring to her clients having bereavement issues) until I started at the D/A program

   I didn't realize so many things about that relationship (referring to her ex-fiancé) until I started at D/A program

   Other family members would describe things that reminded me of my own time going to Al-Anon for support

   I'd be lying if I didn't say I wouldn't leave (practicum) and go home and reflect on it and cry about it, or need to speak to my own therapist.

9. **FOUR LIVED EXISTENTIALS**
   - *Lived Body*

   like a cleansing experience

   it never affected me while I was there (practicum)

   I'd be lying if I didn't say I wouldn't leave (practicum) and go home and reflect on it and cry about it or need to speak to my own therapist

   - *Lived Relation*

   It's just sad

   it's difficult because you always want to hope that they're doing well and you almost perceive that they are…

- *Lived Space*   N/A

- *Lived Time*   N/A

10. **Units of Meaning**   N/A

Recommendations

Participant #7 had four distinct recommendations concerning professional preparation by graduate counselor education programs, including the screening process, academic course work, supervision, and a counseling requirement. Participant #7 believes that students would benefit from engaging in more real-world work experience prior to attending graduate school, rather than matriculating immediately after undergraduate studies. She also recommended that students examine their own motivation and make sure that they enter the field for the "right reasons" – i.e., not as a fallback or out of a desire to "fix" others. Participant #7 believes that she could have been better prepared for her practicum experience if she could have chosen more relevant elective courses, like pharmacology, dynamics of addiction, and families and couples, within her mental health academic track. She would have preferred that school supervision be conducted in an open group, which would have encouraged more student interaction, rather than in the more rigid structure of formal case presentations. Participant #7 also believes that counseling should be mandatory for graduate counselor education students, who should "have your own issues taken care of before you try to counsel other people."

Participant #8

Participant #8 is a 29-year-old Caucasian male who was in the last semester of the Community Counseling Program at the time of the interview. Participant #8 performed his

practicum experience at a faith-based organization that serves clients, many court mandated, who present a wide range of issues. Participant #8 was in counseling at the time of the interview, and had had more than one year of counseling prior to his practicum experience. We discussed the parameters of the interview, and reviewed the consent form. Participant #8 indicated that he understood and agreed to proceed with the interview, which lasted for about 110 minutes, including time spent on preliminary housekeeping matters. It followed the standard format comprised of a set list of questions supplemented by additional questions that solicited more detail or clarification.

Process of Population Selection

Participant #8 "…knew ahead of time that I wanted to choose a faith-based organization" for his practicum. "That was my primary goal or aim in looking at a practicum site." He had hoped to find a site close to his home, but chose the faith-based organization because it came highly recommended by a good friend, because his supervisor would be a Reverend, and because he was hoping to learn there how to integrate faith into a client-centered practice. He stated, "All the other particulars, I didn't mind as much," although his time-consuming and expensive commute (more than two hours roundtrip) became a bigger barrier than he had at first anticipated.

Participant #8 appears to have selected his practicum site with intentionality, at least insofar as he expected that the culture at a faith-based site would be consistent with his "personal belief and world view that counseling is limited without Christ." He assumed the population would consist of "specifically Christians and families," and felt prepared to handle cases involving "family conflicts, some anxiety that they are having trouble dealing with, those kinds of things…" However, his supervisor "believed in the motto sink or swim…he wasn't afraid to

give me a lot of clients at one time, and not just any clients, the difficult ones" such as court ordered clients with divorce, domestic violence issues, and high suicide risk. As he put it, "We [students] were always given the clients that nobody else wanted, so sometimes it was hard…we didn't have that comfort level" of knowing that the site supervisor had screened clients and assigned them based on a student's individual skill level and capacity, as Participant #8 had apparently expected.

Although Participant #8 was aware of the type of practicum environment he desired, and why, he had imagined a practicum experience that was markedly different from the one he actually had. He had wanted to "be at a place where I can talk about Christ and it's okay." He was "interested in families" and felt that clients at a Christian-based counseling organization "may be more open, maybe feel like, oh, the people here profess a faith in Christ, therefore, they might be more interested to integrate that…" He did not realize, until he arrived at the practicum site, that his skills set was inadequate to address his clients' clinical issues; that he could not "refer" his clients to a more suitable counselor; and that only half of his clients were Christians.

Like his contemporaries in this study, Participant #8 selected his practicum site from "…a list of places where we've [the counseling department] had connections with, [so, we were told to select] whatever [site] suits your needs." While he selected his site with a definite purpose in mind, it appears that his figural intention was informed by expectations based more on ground issues than on reality. Thus, Participant #8's site selection does not demonstrate professional purpose, as described by Damon (2008). Although he learned from the experience, after "a really rough start" Participant #8 spent much of his practicum "in survival mode." This may be due to inadequate communication about and preparation for the practicum experience on the part of the University; to romanticized notions about the faith-based counseling field and those in it on the

203

part of Participant #8; and/or to emerging ground issues that affected his experience of counseling sessions and supervision.

Meaningfulness of Population Selection

As a former teacher, Participant #8 had experience with elementary and high school students. He was interested in experiencing "the dynamic outside the school setting." He "was interested in how was faith brought in [into counseling], because a lot of secular settings don't necessarily always bring in spirituality, or maybe clients don't necessarily know that they can bring that up." While he would not proselytize – "I don't want to throw a Bible in someone's face, or throw some verses at them, that doesn't make sense" – Participant #8 wanted to know "how does that [integrating faith and counseling] actually work? Still being client centered, but yet integrating faith."

He feels that questions of faith are central to the human experience, and that faith supplies meaning:

It's kind of like an available door. Clients can still choose whether or not to go through it, but it's more or less for both the Christians and non-Christians to look at that going, 'You know, this is one of those things that's typical for all people, that we kind of ask these kind of questions.' One thing that brings meaning to life, one thing that can explain, at least, what's beyond this world are spiritual things…

Participant #8 is aware that his faith in Christ is at the core of his identity and gives meaning to his life. His practicum population had meaning for him, insofar as he believed that it was comprised of a group of people who would be open to exploring this profound connection for themselves. However, "one of the main reasons I went into counseling was because of my faith;" the real meaning behind Participant #8's population selection lay in his desire to integrate

his faith into everything he does, including his work as a counselor. Although he believed this opportunity would be more readily available at a faith-based organization, he appeared to find potential meaning with Christian and non-Christian clients.

Clinical Resonance

Participant #8 identified several general areas in which he resonated with his practicum population. Approximately half of his clients were Christian, "so, of course, I can resonate with those that are of the same faith. But I think in general [we all shared some] life experiences…those that experienced stress and anxiety due to life changes, certainly I can relate to that, or family stressors and conflict, yeah, who doesn't have family conflict, so absolutely." He added that everyone has unique circumstances and a different worldview, "so even though I resonate, there's quite a different experience."

When asked for specific examples of how he might see himself in his clients' spirituality, Participant #8 stated:

> Primarily, it was the faith that I really resonated with and just the struggles with God. There's a lot of anger toward God that individuals face when there's life crises, and problems that kind of come up. There's times where I've been angry with God. I think it's really healthy to be able to express it fully, especially when things kind of pop up when you weren't expecting it.

Regardless of role distinctions between counselor and client, Participant #8 sees "us as all part of the same pot. We're all struggling in this world. What can we do? A big part of it too is we struggle with the existential things as well, those faith questions of what is beyond this world and how do I connect with that?"

Participant #8 had engaged in personal counseling, and alluded to his own issues with his family and other stressors. As with his process of population selection, however, the figural aspect of his resonance with that population was spiritual, rather than clinical. He appeared less aware of and concerned with the secular aspects of his clients' problems, and did not articulate or demonstrate a need to work with them on that basis. For Participant #8, faith is a leavening agent that can transform any problem. This may be why he did not focus on a population with a particular counseling issue, or inquire in advance about the nature of the issues his selected population might bring into sessions. These aspects of the practicum were indistinct for Participant #8, and, to some extent, he seemed to feel that it was unnecessary to ask about them before the practicum. He was primarily focused on spiritual matters. For example, he pursued independent study when he felt that University faculty ignored and marginalized his questions about how to reconcile secular counseling approaches with Biblical counseling, but did not engage in outside study when confronted with clinical issues around topics, such as pharmacology and marriage and family, that came up during his practicum but that he had not yet studied in his academic program.

Faith is the dominant figure in Participant #8's perception, and he has devoted a great deal of thought to every aspect and component of faith-based counseling. Depending on the denomination, for example, he believes that a spiritually-attuned counselor must become aware of many different forms of worship, prayer, ritual, services, and modes for confession/reconciliation, and be sensitive to the different ways in which different denominations interpret and use certain words, such as "saved". What appears to be ground for Participant #8, and which appeared as a theme during his practicum, is a less distinct view of life as an impossible struggle that can only be dealt with through Christ's strength.

Skill Set

As he did in his responses to the previous interview questions, Participant #8 viewed the skills necessary to work with his practicum population through the lens of faith. His first observation was that "there's so many different denominations, which is such a struggle" and which requires familiarity with a wide variety of beliefs and practices, in order to determine commonalities and still "stay very close to the client's sense of meaning-making and world view." This requirement applies to Christian and non-Christian counselors, although he suggests that non-Christians might spend extra time with a member of a client's denomination to promote that understanding, and be open to referring clients to Christian counselors who are better able to work with a client on a particular spiritual topic. In addition, "there's the general counseling skills of being open, of course, active listening, and all of those kinds of things. The sense of a presence. There's a lot of just being flexible. Willing to be in a moment where they don't want to talk about God, don't talk about it." If non-Christians don't know or understand a concept, they should not "be afraid to ask." Finally, a novice counselor must learn the basic milestones of practice, including the mechanics of conducting a counseling session:

> There's a lot to learn and I think it's going to be a lifelong process. It's hard to really work on a lot of those skills completely through practicum, only because it's such a fresh start that you're just trying to say, "Oh, gosh, I survived one session with a client." That's enough for one day. The next day I was able to write a case note successfully. There's little milestones, so it's like Bloom's taxonomy or Maslow's hierarchy of needs almost. It's like you need to be able to – the basic needs of eating before you can get up to self-actualization, the same way, you need to be able to get the milestones down of the basics of counseling before you ever get to those theory kind of honing in skills.

Participant #8 has articulated a multi-tiered hierarchy of necessary skills, beginning with the most basic, spanning the Rogerian Model, and culminating in the integration of secular and spiritual theories and approaches. This is an ambitious sequence made more difficult for him by the fact that his focus on faith, and the urgency with which he views the need for integration of spirituality and psychotherapy, has led him to tackle all of these levels at once. Although he appreciates the need for handling the basics first, he gives faith first priority.

To be fair, the profession as a whole is challenged by the daunting prospect of integrating spirituality, formerly taboo in counseling, with mainstream assessment and treatment. As Participant #8 pointed out, CACREP has revised its standards to require that counseling students learn about spirituality in counseling as of 2016, even though the field has developed no definitions or benchmarks, and has no generally agreed upon process, for integration. In this respect, Participant #8's practicum quest put him squarely in virgin territory. However, he did not experience himself as a pioneer; nor did he seem to appreciate the magnitude of this shift in the profession, or to have much tolerance for counselors whose faith in humanistic approaches may be as fervent and focused as his own faith in Christ. This was particularly true of his interactions at the faith-based University to which he had transferred, expecting that the faculty there would be open to discussing issues in Christian counseling:

> One of the things I really missed was one-on-one interaction with the professors to be able to talk about these questions, how to integrate the spirituality and where the problems come up, and how do I navigate that? How do I work with some specific populations, especially those that conflict with some perspective of the Bible?

As in other aspects of his practicum, Participant #8 made assumptions about what he should expect, and was disappointed:

For example, I believe homosexuality is a sin. My question was such as how to help an individual who wants to accept these homosexual feelings while being conflicted with his faith. A teaching professor spent time arguing why he thinks homosexuality is right rather than answering my question. It was completely unprofessional and unproductive, [and I wonder] if professors are trained in handling spiritual matters and how to target countertransference (related to spirituality) with a client/student.

This account is interesting for several reasons. First, Participant #8 felt rebuffed in this exchange and, presumably, in others. He concluded that the professors "pushed their agenda more than help facilitate" his questions; he "almost felt oppressed," even though he felt safer at this second school, where there was no formal training on spirituality but he could at least ask his questions. Second, his report of this interaction with the professor was similar to his later account of his relationship with his supervisor, in the sense that he viewed the professor as the actor with the problem, and this problem as the reason why Participant's #8 expectations were not met. At no time did Participant #8 confront the possibility that Christian counseling, in its purest form, has in the Bible an absolute standard for evaluating a client's choices and crafting a treatment plan designed to lead to eventual obedience to that standard. It is unclear whether his question was informed by his own discomfort with this irreconcilability or by his client's, in this hypothetical situation. In either case, it is possible that his discomfort is a projection of the countertransference that he attributed to his professor.

Participant #8's desire to be validated and supported, and his impatience with the pace of change in the counseling field, joined with what may be a streak of perfectionism, rooted in ground material, to set him up for further disappointment. Participant #8 paid careful attention to each interview question and often asked for clarification so he could "make sure I'm answering

209

it." He was the only participant to submit written corrections and somewhat lengthy additions to his interview transcript, one to clarify the long list of religious conventions a Christian counselor must know about in order fully to understand the role of faith in a client's experience, and another to elaborate on his experience of his adversarial exchange with his professor. He worried about how to deal with court mandated clients, not only because they presented difficult clinical issues, but because there was "risk of us being subpoenaed…and us still trying to learn how to do case notes and then knowing that it might be legally bound…I don't know the legalities…"

Participant #8 stated that he grew in his own faith during his practicum, and that he saw the need to look at "common threads" among different denominations, "…and not necessarily focusing on one and have your own agenda, and go, 'Oh, gosh, that's different from my denomination,' but kind of just relaxing for a bit and trying to see it through their world view, their denomination, if it's vastly different…" He stated that he could recognize when to "step back and let [clients] take the wheel, because…I was starting to almost – I don't want to say be in control – but it's influencing them way too much where they should be the one making the decision." Participant #8 appears to have been aware of the need to relax his judgments about differences. However, he may not have been as aware of the need to be "right" about them.

These factors culminated in Participant #8's experience of his practicum as "very intimidating. There was a lot of fear, a lot of feeling overwhelmed right at the get-go. There was a lot of doubts to my efficacy…is this the right career…?" He stated that during sessions:

A lot of me was trying to deal with the fact of I'm not prepared. I feel flushed, I feel embarrassed, I feel just sad for them that they don't have a quality counselor or someone that is prepared to handle them with some level of experience to handle something so deeply rooted. Especially when it comes to divorce cases, or even custody cases and

210

you're battling over your child and you may or may not get them. I would want a good

counselor that is experienced, and not a student, that's just me…I think it's feeling that

you just are not good enough when you're there.

The stressors in Participant #8's life during his practicum contributed to the intensity of

this feeling. Financial issues, difficult family dynamics, and the demands of work, school,

church, and his practicum, which was quite a distance from home, added to his worries. He lost

sleep, ate poorly, and missed opportunities to exercise and obtain medical care. "I was kind of in

survival mode." Unlike some students in his cohort who found a paid internship or practicum, he

was "drained." He felt unsupported except for the camaraderie he developed with other students

at his practicum site, "didn't have a firm friendship network at the time," and felt mistreated and

disrespected at school and at his practicum. Although he found comfort in prayer, worship, and

personal counseling, the very nature of the practicum was stressful and taxing. He would let

novice counselors know that the practicum is "not fun. There's some awesome moments

when…you feel like you're on Cloud Nine, but the very next day could be a very different

story…[be] willing to ride the wave…but…share it with someone you can trust."

Participant #8's practicum experience was one of "added stressors upon

stressors…Everything was go, go, go; not much down time." Clearly, Participant #8 took on

substantial commitments at this time, and experienced some unusual burdens. Despite his own

aspirations to "be real," however, his experience of this time seems informed, in large part, by

his unrealistically high expectations of what he should or could be able to accomplish. These

expectations, in turn, appear to be related to standards that derive from his desire to integrate his

faith into his counseling practice, which involves, for example, an exhaustive examination of

many aspects of each client's religious affiliation in addition to learning clinical skills.

Participant #8's expression of his own faith in prayer, worship, and service, and his personal inquiry into "what would Jesus do," if He were a counselor, anchored and sustained him during his practicum, but also required extra time and constant vigilance about even small things, as when he stopped during his interview to correct a minor verbal slip about advising new counselors to develop a strong network with fellow students, and staff at the University, "…including the custodian. They will be your savior, your saving grace I should say, excuse me." Participant #8 is a self-proclaimed passionate "prayer warrior" who takes up burdens in Christ's name that many would find impossible, without first critically examining his own capacity. His disappointment, when his expectations are not met, leads him harshly to judge himself and others: "that's it, [I was] just feeling inadequate. Just really feeling inadequate." This pattern informed his practicum experience, which, ironically, was salvaged by the faith that may have been a factor in his unrealistically high expectations. During his practicum Participant #8 learned that, "Through God, all things are possible. And that even though I think it's impossible, He doesn't so its looking at me going, 'I can accomplish a lot more with Christ's strength.'"

In this way, Participant #8 got through his practicum and learned some basic counseling skills. Clients are largely absent from his accounts of sessions, except insofar as he felt "empathy that we're in this kind of situation" – that is, they both knew that "they don't have a quality counselor." By his own admission, Participant #8 had not thought about the clinical issues his clients might present until he was in counseling sessions; he could not accurately assess the skills he would need or whether he had attained them. Developing clinical skills had never been his main objective, however. Until he was in sessions, clinical skills seemed less important to him than learning how to integrate spiritual and secular counseling, even though it might have been more realistic to develop clinical and pastoral skills before attempting to integrate them. For

reasons that are most likely to be found in ground material, however, Participant #8 chose the more difficult path, which he then "survived" by God's grace and by doing "the best with what we had."

The Role of Supervision

Participant #8's site supervisor came highly recommended. He stated:

I heard from a good friend that referred me to this faith-based organization, and she said it's a phenomenal one. The supervisor is great, provides great supervision to his interns, and there's such a variety of clients that you get there. And also, that the supervisor that I would be seeing was a Reverend, so he would be able to help integrate spirituality into my practice…that was what sold me.

The reality was very different from his expectations and, in fact, Participant #8 would have requested a different site supervisor once his practicum was underway had he not felt that it was "just too late." He felt that his supervisor's guidance was too general ("Oh, you just need to be a better listener…") and that "there wasn't a lot of encouragement." He had expected that his site supervisor would assign a limited number clients to him based on his skills level and capacity, and was dismayed to find that sessions were "sink or swim," with many, and many of the most difficult, clients. He had expected an in-depth orientation, observation, videotaping, and that the site supervisor would "engage in the process of how I was counseling, versus how to help me solve the client's problems. I also wished to have a more personable supervisor, one that empathized and was more human than authoritative."

Participant #8 reported that individual site supervision was "not helpful." Other staff members said that, "it just wasn't a good atmosphere as far as being able to share your concerns, because my supervisor has some anger difficulties…" That was Participant #8's experience as

213

well. His supervisor "came from a different theoretical orientation than I did, but also…he had some anger concerns that would come up. If I wasn't filling out a paper work once or twice, he got really angry. He even admitted that to me, and we worked through it, but…we didn't have a good relationship as…supervisor and supervisee." On the other hand, Participant #8 found the small group setting of group supervision with the other interns to be a helpful forum in which to "talk about our struggles as counselors and just share what we learned or share the burden. The larger group setting of the school wasn't helpful…it wasn't very intimate, I didn't feel it was an okay place to really share much…We talked about cases, like in our practicum class as far as the supervision we get here at school, but there wasn't a lot of encouragement…which sucks."

Participant #8 was offended by the manner in which he felt interns were mistreated and disrespected at the practicum site: "…we really almost seemed like dirt. We were given menial tasks to do…things like arrange this, pick up these chairs…sometimes that was taking more time than actually preparing for a client…We were always given the clients that nobody else wanted…" His perception was consistent with his preference for a more relational, supportive environment. He compensated by praying more and "started to rely on more friends and family for support…I guess overall, I learned what it looks like to handle situations in family conflict with more than one person in the room, and to be able to just manage things better and honestly, just survive. Yeah. There was a lot of opportunities where I could have learned more and felt more comfortable. That wasn't my experience."

Participant #8's "relationship with the other interns, even with the other supervisors, was great," but he never resolved his relationship with his site supervisor. "…It was the first couple of weeks I started to run into problems, and I figured it was more of me than him. As the practicum went on, I feel like I was able to start handling things more, but our relationship didn't

grow much…for some strange reason, it just wasn't working between us…" Although it seems likely that Participant #8 and his supervisor were mismatched, two aspects of his account are particularly interesting, in light of his previous responses. First, he had high expectations of his site supervisor, which were not met. Second, his expectations of supervision may have been unrealistic as well. While supervisors should be warm, accessible, empathic, and helpful, their role is primarily didactic and often involves delivering difficult feedback. Supervision is performance-based, and although it should include positive reinforcement and praise where warranted, it is meant to reduce supervisees' anxiety primarily by improving their clinical skills. Participant #8 did not provide specific examples of how he "didn't get good supervision," and did not seem aware of how he might have contributed to the failed relationship. However, this characterization fits with his general view of the practicum as a struggle, and of himself as surviving through the strength of his faith.

The Role of Counseling

Participant #8 had engaged in therapy for several years prior to his practicum experience. He stated that his personal work helped him to be more self-aware during sessions with clients, and he sought his counselor's advice when he had questions that were not answered in supervision. While he "absolutely" encouraged self-care in general, and counseling in particular, for students, he was sensitive to the financial burden that might be created if graduate counseling education students were required to engage in counseling: "…that's an extraneous thing, and that's one choice for self-care, but for the University to decide that it's the only way or [that] you have to get it, that's rough." However, "if the University is providing it for free, and it is built into the curriculum to allow time for it, then yes."

The Role of Professional Purpose

Participant #8 described purpose as, "my reason to live, my faith," and professional purpose as an extension of purpose, "…still based on my faith. It's my understanding where my calling is based on that and with all of my skills and my gifts and where I felt led, where I could be used the best, used the most…" He believes that purpose includes, "that gut-driving force, that passion that's underneath." He added, "A purpose involves an aspect of yourself that you found there's an injustice someplace, there's a wrongdoing and it irks you to the core and it gives you meaning to pursue after it." For example, a colleague "…was so irked about domestic violence that she had to go into it, so that she could help those victims that were affected by it."

Although Participant #8 had several different reasons for becoming a counselor, "…one of the bigger ones is that, when I was teaching, half the time the kids that I was working with had a lot of emotional burdens, a lot of family concerns, a lot of conflict. It just seemed like they had way too much burden, way too much stress, way too much overload for their age." As a teacher, his role was limited to academics, even though "…that wasn't their biggest need at the time. They needed to talk…that's what drove me into counseling, to not only work with kids but to work with the family system, to work with other factors that are involved and be at a place where I can talk about Christ and it's okay. No, I understand not all clients you can talk about that with, but those few that I can make the difference."

Participant #8's understanding of professional purpose in the context of his career trajectory has several interesting aspects. First, there is a startling parallel between his description of his students (overwhelmed, unnecessarily overburdened, in circumstances where they were not able to focus on what they really need) and his description of himself during his practicum. Second, it appears that he considers matters of faith to be an important part of a

counselor's tool kit, when the client is open to examining them. Although he did not explain the process by which his own faith became so firmly established, its central role in his life and his desire respectfully to share it is clear.

It is the centrality of his faith, however, that creates conflict and frustration for Participant #8 in his role as a counselor; it is also the reason why he has not established a purpose as described by Damon (2008). The counseling field is just beginning to consider how to integrate conventional therapies and spirituality. This process might be particularly difficult around issues involving boundaries and personal responsibility, and Participant #8 mirrors the field's larger struggle with these difficulties. His process of population selection seemed somewhat intentional ("I wanted to choose a faith-based organization") but was, in fact, based on unproven assumptions and unrealistically high personal standards that culminated in disappointment. His site choice was based on assumptions about his population's affinity for faith-based interventions, and about the expertise of staff in implementing those interventions in a conventional therapy setting. He was less concerned with the nature of his clients' clinical issues. As a result, he could not identify the skills needed to address those issues, or assess the degree to which he had those skills. He felt overmatched when he discovered that many of his clients were, "court mandated, domestic violence cases, high risk of suicidality." He felt inadequate and stuck in what he viewed as a "sink or swim" culture; survival became the goal.

Although Participant #8 was guided by a passion for faith, which has great personal meaning for him, it appears that he also let that passion overshadow other important components of purpose. This may explain why he sought comfort in faith, rather than in clinical knowledge, when he felt inadequate during his practicum experience. He got through challenging moments with clients through "Prayer, lots of prayer," and " being willing to cry and just let things out in

your car, and just knowing that there's a time when you can't handle it all, and going outside when you need to go for a walk…" Looking back, Participant #8 saw things he could have done differently, but at the time he was left to do "the best with what I could with what I had…"

It is a fair estimation, by these accounts, that Participant #8's clients did not receive proper counseling, that he did not receive adequate supervision, and that he survived but did not thrive in his practicum experience. While some of this failure can be attributed to Participant #8's own process and lack of an articulated professional purpose, it would also appear that the practicum process failed him. Although he remembers receiving vague advice about site selection ("There was a couple of times where they [professors] kind of mentioned, start to think about areas that might be or populations that you may not, that are difficult for you and maybe ones that you want to specialize or gravitate toward"), the primary direction was to choose from a list of agencies with which the University "had connections…whatever suits your needs." Ironically, in a profession that stresses the need to see clients and meet them where they are, students who lack self-awareness, and are unable accurately to assess their own needs and capacities, are indeed left to "sink or swim".

Gestalt (Figure/Ground)

Participant #8's figural goal in selecting his practicum site was his desire to work in a faith-based organization where he could "learn how to integrate faith into sessions." He acted on the advice of a friend, who told him that the site was "phenomenal," that "the supervisor is great," and that he [the supervisor] was a Reverend "so he would be able to help integrate spirituality into my practice…that was what sold me." Other considerations, such as the long commute, "I didn't mind as much" at the time, although they did in fact become burdensome.

Participant #8 did not achieve his goal, and although he learned from his practicum experience, it was stressful and costly in many ways:

My practicum experience was very intimidating. There was a lot of fear, a lot of anxiety, a lot of feeling overwhelmed right at the get-go. There were a lot of doubts to my efficacy. There were a lot of questions of, is this the right career that I was meant to go on?

It is common for practicum students to experience stress and anxiety, but not at the extreme levels described by Participant #8. Participant #8 was in touch with his feelings, and eloquently articulated them, but he appeared to be less aware of the ground issues from which his feelings of being overwhelmed, inadequate, oppressed, and marginalized derived. While some of those feelings seemed logically related to his circumstances – for example, he did not have adequate academic preparation for working with complex clients, and he had to manage an outsized number of time consuming and disruptive responsibilities during his practicum – he did not seem to question his own role in crafting those circumstances.

He also seemed unaware of the nature and extent of his own needs. Participant #8 seemed heavily to rely on validation from others, and keenly felt the consequences when it was withheld: "it [the practicum site] just wasn't a good atmosphere as far as being able to share your concerns because my supervisor has some anger difficulties, so I think that's half the issue." At various times during the interview he alluded to his own vulnerability ("I feel safer here [at his current school} than I did there [at his former school]"), and he seemed particularly sensitive to challenging interactions with professors, which he experienced as attacks. He coped with the stress of "a really rough start" to his practicum through strategies he knew would restore and sooth him, such as prayer, going for a walk, worship, and taking a break "to cry and just let

219

things out." His intent with these strategies was to take "the focus off me and [get] me back on the big picture." These supports may have helped Participant #8 steel himself to return to his stressful circumstances, but they did not help him become more aware of ground issues that informed his stress.

Although he expressed a desire to work with family issues, Participant #8 recognized that he was unprepared to counsel clients with relational issues: "No, even couples, I'll throw that in as one of the, only because for my practicum experience, I didn't know anything about marriage and family." Participant #8 also felt unprepared to work with court mandated clients. He felt inadequate to help them deal with high stakes conflicts, like child custody outcomes. He was concerned that his records might be subpoenaed and found wanting, and was acutely aware that he didn't "know the legalities of where my bounds are as far as mandated clients come in…how to conduct myself, what do I look for, what is the framework of working with this population." Although his anxiety was, ostensibly, for his clients, it seems driven more by his own feelings of overwhelm and perfectionism; although he claims to have learned the value of the therapeutic alliance during his practicum, for example, there is no evidence that he actually established these relationships, or that he developed techniques for dealing with resistance in these populations.

Participant #8's figural experience was of frequently feeling stuck, inadequate, sad, and embarrassed. These feelings were the result of being "in survival mode," and, at least superficially, seem understandable in light of the situation as Participant #8 saw it. How he saw it, however, was perhaps heavily influenced by ground material of which he was unaware. While it is impossible to identify those issues with specificity, it seems clear from Participant #8's lack of purpose, as defined by Damon (2008), that he lacked awareness of these influences. He was close to his feelings, even flooded by them, and appeared to be "floundering" during his

practicum, as predicted by Damon. Participant #8's faith – always figure for him – helped him

through his practicum challenges but did not facilitate a successful experience for Participant #8,

either in terms of clinical attainment or in progress toward his goal of integrating spirituality into

his practice.

Units of Meaning

    N/A

Table 9

Topic: Participant #8 Professional Purpose (Community Counseling Program)

Analytical Categories	Quotations of Significance
1. **Process of Population Selection** • *Intentionality*	I knew ahead of time that I wanted to choose a faith-based organization. I was interested how faith is incorporated into the sessions.
• *Lack of Intentionality*	Specifically Christians and families, honestly because of my personal belief and world view that counseling is limited without Christ.
2. **Meaningfulness of Population Selection**	…because of my personal belief and world view that counseling is limited without Christ
3. **Clinical Resonance**	we share the same faith experienced stress and anxiety due to life changes, stress in relation to family conflict, and struggles with God.

There's a lot of anger toward God that individuals face when there's life crisis, and problems that kind of come up. There's times where I've been angry with God. I think it's really healthy to be able to express it fully, especially when things kind of pop up when you weren't expecting it

4. Skill Set

being open, active listening, (Rogerian Model)

a sense of presence, flexibility, and being in the moment

understanding their faith

ability to refer out

5. The Role of Supervision

my (site) supervisor believed in the motto 'sink or swim'

When I came in, he (site supervisor) wasn't afraid to give me a lot of clients at one time and not just any clients, the difficult ones such as those that are court ordered, such as those that have divorce conflict, those that are struggling very heavily with suicide.

my (site) supervisor has some anger difficulties

(school supervision) we only presented our cases twice during the semester which stunk, we didn't have those moment to moment abilities to be able to just talk and discuss things…

222

(School practicum class) it wasn't very intimate, I didn't feel it was an okay place to really share much.

6. The Role of Counseling

had engaged in his own counseling prior to and again during her practicum experience.

I would say if the University is providing it for free, and it is built into the curriculum to allow time for it, then yes

7. Role of Professional Purpose

A purpose involves an aspect of yourself that you found there's an injustice someplace, there's a wrongdoing and it irks you to the core and it gives you meaning to pursue after it

8. Gestalt

    a. Figure

I knew I wanted to work in a faith-based organization.

Christians and families

    b. Ground

court ordered, domestic violence issues, and high suicidality.

it was a really rough start

A lot of me was trying to deal with the fact of I'm not prepared, I feel flushed, I feel embarrassed, I feel just sad for them that they don't have a quality counselor or someone that is prepared to handle them with some level of experience to handle something so deeply rooted. Especially when it comes to divorce cases or even custody cases and you're battling over your child and you may or may not get them

My practicum experience was very intimidating. There was a lot of fear, a lot of anxiety, a lot of feeling overwhelmed right at the get-go. There were a lot of doubts to my efficacy. There were a lot of questions of, is this the right career that I was meant to go on?

My prayer kicked up like crazy.

being willing to cry and just let things out in your car and just knowing that there's a time when you can't handle it all and going outside when you need to, go for a walk…

it just wasn't a good atmosphere as for as being able to share your concern because my (site) supervisor has some anger difficulties…

9. FOUR LIVED EXISTENTIALS
- *Lived Body*

A lot of me was trying to deal with the fact of I'm not prepared, I feel flushed, I feel embarrassed, I feel just sad for them that they don't have a quality counselor or someone that is prepared to handle them with some level of experience to handle something so deeply rooted. Especially when it comes to divorce cases or even custody cases and you're battling over your child and you may or may not get them

My prayer kicked up like crazy.

I was in survival mode.

I think it's a feeling that you are just not good enough when you're

there. A feeling of anxiety---
yeah…feeling really inadequate

being willing to cry and just let
things out in your car and just
knowing that there's a time when
you can't handle it all and going
outside when you need to, go for a
walk…

- *Lived Relation*

We were always given the clients
that nobody else wanted, so
sometimes that was hard

My practicum experience was very
intimidating. There was a lot of fear,
a lot of anxiety, a lot of feeling
overwhelmed right at the get-go.
There were a lot of doubts to my
efficacy. There were a lot of
questions of, is this the right career
that I was meant to go on

there wasn't a lot of encouragement
during this time from my practicum
site which made it difficult

- *Lived Space*

struggled a lot during sessions

I felt more of presence of God in the
room.

- *Lived Time*

a rough start

10. **Units of Meaning**

N/A

Recommendations

Participant #8 is passionate about spirituality and fervently believes that it should be integrated into counseling sessions. He would like more opportunities for one-on-one discussions with professors who are attuned to spiritual issues in counseling, formal classes on spirituality, and direction toward relevant outside resources. He strongly recommends that novice counselors should engage in counseling and self-care; pray; establish close friendships and networks with peers and staff in their educational program; and "don't be afraid to be real with how things are [during the practicum experience], cause it's not fun."

Final Thoughts

Eight participants were interviewed in this qualitative study. Each interview proceeded through a set list of questions, followed by additional questions as needed to clarify and illuminate the lived experience of the participant's practicum. The research became exhaustive and saturation was reached by the eighth interview, when themes began to emerge and solidify without the need for further data. Separate tables (Tables 2-9) illustrate significant key points derived from the interviews. The key themes are summarized below, and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter V.

1. The process of population selection that lacks intentionality. This study examines the process by which graduate counselor education students select the population with which they will work during their practicum, usually the students' first professional experience as counselors. In the first stages of the practicum experience, every graduate counselor education student must secure an available position at a field site that has been approved by their academic institution. Different sites serve different populations. This study inquires into the considerations that influenced participants' population selection; whether the students can articulate their

professional purpose; and how professional purpose, or the lack of one, might have informed population selection. The student's ability to articulate a professional purpose was a gauge of the degree to which the student was self-aware, and whether the student selected the population with intentionality consistent with that self-awareness.

In each case, participants appeared primarily to have selected their practicum population on the basis of convenience, practicality, or some factor other than the clinical issues the population might present. These considerations overshadowed concerns about the participant's fit with the population, including whether the participant possessed the requisite skills for working with the population, even in the few instances where this question occurred to the participant prior to the practicum.

Intentionality and awareness about the population did not appear to be central to the selection. However, in describing the practicum experience, each participant revealed ways in which the practicum population mirrored some unresolved issue of his or her own. Not all participants were aware of this congruity, but all exhibited a degree of clinical resonance with their population that colored their practicum experience. "Clinical resonance" is a term exclusively used for the purposes of this research. The term identifies the tendency of a novice counselor who lacks self-awareness inadvertently to gravitate toward a population that mirrors his or her own issues, in order to have resolution. Resolution is less likely to occur, however, when clinical resonance is not mitigated by awareness; and, given life's complexity, clinical resonance in some form is likely to occur with any population. When the counselor is unaware of the impact of clinical resonance, however, this tendency might also be expected to affect the counselor's ability to identify the skills needed effectively to work with the population, and to manage the self during sessions.

2. The unprepared counselor. Seven of the eight participants indicated that they were not prepared to work with the population they selected. These seven described their experiences during sessions with challenging clients as stressful and overwhelming. The participants were frustrated because they could not tend to the client's needs. They felt unsupported by their site and school supervisors at times, and often relied for guidance and comfort on their own resources and on feedback from peers. The practicum is designed as a learning experience in which the novice counselor might be expected to make mistakes, and this could account for some of the anxiety participants described. Some participants also lacked academic training in relevant counseling fields, such as addiction. However, this study inquires more deeply into how a student's self-awareness, as evidenced by whether population selection was intentional in accordance with a professional purpose, might affect the practicum experience. The data showed a link between unpreparedness and lack of self-awareness, as evidenced by clinical resonance and a lack of skills. Because all involved parties have an interest in increasing the level of graduate students' preparedness for their first professional experience, it seems prudent to looks for ways to develop self-awareness. For this reason, the study also inquires into the impact of professional purpose: specifically, whether a student's ability to articulate a professional purpose might be a predictor of whether the student's practicum experience will be successful.

3. The lack of professional purpose. This study utilizes the definition put forth by Damon (2008), according to whom purpose is "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self" (p. 33). Damon's definition presumes that an individual with purpose has established a goal with these multiple dimensions: the goal has personal significance, applies the individual's skills set to address a need for those skills, and benefits the larger world. Having a sense of

228

purpose is critical, because purpose makes the difference between "those who flounder and those who are successful" in life (Damon, 2008, p.7).

Damon's definition of purpose implies that the individual has achieved some measure of awareness, self-understanding, and self-acceptance rooted in a sense of personal identity. This study applies Damon's definition of purpose to a student's understanding of how purpose affects professional undertakings, on the theory that purpose encompasses all endeavors, and must inform professional life as well. Because purpose includes intention, meaning, an assessment of skills needed, and the capacity to benefit the world outside the self, this study inquires into whether graduate counselor education students can articulate a professional purpose, and what role professional purpose might play in a student's preparation for and lived experience of the practicum. The data shows a lack of consistency in how participants define purpose and professional purpose; most participants appeared to be considering these concepts for the first time during their interviews. Although all answered the question, none articulated a professional purpose that satisfied all of Damon's criteria. Their inability to express a professional purpose indicated a lack of personal and professional awareness, which is of concern, given the maturity and depth that a clear professional purpose would provide.

4. The challenge of resistance. All participants encountered resistant clients during their practicum, and this appeared to be a major struggle. Participants were unprepared for court mandated and other clients who pushed back, acted out, or did not see the value of what the client had to offer. Participants reported that these clients evoked feelings of guilt, sadness, shame, anger, bitterness, and disappointment. Those who did not characterize this part of the practicum as a failure did so only by casting these clients as examples of people who just don't want to change. Some thought the fault was theirs; others blamed the client or their supervisor.

Most participants were so overwhelmed in the face of resistance that they often did not accurately identify it or clearly understand it; they certainly did not know how to work with it. Almost all participants expressed a desire for more "real-life" examples of cases in the classroom, and more hands-on experience, indicating that their training had involved only hypothetical clients who willingly entered counseling and were eager to do the work. This appears to have created unrealistic expectations for participants, with respect to their own capacity and the capacity of their practicum clients.

5. **The overly confident novice counselo**r. The data from this study aligns with other research suggesting that most clinicians perceive themselves as conducting themselves with more skills than they do in reality. Although some participants observed that their skills levels are a work in progress, all tended to overestimate the depth and breadth of the skills and knowledge they acquired during the practicum. This was true regardless of the site setting and the population served, and was most pronounced around issues where there was clinical resonance between novice counselor and client.

<div align="center">

Similarities

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The themes captured above, and discussed in more detail in Chapter V, were derived from common patterns and significant similarities among participants. By the eighth interview, it became evident that only one participant had selected the practicum population with any degree of intentionality. This may have been due to a perception, not investigated during the interviews, that the practicum was just another graduate level course; if that were the case, academic institutions might rightly be expected to provide meaningful guidance and direction around the placement decision. However, because the institution's role is limited to providing a list of possible sites, the selection of a practicum population becomes, in effect, the first

professional decision a novice counselor independently makes. There appear to be grave implications when that decision is made without intentionality. Study participants were unprepared, and their lack of technical skills was exacerbated by the reemergence of their own unfinished business. Participants reported that they often felt "stuck" in sessions, relying more on instinct than on training. The participants felt stressed, overwhelmed, and helpless. For the most part, participants endured their practicum experience and few seized the full opportunity it afforded for learning and personal growth. Although client outcomes were not a part of this study, it seems fair to speculate that many clients did not receive effective counseling from these students.

This was most true of participants whose statements of purpose and professional purpose were unclear. Participants reported that they had not engaged in classroom discussion about purpose, or professional purpose. When asked, they articulated their purpose and professional purpose in vague and aspirational terms that lacked richness and depth. A well-defined professional purpose is like a reliable map; it provides the basis on which an individual can proactively select experiences that will further the purpose, and pass over those that will not. The participants demonstrated what happens when professional purpose is undefined: they survived and endured the practicum experience, without realizing its full potential.

In some cases, participants declared that the practicum showed them that they loved counseling, and confirmed that counseling is what they are meant to do. Of course, such validation is meaningful; it is not uncommon for students to find that the real world application of academic theory is not what they expected. However, none of the participants knew what to expect during their practicum experience, and they were unprepared to deal with what they found when they got there. This has serious implications for both client and counselor. The practicum

231

experience in graduate counseling education programs is unlike learning experiences in other fields, such as teaching and medicine, where the student novice works under constant direct supervision. Many participants described supervision at their practicum sites as spotty and superficial; those who said it was helpful apparently did so not because their supervisors taught them new skills and techniques, but rather because the supervisors' feedback helped them to feel better about their lack of skills.

This was particularly true of the students' capacity to deal with resistant clients, although participants were also unable accurately to assess the level of clinical skill that their chosen population would require in general. Almost every participant referred to specialized courses that they might have taken, had they known they would be working with their practicum population, but this observation was in hindsight. Practicum population selection was not viewed as a material concern at the time it occurred, possibly because it was not informed by professional purpose. According to Damon (2008), purpose enhances a person's the chances of success in chosen endeavors. Because purpose is generated by self-awareness, is founded on an authentic assessment of skills, and includes a realistic appraisal of the environment, its foundational value should not be overestimated. The data clearly demonstrates that participants had not developed the self-awareness or the capacity to act with professional purpose.

Differences

Although every participant satisfied the criteria for inclusion in the study, the study sample was not an entirely homogenous group. Two participants presented narratives that, at first glance, cast their practicum experiences as different from the others. They reported that they got little value from the experience, primarily because of shortcomings in the population and at the site:

232

1) Participant #5 worked with disadvantaged mothers, some dealing with issues related to abortion and many in abusive relationships. She averred that her population did not resonate with her in any way, except for the fact that they were female and that, some day, Participant #5 would like to have children. Participant #5 did not feel challenged during her practicum. Some of her clients were resistant; her assessment was that they "didn't want to try." Reportedly on the advice of her supervisor, Participant #5 concluded that she should stop "working harder than they [her clients] were" and not give in to her tendency to "care so much." Overall, Participant #5 noticed her tendency to ask close-ended questions and felt that she became a better listener. Seeing the bad decisions her clients had made, she was also "grateful for myself and where I am in life."

2) Participant #8 selected a Christian-based counseling facility with the intention of learning how to integrate faith into counseling sessions. He did not inquire into the nature of the client population – e.g., how they were referred to the facility and what issues they might present – beforehand, and reported feeling completely unprepared, overwhelmed, unsupported, and "in survival" during the practicum. He was acutely aware that his clients deserved more, and was embarrassed that he was not a "quality counselor" for them.

These participants exhibited common themes, even though they conducted their practicum experiences at different sites and worked with different populations. First, they seemed actively disconnected from their clients' issues and circumstances and, perhaps for this reason, found it difficult to establish a therapeutic alliance. Second, their attention was primarily upon themselves: for Participant #5, the focus was on how hard she should work, and for Participant #8, on his own lack of clinical skills. Both participants explained away problems

during the practicum and, although they admitted that they might have contributed to the problem in some way, concluded that the "fault" was not theirs. For Participant #5, the deficit was in the client; for Participant #8, the deficit was in his school and his supervision. Third, the primary obstacle for both was resistance and a lack of skill in dealing with it. Neither participant acknowledged the possibility that they could be exhibiting resistance themselves, although this is suggested by a lack of curiosity and compassion for the clients, along with relief that she had made better decisions, on the part of Participant #5, and a somewhat judgmental stance regarding court mandated clients on the part of Participant #8. Both claimed to care very much about their clients' welfare, but neither seemed motivated to seek out opportunities to learn how better to address their clients' needs.

In short, these participants are not outliers in this study. They demonstrate the impact of a lack of self-awareness, a lack of intentionality, and a lack of skills, as evidenced by their accounts of their practicum experience and their inability to articulate a professional purpose. While the nature of their clinical resonance with their selected population is not as obvious as it was with other participants, the roots of the participants' immobility with resistant clients may be in ground material so indistinct that it could not emerge during the interviews.

Summary

This section focused on the data collected, and its analysis. As described by Berg (2007), a qualitative study is an on-going and recursive process. The qualitative analysis in this study incorporated the characteristics of professional purpose (Damon, 2008), Gestalt therapy principles, and van Manen's lived existentials. This chapter provided a detailed analysis of the data collected from the eight study participants during individual one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The data were also captured in tables that highlighted and summarized common

themes that emerged during the interviews. I included a brief synopsis of my personal

experiences in relation to this study as well. A summation of the findings and their interpretation

can be found in Chapter V.

In this study, I interviewed eight post-practicum students enrolled in one of several

graduate counseling education programs in southwestern Pennsylvania that are accredited by the

Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). These

students volunteered to discuss their practicum experiences with me in personal interviews, all

but one of which lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Each participant was asked a set of pre-

determined questions, followed by additional questions as needed for clarity and understanding

of the participant's practicum experience. Seven females and one male participated in this study.

Their ages ranged from 24 to 30 years old and all were engaged in their last year of graduate

studies. Four of the participants had engaged in some form of personal counseling prior to their

practicum, and four had either never engaged in personal counseling, or had less than one year.

Five of the participants were enrolled in a Community Counseling program, and three were in a

School Counseling program.

The research findings revealed that the participants lacked intentionality in selecting a

population with which to work during their practicum experience, and that the lack of

intentionality stemmed from a lack of self-awareness as evidenced by the inability to articulate a

clear professional purpose. Practicum population selection is the first professional decision a

novice counselor independently makes, and this study showed the impact of making this decision

without intentionality. The effects of undetected clinical resonance, defined in this study as an

unaware novice counselor's tendency to gravitate toward a population that mirrors his or her own

issues, are profound. Clinical resonance exacerbated the novice counselor's lack of necessary skills and made it more likely that the practicum would be difficult for counselor and client.

The definition of purpose proposed by Damon (2008) presumes that an individual with purpose has established a goal informed by self-awareness and infused with personal meaning; it includes a realistic assessment of the capacity of the self, the need to be met in the world, and the skills required to meet that need. Having a sense of purpose is critical, because purpose makes the difference between "those who flounder and those who are successful" in life (Damon, 2008, p.7). This study inquired into whether graduate counselor education students can articulate a professional purpose, and what role professional purpose might play in a student's preparation for and lived experience of the practicum. The data shows a lack of consistency in how participants define purpose and professional purpose and a lack of attention to professional purpose on the part of academic institutions. The students' vague expressions of professional purpose demonstrated a lack of self-awareness and depth that had implications for their practicum experience. This was particularly true of their experience of working with resistant clients. Accounts of the effectiveness of supervision were only from the student's point of view and most likely were colored by ground material of which the student was unaware. However, it seems clear that supervision was not particularly helpful to most of the students; this appears to be due to a variety of reasons, including the student's inability fully to be present with clients, clearly describe sessions, and ask for appropriate help.

The implications of this research are further elaborated in Chapter V, which details the themes that emerged, the research questions that were generated, and suggestions to the profession regarding the need for beneficial changes that respond to the data.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Graduate counselor education students encounter many challenges as they engage in practicum experience. Stress and anxiety are inherent in what, for most novice counselors, is their first professional placement (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Pearson, 2000; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003). At its worst, the anxiety of the situation can be paralyzing for the student (Owens, 2011). At its best, the novice counselor grows along with the client (Gazzola & Theriault, 2007). In either case, the hope is that the novice counselor will learn from the practicum experience without making errors that could harm the client. This experience is daunting even for students who have excelled in the academic portion of their program; there is no guarantee that a student with high grades will have the capacity to translate and apply theory in a counseling session (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003). Some students perform better than others; while there are many possible explanations for variations in competence and performance, this study concerns the effect of the student counselor's professional purpose–or lack of purpose–on experience and performance.

Most graduate counselor education students are in the "emerging adulthood" phase of development, in which they are expected to make their own decisions, often for the first time, about consequential issues like love, marriage, children, career, and worldview (Arnett, 2000). Although purpose-infused action can make a difference at any stage of life, it appears to be critical during this identity phase of development (Damon, 2008). While Arnett (2000) concludes that many emerging adults navigate this developmental period with some measure of success, Damon (2008) argues that this is less often the case. He believes that the failure to achieve a consistent sense of well-being at this developmental stage may stem in large part from the individual's failure to understand the importance of having, and acting in accordance with, an

established purpose. Lack of purpose, due either to a failure to identify a purpose or to appreciate the need for one, can have demoralizing effects on the individual that can last a long time and leave people feeling empty and resentful (Damon, 2008).

As previously described, in this study purpose is defined as "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self," (Damon, 2008, p. 33). It is "the final answer to the question of 'Why? Why am I doing this? Why does it matter? Why is it important for me and for the world beyond me? Why do I strive to accomplish the end?'" (Damon, 2008, p. 33). Having an established purpose is part of what motivates, energizes, and imparts confidence and optimism in the individual; it can make the difference between those who succeed in their endeavors, and those who do not (Damon, 2008).

Bundick (2009) confirmed that having an established purpose during emerging adulthood is associated with psychological well-being and, in the absence of mental illness, confers psychological benefits well into adulthood (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Psychological well-being in this context is associated with *eudaimonia*, the sustained happiness that flows from an established purpose, rather than with the more fleeting hedonistic happiness derived from pleasure-seeking pursuits (Bundick, 2009; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Ryff, Singer, & Love, 2004). In ancient times, Aristotle (350 B.C.) posited the connection between *eudaimonia* and internal *daimon* or true self, the uniqueness with which individuals come into the world. In his view, the central human task is to discover *daimon* through the process of self-reflection. Aristotle's philosophical model meshes with research confirming that the fruitful search for meaning in life, characterized by self-reflection and open-mindedness, has been consistently related at any age to

238

greater optimism, self-actualization, and self-esteem, as well as to lower depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (Steger & Kashdan, 2007).

Finding purpose is an internal process through which individuals seek a better understanding of themselves, their values, skills, and how they relate to the external world (Damon, 2008). Such self-insight and self-knowledge is a function of self-awareness, which is necessary for identity development (Erikson, 1968). Self-awareness is considered an important characteristic across various cultures (Quinn, 2012) and has been cited by Carl Rogers as a particularly essential quality in the effective counselor (Overholser, 2007).

This study furthers current thinking on purpose and its connection to well-being and effectiveness by inquiring into the application of these findings to graduate counselor education students undertaking a practicum experience as part of a program preparing them for the counseling profession. These students are, for the most part, emerging adults. They have already made the pivotal choice to enter the counseling field. Their first professional choice as novice counselors is to determine what population they will serve during their practicum experience. If this choice derives from an articulated professional purpose, the research implicitly indicates that the novice counselor has engaged in personal growth, has or can develop relationship-building skills, and has healthy self-esteem and a sense of command over life (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 2006; Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, & King, 2009). These are central components of well-being, health and happiness (Bundick, 2009; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Ryff, Singer, & Love, 2004). In counseling, these components are also critical to working effectively with clients (Overholser, 2007). A novice counselor's lack of purpose might have negative implications for performance that would taint his or her practicum experience as well as the experiences of clients and supervisors who are part of that experience.

On the other hand, articulating a professional purpose may provide the graduate counselor education student with a solid foundation likely to enhance the prospects of ultimate professional success. A professional purpose enhances confidence and self-esteem, and can ward off the effects of burnout (Damon, 2008), a discouraging condition that could cause a novice counselor prematurely to abandon the field (Ventura, 2010). At the very least, a lack of purpose may be a manifestation of a lack of self-awareness that can diminish the novice counselor's practicum experience. It may also indicate that the novice counselor has not yet developed the psychological maturity accurately to assess and process the complex dynamics at work in counseling. Polster & Polster (1973) discuss the role of perception in the individual's movement toward closure:

> The perceiver not only structures what he perceives into economical units of experience, he also edits and censors what he sees and hears, selectively harmonizing his perceptions with his inner needs. Just as a hungry person perceives food when it is not there, so does another unsatisfied person continue to work out, in his current activities, unfinished business from his past. (p. 31)

Similarly, Rogers (1961) states that:

> Individuals who are more mentally healthy may be able to more easily understand themselves because there is less of a need to engage in distortion or denial among well-adjusted individuals than among those for whom accurate self-knowledge highlights personal inadequacies and painful truths. (as cited in Vogt & Colvin, 2010, p. 240)

Some theorists, including Jung, have posited that there can be a meaningful relationship between events that may not be causally related (Roehlke, 1988). Although personal meaning can be found even in a chance encounter, Jung suggested that "in the process of psychotherapy

there is often a significant relationship between the patient's problem and the therapist's own struggles" (Roehlke, 1988, p. 133). Bolen (as cited in Roehlke, 1988) described the counseling process as an opportunity for the therapist to encounter aspects of himself as he sits with his clients. If conducted with awareness and proper timing, the counseling session is an opportunity for both client and therapist to move toward resolution (Roehlke, 1988). If a novice counselor is unaware of this subtext, however, the implication is that there is potential for harm to the client, the counselor, and the supervisory relationship. The client's needs may not be met, because the client is not seen; the novice counselor may be triggered and re-traumatized; and supervision may be compromised, depending upon the skills and experience of the supervisor. An established professional purpose may modulate these effects: that is, if student counselors know who they are in relation to the population they have selected, have the necessary skills, and appreciate the scale of the endeavor, they may perhaps be more aware of their own issues and have a greater chance of being successful in meeting the clients' needs as well as their own.

This study sheds light on the very real challenges graduate counselor education students face as they take their fledgling steps as clinicians. Course catalogs from universities around the country commonly describe the practicum in various fields as one in which a series of practical experiences help students learn how to assume professional roles in a variety of practice settings and to develop professional identification with the field. The practicum is a learning experience geared to the student's level of expertise. Programming based on the student's need for practical application of academic learning, and the University's desire for a formative assessment of the student's ability and confirmation of the relevance of its curriculum, must account for the fact that this is a setting in which mistakes probably will occur. However, the population served is comprised of real clients, with real issues, and a legitimate expectation that the novice counselor

is capable of offering real assistance. Steps must be taken to minimize potential harm to the client. This study examines whether one of those steps might be affording an opportunity for graduate counselor education students to develop and articulate a professional purpose as it relates to the selection of the practicum population.

Graduate counselor education students embarking on their practicum are placed in a position that may be more stressful, and ultimately less productive, if they have not been led to it by an established professional purpose. As a novice supervisor, for example, I observed a pattern in which graduate counselor education students under my clinical supervision selected practicum populations that mirrored unresolved issues of their own, with no awareness of the parallels. Counseling and supervision outcomes suffered as the student counselors struggled to help clients handle issues that they had not worked on themselves. These novice counselors–and their clients–might have had a much different experience if the counselors had been guided by a heightened awareness of professional purpose, as defined in this study, in selecting the population for their first professional clinical experience.

Although it may be realistic to expect that novice counselors will make mistakes with their clients, in order to learn from them, it also could be argued that academic institutions must provide more targeted support to insure that graduate counselor education students do no harm while they learn. The Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the ACA (2014) states that, "counselors practice only within the boundaries of their competence…" (p. 8) to protect the client from possible harm. The Code seems to impose a form of self-monitoring, and does not articulate the parameters of a training program's responsibility for insuring competence in the student. However, this study provides insights into how the process of articulating a professional purpose can enrich the practicum experience for counselors and their clients. It raises issues with

respect to the pedagogy of counselor education, an area of inquiry that is relatively new and not yet well-developed (Ventura, 2010). Because this study is a step toward establishing that there may be a link between a graduate counselor education student's emerging professional competence and his or her self-awareness, as manifested in an articulated professional purpose, it might also raise the larger question of whether the line between personal and professional development should be less distinct in counseling than it is in other fields. It certainly raises the question of whether higher education institutions should make a concerted effort to initiate a dialogue about professional purpose with their students, to ensure a greater chance of their earliest professional success.

The purpose of this qualitative existential phenomenologically-oriented study is to explore the lived experience of the graduate student counselor education as it relates to the process of selecting a population with which to work. According to van Manen (1990), the genesis of any research study is an experience accompanied by a sense of curiosity about the potential of the same occurring again with another. As a novice supervisor, I detected a possible connection between a supervisee's lack of professional purpose and his or her lack of intentionality concerning the choice of population. I wondered whether the supervisee who has not reflected upon his or her sense of professional purpose would be more likely to gravitate toward a population that mirrors his or her unresolved issues, seeking the potential for resolution as described by Polster and Polster (1973). I observed that a lack of professional purpose can lead to issues in supervision such as countertransference, resistance, feelings of incompetence and inadequacy, and re-traumatization; and that these issues can be compounded by the supervisee's difficult relationships with clients in the mirror population. I was curious about whether my experience was an isolated incident. If there is a pattern around the role of purpose

in the graduate counselor education student's process of population selection, I wondered what implications it might have for the field.

There is already much research on how a counselor's own unresolved issues can disrupt counseling and supervision. However, no research has been done on how the graduate counselor education student articulates his or her professional purpose in choosing a population with which to work. The more we know about how graduate counselor education students engage in their own learning journey, the better we can prepare them to attend to their clients' needs. If this study demonstrates a pattern in which a graduate counselor education student's lack of professional purpose results in choices that make the learning journey more painful and difficult for the counselor and client, then that pattern must be addressed. For instance, it may be time to re-evaluate the field's general view that a graduate counselor education student's decision to attend counseling is a personal, optional choice. There is much at stake in the counseling profession, and to the extent that a graduate counselor education student's use of self can undermine his or her professional competence, educators in the field may well ask whether personal and professional development should continue to be viewed as separate domains.

The purpose of this investigation is to identify patterns that may shed light on the graduate counselor education student's learning experience and how that experience might be enhanced for the ultimate benefit of clients and the profession as a whole. This inquiry concludes, therefore, with findings that can be shared with other professionals as part of a discussion about what supervisors can do to prepare graduate counselor education students for the most productive practicum experience. Likewise, I explore ways in which supervisors can be better prepared to work with non-purposeful students. These areas have not been thoroughly

244

studied despite their potential to have a lasting effect on graduate counselor education students, their clients, and their supervisors.

When unresolved themes emerge and are brought to figure or awareness, the supervisee can grow and change; change is incremental, not monumental. For that reason, supervisees might gain the most benefit from engaging in professional purpose discourse or self-reflective analysis early in their training, the better to anticipate and prevent any damage that might otherwise occur during the practicum. The pedagogy related to the themes that emerge from this study may lead to best practices for dealing with them. Perhaps a larger question is what deters graduate students from engaging in discourse on professional purpose or pursuing self-reflective work. A study that examines the relationship between articulating professional purpose and effectiveness in the counseling and supervision relationships may show why this self-reflective work is important, motivate students to engage in it, and inspire instructors to encourage or even require it. An emphasis on development of professional purpose might result in much-needed clarity in the field: according to the American Counseling Association (ACA), "strengthening identity" is a top concern and goal for the profession (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011). This priority is striking for what it acknowledges as absent in the field. If, overall, the counseling profession itself struggles with articulating and strengthening professional identity, counseling students must certainly struggle with these constructs. We must consider the implications for our profession, students, and counseling sessions. This study may illuminate a connection between professional purpose, as it relates to a graduate counselor education student's selection of a client population, and the development of professional identity that has been deemed so important to the field as a whole.

Summary of Findings and Implications for the Field of Counselor Education

Data derived from eight semi-structured interviews, and were coded and categorized according to the three theoretical frameworks that inform this investigation: purpose, gestaltism, and van Manen's existential phenomenologically-oriented theory. This study picks up on the recent renewed interest in the topic of purpose in popular culture and scholarly research, and employs Damon's (2008) definition of purpose, "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self" (p. 33). Damon's definition presumes that an individual with purpose has established a goal with these multiple dimensions: the goal has personal significance, applies the individual's skills set to address a need for those skills, and benefits the larger world. This definition of purpose implies that the individual has achieved some measure of awareness, self-understanding, and self-acceptance rooted in a sense of personal identity. Purpose is important at every stage of life, and Erikson's theory of personality development suggests that the emergence of purpose is particularly significant during the phase of identity development, between the ages of 12 and 18 (Erikson, 1968). An individual who fails to establish an identity during this phase may lack confidence, and could make life-altering choices solely based on others' expectations; for instance, a son may decide to become a doctor in order to satisfy his parents' ambitions rather than out of an internalized sense of purpose (Erikson, 1968, Marcia, 2010).

Economic and social conditions have changed since Erikson formulated his stages of human development. In light of these changes, Arnett (2000) has forwarded the identity phase to the "emerging adult" period between the ages of 18 and 25, when most individuals make decisions about career choice, marriage, children, and their worldviews. Arnett (2000) is optimistic that emerging adults have the capacity to resolve their identity with some measure of

success. However, Damon (2008) has found that youth do not so easily find their place in life, and he challenges higher education to provide opportunities for discourse that might better prepare students for life and its transitions.

I employed the Gestalt approach when I supervised graduate counselor education students and began to formulate the questions that have resulted in this investigation. I adopted other, equally valid, approaches in those sessions as well. While I favor the paradigm of the humanistic-existential approach, I believe that all theoretical orientations have their usefulness and rationale. Hansen (2014) discussed the various psychotherapy orientations and meta-analysis outcomes and found that none was significantly more effective than another (Smith & Glass, 1977). This finding has been consistent throughout decades of research (Wampold, 2001). However, the figure-ground concept lends itself to an inquiry into what is in and out of the awareness of graduate counselor education students, and provides consistency in the way I have thought about this subject since I first became interested in it. van Manen's existential phenomenologically-oriented theory was included to provide additional context for examining this study's guiding question, but not to the same extent.

In this qualitative study, I interviewed eight participants from several CACREP Counseling Educational Programs in Southwestern Pennsylvania. After the eighth interview, saturation was reached, as no new data had emerged. After careful analysis, using the constructs of purpose, Gestalt, and van Manen's lived existentials, themes became clear, and are outlined below. Further, a summary of this information is included in the cross analysis tables (Tables 10 – 13) which depicts van Manen lived existentials, characteristics of professional purpose, the role of counseling, and the summary of themes, which are located at the conclusion of this Chapter V.

I discuss each theme and its implications for the profession. I later discuss the pedagogy of counseling, limitations of the study, implications for future research, the research questions generated from this inquiry, and draw conclusions.

Theme 1: The Process of Population Selection that Lacks Intentionality

As participants described the process by which they selected the population with which to work during their practicum, it became clear that they did so without intentionality. In effect, their schools discouraged intentionality during the process, by instructing students to secure a hasty placement from a list of identified sites. There was no discussion about what students might expect at those sites and what factors should inform site selection. It is curious that the counseling profession stresses the need for counselors to be intentional during the counseling session, but does not apply that standard to the counselor's first independent professional decision. In order to intentionally to select a population with which to work, a novice counselor would need to know himself or herself in relation to the population, identify the skill set required to be most effective with the population, and determine whether he or she has the skills required to provide reasonable care.

The following are some comments participants made in reference to this theme: Participant #1 stated, "I don't know if I so much chose it as it chose me…I was mainly trying to get close to home, so I didn't have to drive so far away." She later added, "…the elementary was the only one that would take a practicum student, so I had to go pretty far away."

Participant #2 stated, "The way I chose the population was really that D/A program was the first place that I got for practicum." She later added, "I really self-reflected to make sure that that was a population I felt comfortable working with and my dad's an alcoholic so I didn't know

248

how that was going to be, but it was a process of pushing myself and putting me out of my comfort zone…"

Participant #3 stated, "I really didn't focus on the population that I was working with. The inner city public elementary school was easy because I knew the teacher there, and he got me in…" She later added, "The first day I was like, oh my gosh…I didn't feel that prepared, no."

Participant #4 stated, "It was more out of convenience…" because her placement was at her workplace. She added, "I actually chose to work in another program at my facility, because we have multiple programs so I wanted to have some additional experience…"

Participant #5 stated, "It wasn't my initial plan to do my practicum there (at the selected site). I actually had a practicum at another site, and the supervisor that was supposed to work with me got ill, and was hospitalized at the last minute. I had to find somewhere else, and that's the first place that got back to me, so then I just went there."

Participant #6 stated, "Whenever I chose the elementary school, I needed somewhere that was closer to my work, so I chose the northern side of Pittsburgh."

Participant #7 stated, "I initially wanted to work with a bereavement agency…it kind of fell through." She added, "It was suggested from my advisor to check out drug and alcohol counseling…I went there and they had an opening and took me on the spot."

Participant #8 stated, "I knew ahead of time that I wanted to choose a faith-based organization. That was my primary goal or aim in looking at a practicum site. As far as all the other particulars, I didn't mind so much."

All of the participants, with the exception of Participant #2, chose their practicum population without attention to the nature of their potential clients, the issues they might bring to sessions, and how those issues might result in clinical resonance.

Implications for the Profession. The counseling profession urges counselors to be intentional while working with their clients. Counselors are taught to have an awareness of their clients' needs, and to be aware of the manner in which they are meeting those needs. Counselors who do not attend to themselves and their clients cannot assess the degree to which they possess the skills necessary to do their work in sessions. To be effective, intentionality cannot be randomly introduced; ideally, it should inform all aspects of a counselor's practice, including the novice counselor's first independent professional decision. This study shows that a graduate counselor education student's practicum experience is unintentional from its inception and that training programs overlook the need for intentionality in site selection, perhaps due to the complexity of getting so many academic ducks in order each semester. This is a costly oversight that this study shows is detrimental to the student, the client, and the supervisory relationship.

Theme 2: Clinical Resonance

The study identified a phenomenon that, for want of an existing term, I have identified as "clinical resonance." Clinical resonance occurs when an unaware novice counselor is drawn to a population that mirrors the counselor's own unresolved issues. This tendency is similar to the sympathetic resonance that occurs between two proximate string instruments; when the E-string is plucked on one, for example, the same string will slightly vibrate on the other. Clinical resonance is consistent with the experiences Polster & Polster (1973) described when discussing the role of perception in the individual's movement toward closure:

> The perceiver not only structures what he perceives into economical units of experience, he also edits and censors what he sees and hears, selectively harmonizing his perceptions with his inner needs. Just as a hungry person perceives food when it is not there, so does

another unsatisfied person continue to work out, in his current activities, unfinished

business from his past. (p. 31)

Similarly, Rogers (1961) states that:

Individuals who are more mentally healthy may be able to more easily understand

themselves because there is less of a need to engage in distortion or denial among well-

adjusted individuals than among those for whom accurate self-knowledge highlights

personal inadequacies and painful truths. (as cited in Vogt & Colvin, 2010, p. 240)

Participants described their clinical resonance with their practicum clients in the following brief

excerpts from their interviews:

Participant #1 did her practicum at a public elementary school. She stated that children

need an advocate, because adults do not hear or seek to understand them. Parents, especially,

don't listen to their children, and are unaware of what their children need. Listening emerged as a

theme throughout her interview, and she described recent experiences in her professional life

when she felt unheard and dismissed:

When I was a teacher and I worked with the children with disabilities, I as the teacher,

could keep advocating until I was blue in the face for those children, to get them what

they could have or what they should need, and it aggravated me when I was a teacher that

no one would listen to me, no one would help them, nobody cared in the higher-up

positions or generally didn't understand---which happens a lot.

Participant #1 did not give examples of similar experiences in her personal life. However, her

affect while describing her thwarted efforts to speak on behalf of her students was still quite

passionate, and she mentioned the importance of listening frequently during her interview. Due

to time constraints, there was no opportunity to ask probing questions that might yield additional

examples. However, it seems quite likely that there were other occasions on which she felt she had no voice, and that this material might still remain in ground for her.

Participant #2 did her practicum at a community outpatient D/A facility. She stated, "I really self-reflected to make sure that that was a population I felt comfortable working with and my dad's an alcoholic." She added, "Growing up with someone who struggled with alcoholism, I did feel that there was a certain spot in my heart that I really liked this population." She reported that her personal experiences gave her greater insights into the experiences of her clients' families, with whom she worked in family groups. Although she did not volunteer much information about her relationship with her father, she alluded to her mixed feelings about "what he had ever done when he was drinking" and may also have been referring to herself when she said that her clients "just need someone to listen and to be there for them…"

Participant #3 did her practicum site at an inner city school, working with adolescents who have issues with violence and drugs. She stated, "it's just drugs and violence everywhere, fights in the halls, and the halls smell like weed." She further exclaimed, "I never imagined it would be that bad." When asked if the population resonated with her, she stated, "Yeah, my sister overdosed on ecstasy, so she almost died from that…" She added, "My friend was killed because her boyfriend was all messed up off of heroin. Where I grew up out in the city, it's not the greatest neighborhood, like pills were around a lot. When I was in a relationship where my boyfriend on pills…"

Participant #4 conducted her practicum at a non-profit organization working with "families that are at risk of losing their children in foster care and they're all court-ordered." Participant #4 seemed aware of her clinical resonance with her clients, at least in hindsight, when she stated:

I was dealing with my daughter's father who is an alcoholic and lived with him and my daughter---I was with him for eight years and now he doesn't have any interaction with her, and so, it's very interesting because now I can see how people get into situations because I, myself have a child to a man that is very much like the families that I worked with.

Participant #6 performed her practicum at a small public elementary school, and worked with 4-6th graders who primarily have "social issues, family issues," including bullying. She stated:

In elementary school I kind of had a rough time, I guess, so that would probably be --- yeah. Four through sixth grade were especially rough for me. I didn't even think about that beforehand…Yeah, I had a lot of bullying when I was that age too so I guess it did resonate with me.

Participant #7 did her practicum at a D/A outpatient community agency, at the last-minute suggestion of her advisor when her first choice became unavailable. Because her main professional interest is bereavement, she was attuned to that and other issues in her population. She reported that, "it's not just drug and alcohol, there's grief issues, there's marital issues, there's family counseling, there's co-occurring mental disorders." When asked if the population resonated with her, she stated, "I've had a lot of deaths in my life: specifically suicide deaths that just makes me curious of how the survivors react, how family and friends and people move on." She later added:

I was with someone abusive and he abused drug and alcohol. I didn't realize so many things about that relationship until I started at D/A program (practicum) and it was just kind of like a cleansing experience, so it never affected me while I was there but I'd be

253

lying if I didn't say I wouldn't leave and go home and reflect on it and cry about it or need to speak to my own therapist…

Participant #8 conducted his practicum at a faith-based organization, "I knew ahead of time that I wanted to choose a faith-based organization. That was my primary goal or aim in looking at a practicum site." A devout Christian, Participant #8 was seeking training and experience in integrating spirituality and conventional counseling. He admitted that this primary objective was to counsel other Christians who might be more receptive to counseling that incorporated prayer and Christian values; he was unconcerned about the reasons why his clients were in counseling. When asked if the population at the site resonated with him, he stated, "You know, from those that experienced stress and anxiety due to life changes, certainly I can relate to that or family stressors, and conflict so absolutely." He later added that, in his view, he and his clients were not so different:

> Primarily, it was the faith that I really resonated with and just the struggles with God. There's a lot of anger toward God that individuals face when there's life crisis and problems that kind of come up. There's times where I've been angry with God. I think it's healthy to be able to express it fully, especially when things kind of pop up when you weren't expecting it. It's one of those things where I kind of look at it going, yeah, even though I'm a counselor and you're a client, I still see us as all part of the same pot.

Implications for the Profession. Although some participants observed that they shared common experiences with their clients, the nature and depth of their clinical resonance with clients remained in ground, unnoticed and undetected. This is clear from the fact that all described themselves as unprepared to sit across from their clients, particularly when working with issues that they had not yet resolved for themselves. As a result of this dynamic, the client

was not seen, heard, or served in an appropriate manner. The potential for harm to the client presents an ethical dilemma, even though clients presumably understood that sessions might be of limited benefit when they agreed to work with an inexperienced graduate student. Clinical resonance also affected participants, who felt unprepared and overwhelmed. Clinical resonance was not discussed during supervision, either because participants were unaware of it or because supervision was superficial and narrow; some participants felt better about their shortcomings due to their supervisor's feedback, but none received guidance or direction that would help them improve their clinical skills. Like population selection, site supervision seemed somewhat haphazard, and focused more on quieting the student's anxiety than on fostering professional growth that would benefit the client.

According to the American Counseling Association (ACA), "strengthening identity" is a top concern and goal for the profession (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011). According to Damon (2008), purpose builds upon and strengthens identity, because it is based on an awareness of self, the environment, the need to be addressed, and the skills required to meet that need. Discussion of and reflection on each of these aspects of purpose could easily be integrated throughout academic training—including coursework, practicum, and internship experiences—by taking a personal inventory of past experiences that might reveal a student's unfinished business. At the very least, students should be alerted to the potential issues they might encounter at a specific site before they commit to working there; otherwise, they have no way of determining what skills they will need effectively to work with their clients, and whether they have those skills.

Theme 3: The Unprepared Counselor

Participants were directly asked whether they had been adequately prepared to counsel their assigned practicum clients. While most averred that they had received adequate training in basic counseling skills–even though all described incidents in which they did not demonstrate these skills–almost all recognized that they were challenged to address the unique needs of specific populations. They identified these gaps in their academic preparation:

Participant #1 revealed that she would have been unprepared to work with her practicum clients if not for her previous work experience as a teacher. She stated, "I don't think anything particularly in my education prepared me…to actually work with the children and understand them, is a piece that's missing (from coursework)." She explained, "…it wasn't missing (for me), because I already had it" from her previous work experience at a daycare provider, as an elementary school teacher, and as a Therapeutic Staff Support worker. Despite her previous experience, however, she was unprepared to connect with her clients and to address their needs. The most dramatic illustration of this was her account of working with a young girl who said she had been raped: "I think she told me something shocking the one time and I just went…okay, because there was nothing else you could really say about it but she was that kind of girl." Participant #1 may have had additional information about the client and, perhaps, accurately understood that the client was inclined to exaggerate and lie. However, her dismissive attitude toward the client precluded any inquiry into the issues that might be driving this behavior. This is doubly curious in light of Participant #1's earlier portrayal of herself as an advocate for children to whom no one in authority will listen.

Participant #2 stated, "Technique-wise, I feel like I was very prepared just with the variety of techniques and how to use them and integrate different parts…" However, she later

described parts of her practicum experience at a D/A outpatient facility as, "very nerve-wracking" and "it's very overwhelming." While conducting groups, she said, "I wasn't ready to confront group members about being disruptive or doing things in group that weren't appropriate. It took me till the end of my practicum, was when I really got comfortable." When working with resistant clients, Participant #2 said that, "I took it personally, that there was something about me and how I approached individual sessions, why they weren't talking or why they didn't really want to do anything…" She imagined, "What are they going to think negative of me because I'm letting them just sit there and be quiet." She added, "I also thought they were judging me while they were just sitting there…" and believed that "it was negative about me." Participant #2 believes that, "addiction counseling should be a core class here (at her academic institution) because it is a population that a lot of people work in." She suggested that classroom training should include "doing more videos or doing a tape recording, …a lot more hands-on learning…."

Participant #3 stated, "…the first day I was like, oh my gosh…at the beginning, I didn't feel that prepared, no." She stated, "I think all of the school work that I did learn had given me a good understanding of stuff, but I think like maybe a little more real experiences." She went on to describe how helpful it would have been if students have been given more opportunities to do "role plays" and "hands on" exercises. Participant #3 gave numerous examples of how she felt stuck with her clients, and she understood in hindsight that, "In the beginning, I was worried that I was going to make a mistake a lot, and I was more trying to solve everyone's problems and give advice…I want to fix everything for everyone," She described several instances in which she was so overwhelmed by what clients were telling her that she simply left the room.

Participant #4 realized that she and her practicum clients were experiencing some of the same feelings and issues. She stated, "I was just feeling completely overwhelmed and out of control with my own life and that's where I needed to go" (referring to her own counseling). She added, "I really did take time and went to counseling weekly, just to keep myself in check and to work through that (separating from her daughter's father) and to work through what was work, what was my personal life, what was the practicum…" She was candid about the overlap between her personal and professional life:

Understanding how not to enable because I --- in my personal experience did enable a behavior in my own family and then to be a professional and to try not to enable a behavior because emotions make you feel bad for somebody's situation.

She was also struck by the counseling field's generally underdeveloped understanding of the child welfare system, and lack of training in relevant theoretical approaches for addressing the needs of at risk children: "I was actually very shocked at the lack of education on child welfare and trauma in general and how that impacts our society." She added, "I actually have had doc students that didn't have a good understanding of the neurobiological effects on brain development and what can happen when kids are unattached and so just that piece of it was interesting."

Participant #5 stated that her academic training had prepared her to work with her practicum population, and that there was nothing missing. "If anything," she said, "I just didn't feel challenged enough." However, she also recalled that some of the expectant mothers she was counseling were unwilling to join her in planning for their futures, and that she was unable to kindle their interest: "I expected to deal with certain clients that would be resistant, regardless of where I was. Certain things I wasn't so prepared for and that's part of why I had to talk with my

supervisor, because it was a lot more challenging than I thought it was going to be for certain clients." Her supervisor "…agreed not pushing the client but waiting until they were ready to talk." Participant #5 did not elaborate on the conversation, or indicate that supervision gave her insight into why her clients – who likely suffered from depression or trauma – might not be ready to talk. Without knowing the full context of what was said, it appears that Participant #5 primarily heard reassurances to support her feeling that, "At some point, I felt that I was working harder than they were willing, so I had to become aware of that and try to not work as hard."

Participant #6 stated that her formal education had adequately prepared her to work with her 4th-6th grade clients. However, she mentioned numerous struggles when describing her counseling sessions. A last-minute assignment to deliver a lesson on stress was, "…kind of a fly-by-the-seat-of-my pants kind of thing" made more difficult by her lack of skills in classroom management:

> I'm not a very assertive person, I guess, and I don't like to yell at kids so whenever they
> start getting all crazy and talking to each other while I'm trying to teach a lesson, I have a
> really hard time rounding them up and …getting them to focus on what I'm saying.

She described the experience as "embarrassing," and feared that, "that the teacher is going to think I don't know what I'm doing. They're not going to trust me to do this again. They're going to get annoyed because I'm winding up their kids…" She was particularly challenged by resistant clients during individual sessions: "I felt prepared for counseling in general, but having a client not respond to what you're trying to do, I wasn't so much prepared for." She later added, "I felt stuck in the way where I thought---I was trying to help him, but I just felt like he didn't want the help."

Participant #7 explained that relevant training for meeting the specific needs of her practicum clients was available at her academic institution, but that she had not taken those courses prior to the practicum. When asked whether she had been adequately prepared, she stated, "Yes and no. Yes, because the education we received here helps us work with any population if you know how to apply it. No, because there is a specific drug and alcohol addiction track here and it's not what I'm choosing." Even with that training, however, she felt that the current classroom experience alone would have been inadequate. When asked whether she was prepared for individual counseling sessions with her practicum clients, she replied, "Well, no. I don't think I could have because it was a new population, so even if I took classes and read every book, you're never prepared until you really start talking to someone in person."

Participant #8, who conducted his practicum at a faith-based agency, stated that his education had not prepared him to work with the population, either to further his goal of integrating spirituality into sessions or to deal with his client's clinical issues. He stated, "There's no formal classes on spirituality and I don't think many programs even highlight that, which stinks. I think it's a vital, important piece to counseling." Many of his clients were court mandated, and presented serious clinical issues beyond his capacity. He experienced his practicum as, "…very intimidating. There was a lot of fear, a lot of anxiety, a lot of feeling overwhelmed right at the get-go. There was a lot of doubts to my efficacy."

Implications for the Profession. A certain degree of unpreparedness is to be expected during the practicum experience, which is a graduate counselor education student's first real field experience. Under these circumstances, it is likely that students will experience anxiety, feel overmatched, and be confused about what to do to meet their clients' needs. It does not follow, however, that the practicum experience must be—in the words of Participant #8—"sink or

swim." Academic institutions should do everything in their power to improve the quality of the experience, for the benefit of students and clients. They could begin by cultivating their students' self-awareness, which might have alleviated some of the struggles reported by participants in this study.

Theme 4: The Lack of Professional Purpose

This study uses Damon's (2008) definition of purpose, which is defined as, "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self" (p. 33). This definition implies that a goal has been established, a set of skills has been identified, the individual has the required skills, the goal has personal meaning, and the intended action benefits the world. Each participant defined professional purpose in a different way, but none described their professional purpose in the fullness proposed by Damon (2008). All had established a general goal to be a counselor. Most could articulate a required skill set; however, their assessment of the needed skills was incomplete and, in most cases, they overestimated their own skills levels. In order to articulate professional purpose, an individual must have a clear identity, self-awareness, and self-understanding. It may be inferred from participants' inability to articulate a professional purpose that they had not achieved these attributes prior to their practicum experience. The four students who had engaged in personal counseling exhibited a greater level of self-awareness than those who had not, and were more open to discussing their challenges in practicum sessions. However, all students were unprepared to work with the populations they selected. The cross analysis chart at the end of this Chapter documents their failure to establish a professional purpose and how that failure affected their capacity to prepare for their practicum experience (See Table 11).

Theme 5: Dealing with Resistance

All participants encountered resistant clients during their practicum, and all struggled with these clients regardless of the population. Some participants did not recognize resistance, as it can manifest in different ways. Most participants tended to blame themselves for what they perceived as a client's lack of progress; they took the client's resistance personally or believed that they were doing something wrong. Some blamed the client, and decided that the appropriate course of action was simply to wait until the client was "ready to talk." Participants were much less aware of their own resistance, which was exhibited in their attitudes toward resistant clients, in their clinical resonance with clients, and in their general stance about whether they "needed" to engage in counseling themselves. The following interview excerpts describe participants' experiences with resistant clients, and their responses to it:

> Participant #1 recalled that her most difficult client was:
>
> Maybe the one that was raped, that one was a little rough. She tended to also have a little
>
> bit of lying going on but that comes the with the territory because I think she lied about it
>
> for years or lied to herself about it. …I think she told me something shocking the one
>
> time and I just went…okay, because there was nothing else you could really say about it,
>
> but she was that kind of girl.

Participant #1 may have recognized that this client was deeply troubled and most likely had experienced trauma in some way. However, she responded by pointing out to the client that there were holes in her story:

> I personally just listened, asked questions, saw where the discrepancies were, pointed out
>
> the discrepancies so she would clarify, which could be another discrepancy in something

else she said, which then I would point out so sometimes it was just pointing out to her

'Well, you said this so you need to clarify.'

Although Participant #1 stressed the importance of listening to her clients, she appears to approach it in a mechanical rather than relational way, suggesting that she is the actor "getting them to" open up. Her own resistance comes through in her adamant assertion that she wouldn't want to "be forced" to engage in counseling that she doesn't need. Although she did not explain who "needs" counseling, the strong implication is that there must be something wrong with people who do.

Participant #2's relationship with her clients seemed to focus on her need to have them listen to her, as well as on her need to take care of them. She stated, "My first couple sessions, if there was silence, if they weren't talking, I tried to fill the space talking and that was a challenge for me to learn that I have to comfortable with silence." During group work, Participant #2 stated, "Another challenge was when clients would be disruptive in group. Because I'm quiet and reserved, I wasn't yet ready to confront group members about being disruptive or doing things in group that weren't appropriate. It took me till the end of my practicum was when I really got comfortable."

Participant #2 recommended counseling and other methods of self-care for graduate counselor education students. Although Participant #2 exhibited many of the characteristics associated with adult children of alcoholics, she appeared to have a good grasp of the connection between why she should be in counseling and her own effectiveness as a counselor: "every day I ask clients to push outside their boundaries…"

Participant #3 stated, "I did a college readiness group and some of them just dropped out of the group and they wouldn't come and I would try, I'd try to talk to them in class and it made

me sad. I'm like, oh what am I doing wrong?" She stopped blaming herself when she realized that "…the most challenging is just accepting that some people just are not going to change, I guess. That kind of made me sad."

Like Participant #1, Participant #3 would not recommend that graduate counselor education programs "should force us into" counseling, but her reservations appeared to be more about how counseling would be provided and who would pay for it than about the element of perceived coercion.

Participant # 4 worked with court ordered families at risk of losing their children to the foster care system. She stated, "There's a barrier as soon as you even walk in the door, they already don't want you to be there…" She added, "it just made me really realize about how building that rapport and not setting my agenda was extremely important. That was tough." Participant #4 descried a particular client, "…it was also very challenging to direct her in any sort of way because she was just all over the place with every story that she wanted…I really realized I needed to get better at directing [the counseling session]."
Participant #4 saw herself in many of her practicum clients, and is a strong advocate for mandatory counseling for graduate counselor education students: "I think anybody in the helping field in any role needs to [go to counseling]."

Participant #5 stated that she detected "…a pattern I noticed with some of them (clients who were pregnant or who had given birth), a lot of them didn't want to try…to change or try to move on from the past." Although she had expected to encounter resistant clients, "regardless of where I was, certain things I wasn't so prepared for and that's part of why I had to talk to my supervisor because it was a lot more challenging than I thought it was going to be for certain clients." Participant #5 did not recognize that her response to her resistant clients mirrored their

response to their circumstances: they both gave up. "At some point," she said, "I felt that I was working harder than they were willing to work so I had to become aware of that and try to not work as hard." According to Participant #5, her supervisor agreed: "Just talked with my supervisor about it and she agreed not pushing the client but waiting until they were ready to talk."

Like the other participants who had not engaged in personal counseling, Participant #5 "would not have any trouble seeking counseling if I needed to. I think it can be helpful to actually be in the client's position and see – [but] I just haven't needed it."

Participant #6 worked with a 6th grade boy whom she described as angry and a liar. She seemed more intent on exposing him as a liar than on connecting with him in order to explore the issues that informed his self-destructive behavior. She stated, "I think that part of me was trying to get him to admit that he was lying to me…" She added, "I felt he was trying to prove himself to me. But, I would try to go more into his lies, see where it was coming from." She later admitted, "…having a client not respond to what you're trying to do, I wasn't so much prepared for."

Although she appeared not to see the connection, Participant #6 sought counseling earlier in grad school to deal with many of the same social issues her clients were experiencing, and that she had experienced as a child. She believes that counseling should be mandatory for graduate students in a counseling program, because "it can't hurt." Students would also derive professional benefit from seeing how counseling works, and to get the client's perspective.

Participant #7 stated, "There have been clients that seem to want to change but there's no internal motivation, so it's very difficult. Clients who can't seem to get deeper with their emotions and feelings; that could be difficult." She later stated:

I was with someone abusive and he abused drug and alcohol. I didn't realize so many

things about that relationship until I started at D/A program (practicum) and it was just

kind of like a cleansing experience, so it never affected me while I was there but I'd be

lying if I didn't say I wouldn't leave and go home and reflect on it and cry about it or

need to speak to my own therapist…

Not surprisingly, Participant #7 believes that counseling should be mandatory for students in

graduate counselor education programs.

Participant #8 stated, "We were always given the clients that nobody else wanted so

sometimes it was hard." He described the population, "court mandated," domestic violence," and

"high risk of suicidality." Participant #8 responded with, "prayer, lots of prayer." He later added,

"A big part of it too was being willing to cry and just let things out in your car and just knowing

that there's a time when you can't handle it all and going outside when you need to, go for a

walk…rough, it's real rough." Although Participant #8 felt he had some successes with clients,

he also regretted that he did not have the skills to provide them with meaningful assistance.

Personal counseling was "huge" in helping him deal with, but not overcome, his feelings of

stress, inadequacy, and overwhelm during his practicum. In keeping with those feelings,

however, he would not recommend mandatory counseling for graduate counselor education

students unless it was provided free of charge, with time for it built into the curriculum.

Implications for the Profession.

Counseling is a challenging profession. Resistance will occur even under the most

favorable conditions and with the most willing clients. However, this study uncovered several

significant issues in connection with how participants understood and responded to resistance.

First, some participants could not identify resistance as it was occurring. Second, participants

defaulted to blame when they perceived resistance as a failure; they saw either themselves or their clients as inadequate or "wrong," became resigned, and withdrew. Supervision did not improve participants' skills in dealing with resistance; it is not clear whether supervision was inadequate in this respect, or whether participants were simply unable to take in their supervisor's instruction. Finally, participants who had not engaged in personal counseling were less likely to recognize resistance, more likely to give up in the face of resistance, and more prone to characterize clients as people who "need" counseling because there is something wrong with them.

As some participants noted, their classroom instruction did not include strategies for dealing with resistant clients; it certainly did not prepare them for the flood of feelings they would experience in the face of clients' resistance. A framework for the latter might be established in personal counseling or other forms of self-care. Certainly the former might be easily achieved by introducing instructional models like the Transtheoretical Model for Change developed by Prochaska and Associates, which incorporates Motivational Interviewing as a specific method for effectively dealing with resistant clients in sessions (Gladding & Newsome, 2010). Motivational Interviewing is grounded in the Rogerian Model, that is, it comes from an accepting, patient, understanding, and nonjudgmental stance that provides a welcoming space in which to build trust, and a forum for open communication. At the very least, academic programs should do more to normalize resistance, so that it does not surprise or dismay students to the degree experienced by the study participants. If the resistance is anticipated, then the counselor can be better prepared to identify, assess, and deal with it, when and as it occurs (Gladding & Newsome, 2010).

Summary of Themes

I have discussed the themes that emerged from the data in this study, which include the following: the process of population selection that lacks intentionality, clinical resonance, the unprepared counselor, the lack of professional purpose, and dealing with resistance. A summary of this information is listed in Table 10, which is included at the end of this chapter. While all of the participants selected their practicum population without intentionality, all reported that they struggled in sessions and felt stressed, overwhelmed, and unprepared. As the saying goes, even the most competent counselors "had to start somewhere," and no one expects the practicum experience to be smooth and easy for novice counselors. However, this does not excuse graduate counselor education programs from doing their utmost to ensure that novice counselors attain a level of functioning commensurate with their practicum undertaking. Additional supports could be incorporated without great disruption, including classroom discussion of and reflection on professional purpose. Having a professional purpose, as described by Damon (2008), can have predictive value, provide a framework for more and earlier skills development, and better prepare novice counselors for their first professional field experience. Before examining specific changes that academic programs might make in order better to prepare their students, it is important to understand the consequences of a student's lack of professional purpose, and how these changes might address them.

This study identified the interesting phenomenon of clinical resonance, a new term that describes the manner in which an unaware counselor will gravitate toward a population that mirrors his or her own issues in order to find resolution. Some of the participants in this study had engaged in personal counseling, and some did not. It appeared that even those who had been to counseling were unaware of the full extent of the dynamic of clinical resonance and, like their

peers who had not engaged in personal counseling, they did not select their practicum population with intentionality. They did, however, exhibit a greater awareness of issues that emerged during sessions and supervision, and a greater capacity to deal with them. They were also more transparent and vulnerable as study participants, and vividly described their challenges and struggles when sitting across from the client. By contrast, the participants who had not engaged personal counseling minimized their challenges, perceived themselves as prepared, and tended to blame and label the client as resistant when sitting across from the client.

Life is a journey, and the quest for self-awareness is never over. The question for the counseling field is when it should start. Arguably, it should at least commence during academic preparation and be evident in the first independent professional decision a novice counselor makes. This is an argument for infusing practicum population selection with intentionality, and for implementing changes in the pedagogy of counseling to heighten the self-awareness of graduate counselor education students.

A Pedagogy Issue

This study illustrates the need for more self-reflection exercises in the classroom environment to ensure that counselors are better prepared for work in the field. Although effective counseling requires effective use of the self (Rogers, 1961), it appears that counselor education programs mainly focus on theory and technique, and do not harness or develop the students' capacity for reflection and self-awareness. The pedagogy of counselor education is a relatively new area of inquiry; there are few data that suggest best practices for incorporating students' personal development, including the development of the capacity for reflective thinking, into academic training programs (Ventura, 2010). In fact, the teaching profession as a whole has only recently begun to reexamine its long-accepted models of pedagogy.

Drawing on insights he developed while teaching illiterate Brazilian adults, Paulo Freire (2011) offers a more contemporary view of teaching. He characterizes the conventional westernized way of teaching as "the banking concept of education," in which a teacher deposits facts and figures into students' heads and then withdraws the material in tests and assignments. Freire proposes a more constructivist alternative pedagogy that elevates the role of the student and casts the teacher in the role of facilitator. This model gives the student maximum opportunity to bring forth his or her own potentials and capabilities. The student begins by formulating some sort of idea or hypothesis, which he or she examines, tests, applies, and modifies until reaching a conclusion. The teacher provides guidance, acts with humility, and liberates the students to pursue their own learning (Freire, 2011).

Nelson and Neufeldt (1998) suggest similar best practices for counselor educators. In addition to incorporating the Rogerian model in the classroom and counseling sessions, they recommend the constructivist method for teaching novice counselors how to think reflectively: the student is elevated to the role of expert and the professor becomes a facilitator rather than a leader. As issues are discussed in class, the students explore potential explanations and available options; as they engage in their own creative problem solving, students learn to struggle with what is.

"What is" in a counseling session repeatedly exposes the counselor to a client's deeply painful and complex issues and experiences. The counselor must be present to the client, and at the same time, develop protective factors against burnout. Farber and Heifetz (1982) discuss how burnout impairs the delivery of mental health services, in addition to debilitating the counselors who provide them. Burned-out professionals may become cynical about their clients, blame clients for creating their own difficulties, or label them in derogatory terms. The emotional

fallout for clients can lead to physical manifestations such as insomnia, ulcers, and headaches which, in turn, can lead to an increase in family conflict (Farber & Heifetz, 1982). Farber and Heifetz (1982) found that burnout was attributed to the non-reciprocated attentiveness, giving, and responsibility demanded by the therapeutic relationship. They suggest that this issue should be addressed in graduate training programs, which burden students with unrealistic expectations by failing to prepare them for inevitable disappointments (Farber & Heifetz, 1982).

According to Seaman and Rheinhold, (2013) a major premise within experiential education is that experience is the initial phase of learning, but is not sufficient to obtain new knowledge unless accompanied by reflection. Reflection is a process by which an individual's experience is recaptured for further thought and evaluation; it is a critical element of learning. This research strongly supports the notion that an individual cannot learn from an experience without reflecting on it (Seaman & Rheinhold, 2013).

Griffith and Frieden (2000), discuss ways to encourage reflective thinking in novice counselors, such as Socratic questioning, journal writing, Interpersonal Process Recall, and reflecting teams. For maximum benefit, they suggest that these methods be incorporated as an active ongoing process throughout the program. They believe that the capacity to reflect prepares the counselor to deal with myriad unexpected developments in sessions; memorized responses, by contrast, can be counterintuitive in sessions.

Roach and Young (2007) found that incorporating a wellness program for counseling students was critical for the student, and equally critical for effective counseling. A wellness model "advocates self-care; self-awareness; and personal development on one's physical, mental, and spiritual life" (p. 30). Due to the inherent stress associated with the profession, it is understood that its demands can be taxing and link to burnout, leading to a less than productive

271

counseling session. The inclusion of a wellness program in the course of study might reduce these stress factors; participating students might enhance their personal growth and development, and experience more satisfaction (Roach & Young, 2007).

Nagata (2004) promotes self-reflexivity and describes it as the "on-going conversation with your whole self about what you are experiencing as you experience it" (p. 139). Nagata (2004) makes the distinction between self-reflexivity and self-reflection in that self-reflexivity occurs in the moment, while self-reflection occurs after the moment has passed. Being self-reflexive in the moment enhances the quality of relationships and promotes greater self-awareness.

As previously mentioned, Fur and Carroll (2003) researched 'critical incidents,' defined as "a positive or negative experience recognized by the student as significant because of its influence on the student's development as a counselor" (p. 483), to inform faculty on how coursework can better be structured to prepare students for success. The core theme of this qualitative study was experiential learning. Students reported that being in the role of the therapist and client was the most beneficial of the studied activities. They moved from role-playing to dealing with actual issues and, although this raised legitimate concerns for the faculty, many students praised the process for teaching them to trust, take risks, self-disclose, and gain insight into the dynamics of an actual counseling session. Students experienced an awareness of their personal issues and the influence they had on the sessions. They also recognized that the private counseling they received was critical to their development as professional counselors (Fur & Carroll, 2003). Other personal growth development activities included high-ropes courses, personal growth groups, spelunking, and spending a night in a homeless shelter; the study was inconclusive as to whether such activities should be required or merely encouraged.

Academic programs might also provide more training for students around the issue of resistance. All participants struggled with resistance, on many levels: they struggled to identify resistance as it was occurring in sessions, and inaccurately attributed causation to themselves or their clients. They were frustrated and, for the most part, remained stuck for the duration of their practicum. Some demonstrated their resistance to their clients by referring to them in derogatory terms. All were resistant to identifying their own issues, and many who had not engaged in personal counseling exhibited a resistant bias toward individuals who "need" counseling. As previously mentioned, the Transtheoretical Model for Change developed by Prochaska and Associates, and which incorporates Motivational Interviewing, specifically deals with how to handle resistance in sessions (Gladding & Newsome, 2010). This model complements many theoretical orientations, as it incorporates the features of the Rogerian Model, and has the added benefit of normalizing resistance for students. If resistance is anticipated, then the counselor can be better prepared to identify, assess, and deal with it, when and as it occurs (Gladding & Newsome, 2010).

Many graduate counselor education programs, including those in which participants in this study were enrolled, already incorporate some or all of the suggestions outlined above. The data suggests, therefore, that the profession as a whole might benefit from a more rigorous examination of the entire process of a counselor's academic preparation. For example, academic institutions might consider including a brief pre-practicum course that, among other things, engages students in reflection on their professional purpose as it relates to population selection. However, even that may not be enough. Graduate counselor education students are making the first major decision in their professional careers. Given the findings in this research, it appears that these students are unprepared to meet the demands of the experience. This raises an ethical

dilemma, in light of the ACA (2014) professional code requiring that "counselors practice only within the boundaries of competence...," (p. 8) to protect the client from harm. Three aspects of this study suggest that academic institutions should take a firmer stance on a requirement that graduate counselor education students must engage in counseling during their graduate studies: 1) self-awareness plays a critical role in a student's ability to articulate a professional purpose and to select a population with intentionality; 2) students who are not self-aware usually fail to detect their lack of self-awareness on their own; and 3) beneficial self-reflection, like any vehicle for change, must be incremental not monumental. It seems fair to suggest that all graduate counselor education students must engage in counseling as early as possible during their studies, and perhaps this should be made a requirement upon entry.

Further, it would be helpful if graduate counselor education programs acknowledge that instructors in graduate counselor education programs model the self-awareness that will further assist their students to achieve professional success. This is not a new idea. One of the most important qualities a good teacher exhibits, according to Palmer (1998), is a sense of personal identity that infuses their work. He stated, "Good teachers join self and subject and students in the fabric of life" (Palmer, 1998, p.11). Hamachek (1999) was even more explicit about the impact of a teacher's lack of self-awareness when he stated, "Consciously, we teach what we know. Unconsciously, we teach who we are" (p. 209). These insights have great implications for instructors in a profession where self-awareness is paramount. If teachers are not connected to self and struggle to connect with students, their students may struggle to establish a quality relationship with clients. This lack of connection is then likely to reverberate "in-session" and in supervision. The need for self-reflection, then, is not exclusive to students; it may be important

for graduate counselor education programs to ensure that instructors engage in self-reflection as well.

Limitations

This study derived its data from eight participants. All participants were enrolled in several CACREP Graduate Counseling Education Programs in Southwestern Pennsylvania, and each of these programs allowed students the freedom to select their practicum sites. Saturation was reached by the eighth interview, from which no new data emerged. As is typical of qualitative studies such as this one, it is difficult to draw generalized conclusions from the research, due to the relatively small number of interviewees, their distribution across several programs, and their very similar demographics–i.e., all but one participant was Caucasian, and all but one was female.

This researcher had preconceived notions about clinical resonance, based on previous observations made as a novice clinical supervisor, and a bias in favor of required personal counseling for counselors regardless of their competency level. Care was taken to counterbalance any influence these notions might exert on the findings. Trustworthiness was ensured through keeping a reflective journal and field notes, and in conversations with the dissertation chair and committee members.

Implications for Future Research

This research demonstrates a need for more self-reflection during academic training, so that students can select a practicum population with intentionality and in accordance with an articulated professional purpose. A study that explores the impact of the introduction of the concept of professional purpose before the practicum would be beneficial, as would a study of how frequent, early opportunities for self-reflection and self-awareness might support students in

275

confronting their own unresolved issues and improving the quality of their work with practicum clients. Further study on whether personal counseling enhances the practicum experience for student and client would also be helpful. Future studies must accommodate the reality that counseling is a journey to wholeness, not perfection, and that change is incremental, not monumental. This is, however, all the more reason why students should engage in self-reflection well before the practicum experience, so as to better assess their skill level against the skill set required for the population. Such studies would also support counselor educators in their role as the gatekeepers of the profession; support for the coursework changes suggested by this study should lead to a more accurate assessment of whether a student is stable and capable of providing clients with reasonable care.

Although this study did not delve deeply into the supervision experience, especially from the perspective of the supervisor, it would appear that participants did not derive the intended full benefit from site or school supervision. As previously noted, this was a particular problem for students as they struggled with resistant clients. Novice counselors must develop the skills effectively to deal with resistance, because it will always occur. Studies on the effect of introducing Motivational Interviewing techniques in the classroom, and how prior experience with these techniques might affect supervision, could be useful. Additional studies might investigate the assumptions that inform the decision to volunteer as a site supervisor, and whether site supervisors actually have the education, skills and experience, as well as the time and mental space, properly to guide practicum students. The findings from such studies might suggest ways in which site supervisors might better be prepared; more effective supervision would benefit all parties to the therapeutic alliance and, ultimately, the profession as a whole.

Research Questions Generated from this Inquiry

The following research questions were generated from this study:

1. How might having an established professional purpose, prior to selecting a population from which to work, be useful for practicum students?

2. How might counselor education programs find value in intentionality, with respect to practicum population selection, as a way to ensure that students are better prepared?

3. How might counselor education programs better understand the dynamic of clinical resonance and its implications for the practicum student, the client, and the supervisory relationship?

4. How might counselor education programs better offer sufficient opportunities for self-reflection in the classroom, to better prepare the students?

5. How are counselor education students being trained to handle resistant clients?

6. How might the more complex life experience of a more mature student who is not an emerging adult affect the ability to articulate a professional purpose, and impact the practicum experience?

7. To what extent are site supervisors skilled in providing the supervision required to assist the counselor education students with their personal and professional growth?

Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenologically-oriented study was to explore how graduate counselor education students articulate professional purpose as it relates to the selection of a population with which to work. Five key themes emerged from this research, including the

following: the process of population selection that lacks intentionality, clinical resonance, the unprepared counselor, lack of professional purpose, and dealing with resistance. These themes have implications for the profession, and underscore the need to reassess how graduate counselor education students are prepared to make their first independent professional decision. This study revealed that students generally select their practicum population without intentionality, even though the profession stresses the importance of awareness in all other aspects of clinical practice. There is no real basis on which to except practicum site selection from that requirement. This study also revealed that clinical resonance exerts a significant influence on the practicum experience. Clinical resonance is a new term, coined during this study to describe an unaware counselor's tendency to be drawn to a population that mirrors his or her own issues, in order to move toward resolution. There are no studies regarding the possibility that a novice counselor may be pulled toward assigned clients with the same or similar unfinished business. There are, however, analogous "pulls" in the physical sciences. For example, sympathetic resonance occurs between the same types of stringed instruments; a tuning fork, or "acoustic resonator," vibrates with the same pure sound when a second tuning fork is struck nearby. A novice counselor might be attracted, in a similar way, to conditions that could lead to his or her own healing. Although resolution may be the goal, without awareness clinical resonance actually inhibits the counselor's ability to be present with the client, and lays the foundation for countertransference in sessions. Clinical resonance might also deter the student from accurately describing sessions during supervision. This could be especially detrimental for students whose lack of intentionality had made them less prepared for, and therefore more overwhelmed by, their practicum experience.

Self-awareness, self-understanding, and self-identity are hallmarks of the counseling profession. "Know thyself," the *sine qua non* of the profession, is a prescription as old as

Socrates. It seems overdue, therefore, that the profession should seriously consider making needed changes in the manner in which it educates future counselors, particularly when these changes–such as opportunities for self-reflection, more hands-on experiences, emphasis on techniques for dealing with resistance–can be made fairly easily.

One of the simplest changes is perhaps the most significant: students should establish a professional purpose, as defined in this study, before they undertake their practicum experience. This would align with the primary goal of the CACREP, which, according to the American Counseling Association (ACA), has made "strengthening identity" a top concern and goal for the profession (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011). A firm identity–clearly articulated goals, values, and competencies–is essential at the macro level, in the culture and among practitioners. This study demonstrates that it is equally important at the individual level, and that a practicum experience grounded in professional purpose is more likely to be successful for the novice counselor, the client, and the supervisory relationship.

Table 10

Cross Analysis of van Manen Lived Existentials with Participants

Participant   van Manen Lived Existentials

	Lived Body	Lived Relation	Lived Space	Lived Time
Participant 1	X	X	X	
Participant 2	**X**	**X**	**X**	
Participant 3	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Participant 4	**X**	**X**	**X**	
Participant 5	**X**	**X**		
Participant 6	**X**	**X**	**X**	
Participant 7	**X**	**X**		
Participant 8	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**

Table 11

Cross Analysis of Participants with Characteristics of Professional Purpose

Participant   Characteristics of Professional Purpose

	An Established Goal	*Meaning (as attributed to initial population selection)*	*Articulated Skill Set*	*Attained Skill Set*	*Self-Awareness (participants who experienced more than one year of own personal counseling)*
Participant 1	X		X		
Participant 2	X		X		X
Participant 3	X		X		
Participant 4	X		X		X
Participant 5	X		X		
Participant 6	X		X		
Participant 7	X		X		X
Participant 8	X		X		X

Table 12

Cross Analysis of Participants with Role of Counseling

Participants	Role of Counseling		
	Engaged in Self-Care (more than one year)	Should Programs Mandate Counseling for Students	Feeling Unprepared, Stressed or Overwhelmed During Practicum Experience
Participant 1	No	No (Helpful)	Yes
Participant 2	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participant 3	No	Optional/Provide counseling service for students	Yes
Participant 4	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participant 5	No	No, only encouraged Not needed	Yes
Participant 6	No	Yes	Yes
Participant 7	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participant 8	Yes	Yes, if University provides it and built into curriculum	Yes

Table 13

Cross Analysis of Themes that Emerged with Participants

Themes	Participants							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.The process of population selection without Intentionality	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
2. The Presence of Clinical Resonance	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
3. The Unprepared Counselor	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
4. Lack of Professional Purpose	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
5. Dealing with Resistance	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Probes

1. What process did you engage in when you chose the population you worked with during your practicum?

    a. Why was it important for you to work with the population you selected?

    b. Does this population resonate with you in any way?

    c. What skills do you believe are necessary to be helpful with the population you chose?

    d. Do you believe you have successfully attained these skills?

    e. Do you think your education has prepared you to work with this population? If not, what was missing and what advice would you offer?

2. Tell me what your practicum experience was like…

    a. What did you find to be most challenging?

    b. How did you get through the challenging moment(s)?

3. Did you feel prepared to counsel this particular type of client?

    a. What did you experience when sitting across from this client?

    b. Did you ever feel stuck when working with this client? If so, please explain.

    c. Did you find supervision to be helpful?

4. What have you learned about yourself during this experience?

    a. Based on what you learned, what, if anything, would you do differently?

    b. Have you engaged in counseling during graduate school? If no, why not?

    c. Do you think graduate schools should require counseling for their students?

    d. What recommendations do you have for other counselors entering the profession?

5. How do you define purpose?

    a. What do you think it means to have a professional purpose?

    b. What do you think purpose includes?

    c. Have you ever had a discussion in any of your classes on the nature of professional purpose as it relates to your population selection?

    d. Do you have a professional purpose? If so, what is it?

6. What should I have asked you that I did not ask, and that would help me to better understand your lived experience as a beginning counselor working with the population you chose?

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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE:	The Lived Experiences of the Graduate Counselor Education Student and the Process of Selecting a Clinical Population for the Practicum Site as it relates to professional purpose.
ADVISOR:	Dr. Lisa Lopez-Levers, Professor Duquesne University Department of Counseling, Psychology & Special Education 412.396.1871
INVESTIGATOR:	Christina M. Riga, MsEd., LPC, ACS, NCC 325 Nature Trail Lane Murrysville, PA 15668 412.427.5747 In pursuit of the fulfillment of the requirements for Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Counseling, Psychology, & Special Education: ExCES Program
SOURCE OF SUPPORT:	This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Philosophy at Duquesne University.
PURPOSE:	You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate the lived experiences of Graduate Counselor Education Students and the process of site selection as it relates to his or her professional purpose. In the interview portion of this investigation, I will be asking you to discuss your experiences of practicum, your supervisory experience, and level of preparedness prior to practicum experience. The interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed. These are the only requests that will be made of you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: There are no risks greater than those encountered in everyday life. While there are no personal benefits, your participation will benefit the profession by advancing greater knowledge regarding counselor education graduate students' established purpose about client population choice.

COMPENSATION: Participants will not be compensated in any way. However, there will be no costs to you associated with this study

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your name will never appear in the description of the data, nor will it appear on the audio recordings or its transcription. Transcriptions will delete any identifying material of anyone subjects talk about, as subjects themselves. No identity will be made in the data analysis. All written materials and consent forms will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's home. Your response(s) will only appear in statistical data summaries. All materials will be destroyed at the completion of the research.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be required to do anything in order to withdraw from the study, other than notifying the researcher of your decision.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Christina M. Riga, Investigator, Dr. Lisa Lopez-Levers, Advisor and Dr. Linda Goodfellow, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board 412-396-6326).

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Researcher's Signature

Appendix C

Email to Department/Program Heads of CACREP Programs

Dear [Department/Program Head],

I am a doctoral student at Duquesne University School of Education, working on my dissertation on the lived experience of graduate counselor education students and how they articulate professional purpose as it relates to their selection of a population with which to work. I've successfully defended my dissertation proposal and have received IRB approval for my study. The next step is to recruit participants for my qualitative study.

My study focuses on the effect, if any, of professional purpose on the professional experiences of novice counselors. I am intentionally recruiting from among the least experienced students, which is why I would like your permission to ask the professors of practicum classes in your department/program if I may recruit participants during a brief classroom visit. In addition to your permission, I will need the names of the professors assigned to practicum classes and their email addresses so I can reach out to them with my request.

For your information, I have attached the consent form I will distribute to potential participants and the script for my recruitment announcement in class.

Questions regarding this study can be directed to this researcher at rigac@duq.edu or to my dissertation chair, Dr. Lisa Lopez-Levers at levers@duq.edu.

I appreciate your support for my research and look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,

Christina M. Riga, Doctoral Candidate
MsEd., LPC, ACS, NCC

Appendix D

Email to Practicum Professors of CACREP Programs

Dear [Professor],

Your department chair has given me permission to contact you. I am a doctoral student at Duquesne University School of Education, working on my dissertation on the lived experience of graduate counselor education students and how they articulate professional purpose as it relates to their selection of a population with which to work. I've successfully defended my dissertation proposal and have received IRB approval for my study. The next step is to recruit participants for my qualitative study.

My study focuses on the effect, if any, of professional purpose on the professional experiences of novice counselors. I am intentionally recruiting from among the least experienced students, which is why I would like your permission to recruit participants during a brief visit to your practicum class toward the end of this semester. For your information, I have attached the consent form I will distribute to potential participants and the script for my recruitment announcement in class.

Questions regarding this study can be directed to this researcher at rigac@duq.edu or to my dissertation chair, Dr. Lisa Lopez-Levers at levers@duq.edu.

I appreciate your support for my research and would be happy to answer any questions you might have about my study. I look forward to hearing from you and scheduling a mutually convenient time for me to visit your class.

Thank you,

Christina M. Riga, Doctoral Candidate
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RECRUITMENT ANNOUNCEMENT
to be made at practicum classes held at
various campuses with CACREP programs in the Pittsburgh area

My name is Christina Riga. I'm a doctoral student at Duquesne University, working on my dissertation research on the lived experience of graduate counselor education students and how they articulate a professional purpose as it relates to population selection.

Your professor has given me permission to talk to you today about your potential participation in my dissertation study. I'm coming to you with my request because you have just completed your practicum. That's usually the first practical professional experience we have as counselors, and the first opportunity we get to select a certain type of client. My research looks into the factors that go into making that selection. Specifically, I'm curious about what, if any, effect professional purpose might have on the selection process.

There's a renewed scholarly interest in purpose, and, to my knowledge, my study is the first one to examine professional purpose in this context. I'm here today to answer your questions about the study and to ask for your participation.

I have a consent form that explains the parameters of the investigation. Please take some time to review it now. If you're interested, please sign the consent form and turn it in to your professor at the end of this class. Signing the consent form will not obligate you to complete the study. I'll be in touch within five business days to confirm your participation and schedule your individual interview appointment.

Can I answer any questions about the study for you now?

If you think of questions about this study later, and are interested in participating, you can contact me at rigac@duq.edu or my dissertation chair, Dr. Lisa Lopez-Levers at levers@duq.edu.