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## Fall 2017 Complete Issue

Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision

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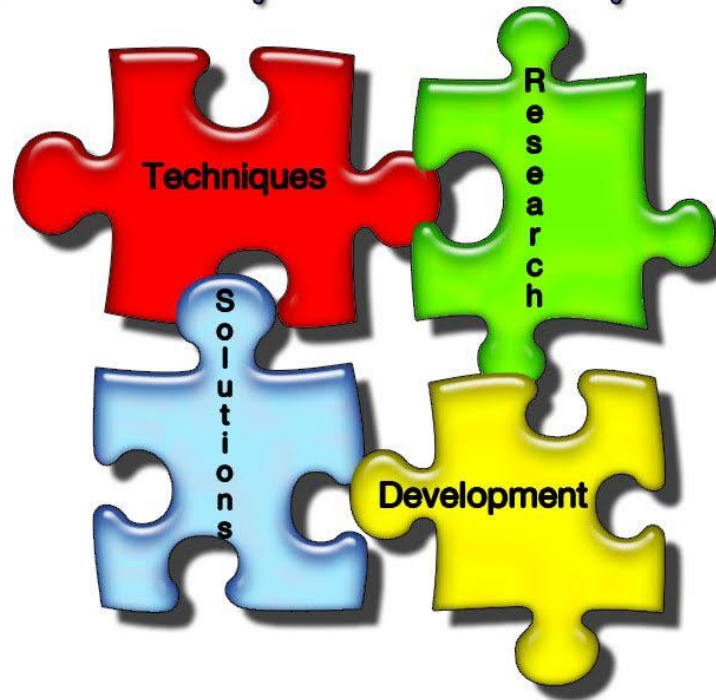
Fall 2017 Complete Issue

# The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision

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Counselor Preparation & Supervision*



# Official Journal of the North Atlantic Regional Association for Counselor Education and Supervision

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Edina Renfro-Michel  
*Montclair State University*

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There are six general categories that help focus the content of the journal.

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**Techniques.** These articles focus on professional models for teaching empirically grounded techniques used by professional counselors, as well as teaching and supervision techniques used in professional preparation programs.

**Counselor Development.** These articles include insightful commentary on means by which professional counselors can continue to develop professionally. Effective teaching strategies for counseling students as well as continuing education for experienced counselors will be highlighted.

**Supervision.** These articles specifically target ideas, research, and practice related to counselor supervision. These articles should investigate and discuss supervisory issues from a perspective applicable to site supervisors, counselor educators and/or clinical supervisors (e.g., supervising professionals working toward a professional counseling license).

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# The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision

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## Editorial Note



Edina Renfro-Michel, Editor

It is with great sadness that I put the Fall 2017 issue to bed. This is my last issue as editor of JCPS. In the 7 years I have been editor, JCPS has seen many changes. Under my leadership, and with significant help from assistant and associate editors, graduate assistants, and editorial board members, JCPS has grown into a journal with worldwide readership. During my tenure, a system for reviews was established, JCPS acquired an ISSN number and DOIs for all individual manuscripts and whole journal issues, it became indexed on Ebsco and Proquest, and migrated from a traditional email/googledoc system to the current BePress digital repository system. Submissions have increased from 15 manuscripts a year to over 70 manuscripts in the past year. JCPS is now read in 181 countries, and in the past year has had over 26,000 downloads. We currently have 50 active editorial board members from across the United States. Since its inception in 2009, JCPS has published 19 issues with a total of 109 articles.

At its initiation, the NARACES Executive Board tasked JCPS with the mission to provide quality manuscripts with an open-minded, kind place for counselors, counselor educators and supervisors to publish their work. I have upheld that mission and those who volunteer their time for JCPS believe that we are mentoring writers, and that is often the focus of our work. I am

proud of our editorial board members' constructive, and yes, kind, reviews. I am extremely proud of the journal JCPS has become.

Thanking everyone who helped JCPS, and me, over the past 7 years seems a huge task, and yet it seems like not enough. I feel I should be shouting this from a mountaintop or with fireworks, or both, while toasting with champaign. Well, you get the idea. To say that I have received support from the present and past NARACES Executive Board members minimizes my experience. At every turn, with every idea no matter how large, or what the cost, the Board has always given me the green light. So, thank you. Thank you to all of the current and past NARACES Executive Board members for your unfailing support of JCPS, and of me as editor. The success of JCPS is in great part to your NARACES leadership.

Thank you to all of our present and past Editorial Board members for helping me grow the journal, providing kind, constructive reviews, and for sharing this ride with me.

I want to thank Larry Burlew, who was my co-editor for the first 2 years, and taught me so much about being an Editor. Jane Webber stepped up to be Associate Editor when I was diagnosed with cancer, and helped to keep the journal running, and me motivated. Ellery Parker also became part of the JCPS family during this time as Assistant Editor. Both of them allowed me to continue my work with the journal, a bright light in a very dark time. Michael Mariska, current President of NARACES, acted as Associate Editor until he was promoted to President. His support is unfailing. Thank you to Montclair State University for providing graduate assistant hours to help with the journal. I have had many GA's in the past 7 years, and all of them were exceptional. For this issue, I want to thank Massiel Rosario, who completed this issue, with many late night hours, even though she is no longer a GA. She has read, and touched, most of the manuscripts in this issue, and formatted the full issue, linked the dois, and did final preparations.

I also want to thank my current GA, Andriana Matos, who happily threw herself into the chaos that is working with JCPS.

As with any journal, completing final edits of manuscripts is laborious. For this issue, with the amount of manuscripts published, (14!), completing final edits in time for publication would have been difficult. Several editorial board members stepped up to aid their support, by completing final edits, sometimes with a less than 24-hour turn around. Because this issue would not have been published on time without their help, I want to thank Roberto Abreu, Vanessa Alleyne, Jennifer Beebe, Stuart Chen-Hayes, Blaire Cholewa, Louisa Foss-Kelly, Yuh-Jen Guo, Les Kooyman, Eric Owens, Lacey Ricks and Tyler Wilkinson.

At the end of December, I will officially step down as Editor, and pass the torch to a new editorial team to continue the work I have started. I have enjoyed my work with JCPS, and am ready to start a new adventure. I wish the new editorial team great success as their adventure begins!

Edina Renfro-Michel

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# Exploring Internship Experiences of Counselors-in-Training through Pinterest: A Consensual Analysis

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Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision, Volume 9, Issue 2, Fall 2017

Jeffrey M. Warren, Mark Schwarze

Field placements are one component of essentially all counselor education programs. However, little is known about the lived experiences of counselors-in-training enrolled in internship. Over the course of a semester, students enrolled in internship submitted images and comment to an on-line pinboard (Pinterest) to describe their weekly field placement experiences. Consensual qualitative research was utilized in this study to analyze the submissions and to better understand counseling students' experiences during internship. Findings are presented and implications for counselor educators are discussed.

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*Keywords: counselor education, field placement, supervision, wellness*

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Field placement courses such as practicum and internship provide opportunities for counselors-in-training to engage in experiences that strengthen their skills and techniques (Mansor & Wan Yusoff, 2013). Students refine their conceptualization of client issues, challenge personal anxieties, and crystallize their identity as professional counselors. Furr and Carroll (2003) referred to these experiences as “critical incidents” because they play a significant role in counselor development. Internship provides ample opportunities for these critical incidents to occur. As a result, it is advantageous for counselor educators to understand the perceptions and experiences of students enrolled in field placement courses. Counselor educators must help their students process these experiences to facilitate insight and growth that lead to effective counseling practice.

Literature explaining the emotional, cognitive, and identity development of counselors-in-training is substantial (Lambie & Sias, 2009; Nelson & Johnson, 1999; Ronnestad &

Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987; Woodside, Oberman, Cole, & Carruth, 2007). Students begin to undergo developmental processes upon entrance to a counselor education program and continue through field experience. Studying first-semester counseling students, Wagner and Hill (2015) found experiences of counselors-in-training included anticipation, evolving identity, growth and learning, coping, a trusting of the process, and interacting with feedback. Shuler and Keller-Dupree (2015) noted that guided or directed experiential activities can facilitate development of counselors-in-training. Students at various stages in a counselor education program experienced a greater sense of awareness related to challenges, the need for change, the power of group work, and better understood the role of expressive activities in counseling.

In an investigation of the practicum experience, Howard, Inman, and Altman (2006), found 157 critical incidents noted in the journals of nine counselors-in-training. These experiences were categorized as professional identity, personal reactions, competence, supervision, and philosophy of counseling. One third of the documented experiences related to professional identity and the students' struggle to place themselves in the defined role of helper. More recently, Gibson, Dollarhide, and Moss (2010) confirmed this struggle in a study of professional identity development. Three transformational tasks emerged for counselors-in-training: (a) developing a personal definition of counseling; (b) taking responsibility for professional growth; and (c) finding professional identity within the context of the field. Additionally, Gibson et al. (2010) found differences in levels of autonomy and responsibility related to the development of professional identity for students near the beginning and end of their programs.

Using multiple reflective practices such as journaling, case presentations, and interviews, Mansor and Wan Yusoff (2013) also explored the experiences of students enrolled in practicum. Themes including anxiety, self-efficacy, and task completion emerged. Findings indicated that students lacked confidence in their ability to complete the tasks required of a counselor. Later, Parker (2014) found “peripheral stressors” or stress associated with factors independent of students’ direct work with clients led to additional challenges for students. Lack of adequate on-site training and poor rapport with supervisors were key indicators of peripheral stress. In addition to general financial and wellness concerns, field placement procedures requiring students to find and select their own site also contributed to stress. Furr and Carroll (2003) found students in field placements who overcame these barriers and challenges experienced significant positive growth.

As literature and research findings have suggested, students enrolled in counselor education programs encounter a variety of experiences. While most studies explore practicum experiences, less is known about students’ experiences during internship. As a result, counselor educators may have limited knowledge of common internship experiences and the struggles students face during this stage of development. To date, researchers have failed to clearly identify novel strategies that offer students creative opportunities to reflect on and gain insight from their field experiences.

This study explored the experiences of students enrolled in an internship course. During this investigation, counselors-in-training were provided a creative way to compile and reflect upon their field experiences. An online pinboard captured the lived experiences of students throughout their internship semester. Based on available literature, two research questions emerged:

1. What types of experiences do students engage in during internship?
2. What emotions are associated with the internship experience?

Consensual qualitative research (CQR) methodology (Hill, Thompson, & Nutt Williams, 1997) was utilized to develop a theory illustrative of the experiences of counseling students completing counselor education program internships.

### **Method**

After exploring several qualitative traditions in counseling research (e.g., grounded theory and phenomenology), CQR emerged as the preferred methodology for investigating the lived experiences of students enrolled in an internship course. CQR is a rigorous qualitative research methodology influenced by grounded theory, comprehensive process analysis (CPA), and the phenomenology approach (Hill et al., 1997). CQR incorporates the use of research teams, examination of data within and across cases, as well as a distinct process for reaching agreement or consensus (Hill, Thompson, Hess, Knox, Nutt Williams, & Ladany, 2005; Hill et al., 1997). Additionally, CQR encourages the identification and selection of participants from similar groups that have recent experiences with the phenomena under investigation.

The researcher elected to use CQR because of its emphasis on agreement and single, homogenous sources of data. Participants' perceptions and experiences are accentuated through consensual data analysis, which is a goal of CQR (Hays & Wood, 2011). Consensual processes at all stages of analysis minimize the potential for bias. In CQR, researchers consider participants as experts on the topic under investigation, which leads to rich descriptions rather than antithetical numerical representations of experiences. These aspects of CQR were appealing to the researcher. The CQR methodology also offered flexibility when determining a method for data collection (Mao, Deenanath, & Xiong, 2012). Finally, CQR afforded the

researcher the opportunity to explore commonalities across participants. As a form of constructivist inquiry, CQR offered a method of consensual investigation necessary to develop a theory that describes the experiences of students enrolled in an internship course.

### **Participants and Procedure**

The participants (n=11) were graduate students enrolled in a clinical mental health counseling (CMHC) internship course in a counselor education program at a small liberal arts university in the southeastern United States. The counseling program was transitioning from Service Agency Counseling (SAC) to CMHC in preparation for an accreditation review by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009). Therefore, two students were enrolled in the 48-hour SAC program and nine students were enrolled in the 60-hour CMHC program.

Prior to this semester, all students had participated in a 100-hour practicum experience. The two students enrolled in the SAC program planned to graduate at the end of the semester after completing one 300-hour internship course. Seven students enrolled in the CMHC program were completing a second 300-hour internship course and planned to graduate at the end of the semester. The two remaining students were enrolled in the CMHC program and were completing the first of two 300-hour internship courses. Eight of the students were female; three students were male. Five students identified as African American; four were White and two identified as American Indian. All participants completed an internship experience at local mental health agencies.

As one of the course requirements, students completed a Pin-Your-Experience assignment. This assignment was developed and implemented for two reasons. Initially, the first author, who served as the course instructor, sought to facilitate a process in which students



reflected upon and shared their weekly experiences in a unique and creative way. The first author also anticipated using the data collected from the assignment to better understand the lived experiences of the students participating in internship.

All data were collected through Pinterest (2017). Pinterest (2017) is an on-line pinboard or “bookmarking site” that allows users to easily collect, share, organize, and access images. Participants were granted access to a single Pinterest account. A log-in and password for the account were distributed to all participants. As part of a weekly assignment, participants were asked to respond to a single interview question: “How would you describe your weekly field placement experience?” Participants were instructed to answer this question by reflecting on their field placement experience while utilizing Google Image to search for and select a representative image. Participant posted (i.e., copy and paste) one image in the on-line pinboard each week, with the exception of the first and last weeks of the semester, fall break, and the Thanksgiving break week.

The participants had the option of posting comments in the accompanying text box of each image they posted in Pinterest. Together the selected image and comment described their internship experience each week. With each submission, participants included a pre-determined unique alphanumeric identifier in the text box. This allowed the researcher to track submissions to the pinboard anonymously. Participants were instructed to refrain from providing identifiable client information when submitting their images and comments.

Participants submitted images with comments weekly for the duration of the internship experience. At the end of the semester, 120 images were accounted for in the online pinboard. The first author copied these images and comments from Pinterest (2017) and pasted them into a Word document. Once all images were housed in a Word document they were deleted from

Pinterest (2017) and the account was deactivated. Using the alphanumeric identifiers, the images were organized chronologically by each participant. The first author received approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to carry out all aspects of this study. Additionally, both authors adhered to the ACES and ACA ethical codes throughout the research process.

### **Research Team**

The first author formed a set primary research team to analyze the data collected through Pinterest (2017). The team comprised three female graduate students enrolled in the CMHC program at the university where the study occurred. One team member identified as African-American; the other two members identified as White. The CMHC graduate students, none of whom were participants in the study, served as graduate research assistants for the Professional School Counseling Program and the Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program at the university. The first author trained all team members in CQR as recommended by Hill et al. (1997) and Hill et al. (2005). To supplement the training, team members were provided with examples of studies which implemented CQR as a method for data analysis. Team members were required to read relevant literature related to the CQR methodology (i.e., Hill et al., 1997, Hill et al., 2005). The first author encouraged the members to maintain an egalitarian research team, equally sharing power and participating in decision-making processes to minimize the potential for biased results. The research team reviewed and analyzed images and comments provided by the participants, developed domains and core ideas, and conducted the cross analysis.

The first author enlisted a local professional school counselor to serve as an external auditor for the study. The professional school counselor was certified by the state's department of public instruction to practice school counseling (k-12) and was a Licensed Professional

Counselor (LPC). The auditor was female and White. While the auditor was familiar with the CQR procedures, supplemental study materials were provided for review. The auditor's role was to systematically review and provide detailed feedback on the primary team's work (Hill et al., 2005).

### **Data Analysis**

Three primary phases of data analysis are implemented in CQR. These phases include (a) selection of domains; (b) identification of core ideas; and (c) construction of common themes or categories across participants, also known as cross analysis (Hill et al., 2005). An external auditor assisted the research team at each phase of data analysis.

**Selection of domains.** Initially, the primary research team met and reviewed several cases or data subsets disaggregated by participant. Cases included a chronological account of all images and comments submitted by each participant. Consistent with the recommendations of Hill et al. (2005), the team examined the data (images and comments) and established domains based on these cases. Using these domains, members of the research team separately reviewed each case, developing additional domains as necessary. The research team convened and jointly analyzed the data by viewing the images and reading each accompanying comment aloud. One image did not include a comment. However, the team elected to utilize the image because members agreed its meaning was explicit. Through this process, the team consensually identified core ideas and agreed upon 46 domains.

The auditor thoroughly reviewed the domains established by the research team. Based on the feedback provided by the auditor, the research team met again to reformulate the domains. The research team removed domains that seemed repetitive or assumptive and renamed domains

that appeared to inaccurately describe cases. The research team agreed on 20 domains at the conclusion of the second analysis.

A review of the results of the second analysis was conducted by the auditor. The auditor determined further reduction of domains was necessary to clarify and accurately depict the lived experiences of the participants. During this audit, domains the team should consider collapsing within other domains were explicitly identified. For example, the auditor suggested removing the domain “emotional distress” and merging the core ideas with the domain “stress.” The research team met again and based on feedback from the auditor consensually agreed to further refine the domains. Several domains were removed (e.g., emotional distress, relaxation, goals, anticipation, and counseling processes); core ideas were relocated to other representative and appropriately labeled domains. At the conclusion of the third analysis, the research team determined six domains accurately described the data. This process of data analysis aligned with the procedures recommended by Hill et al. (2005).

**Identification of core ideas.** Once the research team and auditor approved the domains, emphasis was placed on abstracting core ideas. Team members reviewed all images and associated comments to identify key ideas exemplary of the domains. The identification of core ideas was consensual in nature and involved a joint effort among team members. Once the initial identification process was complete, the auditor reviewed the results of the analysis and offered feedback. The research team met again to address the auditor’s concerns and ensure the selected core ideas accurately represented the participants’ experiences.

**Cross analysis.** All members of the research team participated in the cross-analysis procedures. Using a Word document and the “cut and paste” feature, one team member compiled the core ideas for every domain across all participants, except two, as recommended by

Hill et al. (1997). The exclusion of two participants provided the opportunity to conduct a stability check once categories were determined.

In a group effort, the team members reviewed the data to explore possible categories. In a few instances, some of the core ideas were clarified at the participant level. The team agreed that eleven categories most appropriately housed the core ideas. The stability check was conducted once initial categories were established and confirmed the categories were adequate (Hill et al. 2005). The team represented the occurrences of the categories by applying frequency labels. As suggested by Hill et al. (2005), “general” indicated all cases (G; 11 cases), “typical” results specify half of the cases (T; 5 or 6 cases) and “variant” represented a few cases (V; 3 cases). “Rare” was also used to describe the frequency of categories (R; 1 or 2 cases).

Finally, the team considered connections between domains and categories. The data were disaggregated by participant and chronologically re-ordered to explore occurrences and sequences of domains and categories. Consistent with Hill et al. (2005), the team utilized a criterion of 3 cases to identify viable pathways or sequencing of domains and categories. All pathways were consensually agreed upon by the primary research team and the external auditor.

### **Trustworthiness**

Demonstrating trustworthiness and accuracy of data collection, analysis, and findings are the challenges of qualitative investigation (Hill et al., 2005). Throughout the data collection phase of this study, the first author attempted to bracket or separate preconceived ideas or notions from the observed experiences of students in field placements. The first author had not previously taught a CMHC internship course and was a new faculty member at the university. As a result, the first author had limited knowledge of CMHC students’ internship experiences in general and within the specific region. The first author also attempted to bracket any

expectations of the assignment that could influence the investigation. The assignment was developed specifically for the internship course and the first author had no basis for determining its potential efficacy in capturing students' field experiences.

Several steps also were taken during data analysis to strengthen the fidelity of the study. For example, data saturation, consensus meetings, dependability audits, and member checking were implemented at various stages of the analysis. As the study continued, the collection of new and relevant information appeared to subside naturally, suggesting data saturation was reached. To ensure domains, core ideas, and categories were dependable, the team regularly participated in consensus meetings. The formal consensus process promoted by Butler and Rothstein (1987) was used during each consensus meeting to promote reliability. In an effort to reduce or remove bias, the authors did not participate in the consensus meetings or any aspect of data analysis. During the consensual meetings, research team members bracketed personal biases and expectations that may have influence data analysis. As suggested by Hill et al. (2005), team members were asked to openly discuss their biases and expectations with each other throughout all phases of data analysis. Dependability audits also were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of this research. The use of an external auditor, rather than an internal auditor, offered a perspective free of influence from the authors or the primary research team, thus further reducing bias (Hill et al. 2005). Finally, "member checking" was employed to further establish trustworthiness. Participants received a copy of the final draft of the results and were asked to participate in a conference call. The conference call was conducted by the auditor and included four participants who provided feedback consistent with the findings of the study. The second author was not involved in any aspect of the data collection or analysis.

## Results

After consensus meetings, dependability audits, stability checks, and member checks were employed, six domains and eleven categories emerged from the data (see Figure 1). The *Self-Care* domain included participants' efforts to maintain balance in their life. The categories in this domain were *Encouragement*, *Rewards*, and *Imagery*. The second domain, *Personal Growth*, encompassed instances when students experienced growth. *Learning* and *Reflection* were categories in this domain. The *Success* domain arose from images and comments related to achievement. *Encouragement* was the single category in this domain. The fourth domain was *Challenges*, which stemmed from general barriers students faced during the internship experience. The *Stress* domain included instances when students were discomforted and emotions were heightened. The categories in this domain were *Field Placement Sites* and *Work/School*. The final domain was *Clinical Experiences*. This domain was described as experiences that occurred during the processes of delivering counseling services. Categories within this domain were *Client Intervention*, *Relationships/Rapport*, *Ethical Practice*, and *Supervision*. An overview of domains, categories, example core ideas, and frequencies are provided in Table 1.

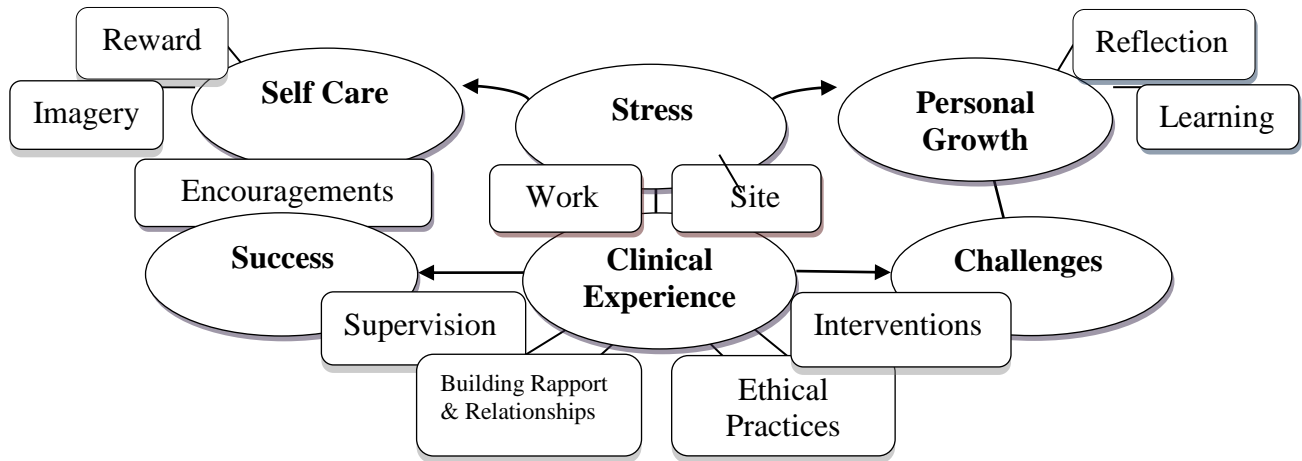


Figure 1. Representation of counseling student experiences during field placement with directional relationships between domains (ovals) and categories (rectangles).

### Self-Care

The analysis revealed participant descriptions of various methods of self-care. Self-care was implemented throughout the internship, although it was most prevalent following stressful experiences. Three categories, encouragement (G), rewards (T), and imagery (V), emerged and clarified the ways participants engaged in self-care.

**Encouragement.** Most participants described ways in which they utilized encouragement as a form of self-care. Representative of encouragement, Participant 8 posted an elegant photograph of Whitney Houston, an American recording artist and actress. Whitney Houston died in the first quarter of the participants’ internship semester. The participant appeared to gain encouragement from this tragic event as indicated by the comment, “LIVE LIFE.....with the mindset that if I treat the body right with the right things (maybe a few bad - no one is perfect)....it will treat me right with GOOD HEALTH & LONGER LIFE.” Similar to Participant 8, other participants took the opportunity to seek encouragement as a way to establish a positive mindset and focus on self-care.



**Rewards.** Of the eleven participants, seven indicated they planned to reward themselves with tangible prizes. For example, Participant 3 submitted an image of a new gray and black hiking backpack purchased as a reward. The comment read, “This is a picture of my new backpack. I am planning a "self-care" camping trip over Spring Break. Backpacking regularly helps keep me relaxed, grounded, and inspired.” Similarly, Participant 5 indicated a vacation was in order, by posting an image of a town and commenting, “Much needed vacation to Kansas.”

**Imagery.** A few participants suggested imagery was used to promote self-care. In these cases, the participants commented on utilizing their imagination, daydreaming, and dreaming. The accompanying images demonstrated the topic of the imagery. For example, Participant 2 suggested the use of imagery by providing an image of a plate of blackberries, blueberries, and strawberries covering a tart with strawberry syrup drizzled over top. The participant included the caption “Gracious and sweet! After a long day at work, a sweet, fruity dessert can be pleasing to the mind.”

Table 1  
 Domains, Categories, Core Idea Examples, and Frequencies of Experiences of Internship Students (N = 11).

| Domain/<br>category      | Core                                                                   | Idea Examples                                             | Frequency |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Self-Care             |                                                                        |                                                           |           |
| a) Encouragement         | “Take care of self,”                                                   | positive mindset, empowering statements                   | General   |
| b) Rewards               | Vacation, relaxation, purchases, spending time with nature             |                                                           | Typical   |
| c) Imagery               | Dreaming, daydreaming,                                                 | imagination                                               | Variant   |
| 2. Personal Growth       |                                                                        |                                                           |           |
| a) Learning              | Developing professional identity, continuing education, coursework     |                                                           | General   |
| b) Reflection            | “Life can leave you confused,”                                         | hindsight, Typical review of preparation                  |           |
| 3. Success               |                                                                        |                                                           |           |
| a) Encouragement         | Personal achievements, client growth, positive affirmations/self-talk  |                                                           | General   |
| 4.                       | Challenges                                                             | Client situations an struggles, confusion, making choices |           |
| 5. Stress                |                                                                        |                                                           |           |
| a) Field placement sites | “Overwhelmed to provide quality care,”                                 | burnout, frustration, countertransference                 | General   |
| b) Work/ school          | “Feeling stressed from studying and working all day,”                  | unemployment                                              | Typical   |
| 6. Clinical Experiences  |                                                                        |                                                           |           |
| a) Client Intervention   | Art therapy, EMDR, therapeutic activities, sandtray, crisis counseling |                                                           | General   |
| b) Relationships/rapport | Establishing relationships, trust, understanding                       |                                                           | Typical   |
| c) Ethical practice      | Competence , navigating nuanced situations                             |                                                           | Variant   |
| d) Supervision           | Support, lack of concern, strategies, collaboration                    |                                                           | Variant   |

### Personal Growth

In general, participants experienced a sense of personal growth over the course of the field placement and most notably following stressful and challenging situations. Participants

experienced personal growth in a variety of ways. A cross-analysis of the data collected indicated these experiences were rooted in learning (G) and reflection (T).

**Learning.** Most participants described experiences that led to the acquisition of knowledge. Demonstrative of the learning category, Participant 2 seemed to thoughtfully question the practices used by counselors. The participant posted an image of two females in bikinis hanging upside down by their knees on a pull-up bar. The bar appears to be attached to a piece of playground equipment at the beach. The comment read:

“Owling”.... A currently popular trend, and... a silly one! Are we following trends and basing our treatments on the "theory of the week", or are we grounding our practice in genuine, thoughtful treatment planning. I have been confronted with some creative counseling ideas lately, not all of which have inspired my confidence as a professional....

Other participants noted books, videos, or professional development activities led to learning opportunities. Participant 7, for example, posted an image of a client engaging in neuro-feedback. The accompanying comment read, “Went to a session on Neuro-feedback at the NCCA conference. It was very interesting.”

**Reflection.** Over half of the participants indicated personal growth stemmed from reflective practice. For example, Participant 4 provided an image of a chalkboard drawing suggesting many little ideas will lead to one grand idea. The ideas were represented by light bulbs. The comment read, “As I reflect, this is how I feel today. It feels as though I have some good ideas, and I am just waiting for the time and place to place them on paper.” Another participant posted an image of a woman walking on a beach. A quote on the image read, “What can you do today, that you were not capable of a year ago? The participant commented, “This thought has been on my mind a lot as I reflect on where I've been recently, I am hopeful that in

another year I will be able to look back with as much joy as I do now...” Other posts and comments from participants also suggested personal growth through reflective practices.

## **Success**

During internship, success was commonly experienced by participants following self-care. Encouragement (G) emerged as a category during the cross-analysis.

**Encouragement.** All participants indicated experiencing a sense of encouragement during success. Participant 1 submitted an image of an individual standing on a ladder, sculpting a female with long hair blowing in the wind into the side of a large mound of snow and ice. The comment under this image read, “I feel like taking a climbe [sic.] today. There is nothing like the feeling that you get once you reach the top of the mountain.”

The image and comments based on the Circle of Success (view image here: <https://goo.gl/fZ19PS>) submitted by Participant 9 appeared to exemplify the encouragement category. The circle includes the word success with arrows pointing to words such as “work,” “passion,” and “ideas.” The words on the perimeter of the circle are connected by arrows suggesting one leads to the other. The comment read, “Regardless where you start all the steps in the circle moves you forward toward your goal SUCCESS!!”

Participant 3 described feelings of success through encouragement when submitting an image of a male in suit and tie with balled fists and arms spread in the air. The comment read:

This is me of course but a woman though. This past week has been a relief knowing that I don't have to deal with the drama, moods, and disrespect anymore. Thank goodness it is over. I've never felt so good about anything but when I walked out of the house I thought to myself wow I made it through this site.

## **Challenges**

Participants experienced various challenges throughout the field placement semester. These challenges involved the participants' adjustment and transition to working at the field placement site. An image and caption posted by Participant 7 exemplified the challenges described by participants. This participant posted an image of a male in a suit and tie. The gentleman in the image appears confused and is scratching his head as four question marks float above. The comment read, "I can say this being a new site for me that I am confused at this point because I'm learning so many new people along with new material and rules. At this point I don't really know what to expect to obtain from the site."

Participant 10 described acclimating to work with sexual abuse survivors. This participant posted an image of a young female with eyes closed wearing a dress sitting in a corner of a room. The image also offered statistics including, "One out of every three girls will be sexually assaulted by the age of 18..." and "1 out of 7 children are abused..." The question, "How many do you know?" and statement "You can't afford to ignore it..." were also provided. The comment submitted with the image read:

Initially, I was very hesitant to work with sexual abuse victims. I felt unexperienced and uncomfortable. I still have a lot to learn... but I really enjoy working with this population now. Thinking about furthering my education regarding sexual abuse.

## **Stress**

Stress was the most common experience described by participants. A cross analysis indicated stress was closely related to field placement sites (G) and work/school (T).

**Field placement sites.** All participants indicated experiencing stress at their field placement site. For example, Participant 6 described the field placement experience as stressful

by posting an image of a physically stressed individual in a suit and tie sitting behind a desk with a steaming computer. The individual has bloodshot eyes, clenched teeth, and is grasping onto their hair with each hand. The participant elaborated on the stress by stating:

I am so frustrated with my site. The clients get to do whatever they want and run all over staff and nothing gets done about it at all. Gosh I wish I was in control of that site I would know exactly what to do. All the site is about is keeping heads in the bed not trying to change them as a person or even help. I want to kick all of them out, and start fresh....What are agencies coming too.

Another participant, when describing stress, posted an image of a woman with bloodshot eyes. The heading on the image read, “By day a Rogerian counselor, at night, she turned into PSYCHO-THERAPIST.” The participant commented, “As co-faciliator for substance abuse group, whenever I carry ongoing issues from the previous week, I feel alittle overwhelm.” These examples are indicative of other participants’ experiences.

**Work/school.** Experiences at work and school also led participants to experience unpleasant emotions. Participant 8, for instance, provided an image of a female clinching her open laptop on the sides with each hand. The female’s face appears tense and stressed as she clamps down on the mousepad with her teeth. “Frustration, Frustration, Frustration... so much to do, so little time,” read the statement accompanying the image.

Participant 2 also demonstrated marked stress experienced during work/school. This participant submitted an image of a physically stressed male student with bags under eyes and clenched teeth and grabbing head with his hands. The student is wearing a satchel while a portfolio leans against his leg. The image includes the following statements: “constantly anxious about next assignment,” “grinds teeth,” “bites fingernails,” and “feet hurt from running around

like an idiot,” among others (view image here: <https://goo.gl/g5Ns1b>). The comment that accompanied this image read, “This is how I feel after studying and working with clients all day, at times it can become overwhelming and stressful. It's time for a vacation to relax.” This image and comment are also representative of stress stemming from the field placement site.

### **Clinical Experiences**

Participants described myriad clinical experiences over the course of the semester. Clinical experiences often led to successes as well as challenges. These experiences comprise the process and procedures of counseling: client intervention (G), relationships/rapport (T), ethical practice (V), and supervision (V).

**Client intervention.** All participants indicated they gained experience with client interventions. As a result of these experiences, Participant 9 suggested the value and importance of client intervention in the counseling process. An image of an abstract drawing of a female was submitted. Two skinny trees stand behind the female. Numerous tags hang from the branches of these trees. Words including LIAR, FOOL, REBEL, BETRAY, and MANIPULATE are written on the tags. The comment read, “Art Therapy is an excellent therapeutic activity because it allows the child/adolescent to talk about their own problems using metaphors and narratives. This also works well with some adults.”

**Relationships/rapport.** Out of eleven participants, six highlighted experiences related to relationship development and building rapport with clients. Participant 4 provided an example of the power of establishing relationships and rapport in counseling. The participant posted an image of a heart. The boarder of the heart was made out of white, pink, and red flower petals. Six tealight candles were equally spaced along the boarder of the heart. The comment read:

I'm actually loving my site.... not only am I learning but I'm actually building relationships with the clients which they enjoy because they feel that no one wants to have anything to do with them. My clients also has newborns living with them and that makes it more enjoyable.

**Ethical practice.** A few participants expressed concerns of professional and ethical practice. For example, Participant 2 highlighted ethical practice with an image of professional football players during a football game. The comment below the image read, “Struggling this week just like the Redskins in the playoffs to make sure I am providing good ethical counseling skills.”

**Supervision.** A few participants indicated they participated in supervision while gaining clinical experience at their site. Participant 5, for example, provided an image of a baby learning to walk at three different stages in the process (i.e., sitting, scooting, and walking) when describing supervision. The comment read:

After my supervision this week, this is what I feel like. It made me feel good for her to tell me she was going to use some of my stuff cause it made since [sic] and was easier for the client to understand.

Alternatively, Participant 9 indicated the supervision received was not supportive. This participant posted an image of a manager sitting at a desk throwing trash into the suggestion box. The comment stated, “My impression of my supervisor this week.” While all participants should have engaged in supervision as part of their clinical experience, only a few mentioned the activity.



## Discussion

The findings of this study related to the field experiences of counselors-in-training are consistent with findings from previous research (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Howard et al., 2006; Mansor et al., 2013; Parker, 2014; Wagner & Hill, 2015). Counseling students completing internship requirements appear to have experiences similar to students at other stages in counselor education programs (e.g., entrance, 1<sup>st</sup> year, practicum). These experiences lead to insecurities, stress, growth, and development during internship. This study contributed to and extended current knowledge by offering additional insight into the internship experiences of counselors-in-training.

Prior to internship, all participants completed a practicum experience including 100 hours of supervised practice where they were acclimated to their field placement site. However, the experiences of the participants during internship appear to reflect a continued intersection between the perceived life of a counselor and the realities of professional practice. A degree of dissonance seems appropriate as students develop into practicing clinicians; however, these discomforts should subside to some degree as students journey through the field placement experience. Field placement experiences are laden with thoughts, emotions, and behaviors students must manage through varied methods.

When gaining clinical experience, the participants appeared to face challenges that led to personal growth as suggested by Furr and Carroll (2003) and Wagner and Hill (2015). One participant captured the nuances of clinical experience by suggesting, “I have been confronted with some creative counseling ideas lately, not all of which have inspired my confidence as a professional...”. Additionally, participants attributed successes during clinical experience to self-care. One participant indicated, “backpacking regularly keeps me relaxed, grounded, and

inspired,” highlighting the relationship between self-care and success. While the source is unclear, encouragement appeared to serve as a mediating factor for the self-care and success of students participating in field placement. Lazovsky and Shimoni (2007) and Nuttgens and Chang (2013) suggested encouragement, whether provided by the university or site supervisor, is a growth-supporting factor.

Several categories emerged to varying degrees when considering the clinical experiences of participants. For example, interventions were described by all participants, while less emphasis was placed on relationships and rapport building. Ethical practice and supervision were rarely mentioned. The novelty of implementing interventions may outweigh the value participants placed on the fundamental aspects of counseling (e.g., relationships, ethical practice). Students in internship typically know some intervention strategies and are highly motivated to use them. Therefore, participants may have unconsciously minimized their involvement in building effective counselor-client relationships in lieu of posting more engaging, action-oriented activities such as client interventions. This notion aligns with a preoccupation of interventions among counseling students as noted by Shuler and Keller-Dupree (2015).

The findings of this study indicate stress is a potential antecedent to self-care. The participants appeared to reactively engage in self-care immediately following stress rather than maintaining a consistent regimen across the field experience. Findings also suggest that stressful experiences often led participants toward personal growth. Stress appeared to stem from the inability of participants to find a healthy work-life balance. For example, one participant suggested, “after studying and working with clients all day, at times it can become overwhelming and stressful.” Clinical sites were another source of stress among participants. One participant perceived a level of dysfunction at their site when indicating, “I am so frustrated with my site.

The clients get to do whatever they want...” Other participants faced stressors related to learning the site processes and procedures. Graduate students often have a complicated balance of family, work, and academic pressures to navigate (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2006; Lenz, Sangganjanavanich, Balkin, Oliver, & Smith, 2012; Roach & Young, 2007; Smith, Robinson, & Young, 2007). Reaching the field placement milestone in a counselor education program brings excitement, uncertainty, and apprehension.

When stress impairs a student’s ability to succeed academically and personally or hinders efforts to work with clients in a safe and effective manner, responsibility to intervene lies with the counselor education program and its faculty (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016). However, the findings of this study indicate counselors-in-training engaged in internship are resilient and tend to cope and adjust to experiences despite varying degrees of life responsibilities and program support. As one participant commented, “I feel like taking a climb [sic] today. There is nothing like the feeling that you get once you reach the top of the mountain.”

### **Limitations**

One inherent limitation of CQR is the possibility of bias. Three of the four members of the research team were graduate students in a clinical mental health counseling program at the university where the study was conducted. While CQR emphasizes the use of an egalitarian research team to gain multiple perspectives, establish consensus, and account for bias, it is possible that research team members, in anticipation of starting field placement themselves, experienced anxieties that influenced data analysis. The use of an external auditor served to further limit the potential for bias by providing an objective method of checks and balances clear of program and research obligations. Additionally, at the time the data analysis occurred, the researcher was a faculty member of the counselor education program in which the graduate

students were enrolled. It is possible the graduate students felt pressured to satisfy the researcher. Finally, the three graduate students and the auditor who served on the research team were female. Utilizing a homogenous research team may have compromised the data analysis. Despite measures of trustworthiness implemented, utilizing a heterogeneous research team is a best practice.

Another potential limitation is that this study included eleven participants enrolled in a counselor education program in the midst of significant programmatic changes. The program was transitioning from SAC to CMHC in preparation for review by CACREP (2009). As a result, some of the participants were in a 48-hour program and some in a 60-hour program. Additionally, some students were completing their first 300-hour internship and some were completing their second internship. These varied experiences and expectations could have influenced the field placement process prior to and during the internship experience. This consideration may lead researchers to ponder whether the experiences of students in practicum, internship I, or internship II are substantially different.

### **Implications**

While counselor educators cannot govern all elements of the field placement experience, it is feasible to address many issues and concerns through programmatic initiatives. Implementing more structured field placement processes that offer support, address wellness, and provide greater oversight of clinical settings, including supervision, may enhance the experiences of counselors-in-training.

Counselor educators should consider ways to support and facilitate the development of students prior to and during field placement experiences. Structured and comprehensive field placement orientations that begin early in the program and prepare the student for the realities of

clinical work are prudent. Field placement orientations can include a variety of supportive elements. Barbee, Scherer, and Combs (2003) suggested implementing pre-practicum service-learning activities to prepare students for clinical experiences. A mentorship program aimed at developing relationships between students who are in later stages of field experience with students who are beginning practicum also may prove beneficial. Additionally, counseling programs can host panel discussions that include recent graduates, site supervisors, and field placement instructors to support students entering field placement. Such initiatives may serve to normalize field placement experiences, establish appropriate expectations, and foster preparation and development.

Students participating in field placement courses can also benefit from counselor education programs that adopt supervision models inherently supportive in nature and developmentally appropriate. For example, Tentoni (1995) proposed a mentoring model which aligns with the developmental phases of counselors espoused by the integrated developmental model (IDM; Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Delworth, 1998). The mentoring model included five roles: teaching, sponsoring, encouraging, counseling, and befriending. The roles encourage modeling of appropriate counselor behaviors, providing care and concern for well-being, and nurturing a collegial and egalitarian relationship with counseling interns. A model that emphasizes counselor development, while highlighting the role of the therapeutic relationship in effective treatment and outcomes, may lead students to a greater appreciation for and acknowledgement of fundamental aspects of the counseling process.

In addition to supporting site supervisors, counseling programs can provide clinical supervision training to students prior to entering field placement experiences. The findings of this study can serve as the basis for development of a supervision preparation curriculum geared

to enhance knowledge, attitudes, and skills of students. Instructional opportunities could range from a workshop to a 1-3 credit course that includes instruction on professional dispositions, time-management, wellness, and psycho-educational content. In a brief workshop students may find a presentation of this study appealing. Programs that offer a clinical supervision course should carefully consider logistical issues such as course placement and its impact on the counseling curriculum. Affording students the opportunity to gain knowledge of the fundamentals of clinical supervision models and methods may dispel unrealistic expectations, normalize their experience, and increase their sense of efficacy.

Given the degree of stress experienced by participants in this study, counselor education programs should consider embedding a wellness model in the curriculum which may enhance students' ability to manage field placement experiences. Counselor educators have many opportunities to infuse wellness strategies as permanent and pervasive parts of their training programs. Dowden, Warren, and Kambui (2014) proposed a three-tiered model for improving self-awareness and self-care. This model aims to foster wellness among pre-service counselors through specific cognitive behavioral techniques. Counselor educators can embed this model in field placement courses or use it in a prescriptive manner to enhance the wellness of individual students. Additionally, Wolf, Thompson, and Smith-Adcock (2012) advocated using the Indivisible Self model of wellness (IS-Wel; Myers & Sweeney, 2005). A holistic approach based on Individual Psychology, the IS-Wel model, provides a framework of specific wellness initiatives incorporated at the individual, programmatic, and university levels. One approach of this model, curriculum integration, advocates for the integration of wellness strategies and activities throughout all courses of the program. Alternatively, Abel, Abel, and Smith (2012) endorsed a preventive approach to stress and burnout through the use of a dedicated stress

management course available for counseling students. This course was found to produce positive changes in anxiety and stress levels among graduate counseling students. The structured format of a course of this nature may allow students to more effectively teach valuable stress management skills to their clients, an indirect benefit.

Prosek, Holm, and Daly (2013) found that required counseling can decrease overall problems and levels of depression and anxiety for counseling students. Many counseling programs encourage students to seek counseling for overall wellness or to address specific concerns that arise which interrupt academic progress or therapeutic effectiveness. Counselor educators also can require students to participate in counseling. This requirement would serve as another preventive measure but it is wrought with ethical and legal concerns.

Counselor education faculty members serving in the role of field placement coordinators (FPC) must maintain greater oversight of field placements. This is achievable by vetting sites and supervisors using rigorous standards and requirements. Counselor education programs also should move toward placing students at sites that are mutually suited which may further reduce anxieties and increase satisfaction with the field placement process and experience.

Counselor educators should note the novel way in which technology was used in this study to capture the experiences of students completing internship requirements. It is critical for instructors of field placement courses to strongly consider creative and innovative ways to gauge the lived experiences of their students. Developing accessible, yet secure platforms for open dialog and communication prior to and throughout the field placement experience may foster a sense of community and support while providing a glimpse into the lives of students. For example, through technology counselor education programs can create blogs, moderate discussion forums, manipulate social media, and develop a presence in virtual 3-D worlds such

as Second Life (<http://secondlife.com/>). These initiatives may provide space for students to share lived experiences with faculty and peers. Additionally, with the advent of new technology such as Google Glass (<https://www.google.com/glass/start/>), counselor educators have the ability to witness in “real-time” the lived experiences of field placement students. Counselor educators should embrace the opportunities to implement alternative and innovative methods to better understand and support students participating in field experiences. However, counselor educators must consider the implications of utilizing technology and ensure safeguards are in place to protect student and client information.

Future research should include an exploration of students’ experiences across all field placement experiences (i.e., practicum, internship I, and internship II). Counselor educators will need to investigate which types of continuum-based services and policies are most effective in supporting students preparing for, entering, and completing field placements. Researching ways to successfully integrate wellness initiatives throughout training programs appears an imperative given the stressful nature of field placement experiences and the lives of graduate students. Additionally, counselor educators can explore ways innovative strategies, including various forms technology, can enhance the field placement experience.

Understanding the experiences of counseling students enrolled in field placement courses is vital to counselor educators’ preparing exemplary professional counselors. This study offered a creative method for capturing the lived experiences of counseling students enrolled in an internship. The authors hope these findings will challenge researchers and counselor educators to seek ways to support counselors-in-training with developmentally appropriate experiences for students enrolled in courses at all stages of their programs.



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# Conceptualizing Parent Involvement in Child Therapy: A Framework Roles Using Bernard's Discrimination Model

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This paper introduces a theoretical map conceptualizing parent involvement in the child counseling process by applying the roles from Bernard's Discrimination Model (DM). Semi-structured interviews with experts in child counseling and copyrighted DVDs were collected as data. A framework approach through the DM is utilized to analyze data to offer the conceptual structure of parent involvement. As a result, the three different roles—counselor, teacher, and consultant—and tasks for each role when engaging parents for child counseling are identified. Discussions about the meaning and limitations of this study are included.

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*Keywords: parent involvement, parent participation, parent consultation, Discrimination Model*

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Even though their primary clients are children, many child practitioners in counseling encounter situations in which they deal with parents regardless of their preparation for guiding them. Dougherty (2009) supports the notion that as long as human service professionals are working with children, they will need to consult with the adults living with the children, although the engagement levels may vary. In that sense, child counseling is unique (Gvion & Bar, 2014). Unfortunately, including parents in child counseling is not a simple task. Many of parents visiting child-counseling institutions present anxiety for fear that therapists may find attributable parental failings in relation to their child's symptoms (Kottman, 2011). Also, they may present lack of parenting skills or being inundated with their own issues that may exacerbate their children's issues. Intervening in those parents and listening and responding to their needs while guiding them in a conducive way to benefit their children's sessions seem to necessitate a good amount of effort and expertise from child practitioners. Regrettably, many child clinicians are

left without clear directions on how to effectively give assistance to those parents. Lolan (2011) pointed out how limited training has been provided for play therapists when it comes to including parents in child counseling processes. Even therapeutic work with parents has been considered secondary to child therapy (Sutton & Hughes, 2000). Lack of attention in parent involvement suggests how this topic has been neglected in the discussion of the critical elements involved for successful child counseling outcomes.

Parent involvement is key to successful child counseling outcomes. Parent engagement is one of the five key elements for best practice for the best mental health practice in child welfare, which includes screening and assessment, psychosocial interventions, psycho-pharmacologic treatment, parent engagement, and youth employment (Romanelli et al., 2009). In addition, meta-analyses on child therapy outcomes demonstrate the efficacy of child therapy when parents are included. For example, engaging parents in play therapy had a greater effect than play therapy without parental involvement by 0.83 standard deviation (Bratton et al., 2005; LeBlanc & Ritchie, 1999). Similarly, Dowell and Ogles (2010) reporting on their reviews on 48 studies found that sessions including parents was deemed to have significantly better results than singular child therapy unit ( $d = 0.27$ ).

Unfortunately, there exists a gap between the necessity of guidance and the practical tips on how to engage parents, as well as the efforts needed to facilitate their involvement. Kottman (2011) asserts that it is unfortunate to find many play therapists who decide not to include or to minimally interact with parents because they are not comfortable with dealing with parents. It is believed child practitioners would alleviate anxiety at meeting with parents if they obtain guidance on how to effectively engage them, which may lead to greater parental involvement. Another issue in discussing parent involvement in child therapy settings is a lack of consensus at

illuminating the specific tasks of the therapists involved. This disagreement may be derived from the fact that different approaches in play therapy may vary on how parents are engaged in child therapy settings depending on the differences in their theoretical orientations. For example, Theraplay (see Booth, & Jernberg, 2010) therapists actively coach parents by watching recorded child-sessions, which portray the parents' interactional patterns with their child. It is not uncommon in Theraplay play that parents join their child's sessions as co-therapists and take charge in adult-directed sessions. After the sessions, they receive thorough feedback on their performance from therapists. Significant focus is given to behavioral modifications in interactional patterns between the parents and their child.

Filial therapy (See VanFleet 2009, 2014) is also a psychoeducational model through which parents learn how to communicate with their child and approach issues that their child presents in such a way that strengthens the parent-child relationship. Parents, however, attain those skills by learning non-directive play therapy, in which their child will lead therapy sessions. Without the child's presence, therapists first teach parents basic skills and tenets of non-directive play therapy until the parents gain competence and confidence to the extent they can solely manage sessions with their child. Then the parents independently practice play sessions with their child in their homes while therapists monitor the sessions by having regular meeting with the parents.

As seen, goals of both Theraplay and Filial therapy are similar in that both approaches emphasize teaching and training parents to enhance appropriate parent-child interactional skills and developmental knowledge on children, which ultimately targets improved relationships between children and their parents. However, what each approach includes in teaching and training and how they reach their respective goals by engaging parents also differ depending on

their underlying theories. This divergence in assisting parents causes child practitioners to feel confused, which strongly raises the need for over-arching illustrations on parent engagement during child therapy sessions. To answer the need for overarching ideas on parent engagement and to bridge the gap between the call for guidance and the lack of training, a theoretical framework through this paper is provided. This framework conceptualizes parent involvement in child counseling settings through framework analysis by applying Bernard's (1997) Discrimination Model (DM), which is frequently utilized in counseling supervision. The new model in working with parents is particularly compelling for beginning child practitioners as their experiences and training in relation to working parents are limited. Through this model, they may be able to map out a comprehensive framework in working with parents.

#### **Rationale of Applying the DM to Child Therapy Settings from Author's Perspective**

In working as both a child practitioner and counseling supervisor, I found the distinct roles to resemble each other in that they both fulfill multiple functions in the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. For example, as a child therapist, I had frequently experienced situations where I had to provide care and guidance for parents even though my primary clients were children. Throughout consultation with parents, I not only taught effective parenting skills but offered guidance for parents. Offering parents emotional support and limited counseling at the position of counselor was a major role as a child practitioner. Similarly, in supervisory settings, I fulfilled the instructor's role when I taught or role-played counseling skills with supervisees. At the consultant position, I facilitated supervisees' understanding of their cases and discussed their treatment plans. When I sensed that they needed encouragement and affective support, I provided those comforts for the supervisees. As seen, there are practical commonalities between child practitioners and clinical supervisors in terms of their multiple-role functioning in

which they teach skills, offer consultation, and provide a simple form of counseling to parents of their child clients or supervisees. I believe conceptualization of child practitioners' roles through the DM will serve as a useful map for child therapists in that it illuminates their expected role-performance in regard to parent engagement.

### **Definitions of Terms Used**

For this paper, parent involvement is defined as comprehensive forms of parental participation in the overall process: ranging from intake parent meetings, to family therapy, to child-parent sessions, and lastly to separate parent training sessions. Also, parents have the primary legal responsibility for the child-rearing process. Parental dimensions in this paper include biological parents, family members, relatives, or legally designated guardians. Child counseling equates with play therapy, and child practitioners refer to play therapists. Limited or low-key counseling to parents refers to counseling service for parents at a surface level that does not delve into their individual issues. If parents are deemed for more professional help, they may be recommended for separate individual counseling.

### **Reviews of Different Performances by Child Therapists**

A body of literature supports the idea that child practitioners perform different roles in working with parents. Kottman (2011) listed play therapists' various agendas in working with parents: a) teaching parenting skills and discipline strategies; b) supporting parents through exploring personal issues to optimize the application of parenting skills; c) helping parents understand family dynamics, marital issues, and school issues, and their impact on their child; d) helping parents better understand child development and their child; and e) facilitating parents in gaining insight into themselves and their relationship with their child. Cates, Paone, Packman, and Margolis (2006) also outlined multiple tasks conducted by play therapists in parent



involvement. These tasks include helping parents understand the nature of play therapy and explaining therapeutic processes, establishing rapport with them, gathering data for assessment, discussing children's issues, providing psycho-education, and coaching parents on how to advocate for their child at school.

Gil (2011) described diverse therapists' roles as facilitators, role models, cheerleaders, and dialogue coaches. As facilitators, play therapists create an atmosphere in which parents and their child, and sometimes all family members, have positive interactions. In addition, the therapists demonstrate healthy interaction and communication skills as well as how to provide positive feedback to parents. Therapists' modeling helps parents concretize and enact those communicational skills. As cheerleaders, therapists encourage, validate, and support any trials attempted by the parents. Finally, as a dialogue coach, play therapists first observe conversational patterns between parents and their child. Then the therapists provide parents with feedback on their interactional patterns and suggestions for healthy and successful communication. Similarly, Guerney (2003) discerned different child-therapists' roles from instructors to supervisors, supporters, or co-service providers in the discourse of helping parents become therapeutic agents for their child. Sanders and Burke (2013) identified what therapists offer to parents based on the social learning theory. Primarily, therapists teach parents parenting skills through modeling, rehearsal, practice, feedback, and homework. However, at the same time, they found that therapists serve as encouragers and emotional supporters by employing interpersonal skills in building relationships with parents and in facilitating parents' reception to their suggestions.

Child practitioners implement different roles in parent involvement in which they offer didactic service, increase parents' understanding of their child, and emotionally support the

parents. Unfortunately, even though various tasks and role-performances have been identified through studies on child counseling, there has been no systemic conceptual model mapping out the different role-performances of the clinicians.

### **Bernard's Discrimination Model**

The Discrimination Model (DM), the original conceptual structure for framing child practitioners' tasks in parent involvement, was initially suggested by Bernard in the mid-1970s to provide a teaching tool for clinical supervision for counselor-trainees (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Through this model Bernard (1997) conceptualized what roles clinical supervisors perform to attend to supervisees' needs and further deliver supervisory services tailored to the supervisees' needs and developmental stages. This model addresses three different roles—teacher, consultant, and counselor—that would be implemented by supervisors. For a simple example, in the position of teacher, supervisors focus on teaching supervisees proper intervention skills for their clients. In the consultant position, supervisors guide their supervisees to develop conceptualization skills through which the supervisees increase their understanding of what is occurring in sessions and discern patterns from them. Finally, the purpose of supervisors as counselors is to help supervisees increase their awareness of how their personal issues may interfere with the counseling process so their sessions are not contaminated by personal matters. At the same time, supervisors help the supervisees integrate their personal styles of counseling. While targeting those three dimensions during supervision, supervisors make a judgment about which role(s) to play considering the supervisees' developmental capacity and the counseling stages of the supervisees and their clients.

Contextualizing the DM to parent involvement, the child practitioners are juxtaposed with the position of the supervisors and the parents to those of the supervisees to develop a

theoretical framework of parent involvement for child practitioners. Research questions to explore child practitioners' performances at meetings with parents are:

1. How do play therapists practice parental involvement in the child's therapeutic context?
2. How do play therapists facilitate parental involvement for the therapy processes?
3. How do play therapists handle challenges in the process of parental involvement?

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

This study began with the approval from the institutional review board (IRB) and followed ethical standards according to the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (2005). To recruit participants, the author referred to a professional network such as the Association for Play Therapy and the official website for each play therapy modality. In addition, her personal networks built through play therapy conferences and trainings were utilized. Emails requesting for research participation were sent to qualified participants. Once first contact was made through these emails, snowball sampling, in which one participant recommended other potential participants, was employed.

The total of 10 participants were recruited through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling was pursued to find participants to which research questions were significant and who had expertise in being researched (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2015). To ensure that participants have expertise in parent-involved child therapy settings, two criteria for purposeful sampling were employed. The first was the theoretical orientations of the participants. The 10 participants were intentionally chosen from five different approaches in play therapy depending on the degree to which play therapists of each model take the lead during sessions:

Child-centered play therapy, Gestalt play therapy, Jungian analytical play therapy, Adlerian play therapy, and Theraplay. Child-centered play therapy, a non-directive approach, is one extreme of the spectrum, and Theraplay is the other. Gestalt play therapy and Jungian analytical play therapy are in the middle of the spectrum between directive and non-directive play therapy approaches. Adlerian play therapy was selected as Adler himself championed the significant role of parents in their child's developmental process. As such, Adlerian play therapists take an active stance to involve parents in the therapeutic process, separating sessions between play therapy with children and consultation with parents (Kottman, 2011). As the second criterion, to include participants with rich knowledge of and experience in their practice, at least one participant was assured to be in a trainer position for each play therapy modality. Also, all participants were required to have a play therapist license and at least 7 years' experience with their approach.

Among the 10 participants, two were male, and the others were female. Their years in practice varied ranging from 9 to 55 years. The average of their years in practice was approximately 27 years. Six of them had a doctorate degree and the other four had a master's. Eight of them were Registered Play Therapists & Supervisors (RPT-S); one was a Registered Play Therapist (RPT); and one was practicing play therapy without play therapy credentials. However, she was trained by a prominent play therapist.

Table 1 identifies the demographic and background information of participants. Pseudonyms were introduced to protect identities of the participants except for copyrighted videos.

Table 1. Professional Background Information of the Participants

| Pseudonym         | Gender | Orientation    | Position     | Practice Years | Degree | PT Credentials |
|-------------------|--------|----------------|--------------|----------------|--------|----------------|
| Peter             | Male   | Child-centered | Trainer      | 50             | Ed.D.  | RPT-S          |
| Theresa           | Female | Child-centered | Trainer      | 33             | Ph.D.  | RPT-S          |
| Carly             | Female | Gestalt        | Trainer      | 30             | M.Ed.  | RPT-S          |
| Lisa              | Female | Gestalt        | Trainer      | 20             | M.A.   | N/A            |
| Thomas            | Male   | Jungian        | Trainer      | 10             | Ph.D.  | RPT-S          |
| Jeannie           | Female | Alderian       | Trainer      | 29             | Ph.D.  | RPT-S          |
| Rachael           | Female | Adlerian       | Practitioner | 9              | Ph.D.  | RPT-S          |
| Amy               | Female | Adlerian       | Practitioner | 16             | M.S.   | RPT            |
| Grace             | Female | Theraplay      | Trainer      | 55             | M.A.   | RPT-S          |
| Ashley            | Female | Theraplay      | Trainer      | 17             | Ph.D.  | RPT-S          |
| Sandra<br>(Video) | Female | Theraplay      | Trainer      |                |        | RPT-S          |
| Rise<br>(Video)   | Female | Child-centered | Trainer      |                |        | RPT-S          |

### Data Collection

Interviews with the participants were the primary source of data. Upon the agreement of participants for the research, face-to-face interviews with seven of them were conducted. For the remaining three participants, phone interviews were proceeded because the physical distance

hindered face-to-face interviews. Upon the agreement by interviewees, all interviews were recorded.

Semi-structured interviews lasted 45 to 90 minutes, respectively to obtain in-depth and comprehensive data by interviewing the participants' perceptions and experiences. Interview questions were constructed around the child practitioners' tasks, strategies, and experiences in relation to parent involvement for the child counseling process. In addition, sessions (e.g., video-recorded sessions) from different schools of play therapy were also a part of data collection. Two video sessions from Child-centered play therapy and Theraplay were included to review segments involving parents engaged with their child counseling practice. Analyses on copyrighted video tapes for the other three approaches were not included as the videos from these three play therapy branches only portrayed child sessions without parents.

### **Data Analysis**

With the intention of demystifying tasks by child practitioners during parent involvement within the frame of the DM, Framework Analysis (FA) was employed. FA is an approach in qualitative data analysis rather than “a research paradigm such as ethnography, phenomenology, or grounded theory” (Ward, Furber, Tierney, & Swallow, 2013, p. 2425). This way of data analysis is different from inductive methods that are general in qualitative data analysis (Smith & Firth, 2011). FA has many overlaps with other qualitative data analyses in that it also undertakes data immersion, reduction, and theme development. However, FA usually identifies themes in the early state of data analysis or themes are outlined by existing ideas (Ward et al., 2013). Theme development first necessitates researchers to become familiarized with all of the data. Then researchers classify and organize data in line with identified key themes, concepts, and emergent categories of the cross-sectional descriptive data. This process simultaneously involves

the evolving development of sub-themes comprising the main themes (Ritchie, Spencer, O'Connor, & Barnard, 2014). The processes of moving across data lead to refinement of themes, which may eventually result in developing a conceptual framework (Smith & Firth, 2011). FA allows in-depth exploration of data to developing themes while presenting transparency in the data analysis procedures and credibility of findings (Ritchie et al., 2014).

The rationale for choosing FA for data analysis can be traced back to the data collection and early data analysis stages. While being immersed in the data through transcribing interviews and observational DVDs, reading through them, and writing researcher memos to screen the researcher's bias, the author found that the multiple role-performances by the child practitioners during parent involvement at cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions coincides with those of supervisors during clinical supervision. Particularly, researcher memos played a significant role because these memos enabled the researcher to find provoking ideas or concepts relevant to this research through a ruminating thought process. Having a background as a counselor educator, she discerned the major commonalities in tasks between child practitioners and clinical supervisors, from which she recoded all data based on the DM framework. Finally, constant refinement and synthesis of themes allowed the author to generate a parent involvement model for child practitioners.

For the systematic management of data coding and analysis, NVivo was employed. Particularly, NVivo is useful for developing a "bottom up" approach, whereby categories are drawn from the content of the data (Strauss, 1987). NVivo has functions to develop codes of single cases and categories of cross-cases. Simultaneously drawing data from transcripts, to pictures, video-recorded materials, and textual resources enabled the author to visualize codes and categories and examine relationships between data and the participants. Table 2 illustrates

the major themes and sub-themes identified in relation to child practitioners' role-performance based on the DM.

### **Effort for Validity**

To minimize the researcher's bias for results, she wrote a researcher identity memo suggested by Maxwell (2005, 2012). The researcher identity memo asks researchers to write about a researcher's goals, background, experiences, and feelings, reflecting how they inform and influence the research. The purpose of this practice is to help researchers doing qualitative research to "examine your [their] goals, experiences, assumptions, feelings, and values as they relate to your [their] research and to discover what resources and potential concerns your [their] identity and experience may create" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 27). Whenever data were analyzed, the researcher mostly left small or long memos to screen and minimize her bias, resulting in over 23 memos. To increase reliability, the primary researcher acquired the assistance of one peer debriefer in a counseling program who has knowledge of qualitative research. By discussing pre-assumptions from the researcher's previous work experience and their potential impact on the findings and sharing processes of data collection, coding, and analysis of this study with this debriefer, she was able to check herself. In addition, this debriefing process prevented the researcher from being overly occupied by data. This assistance by the peer debriefer took place four times during data collection and analysis.

### **Results**

Three roles—counselor, teacher, and consultant—and distinctive performances related to each role were identified according to the DM. Table 2 exhibits the major categories, listing general themes, sources, and references. Sources provide the total number of resources that were



referred to each category from the interview and the observation transcripts. References mean the total number of quotations for each category.

Table 2. Three Roles of Child Practitioners and Corresponding Sub-Themes

| Categories                                                            | Sources | References |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------------|
| What the play therapist does in parental involvement                  | 12      | 204        |
| Counselor's Role                                                      | 11      | 65         |
| Emotional Support                                                     | 9       | 35         |
| Helping Parents Gain insight                                          | 4       | 10         |
| Providing Mild Counseling                                             | 4       | 8          |
| Teacher's Role                                                        | 12      | 59         |
| Providing Psycho-Education                                            | 11      | 33         |
| Offering Experiential Learning                                        | 7       | 19         |
| Modeling for Parents                                                  | 4       | 6          |
| Consultant's Role                                                     | 12      | 45         |
| Assessing Child's Problems, Family Functioning and Parents' resources | 9       | 16         |
| Facilitating Family Communications and Process                        | 5       | 10         |
| Information and Counseling Process Sharing with Parents               | 4       | 6          |
| Discussing Alternative Ways of Interactions                           | 4       | 5          |

### Counselor's Role

Child practitioners' performance as counselor was characterized by emotional support and care for parents, helping the parents gain insight into themselves, and providing mild

counseling services. Through these supports, the participants offered comfort and experiences of being heard for parents while promoting their awareness of themselves and of the dynamic between their issues and those of their child.

**Providing parents with emotional support.** Emotional support and care for parents were the cornerstones of the counselor's role, which was emphasized by all interviewees. This emotional support and understanding of parents' positions is tremendously important given that parents decide to seek professional help when their tolerance for their emotional distress and frustration is too excessive to cope with (Landreth, 2012). Child therapists in the study delivered this emotional support through approaches of warmth, caring, understanding, and acceptance. They understood how hard it would be for parents to engage in their child counseling process and to put effort for change. Hill (2009) expresses this genuine and empathetic understanding of parents' positions by therapists as "holding" or "containing," through which child practitioners simultaneously feel the pain and experiences of the parents. Ashley mentioned her work starting from understanding parents; she shared, "I think that because the mom has a lot of knowledge, but for her important thing is nobody understands mom. So, being understood in a professional way, being supportive to mom, helped her really change her gear."

Lisa pointed out parents' experience of being guilty of and angry about their child's symptoms and shared that she understood their emotional hurt in a non-judgmental manner.

But the goal was to get her calm down enough, really I focused I think on her fear of not being a good mother and letting this happen to their child. So I kind of wanted her to get out of that anger and that seemed to work. You know, really focused on the fact that she was a really good mother and that it wasn't her fault. And that's beginning to come through her enough where she could start listening to what would really make sense for her daughter . . . So work on the relation with the parents and make sure you truly feel a sense of compassion for them and the connection that you really do; then you will find some compassion and connection there . . . Because they were children once too and they are hurting as well.

This excerpt exhibits how Lisa endeavored to understand and connect with the parents. Her effort started from learning about the source of the parents' distress and at the same time creating a safe, non-judgmental atmosphere for them.

**Helping parents gain insight.** Another role that the child practitioners performed as counselors was to help parents gain insight into their child and themselves and how their personal or marital issues may interface with those of their child. This type of assistance offered by child therapists has been supported by a significant body of literature (see Booth, & Jernberg, 2010; Gil, 2011; Guerney, 2003; Kottman, 2011; Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016; McGuire & McGuire, 2001; VanFleet, 2009, 2014). Thomas believed child counseling would be fully effective only when parents looked at themselves. He shared one of his cases in which he helped the parents to confront themselves:

At first, there was lot of resistance to the sand part, not from the mother, but from the father . . . So, when I met him separately . . . The father was crying in the session and saying that any time he tries something new in front of his wife, he always felt less than . . . She had no idea, so she started crying, she is like, “I always thought you judge me because I always had to live with your standard.” So, I had them look at this and said, “Could you imagine what the child’s internalizing if you are having this, hyper competitive for each other? What is the child having to achieve? What does the child have to prove to you all?” . . . They were able to work out through some of their challenges.

Thomas created a moment in which the parents were able to look at their relationships and their experiences with each other. In addition, he facilitated how the couple's issues might affect their child's problematic symptom. Booth and Jernberg (2010) concur with Thomas, stressing that child practitioners should help parents become aware of their own needs while helping the parents understand experiences of their child.

Amy briefly described how parents’ insight-gaining through play activities comes naturally. She said, “Changes are being made, so I guess, a lot of having the parents in session,

playing games or activities, which also gives parents insight into themselves without commenting on them.” Amy observed engaging parents in child counseling itself rendered opportunities for parents to obtain insight into themselves.

**Providing brief mild counseling for parents and family.** As counselors, child practitioners provided limited counseling for parents. This type of counseling during the parental involvement occurred naturally through deep understanding of and support for the parents.

Peter shared how his interview with parents could be perceived as a counseling session:

There is a time that you would check in my interview with parents [through microphone] and you would say, "Oh, that's not a parent interview, that's a counseling session." Because one of the parents is hurting, I wanna touch that hurt, I wanna respond to it. I wanna respond, provide understanding of that their hurt, their pain, their confusion. For sure their anger with their child would be in touch with that. So, my or few minutes would be exactly like what I would be doing in the therapy.

As such, Peter’s intention for better understanding of and profound connection with the parents made his interview with the parents perceived as a counseling session for them. Even though this type of counseling is limited, it demonstrates that clinicians function like counselors during parent involvement.

### **Teacher’s Role**

All the participants performed as teachers by delivering psycho-education, experiential learning opportunities, and modeling for parents so that they better understand the concept of play therapy and the healing process of their child and learn specific skills to enhance their interactions with their child as well as their parenting. These teaching components offered by child practitioners have been not only constantly discussed (see Booth & Jernberg, 2010; Cates et al., 2006; Gil, 2011; Guerney, 2003; Kottman, 2011; Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016; McGuire & McGuire, 2001; Sanders & Burke, 2013; VanFleet, 2009, 2014) but have been attributed to effective child counseling results (Thulin, Svirsky, Serlachius, Andersson, & Ost,

2014).

**Providing psycho-education.** The child practitioners of this study helped parents understand what play therapy may mean to their child. This orientation to child counseling is essential because if parents do not understand child counseling processes, they may not have faith in the therapist (Landreth, 2012), which may link to the child's outcomes.

Theresa communicated a process of play therapy to facilitate parents' understanding of play therapy in the first meeting with them.

In the first case, I have to educate them a little bit about play, and so, I will try to do that in a way, I often talk about, you know, 'Play is language, play is how kids express what's really going on inside. And then we can understand more about that . . . Um, the play helps with emotional regulation, helps behavior, like self-control, and helps with that especially if it's done with the context of relationship. Play can assist, you know, how kids express everything about the world . . . You can understand what's really going on for your child's underneath of that might be anxiety instead of anger, or might be other things.

By explaining and educating parents to the meaning of play and play therapy and by highlighting what play therapy can bring for children's emotional and behavioral regulation and relationship improvement, Theresa not only helped parents better understand play therapy, but also instilled hope for them regarding her practice.

Instructing developmental information about children was another teaching component in psycho-education. The education on child development was aimed to improve the parents' ability to distinguish whether their child behaviors could be accepted or whether they are something that requires an intervention. Rachael emphasized,

Um, two would be education about, um, child-development, children's need...information about their specific child . . . just general child development, you know, what is normal, what you can expect from five years old, um, third would be specific information about their child, who their child is, how their child is once in a world and, how they are contributing, how the combination between them is contributing.

Rachael helped parents differentiate what they could expect from their child based on the child's

developmental stage. This knowledge seemed to promote the parents' acceptance of their child's behaviors that once they perceived as abnormal or irritating.

**Offering experiential learning.** The participants coached parents to attain parenting and interactional skills through experiential learning. The clinicians actively invited parents to engage in mock play therapy sessions or demonstrated communication skills to the parents using play activities. Learning through experiential activities is powerful in that they enable parents to understand what is happening during child sessions while at the same time letting parents become aware of their own feelings and responses (Booth & Jernberg, 2010). In addition, parents learn how to apply behavioral techniques to modify behavioral issues their child presents (Wagner, 2008). Filial therapy (Guerney 2003; Landreth, 2012; VanFleet, 2009, 2014; Wilson & Ryan, 2005), Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (McNeil & Hembree-Kigin, 2010), and Theraplay (Booth & Jernberg, 2010) are representative approaches that exhibit experiential learning for parents.

Grace's sharing was a good example of how the participants employed experiential activities for parents, which was similar to what Sandra explained in the DVD demonstration.

I think the first step is the session that they have [play activities] for themselves . . . I once did a kind of role play. I had a father whose son was just all over. He couldn't stop him [his son]. So I said, "O.k. You will be your son and I will try to help you." He [the father] just ran all over the room, climbing upon things, I finally got him and got him down, got him calm. And he went, "Hue [like deep breathing sound], I thought you would never stop me. Do you think that's how my son feels?"

It was clear that through role-play the parent realized how his son may have felt when he lost his control. Experiential learning enabled the parent to get in touch with his son's experience and response.

Rise introduced a parent training group and supervision in which she offered parents feedback on their interactions with their child.

We train parents to the play session; then we as we start doing the play session with their own children. We supervise those sessions. And eventually parents learn to do play session home without our supervision, and very end part of the process is actually very important too, what the parents learn in terms of skills, um, interacting with their children, interaction patterns they learn. We've helped them delivery, help them generalize those new days in their life.

Rise had the parents conduct play sessions with their child at home and practice interaction and communication skills based on play therapy activities. Through this process, Rise facilitated the parents' learning of better parenting and coping skills and a generalization of learning in their life.

**Modeling for parents.** Modeling by the child practitioners facilitated the parents' concrete understanding of the skills in interactions and communication with their child. Ashley said,

It's difficult, because she was so negative to the child. So, I do a lot of modeling. I model mom that in a way she's gonna model the child. I keep emphasizing her positive impatience, even though it turns out something negative.

Through constant modeling in which she demonstrated how the mother's impatience could be understood positively, Ashley hoped the mother would do the same for her child. Modeling by the therapists was an intentional intervention so that the parent learned areas for improvement at behavioral and cognitive levels in an explicit way.

### **Consultant's Role**

The consultant's role that the participants played was found in three activities. First, they assessed sources of difficulties with parents and their child by gathering information. Second, they attempted to promote understanding and communication between parents and their child by serving as mediators between the two parties. Finally, the participants had mutual conversations with the parents to provide feedback on their coping strategies, discuss alternative forms of interactions between the parents and their child, and review the counseling process with them.

Child therapists fulfilling these functions at the position of consultant has frequently been noted in the literature (see Booth & Jernberg, 2010; Cates et al., 2006; Gil, 2011; Guerney, 2003; Kottman, 2011; Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016; McGuire & McGuire, 2001; Sanders & Burke, 2013; VanFleet, 2009, 2014).

**Assessing children's problems and resources of parents.** The participants collected information from both the parents and their child to understand the child's issues and to determine the sources of the problems. Jeannie's comment represented what the participants do to better understand the positions of parents and their child, respectively, and what information they assess. Jeannie shared:

I see the parents as a source of information in formulating my hypothesis about what's going on with the child. I'd also like to know what's been tried, what's worked, what hasn't worked, what's effective, um, in like parenting, kind of things I want to know, all that stuff . . . for example, I'd like to see how the parents talk about the child, but also how the parents talk about themselves, in terms of their attitude toward their kids, their attitude towards parenting. Um, sometimes marital stuff comes in, and I believe in many cases problems between the parents and the child, in terms of like personality not matching very well, um, maybe a source of the child's problem . . . So assessing that . . . I wanna explore kind of the root of the child's problem, and the root may be if their parenting issues.

Jeannie approached her cases holistically to figure out where the child's issues may come from.

For the assessment process, Lisa implemented an activity of family drawing, involving all family members in the activity and asking them to draw a picture together.

I wanna hear what's they're upset about . . . At that [second] session, I have everybody draw a picture of their family, each person in their family as an object or an animal including themselves. And I have everybody go around and talk about each person, you know, why they pick that. And [I say], "Tell me one thing they like and one thing they don't like about each person including themselves." And that starts to set the tone for discussion about, "What you are unhappy about?" The message is this is place we can talk about what you are unhappy about with the person you love. And they are saying things you are really angry about, things you don't like, things you're mad about. This is an open forum here.



Through family drawing, Lisa was able to hear the voices of all the family members and see their perceptions of themselves and other family members.

**Facilitating family communication.** Through the means of play or other experiential activities, the participants established an atmosphere in which parents and their child felt connected to each other. Theresa introduced one of her methods in which she utilized a dog.

One is I just include them [parents and their child] with some of the activities. So we might say, “O.K, today we’re gonna try get the dog to do ZYX or the horse or whatever we are working with.” So, we will say, “Here is your job as a family, is to get the dog to go from here, here without ever touching the dog.” And then they have to figure out how to move dog without touching it. You know, by calling it, or enticing it, you know, whatever they gonna do. But, they have to work it out as a family, so that would be one way.

By employing an activity that required all family members’ participation and cooperation, Theresa not only created a pleasant family time but also promoted family communication.

Jeannie also built moments in which parents had quality of interaction and pleasant time with their child through novel approaches.

I gave homework . . . highly encourage them [parents] to do special thing with their child when he behaves. I always say, “[. . .] Um, pick family game night. Have that family game night on Friday night that you never wanna make time for it. You’re always busy doing some other time, doing some other things” . . . I have one little boy, he had some good week, where he gets up and gets ready for school. And they get there on time, Friday night, they do the Monopoly [name of a board game] night. So I always encourage parents to reward their child with some extra time, doing things better pleasurable that are not electronics.

By helping parents understand what might be better ways of rewarding their child and suggesting an alternative way of interacting with their child through a game, Jeannie played a role of facilitator in communication and interaction between parents and their children.

**Information and counseling process sharing with parents.** At the position of consultant, therapists shared how child counseling sessions went as well as changes or improvements that the child clients presented. Hill (2009) asserts parents need this information

sharing and feedback from an expert's perspective because they lack confidence in their own tentative conclusions about the development of their child's issues. Carly's comment is an exemplar segment as a therapist of consultant.

Well, in the consultation, I'm just getting information, like 'How are things going at home,' 'Are you seeing any changes at home?' Or 'If something has occurred?' Um, oftentimes, I may be sharing with them, with the permission usually of the child without breaking confidentiality, but, what I'm seeing happening in the therapy, themes that may be emerging, things that they might do at home, to support the work I'm doing.

Being aware of the scope within which the practitioners do not break confidentially, the therapists debriefed sessions with parents while helping them recognize changes in their child and themselves.

**Discussing alternative ways of interactions with children.** As consultants, child therapists discussed better ways of interaction between parents and their child, sometimes suggesting professional opinions to parents. Theresa explained how she implements this solution-finding conversation with parents.

I use a lot of examples in my filial therapy training. You kids come home from school every day and get into a big fight. What could you do parents, (chuckle) every day and second day they walk to the door that would keep them, prevent them getting into a fight. So, I will ask that question to parents and I hopefully parents would have some ideas . . . If the parents can come up with the solutions, it's more likely to set into their life style than if I say, "Could you do this? Could you do that? Could you do the other thing?" because I'm trying to get the parents to solve their problems as much as possible.

In the position of consultants, the participants offered a place where parents examined their own ideas on coping strategies to deal with their child's problems, which ultimately facilitated the parents' own problem-solving skills.

### **Discussions**

The intent of this study was to conceptualize the multiple roles child practitioners perform during parent involvement in child counseling settings by employing the roles from

Bernard's Discrimination Model (Bernard, 1997). Specifically, three different roles (counselor, teacher, and consultant) were identified through interview data with experts in child counseling and through DVD observations of parent engaged child sessions. As a result, a conceptual map of parent involvement for child practitioners was generated. This conceptualization of the roles and tasks child practitioners fulfill in parent involvement is meaningful for three reasons. First, the theoretical scheme of parent involvement addressed in this study portrays a systematic and concrete role-performance that is expected of child therapists when mentoring parents. Such a framework on how to exercise parent involvement has been lacking in child counseling settings. Dowell and Ogles's (2010) meta-analytic review on child psychotherapy outcome demonstrates that in spite of the effectiveness of including parents in child counseling process, child practitioners are left without clear empirical evidence about how to guide parents into the treatment of children. Similarly, Nock and Ferriter (2005) assert there has been no articulation of how to manage parents for the duration of the child's treatment. The clinicians' three different roles in the parent involvement model answer the call for an explicative model for parent involvement for practitioners. Furthermore, by providing descriptions through empirical data of how and what to carry out in parent involvement, this study provides tangible understanding of child therapists in relation to enactment of their tasks.

Second, the conceptualization of parent involvement lays out a balanced framework in working with parents. Previous studies on parent engagement in child counseling have excessively emphasized behavioral elements through which therapists' performance is focused on the parents' education or training for skill acquisition, rather than combining all the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects with interventions for the parents. Wagner (2008) asserts behavioral consultation is a pervasive modality in working with parents. Thulin et al.

(2014) also point to the lopsided emphasis on the teaching component in parent involvement. They identify that the majority of meta-analyses on child counseling effectiveness were predominantly derived from child cases with externalizing problems in which parent engagement methods included parent training components such as role-play, modeling, and homework assignments, which are heavily focused on behavioral modification of parents. The framework of parent involvement of the present study, however, suggests that child practitioners should take a holistic approach for parent advisement at affective, cognitive, and behavioral levels as counselor, teacher, and consultant.

Finally, clinicians' tasks identified during parent involvement through this study evoke the significance of support for parents at the affective dimension. As seen in Table 2, among the three roles, services offered at the counselor's position were most cited, and emotional support was the most dominant theme among the sub-themes of the three different roles. This finding indicates that the importance of warm and caring understanding and acceptance delivered by child clinicians toward parents brings attention to the quality of relationships with parents. In fact, valuing relationships with parents in child counseling settings has been stressed through extensive literature (see Booth & Jernberg, 2010; Cates et al., 2006; Gil, 2011; Guerney, 2003; Kottman, 2011; Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016; Landreth, 2012; McGuire & McGuire, 2001; Sanders & Burke, 2013; VanFleet, 2009, 2014). These studies emphasize interpersonal processes, such as collaborative relationships, in addition to skills training that should not be neglected for effective parent interventions (Sanders & Burke, 2013). Without this type of relationship between parents and child practitioners, the effectiveness of parent involvement could be in doubt.

Limitations for the conceptualization of parent involvement based on the DM should be mentioned. First, a systemic perspective in understanding the performance of child practitioners is lacking. The concept of parent involvement is based on a psycho-social standpoint that considers different systemic components in the child counseling process. That is, child counseling does not isolate the child unit from other systems, such as parents and siblings. Interventions that facilitate function and communication as a family, sibling, or parent-child dyad are based on this systemic view. So tasks, performance, and strategies based on a systemic approach should be incorporated into mapping out parents' involvement.

Second, cultural considerations should be addressed when applying the parent involvement conceptualization of this study to different groups in terms of ethnicity, race, and social and economic status. Dominant studies of parental involvement in child counseling have been performed with a Caucasian population. Dowell and Ogles (2010) confirm this through their meta-analytic review exploring the effects of parent participation on child psychotherapy that included 48 cases and 3,893 participants. Among the participants, 65% were Caucasian followed by 28% Hispanic, 19% African American, and 3% Asian participants. Not only is cultural sensitivity required for child practitioners, but they should present respect for cultural values and parents' roles across cultural groups.

### **Conclusion**

The conceptual scheme of parent involvement applying the Discrimination Model to parent involvement is a pragmatic application for guiding parents through child counseling processes. Child practitioners will gain competence by having a theoretical framework to illuminate how to handle and guide parents in relation to their child clients. Three roles—teacher, counselor, and consultant—are conceptualized through empirical data. The parent involvement

conceptualization of this study allows even child therapists without training on parent involvement to grasp what performance is expected at the meeting with parents. Successful parent involvement provides the potential to elicit parents' cooperation and engagement in the children's counseling processes, which is crucial in maximizing the child's results. Regardless of the theoretical orientation child practitioners identify with, results of this study offer a valuable pathway for mapping out the performance of the therapists for parent involvement. Given the reality that the majority of child therapists should deal with parents, review of the application of the parent involvement frame is highly recommended for all child practitioners.

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# Student Perceptions of Online Video Cases to Promote Helping Skills Training

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Video case based learning was integrated with multimodal online learning to facilitate helping skills training for graduate students. Five online cases were utilized before students participated in classroom-based role-plays and live practice. Students' reactions to the activity were positive, and recommendations for counselor training are described.

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*Keywords: helping skills, video case based learning, counselor education*

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Training in helping skills (also called microskills; Carkhuff, 2011) is widely recognized as a fundamental component of training for professional helpers, both in the counseling field (Hill, Knox, & Sullivan, 2007) and in related disciplines such as social work (Gockel & Burton, 2014), medicine (Jackson & Back, 2011), and student affairs (Reynolds, 2011). Hill et al. (2007) noted that introductory helping skills courses that focus primarily on exploration skills (such as reflecting the content and feelings of a client), and later introduce students to more advanced skills such as theoretical integration and case conceptualization. This manuscript describes how video case based learning (VCBL), when used in a hybrid learning environment (i.e., an environment that includes both face-to-face and online learning), can familiarize students with foundational reflecting skills (i.e., reflecting the content, feeling, and meaning of what is said) before practicing live in a helping skills course. VCBL in this context served as a bridge for learning and skill development between reading about helping skills and live practice in class. Specifically, it allowed students to practice and receive brief, individualized feedback about their use of reflecting skills in an attempt to increase their comfort level and readiness. An exploratory qualitative case study of students taking the Helping Skills course was also conducted to gain a

deeper understanding of students' perceptions of the experience, with the ultimate goal of using this knowledge to improve the design of the activity, and to offer recommendations for counselor educators.

### **Theoretical Foundation for Helping Skill Training**

Historically, counselor training programs focused mainly on conceptual skills (e.g., how to think about client issues) and content areas (e.g., theories of counseling) until Truax and Carkhuff (1967) argued that students needed skill-based training to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Ridley, Kelly, & Mollen, 2011). Carl Rogers (1951, 1957) theorized that in order to be effective, a helper must demonstrate the core conditions of unconditional positive regard, congruence, and empathy to clients. However, Truax and Carkhuff (1967) reviewed research on counselor training and determined this was insufficient as training paradigms at the time failed to bridge the gap between didactic instruction and practice. In other words, students were taught that they should exhibit Rogers' core conditions but not trained how.

Truax and Carkhuff (1967) developed a skills-based curriculum founded on Carl Rogers' client-centered theory (1951, 1957), which involved watching experts, role-playing, and feedback for helping skills training. Allen Ivey (1971) then pioneered the microskills approach, which added the critical step of training specific microskills, in sequential order, to reduce the complexity of the training process (Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2010). Ivey's model also included watching expert demonstrations, reading about specific skills, recording practice with skills, and receiving feedback, with a particular emphasis on learning skills in a structured sequence (Ivey et al., 2010).

Effective use of microskills is critical because it constitutes the foundation of the helping relationship, setting the stage for shared understanding of helpee concerns and a collaborative

relationship (Hill, 2014). Microskills training has remained the dominant paradigm for more than four decades, with Clara Hill's (2014) model representing a comprehensive approach. The Hill model primarily grew out of Carkhuff's (2011) Human Resource Training (HRT) model (Hill, Spangler, Chui, & Jackson, 2014), and focuses on three stages in the change process: Exploration, Insight, and Action. According to Hill (2014), in the exploration stage helpers "seek to establish rapport, develop a therapeutic relationship, encourage clients to tell their stories, help clients explore thoughts and feelings, facilitate the arousal of emotions, and learn about clients" (p. 34). In other words, this initial stage of helping establishes a working alliance between helper and helpee that establishes the foundation for all future work. The following stages of the model involve helping clients achieve new understandings about themselves (insight) and develop strategies for change (action).

Hill et al. (2007) suggested that students learn fundamental helping skills early in training so that they "become automatic and recede into the background" (Hill et al., 2007, p. 366) – in other words, so that they become ingrained and do not require as much conscious attention in the helping process. Mastery of these fundamental skills allows students to focus on higher order skills as their training progresses. It should be noted however fundamental helping skills remain important throughout a helper's career: as an example, Cook, Biyanova, Elhai, and Schnurr (2010) found in a web-based survey of over 2,200 psychotherapists' use of specific counseling techniques, that the top six categories selected in the multiple choice survey included microskills, such as "convey warmth, caring, and respect" (used by 97%), "communicate understanding of the client's experience" (used by 90%), and "make reflective or clarifying comments" (used by 89%) (p. 263).

While helping skills are a critical part of the counselor's job, learning how to use them can be a source of discomfort and anxiety for new graduate students (Hill et al., 2007). Anxiety may in turn impact students' self-efficacy, which has been found to correlate with long term counselor performance (Larson et al., 1999). Thus, it is important that new trainees begin with experiences that are both instructive and low-stakes. Role-playing becomes an important part of shaping counselor self-efficacy (Osborn & Costas, 2013), but for the newest students who have few positive or negative experiences to gauge their abilities as a counselor, the stakes can be particularly high (Larson et al., 1999).

It is therefore important for instructors to design courses in helping skills that address these sources of anxiety early in the class. Specifically, instructors must take into consideration the initial, acute experience of performance anxiety that some students will experience when asked to practice in front of peers and instructor (Larson et al., 1999). Secondly, while students often enter the counseling field with some experience in helping skills, they are often less comfortable with using them in a proscribed manner (Carkhuff, 2011). Students who are used to responding to others spontaneously in everyday life may find using helping responses in an intentional way may seem unnatural and frustrating. Finally, a less acknowledged source of anxiety can be the concern that students are not actually as good at helping skills as they believed (Huhra, Yamokoski-Maynhart, & Prieto, 2008), leading to the fear of being revealed as unsuited for the counseling field.

The video case learning activity described in this paper was designed to provide students an opportunity to acquire familiarity and comfort with fundamental reflecting skills (response to content, feeling, and meaning) before being asked to practice these skills in vivo. The timing of the introduction of the VCBL was important: it was designed to ease the transition between

reading and watching demonstrations of reflecting skills and role-plays with peers in class. Consistent with Carkhuff's (2011) terminology, throughout this manuscript we will use the term helper or student to refer to graduate counseling students in training, and the term helpee for those they are helping. The term reflecting skills will be used to refer to the specific skills that explore helpee thoughts and feelings in order to demonstrate active listening and facilitator exploration (Carkhuff, 2011), which was the focus of the VCBL.

### **Incorporating Technology in Helping Skills Instruction**

A number of pedagogical approaches are typically used in helping skills courses, including didactic presentations, demonstrations by the instructor, and small group practice. Lux and Sivakumaran (2010) noted that the use of technology for helping skills training is becoming increasingly common. This trend dovetails with the key role that technology plays in the lives of 21st Century students. A recent national survey found that more than four in five college students took courses that included an online component, and the same study found that 99% of U.S. universities utilize learning management systems to deliver course content and support online collaboration (Dahlstrom & Bichsel, 2014).

Lux and Sivakumaran (2010) noted that training standards promulgated by bodies such as the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) emphasize the use of technology as a best practice for training. In recent years, several specific ways of utilizing technology for helper training have appeared in the literature. Walter and Thanasui (2011) proposed the use of pocket camcorders to record and immediately view footage of helping skills to train students. Adcock, Duggan, and Perry (2010) also developed the Computer Agents Teaching Helping Interactions Effectively (CATHIE) program, which is a web based interview

simulation designed to help human services and counseling students learn fundamental helping skills. The CATHIE program, designed by a team of computer engineers, content experts, and instructional designers, utilizes computer-based agents and an immersive environment that provides students with immediate feedback on their responses to simulated clients in simplified case scenarios (Adcock et al., 2010).

Interactive tools such as this provide a space for meaningful practice that bridges the challenges identified above related to the early didactics of a helping skills course with the later experiential component. Online interactions increase the number of student practice opportunities, and enable individual feedback beyond the temporal boundaries set by a class meeting. Huhra et al. (2008) suggested the need for trainees to develop helping skills through highly structured experiences that reduce the initial level of complexity presented and for them to receive detailed feedback about their skills. Research has not yet determined which instructional strategies are optimal for each aspect of helping skills acquisition, particularly in the initial stages of training (Gockel & Burton, 2014). While helpful, solutions that require teams of computer and content experts to develop both require a heavy resource investment and can lead to a lack flexibility for counselor educators to modify learning systems for their own needs. For this reason, the authors explored an approach that leverages technology that is accessible to most higher education faculty members: the learning management system (LMS).

Learning management systems (e.g., Canvas, Blackboard, Sakai, D2L) are now used by most universities as a convenient online platform to help instructors organize content and support interaction during and between class sessions (Dahlstrom & Bichsel, 2014). When a platform (Canvas) emerged that allowed instructors to upload and organize videos and allowed students to submit audio responses, the authors decided to explore this option for hosting interactive video

cases. They chose this approach based on research that had combined video technology and case-based learning to promote learning helping skills in a low-stakes setting tracing back over a decade (Koch & Dollarhide, 2000) and growing research in medical, teacher and counselor education that supports the use of video cases in an online environment (Beitzel & Derry, 2009; Pierce & Wooloff, 2012). The decisions behind the presentation of each case and the student prompt reflected not only the instructional goals of the course, but also an understanding of the developmental stage of the students as early novice helpers. In other words, in the early stages of learning helping skills, the content presented in videos should minimize complexity. Further, having the students respond directly after watching simulates actual interchanges that occur in live practice (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). The expert responses serve as models, and the timely feedback from the instructor serves as a formative assessment (Bransford et al., 2000). We will next describe how video case based learning (VCBL) can be integrated with widely-accessible learning management systems, such as Canvas, to introduce students to fundamental reflecting skills in a virtual setting on their own time before they are asked to practice live during class time.

### **Embedding the VCBL Activity into a Helping Skills Course**

Foundational helping skills courses typically focus on teaching students a progressive series of skills that include reflecting, summarizing, asking questions, attending to non-verbal communication, and demonstrating empathy (Adcock et al., 2010; Walter & Thanasiu, 2011). Such was the purpose of the course described here, with the first few class sessions devoted to readings (see Hill, 2014), and instructor demonstration of helping skills. After the first few meetings, students practiced helping skills in small groups - typically in triads in which they rotate through the roles of helper, helpee, and observer.

The VCBL described in this article provided students with practice in three types of responding skills: reflection of content, feeling, and meaning. Reflection of content is a skill that involves restating what the helpee has already said in a condensed manner to facilitate further

exploration. Such reflections are often prefaced in training with a suggested response format such as “what I hear you saying is (content)” to facilitate clarity about how to format such responses. Reflections of feeling refer to a response in which the helper identifies one or more helpee feelings, based on the information shared by the helpee and their nonverbal communication. Such responses are often preceded with statements such as “You are feeling (feeling word).” According to Carkhuff (2011), these two responses can be combined in a response he labeled response to meaning, which combines both reflection of content and feeling, using the format “you feel (content) because (feeling).” According to Carkhuff, when accurate, such responses facilitate further exploration of helpee experiences and their progression towards understanding (insight) and change (action).

Every instructor at the university is encouraged to host course materials on the Canvas LMS. For face-to-face classes, Canvas usually serves as a central repository for readings, syllabi, assignments and grades, but it offers additional functionality for hosting asynchronous discussion, chat, and multimedia streaming or upload. The multimodal response and feedback to video cases activity combines a number of these capabilities. The video cases themselves were developed by the first author and uploaded to the College of Education’s YouTube channel (<http://ow.ly/R3KTH>), and are presented to students as embedded videos (see next section for further description of the video cases). The web page for each case includes a picture of the helpee along with an overview of the case and links where they can access each video segment. For example, the link *Reflection of Content* allows the student to access the first video segment and then to record their response to the first helpee statement.

Students who view the course site from a computer submit audio responses via a web browser plugin, and mobile devices also offer an audio recording option (i.e., Android or iOS



phone or tablet). Once students submit the audio response, instructors use a grading tool - Speedgrader - to provide feedback on each student's response for each case from the web interface. The tool allows for text, audio, or video feedback formats, but after multiple iterations of the activity we found that text is the quickest and easiest to produce. Watching the expert responses and the processing session is a simple matter of watching another set of embedded videos. The expert example links take students to a pre-recorded video with an experienced helper demonstrating how they would respond to the helpee statement.

### **Video Cases Used in VCBL Activity**

Following Huhra et al.'s (2008) recommendation, the VCBL learning activity was designed to provide students an opportunity to practice fundamental helping skills in a non-threatening environment and receive systematic feedback prior to being asked to do so in front of their peers in class. The development of video cases was supported by a small technology grant in the authors' college. This funding was provided for developing and recording five vignettes to be used in the website and for technological assistance in developing the functionality of the website. The video segments in the activity portrayed a range of topics that counselors typically encounter (e.g., concerns about choosing a career, roommate trouble). Given that the goal of this project was to provide practice in all three fundamental responses (response to content, feeling, and meaning), each video was divided into segments that would allow students to practice each response in sequence, and then to have an opportunity to watch a more experienced counselor use that response with the same client. These expert segments were supervised by the first author who has taught the course for over 20 years so that they demonstrated the use of each skill with each client using the format prescribed in the course readings and class demonstrations. The five client scenarios - created to give students a chance to practice with a range of helpee topics -

were fictional descriptions of typical concerns addressed in counseling, such as career concerns and problems with roommates. The term client is used here to refer only to the person portrayed in each video case, so as not to be confused with the more general term helpee used throughout the manuscript. Advanced graduate students were recruited to play the role of client and the role of helper in the videos.

### **Structure and Sequence of the VCBL Activity**

Students were assigned VCBL activities to complete in each of the first few weeks of the class. They completed two cases between the second and third class, two the following week, and the final case before the fifth class meeting. The pacing of these assignments was intentional: the first two cases allowed for on-line practice after reading about helping skills, but before their first role-play. The ensuing cases were assigned over the subsequent two weeks so that students could continue on-line practice during the first few weeks of beginning role-plays.

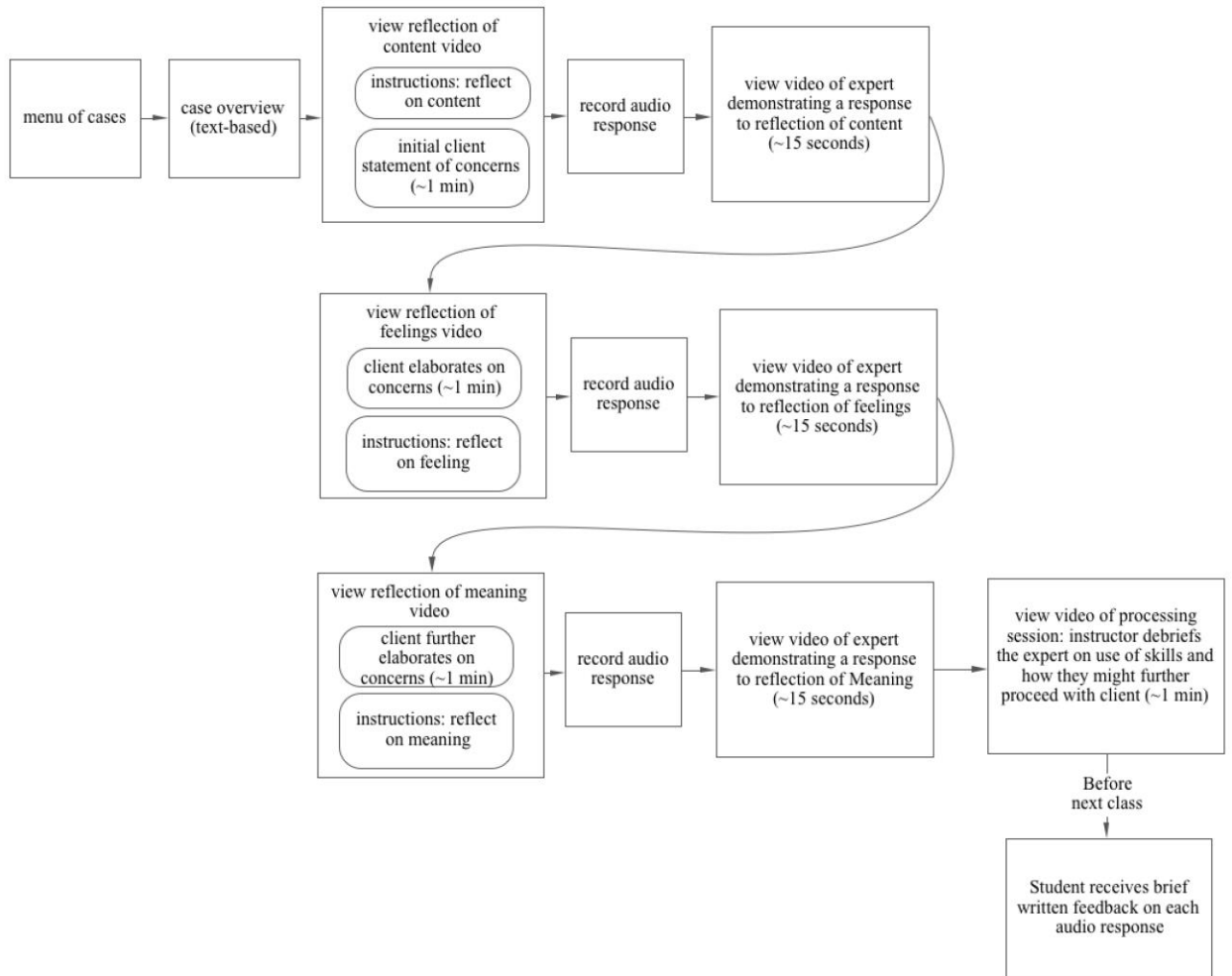
The client videos were divided into three segments: an initial clip in which the client describes their concerns, and two additional video clips in which the client continues to elaborate on their concerns. Figure 1 depicts the sequence of the VCBL activity, which proceeds in the following manner: the student is first presented with text describing the format for responding to content, and then after watching the first client segment, the student records their response to content for that video segment. Each video segment is preceded by written text explaining the skill to be practiced following that clip. The student is then presented with text describing the format for responding to feelings, which is followed with the second video segment, in which the client elaborates on their concerns. After recording their response to feeling, the student is provided with text instructing them in how to respond to meaning, following by the third and

final client video segment. Students have the option to record their responses for each segment using an audio or video format.

While the system provides the students with the ability to delay or repeat recordings, we encourage them to record a single immediate response rather than rehearsing or re-recording in order to provide a more realistic simulation of a helping interaction. Following each clip, after the student records a response, they are then provided with the opportunity to watch a more experienced helper provide a response. Once completing these steps, students had the opportunity to watch the instructor debrief the more experienced helper, discussing how they developed their responses and how they might continue to work with the client. In order to promote extended practice on-line, students are typically assigned one or two of the cases each week during the beginning weeks of the semester (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Graphic illustration of video case based learning sequence of activities



Written feedback from the instructor or a graduate teaching assistant is provided to each student online for each response to each scenario. The goal is to provide clear and timely feedback, so simplicity is a key factor. Therefore, each instance of feedback is usually just a brief sentence. The feedback might take the form of a positive statement noting the student used the skills correctly, or a suggestion for improvement, such as being more concise when reflecting content or making sure to use accurate feeling words when reflecting feelings.

As patterns of responses to the video cases emerge, these are discussed during class as learning opportunities. Typically, we have found certain patterns emerge as students begin to practice these skills: their responses to content are often longer than necessary at first, as they attempt to restate almost everything the helpee has said in an effort to avoid missing any content. Students often struggle at first when attempting to use accurate feeling words, and find they need to expand their emotion vocabulary to accurately capture the type and intensity of feelings expressed by their helpee. For example, students might use the response, “you feel like things are not working out”, which is intended as a reflection of feeling, but does not actually label the feelings the helpee might be experiencing, such as frustration or anger.

### **Preliminary Evaluation of Student Reactions to VCBL**

#### **Research Questions**

Our research design and the methods employed reflect an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivists posit a notion of reality as existing outside of an individual. They view understanding as an “intellectual process whereby a knower... gains knowledge about an object (Schwandt, 2001, p. 194).” The goal of interpretivist research is to discover the meaning of human action (Schwandt, 2001). While the theoretical goals of this study are modest, we felt it

was important to understand the students' perspective as we move forward with new technology tools. To gain this insight, we asked three questions:

1. To what extent did the students find the VCBL activity helpful, and what about it did they find helpful?
2. What, if anything, about the VCBL did the students find problematic or see as interfering with their learning of helping skills?
3. What ideas did students have for addressing issues related to problems with the activity?

### **Participants**

The course in which the VCBL takes place is offered twice a year, once in the fall semester and once in the summer, and typically enrolls 15 - 20 people. During the summer, the course is primarily taken by first year counselor education students (who entered the program the previous fall), and offered in a compressed format - taught daily for two and one-half weeks. During the fall (when data collection took place) the course takes place over the typical 15-week long semester and is also open to counseling psychology students and graduate students in related fields. While the fall semester enrolled proportionately fewer counselor education students than in the summer, the longer time frame of the semester seemed more appropriate to evaluating students' perceptions of the experience, since students had a week between each class to complete assigned cases and receive feedback. In the summer, this process is condensed to just a day or two. This study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board and granted exempt status.

There were 19 students taking the course during the fall semester in which this evaluation took place. Two were master's students in counselor education, seven were doctoral students in Counseling Psychology, nine were masters or doctoral students in Higher Education Affairs, and

one was a graduate student in Nursing. The majority were female (15); information about ethnic/racial identification was not collected. All of the counseling students (counselor education and counseling psychology) were in their first year of study, while most of the other graduate students were in their second year of study. To ensure that their previous coursework had not included helping skills training, the instructor screens all non-counseling students taking the course. Therefore, while some of the students (particularly those not in the counseling field) may have had several semesters of coursework in topics related to helping professions, the helping skills content was new to all. All students taking the course were asked to complete a brief, open-ended instructor-developed survey after they had completed all VCBL activities (approximately four weeks after the course began); the response rate was 100%.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The survey was administered the week after all VCBL cases were completed, which was approximately five weeks into the semester. This was done to gather data about students' perceptions of the VCBL while that experience was recent and at a time when they had just begun to role-play in order to foreground the transition from reading about reflecting skills to actual practice. With the primary goal of improving the design of the activity in mind, we asked students the following questions: (1) What has been helpful to you about practicing reflections using the on-line videos?; (2) Has anything about the on-line video cases caused problems for you or interfered with your learning of helping skills?; and (3) What would you do to address any concerns listed in question 2? In addition to these open-ended items, students were asked to rate "overall how helpful they have found the on-line video cases in developing their helping skills so far" from 1 (not helpful) to 5 (very helpful). Seven students rating the experience 5, ten rated it 4, one student rating it 3 and one student rating it 2. The student who gave the 2 rating

did acknowledge, “I haven’t checked to see if there’s individual feedback, but that would help.” This might indicate the student’s lower rating was reflective of them not fully participated in the VCBL at the time of the evaluation.

We began the analysis phase by examining survey responses and looking for themes within and across the responses of individuals. We then used the constant comparative method to group and then regroup the initial open codes into refined categories, or axial codes (Glazer & Strauss, 1967). As we worked, we maintained an audit trail of our notes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and we used analytical memos to record our thinking as categories came together and themes emerged (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Once we had constructed a code sheet, we returned to the response data and counted the number of responses per code. Themes associated with four or more participants were labeled primary and themes associated with least three participants were labeled secondary.

In an effort maximize the trustworthiness of our coding scheme (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), we asked members of the senior author’s graduate student research team - each of whom had previously taken the helping skills course before to examine survey responses - to view the code framework and tell us if they thought it needed any revisions. We then met to discuss potential revisions to the coding scheme - none suggested changes. We then asked the research team members to look back at the themes per participant to look for areas of disagreement. They quickly and easily reached consensus on that data as well.

## **Results**

One of the primary themes that emerged from question 1 (helpful) was labeled *non-threatening environment*. The following quote was representative of this theme: “I appreciate the opportunity to practice a skill in a safe environment that would otherwise make me feel



extremely awkward.” This theme was the most frequent among all responses and indicated many students experienced increased comfort by practicing on-line before role-playing the skills in class.

The second primary theme identified was *systematic practice with basic skills*, which referred to practicing skills in a specific, structured sequence. As was noted above, for each case students were asked to practice first responding to content, then feeling, then meaning, with each segment preceded by a reminder of the response format to use. Following each practice response, the participants then watched a more experienced student providing a response to the same client segment. A representative quote for this theme was: “It’s helpful to concentrate on one part (meaning vs. feeling vs. content) at a time.” This quote was representative of the general theme that the structured sequencing of the skills in the VCBL allowed students to practice and experience some level of mastery with each skill before moving on to the next skill.

While not as frequent (reported by three participants), two secondary themes emerged from question 1 (helpful), the first of which was *opportunity to practice in a realistic environment*. A representative quote for this theme was: “Feeling that I was in a real life counseling situation.” Responses such as this indicated that to a certain extent the VCBL simulated live practice by giving students an opportunity to listen and respond to helpee comments in much the same way as they would in live practice. The other secondary theme was *opportunity to watch experts*, with the following representative quote: “I also learned from the examples of the experienced counselor.” Clearly, this theme reflected the helpfulness of being able to watch a more experienced helper use the skills they had just practiced with the same helpee statement.

One of the primary themes that emerged from question 2 (not helpful) was labeled *technological difficulties*, which referred to problems students had in accessing or entering their responses to some of the cases. The following quote is representative of this theme: “Only problem has been submitting, the video/audio settings don’t stay saved so it is difficult to respond in a ‘real-time’ way.” This comment reflects the need for instructors using VCBL to address technical concerns reported by students in a timely manner. For this course, students were asked to contact the instructor as soon as possible when they encountered such difficulties, but these responses demonstrate such problems can still be a source of frustration for some.

The other primary theme that emerged from question 2 (not helpful) was labeled *anxiety about doing it wrong*. One representative comment on this theme was a participant who reported “anxiety about doing it wrong” with regard to the cases. This comment demonstrates that while the VCBL may have alleviated some of the anxiety associated with helping skills practice, it was still present for some students. Most of the students did not offer specific suggestions for the question, “What would you do to address any concerns listed in question 2?”, and no consistent themes were identified. The suggestions that were offered had to do with a few students addressing technological issues encountered in the use of the VCBL.

### **Implications for Counselor Training**

The data described above generally supported the use of VCBL described in this manuscript. Overall, students found the experience to be positive (modal rating of 4 on a 5 point scale). Further, their open-ended comments suggested themes that aligned with the goals of the VCBL: many students described it as an opportunity to practice in a realistic, yet safe, environment. Several students also found the opportunity to watch expert demonstrations helpful. The VCBL provided opportunities for self-discovery as evidenced by student comments

that the opportunity to practice using the cases showed them that seemingly simple skills were more complex to use in practice than they previously believed. A number of recommendations follow from our experiences using VCBL for initial counselor training in helping skills.

**Implication #1 Online video cases can provide a non-threatening environment for students to practice fundamental helping skills.**

Helping skills courses may represent one of the few opportunities that new students have to focus on fundamental reflecting skills. Technology will clearly continue to play an important role in graduate instruction and well-designed VCBL activities give students sustained opportunities for practice outside the classroom. A key question is how to best leverage this technology to facilitate student learning. In the context of graduate counseling training, it is important to gain a better understanding of how technology can be used to help students master fundamental skills they will need in counseling practice. Access to videos demonstrating such skills can be one important teaching tool, and the VCBL described in this manuscript could enhance student learning, offer the opportunity for deeper understanding of skills, and to diminish the stage fright that can accompany classroom based practice of helping skills with students and instructors.

**Implication #2: Online video cases can provide students with systematic practice in a realistic environment.**

The lead author developed and used VCBL for several semesters before conducting the preliminary investigation described in this paper. Based on this experience, the VCBL can be an effective tool for providing individual feedback, providing an opportunity to check-in with class members systematically before in vivo practice. This has become increasingly important since limited budgets have necessitated larger course enrollments. Further, providing feedback through

the Canvas LMS allows for a more holistic evaluation of students' overall progress learning skills between classes, allowing for class discussion during the first few weeks about common themes in student progress. Use of the VCBL has led to a much smoother transition between readings and demonstrations of helping skills, and the use of role-plays with other class members, in the first few weeks of the semester.

**Implication #3 Utilizing an existing learning management system to host the videos can simplify the process, but students may still encounter technology difficulties.**

An underlying institutional investment in LMS technology is necessary for hosting the VCBL. As noted, the college where this course was conducted funded some of the initial project development, allowing us time and resources to develop client scenarios, recruit students to play clients, and make and edit the video recordings. Further, the use of VCBL requires technological support, as difficulties occasionally but consistently arose. It is important to give students clear instructions for accessing the websites, and to make sure they use up to date browsers or try different connections if they encounter difficulties.

Some students described in our investigation found the technology challenging. The VCBL allowed students to access the cases at the time of their choosing using the course Canvas site, but since videos were hosted on YouTube, and students submitted responses through the course site, there were opportunities for confusion. In most instances, issues arose when students did not have the latest version of an Internet browser or utilized a slower Internet connection for uploading responses, but user error aside, the result was still frustration.

**Implication #4: The design of a video case based learning activity should reflect its learning objectives, which in this example included practice in a realistic environment and an opportunity to watch experts.**

Considerable thought should be given to the types of scenarios used in the VCBL. This course was designed for counseling students intending to work in a wide range of educational settings, in addition to students in related areas of study such as Higher Education Administration. We therefore utilized a range of scenarios relevant to such sites. Vignettes included difficulties in choosing a career, problems with a roommate, and coping with loss. We found it important to develop sequential segments for each video that allowed the students to practice a progression of skills - for example, in the first video clip, the client described their concern, allowing for a helper to reflect the content of what was said. The next clip typically involved some elaboration of the concern by the client, which allowed for the helper to next practice a response to feeling. The content of such videos can of course be altered to suit the needs of specific students (school counseling, community counseling, etc.) by focusing on client concerns most common in those settings.

Having a specific rationale for using the technology in this way (i.e., because the students need to be able to respond verbally to clients) was essential to the learning objectives of this VCBL. We note this because the use of technology can be exciting or engaging regardless of whether it is serving a learning objective, and has the potential to override educational content if it becomes the focus. Newer tools can broaden the vista of possibilities, but the use of technology should serve the learning objectives, rather than be used just because it is available.

While this technology was used for teaching reflecting skills to novice counselors, additional technology can be used in a meaningful way for more advanced skills. As training progresses, students must typically reflect more deeply on what types of responses they may need to make given a specific client concern or topic. For example, students may need to know how ask open-ended questions, how to summarize important themes for a client, or how to use

specific interventions. VCBL could be constructed to allow more advanced students the opportunity to watch several interventions and decide which is most appropriate for a given helpee concern, for example. Further, the VCBL platform could allow students to share feedback with each other about their use of skills, which could further enhance their knowledge of helping skills.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Further research using qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry is necessary to evaluate the utility of this application of VCBL. While the exploratory evaluation described here used an instructor developed, brief survey about student reactions to the experience, the topic merits more in-depth qualitative and quantitative examination. On the qualitative side, more sustained inquiry would enrich the snapshot of a student's perceptions at a single point in time. Additional survey and focus group data, possibly at the end of the semester so that students had the opportunity to reflect on the experience over time, could be embedded in a sustained qualitative inquiry framework that would enable more thick description, promote data triangulation. Such procedures would provide a more detailed picture for readers to judge the trustworthiness of our assertions about the utility of video case based learning. The data gathered could also be strengthened with a second survey assessing changing perceptions about the VCBL after its initial use. A focus group or interview component could be added to the evaluation, possibly at the end of the semester, to allow students to reflect on how the VCBL added to the totality of their training experience.

More established measures could be used quantitatively to assess important constructs such as students' self-efficacy and actual performance of helping skills before and after use of the VCBL. Larger samples of students across different classes would also be important to

include in research. The semester in which this evaluation took place included students from several different, but related, disciplines (e.g., Counselor Education, Counseling Psychology, Higher Education Administration). Future research could examine if any aspects of the VCBL need to be discipline-specific. One obvious example would be matching particular types of cases to the student's area of study (e.g., vignettes involving elementary school students for school counseling).

In addition to evaluating the VCBL format presented in this manuscript, future research could also address the training needs of more advanced students. For example, the type of feedback offered to newer students about more fundamental skills is often very focused on a particular skill (using accurate reflections of content, identifying client feelings). More advanced students might need different feedback aimed at helping them make decisions about how and when to use more advanced skills, such as using self-disclosure with a helpee. Peer feedback and discussion could be more appropriate at this stage of development and be incorporated into the VCBL.

The VCBL described here seemed suited for the early stage of skill development as outlined in the research on novice learners conducted by Bransford and colleagues (2000), and future research could be aimed at examining how the VCBL case structure should change over the developmental cycle of the students. As they become more adept at helping skills, it is likely that the structure and presentation of cases would need to change, and each step in this process would need empirical study aimed at examining the most appropriate ways to use VCBL to help graduate students maintain a healthy and realistic sense of self-efficacy while reflecting on their use of helping skills.

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### Author Note

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# Experiences of International Students in Practicum and Internship Courses: A Consensus Qualitative Research

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This qualitative study explores the practicum and/or internship experiences of international students in counseling. Based on the foundation of phenomenological research, this study uses a consensual qualitative research method. Semi-structured interview questionnaires asked ten participants regarding their experiences of practica and/or internships (including their fears, challenges, and support from training programs). Results revealed that the fears and challenges that international students face during the practicum and/or internship training primarily stemmed from their language barrier and/or a lack of understanding of the American counseling system. Our findings indicated that providing practical information, such as sites, the American counseling system, insurance, and cultures, in addition to ensuring that supervisors and faculty members increase in multicultural competency and sensitivity about international students, would improve international students' preparation for their practica and/or internships.

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*Keywords: International students, challenge, CQR, counselor education, practicum/internship*

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Counselor education programs are designed to promote the development of students' professional competencies in supervision, teaching, research, counseling, leadership and advocacy (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2009). CACREP standards (2009) require professional training experience, specifically a practicum and an internship for the application of theory and the development of counseling skills. Although these experiences can be challenging for all counselors-in-training, they are additionally challenging for international students.

The number of international students enrolled in higher education in the United States continues to increase (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2014), and the same trend can be observed in counselor training programs (Ng, 2006). International students are enrolled in nearly

50 percent of CACREP-accredited counselor training programs across all five geographic locations, including the Western, Southern, North Atlantic, Northern Central, and Rocky Mountain regions (CACREP, 2009). Reflecting the trend of the growing number of international students enrolled in counselor preparation programs, it is essential that counselor preparation programs provide culturally appropriate training and education. In addition, counselor educators should supervise and mentor the sizable population of international students in culturally-competent ways to appropriately support them. However, the topic of international students in counselor education programs has received relatively limited attention in comparison to racial/ethnic minority trainees from the United States (Mittal & Wieling, 2006; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004; Ng, 2006), even though international students face unique challenges and difficulties in their training programs, especially during their practica and/or internships.

Research has shown that international students face different challenges during their preparation programs than the challenges other minority students experience (Chen, 1999; Morris & Lee, 2004; Ng & Smith, 2009; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004; Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009). For example, Chen (1999) identified three main stressors for international students as educational stressors (e.g., note taking, examinations), social stressors (e.g., social adjustment, housing, social isolation, culture shock), and second language anxieties. In addition to the difficulties that international students commonly face, international counseling students, in particular, reported that they experienced unique challenges and difficulties specific to the counseling discipline, such as language and cultural differences, difficulties in academic and/or clinical experiences, and interactions with clients and/or supervisors from the dominant U.S. culture.

Consequently, these findings indicate that international counseling students require distinctive training and supervisory needs. International counseling students face challenges in all stages of their training, specifically before and during their practicum and/or internship experiences because of language barriers (Killian, 2001; Mittal & Wieling, 2006; Ng, 2006) and different backgrounds, which can lead to varying interpretations of counseling in general (Killian, 2001; Mittal & Wieling, 2006; Pattison, 2003). Further, international students who were less acculturated reported less counseling efficacy and more role difficulties in supervision (Nilsson & Anderson, 2004). Indeed, they tend to experience greater levels of cultural adjustment concerns (Ng, 2006), so they need “to learn a new way of being, talking, and thinking to adapt to their new cultural context” (Mittal & Wieling, 2006, p.378).

Additionally, Ng (2006) studied the counselor educators' perspectives of international counselor trainees' training experiences in the U.S. According to the study, counselor educators noted that international students experienced difficulties in the areas of language, clinical training, adjustment, and cultural differences. Jang, Woo, and Henfield (2014) highlighted the unique challenges that international doctoral trainees confronted in supervision training, in comparison to their U.S.-born counterparts. Specifically, international trainees had concerns regarding language barriers, cultural differences, and/or a lack of understanding about the U.S. counseling system to provide effective supervision. These two studies reveal the challenges of international students, as well as point to the necessity to conduct further research about international students' specific training and supervisory needs.

Clinical courses, namely, practica and/or internships, are key components of counselor preparation training as a comprehensive learning process in integrating trainees' knowledge, theory, and skills. As such, there is a need to investigate the experience of international students

enrolled in the field of counselor education with a focus on how clinical courses best train them in a culturally appropriately way. The purpose of this study is to qualitatively explore the distinctive challenges international counseling students faced before and during their practicum and/or internship experiences, in addition to the strategies used to overcome them. This qualitative study interviewed ten international students enrolled in counselor preparation programs, both on the master's and doctoral levels, who have experienced at least one practicum and/or internship at a CACREP-accredited program in the U.S. To explore international counselor trainees' challenges and needs related to their practica and/or internships, the following research questions were established:

- 1) What, if any, are the major fears and expectations of international students regarding their practica and/or internships?
- 2) What, if any, are the most challenging and frustrating obstacles international students face in their practicum and/or internship period? And how did they overcome those?
- 3) To what, if any, extent does the practicum and/or internship experience influence international students' counseling self-efficacy?
- 4) If additional support and training were available, what, if any, would international students like to have?

## **Methodology**

### **Consensus qualitative research (CQR)**

The authors elected to use qualitative methods to gain a more in-depth understanding of the practicum and/or internship experiences of international students in CACREP-accredited programs. Qualitative methodology is a better fit given the exploratory nature of this study (Creswell, 1998). Specifically, researchers used the consensual qualitative research (CQR)

method, which is widely used to analyze nonquantifiable data (Hill et al., 1997; Kim, Brenner, Liang, & Asay, 2003; Ladany et al., 1997; Yeh et al., 2003).

CQR is relevant for our research goals because it is “especially useful in the early stages of research on previously unexplored topics” (Hill et al., 1997, p. 518). The systematic approach of the CQR method in analyzing data addresses some of the concerns raised about many qualitative methods (Hill et al., 1997). This study included the distinctive and unique components of CQR. First of all, the authors used open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview (Hill et al.). Following Hill et al.’s (2005) suggestion that researchers recruit approximately 8 to 15 participants, this study recruited 10 international students who experienced at least one practicum and/or internship in the U.S. The second component is the rigorous protocol of consensual agreement of the data gained from the participants. In order to overcome possible subjectivity, prejudice, and bias in interpreting the narrative data, the CQR method recommends the use of several judges from the research team to gain multiple perspectives. This means that CQR uses multiple researchers to arrive at consensus at each step of the process. In this study, the research team comprised of three members, two primary researchers and one auditor, for a more accurate interpretation through a process of checks and balances to negate any potential biases of any one team member during the data analysis (Hill et al., 1997, 2005). The third component is the identification and categorization of domains and core ideas. Domains are defined as a conceptual framework to manage the data collected, whereas core ideas summarize the domains which capture the essence (Hill et al., 1997). The domains and core ideas in this study were generated from the narrative data from the participants. Then the authors conducted cross-analysis of the data to understand the whole picture of the data through generating the consistencies across the domains and core ideas. The

fourth component of the CQR process is the use of an outside auditor to check the results derived from the primary research team and to offer constructive feedback in order to minimize potential biases and prejudices. The external auditor of this study, a faculty member in a large Midwestern university, performed as an adviser of this research project, going over the domains and core ideas that were generated by the team and provided feedback to the team regarding the data analysis. The authors discussed the outside auditor's feedback and finalized the data analysis.

### **Researcher Team**

The research team consisted of three researchers who were at the same CACREP-accredited program in a large Midwestern university in the U.S. Both of the first and second authors had master's level training in counseling programs from different schools in South Korea, and are graduating or graduated from the same program in the U.S., which requires an advanced practicum and internship training, as well as a supervision practicum. Also, the first two authors are actively involved in international students' communities. The third author, a Caucasian American associate professor in the same program, has expertise in qualitative research and in training international students in counseling. Each member of the research team had opportunities to conduct multiple qualitative studies. Interviews and data analyses were conducted by the first and second authors, while the faculty researcher played as the auditor to supervise and review the research process.

### **Participants**

In contrast to quantitative research, sampling in qualitative research is purposeful rather than random in nature (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). Since this study has a clearly defined population that is a group of international students who are trained in CACREP-accredited programs in the U.S., the screening procedures included identification of contact persons'

relevant demographic information. To qualify as potential participants, they were asked whether they completed their practicum or internship experience(s) in the U.S. for at least one semester.

Prior to participant recruitment, the researcher obtained approval from the University of Iowa Institutional Review Board (IRB ID #: 201307756). To access potential subjects, the researchers distributed the research invitation describing the study through the listservs, including COUNSGRADS and CESNET. In addition, the researchers sent colleagues an e-mail, a research invitation describing the study to recruit alumni who have graduated from the counselor education and supervision program in a Midwestern university in the past five years and who are practicing counselor educators. Also, the researchers engaged in a snowball method of gaining potential participants by requesting current participants to forward the solicitation e-mail to their colleagues. This e-mail introduced the research team, explained the study, and invited them to participate. Ten international students in the U.S. expressed their interest and voluntarily participated in this study to share thoughts regarding their practicum and/or internship experiences. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants in this study.

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

| Pseudonym | Gender | Major               | School year <sup>a</sup> | Years of residence <sup>b</sup> | Nationality |
|-----------|--------|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Sunmi     | F      | Counselor Education | Doctoral 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 3 years                         | S. Korea    |
| Mina      | F      | Counselor Education | Doctoral 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 3 years                         | S. Korea    |
| Yujin     | F      | Counselor Education | Doctoral 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 3 years                         | S. Korea    |
| Liu       | F      | Rehab Counseling    | Master 2 <sup>nd</sup>   | 4 years                         | Malaysia    |
| Juyeon    | F      | Rehab Counseling    | Doctoral 1 <sup>st</sup> | 3 years                         | S. Korea    |
| Jihoon    | M      | Counselor Education | Doctoral 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 2 years                         | S. Korea    |
| Sieun     | F      | Counselor Education | Doctoral 4 <sup>th</sup> | 7 years                         | S. Korea    |
| Megan     | F      | Counselor Education | Doctoral 6 <sup>th</sup> | 5 years                         | Ethiopia    |
| Jane      | F      | Counselor Education | Doctoral 1 <sup>st</sup> | 1 year                          | Ghana       |
| Fred      | M      | Counselor Education | Doctoral 1 <sup>st</sup> | 1 year                          | Turkey      |

<sup>a</sup> School years in their training programs in the U.S. at the time this study was conducted.

<sup>b</sup> Total lengths of time living in the U.S. at the time this study was conducted.



## **Semi-Structured Interview Protocol**

To capture the experiences and perceptions of participants in this study, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted, and all interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed. Creswell (2002) explained that “attitudes, beliefs, and opinions are ways that individuals think about issues, whereas practices are their actual behaviors” (p. 398). Participants’ attitudes and practices in this study were identified through the use of an open-ended interview protocol. An open-ended interview designed around the primary research question was used.

Interviews revolved around the guiding research question of how do international students in counselor training programs experience the practicum/internship process. Interview questions requested information: a) length of stay in the U.S., ethnicity, and past/current training program; b) their experiences of practicum/internship experiences including frequency, required hours, starting semester for practicum/internship, and experience of practicum/internship in their own country; and c) experiences of practicum/internship training in the U.S., divided into three stages: pre-, during, and post-practicum/internship. Secondary follow-up questions probed for further information about the participants’ attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and experiences regarding their practica/internships. The secondary questions, listed on the sample questions documents, elicited rich and detailed information.

## **Procedure**

The researchers communicated with the participants via phone, Skype and e-mail correspondence for preparation of participating in the study, conducting interviews, and the cross-checking process of the interview reports. The informed consent document was utilized,

which clearly explained the purpose and details of the study. Further, the informed consent guaranteed participants that their identities would be kept confidential by using pseudonyms.

After participants agreed to participate in this study, they received the consent letter describing the study and interview questions. After participants reviewed the consent letter and interview questions, an initial interview was scheduled between participants and one of the research team members, considering no interference with participants' daily routines. Before the interview began, participants were able to choose whether or not they wanted their interview to be recorded for the purpose of transcription. With their permission, interviews were then recorded and all audio/video tapes were transcribed as raw data for data analysis. During the transcription process, all identifiable information about participants was removed, and transcriptions were also destroyed after the triangulation process.

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format in either English or Korean, lasting between 60 and 80 minutes. The interviews conducted in Korean were translated into English by the interviewer, and reviewed by the research team to ensure the adequacy and accuracy of the translations of participants' stories. Interviewees were invited to member-check for both Korean and English transcripts after the research team reached consensus on the translation. Interviews conducted in English were also reviewed and confirmed by the interviewees through the member-checking.

Participants were asked about their practicum/internship experiences in their preparation programs, challenges, perceived counseling efficacy, possible suggestions, and other issues related to the study's purpose. Subjects were also free to skip any questions that they did not want to answer, and to ask for additional information at any time during the interview. If the researchers needed more information, subjects were contacted for a second interview by the

interviewer. After the investigators finished the data analysis phase, subjects were contacted to review and confirm their interview reports, in addition to the confidentiality and authenticity of their information. During this step, subjects were also invited to provide any active feedback to investigators.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Coding and Thematic Interpretation**

Using the Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) method (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997), data were subjected to a series of analyses by a primary research team of two coders and one external auditor. The coders were doctoral level graduate students and external auditor was an associate professor. The primary team first identified all content relevant to the research question in the transcripts and reached consensus regarding the text to be analyzed. Next, the primary team coded transcripts to determine and reach consensus on the domains, or general topic areas, represented in the text. During a consensus meeting, the two main coders and the third consulting coder verified the results of this first level of coding. The coded material was then given to the external auditor who reviewed the coding and provided feedback to the primary team. Based on the feedback, the research team revised the coding. The next level of coding was conducted to determine subcategories that captured the core ideas within each domain and were consistent across the data set of transcripts.

### **Trustworthiness**

Creswell (1998) listed eight specific verification procedures used in qualitative research: prolonged engagement/observation; triangulation; peer review/debriefing; negative case analysis; clarifying research bias; member checks; rich/thick descriptions; and external audits. He recommended that “qualitative researchers engage in at least two of them in any given study” (p.

203). The verification and validation procedures used in this study were member checks, bracketing (a way to clarifying research bias), and peer review. In addition, rich and thick descriptions of participants' experiences in this study also can be considered as the verification of the data.

Creswell (1998) argued that member checking is the most significant verification procedure to ensure the credibility of the data used in a study of this nature. Member checks involve "taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (p. 203). In order to verify and validate the data once the various interviews were recorded, transcribed, analyzed, and coded, participants were asked to review and verify the accuracy of the transcripts and the emerging themes through e-mail communication. These 'verified' transcripts by interviewees were the data source analyzed in this study.

Prior to initiating any interviews, the researchers' own experiences were bracketed to identify any experiences, beliefs, and/or ideas about international students in counseling programs and their practica/internships. This was accomplished through a discussion about each researcher's own biases, attitudes, and beliefs relative to the research questions. In addition, a peer audit was performed by the external auditor. Then participant interviews were reviewed by the other members to ensure that each interviewer did not influence the interview process, so as to more thoroughly address the issue of bias. In combination with triangulation, member checks, bracketing, and peer auditing ensured that verification and validity were kept in mind, while reviewing and analyzing the data.

## Results

The domain and subcategory structure of the data is displayed in Table 2. Three domains emerged that depicted international students' experiences regarding their practica/internships: 1) perceived fear, 2) specific challenges, and 3) perceived support from programs. Table 2 displays the number of occurrences and corresponding qualitative descriptors for each domain and its subcategories. In the 'perceived fear' domain, subcategories included language barrier, relationship with a supervisor and/or co-workers, cultural differences, and others' perceptions of 'me'. The most common challenges international students faced were language barrier, lack of understanding about the American counseling system, relationship with co-workers/clients/supervisors, unfriendly response to racial/ethnic diversity, time management, and finding appropriate interventions. International students' responses to support from their training programs were either satisfied or dissatisfied.

**Table 2. Domains and Subcategories of International Students' Experiences**

| Domains                  | Subcategories                                   | No. of Occurrences | Classification <sup>a</sup> |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| Perceived Fear           | Language barrier                                | 10                 | General                     |
|                          | Relationship with a supervisor and/or co-worker | 5                  | Typical                     |
|                          | Cultural differences                            | 5                  | Typical                     |
|                          | Others' perceptions of "me"                     | 3                  | Variation                   |
| Specific Challenges      | Language barrier                                | 5                  | Typical                     |
|                          | Relationship with clients                       | 5                  | Typical                     |
|                          | Unwelcoming environment                         | 3                  | Variation                   |
|                          | Finding appropriate interventions               | 3                  | Variation                   |
|                          | Relationship with a supervisor                  | 2                  | Variation                   |
|                          | Lack of understanding about site                | 2                  | Variation                   |
| Support from programs    | Satisfied                                       |                    |                             |
|                          | Emotional support                               | 4                  | Variation                   |
|                          | Culturally sensitive supervision                | 3                  | Variation                   |
|                          | Relevant information                            | 2                  | Variation                   |
|                          | Dissatisfied                                    |                    |                             |
|                          | Perfunctory supervision                         | 3                  | Variation                   |
| Insufficient information | 3                                               | Variation          |                             |

<sup>a</sup> General (9~10 cases); Typical (5-8 cases); Variation (2~4 cases)

CQR presents results in terms of general, typical, and variation outcomes. A general outcome means the theme is evident in responses from nine (90%) or ten (100%) of the ten participants. This type of outcome also suggests that the views were representative of international students in all cases. A typical outcome means the theme is evident in responses from at least five (50%) but no more than eight (80%) of the ten participants (see Table 2). Lastly, a variation outcome means that the theme is just applicable to two (20%) or three (30%) cases. The following section presents each theme.

### **Fears before Practicum/Internship**

All ten participants described their perceived fears about their practicum/internship experiences. Specifically, seven of the participants reported that they felt fear due to their level

of proficiency in English before the practicum/internship. For example, Juyeon articulated the following:

Above all, the first one was language. Because it was a practicum, definitely, I will do practice and I also need to do counseling at the same time. So, because of language barrier, the most fear was a language, thinking about “I can do this.”

Since counseling is basically conveyed using verbal language, the majority of participants reported having the concern that their limited language competency may have resulted in ineffective counseling practices. Mina stated that, “In the U.S., I cannot ignore the language issue, so that was the significant concern for me. More specifically, a concern about whether I can understand well or not.” Similarly, Jihoon mentioned that, “First one is language: can I fully understand clients? Can I touch the deep feelings of clients? My level of language was the biggest concern.”

Second, five participants described concerns related with building quality relationships with a site supervisor and co-workers. Juyeon described the fear in the following way:

I also thought the relationship with supervisors, how it will be. Because while I am studying after I came to America, most relationships of mine were with professors, and because it will be difference between the attitudes of professors toward international students and the real relationship with supervisors in practice, I was challenging the relationship how it will be.

Other participants reflected on their concerns of collaborating with co-workers at their sites. As Jihoon stated, “The concern was ‘can I collaborate with co-workers well?’ How they can see me? Perceive me? Do they believe me in that an international students counsel here?”

These concerns were closely related to a lack of understanding about international students from sites. As Juyeon mentioned,

Second fear was a thought about how much this site and the team I will work with can understand international students. For example, co-workers or supervisor at the site, how much can they understand international students? Because, from their stand point, they also have an expectation. From the site, they also have an expectation toward practicum students. Will their expectation to the international students be the same as the American students? Probably many cases will be the same. Thus, I was worried about this.

In addition, Megan explained the reason for this concern was also due to the lack of information about the working environments of their practicum/internship sites: “Not knowing how it worked with site supervisor. I was not sure about what to expect and what to not expect, I think. Well, you know being a school, absolutely White school.”

Third, five participants had concerns in terms of cultural differences. For example, Jihoon identified his cultural background as *collectivism* and he expected to face different cultural behaviors in the U.S. with *individualism*. In addition, Sunmi and Megan were concerned that their lack of cultural understanding may impact counseling relationships with clients. Sunmi described the concern as, “I was worried about cultural difference. Can I overcome any cultural differences that may arise? Different cultures may have different standards of healthy human beings, healthy and fully functioning people. It means that the U.S. might have different standards of well-functioning people in community.”



The last perceived fear was regarding others' perceptions of 'me', which was mentioned the least. In this subcategory, Sunmi, Mina, and Yujin expressed their anxieties about whether people would trust their professionalism as a competent counselor. Though the anxiety level might be the result of individual differences, it is worth considering that Mina and Yujin were from the same doctoral program that requires students to take part in a practicum during the first semester. Since Mina and Yujin needed to start their practicum right after they arrived in the U.S., they might have experienced greater anxiety about their competency due to their lack of experiences and understanding about American counseling systems.

### **Challenges and Obstacles While in Practicum/Internship**

Participants described two typical and four variant themes in terms of specific challenges and obstacles during their practicum/internship period. Within this domain, language barrier (50%) and building relationships with clients (50%) were typical challenges for participants in this study.

First, language barrier, one of the major challenges shared by five participants, significantly affected their counseling practices. Yujin described her experiences as "I could follow the counseling flow, but I missed specific information because of the language barrier. Even when I understood, it was hard for me to speak out something immediately." Mina also reported that "sometimes I realized that I got distracted by a certain English expressions. I couldn't focus on the counseling contents rather I was interested in planning what I should say next in advance." Even though the number of occurrences decreased when compared to the perceived fear domain, language competency was still a great challenge for international students.

Next, building relationships with clients was the other typical challenge participants faced during their practicum/internship period. Regarding this challenge, Megan and Sieun, who worked with minors, experienced low levels of motivation from their clients and their family members. Megan described the characteristics of her clients as “they did not allow me to make changes. Maybe they did not expect changes, because it was just one semester.” Juyeon also described challenges in building relationships with clients because she is an international student who is “not fluent in English.” Moreover, cultural differences became another challenge for participants when they interacted with their clients. As Megan recalled in a discussion on the concept of culture difference with her student clients,

One thing I did have the problem with was... personal experience like the prom, like who got the date, who did not. It was like... I tried my best to share with them to discuss, but they can tell that I don't know much about their culture. you know, the culture of working on weekends and getting money and going to this party or being more independent both in terms of their relationships with... you know, sexual relationship or friendship relationship. It was not something that I was used to from my own culture. I had to learn that culture of the students what's normal and not normal ... some of them played pretty violent games, which I cannot even look at those games. For my culture, I come from more reserved and communal culture, the things they were comfortable to talk about what they spent their evening or which home they went to, which party they went to... was not easy for me to connect with.

In addition, clients' requests to change counselors were discouraged because the counseling practicum students were international. As Sunmi described,

There was some kind of aversion to foreign counselor in school counselors, students, and parents. After I had the first session with my first individual counseling client, the parents called school counselors to change their child's counselor. The case referred to another intern, a Caucasian male. Though the site supervisor told me that they thought the case is not appropriate for interns. Since the student needs consistent help, supervisor explained me that the parents wanted one of the school counselors instead of a student counselor. But, I heard the real story from the male intern who was my close friend. Truth was, during a teachers' meeting, there was some conversation about me. "One of the interns is South Korean", "Can she speak even English?", and "What kind of work should we give her?"

In comparison to the first domain, this domain includes various responses based on the participants' region, characteristics of practicum/internship sites, and the environment of their training programs.

### **Support from Programs**

Participants' responses regarding receiving support from their programs were categorized according to satisfaction level. Based on the participants' responses, the authors delineated support such as resources and/or assistance provided from participants' training programs. All participants perceived supports from programs were effective in some way, yet most of them also felt discontent about the support. Satisfactory supports included 'emotional supports' from their peers, supervisors, and programs. Specifically, Mina described her positive experience with

a supervisor who understood her situation and provided relevant information along with emotional support.

During supervision, I think my supervisor understood the challenges or situations of international students usually have gone through, so it was quite helpful. ...for example, the most challenging case when I had in the career center was the veteran, someone who recently discharged from military service, case. I saw the client for one semester, but I had no idea about the military culture or veteran support system in the U.S. In the supervision, the supervisor encouraged me that it is totally natural that I don't know the military system well. She helped me to understand the situation clearly. ... when there is any dubious thing arises in the counseling session, I could ask about it in the supervision.

In contrast, some participants who experienced the supervisory process reported perceptions that their supervisors lacked multicultural sensitivity. For example, Sunmi reported that the support from her program was ineffective due to a lack of cultural sensitivity in one of her university supervisors: "But I felt she didn't know me well. As an international student and overall understandings like the experiences I've gone through, experiences as a foreign counselor." Megan also stated that,

It [the quality of supervisions] depends on the supervisors who were committed to their responsibilities as it was outlined. Those who were not as committed as I focused on their supervision responsibilities, it wasn't enough in terms of depth or content. It was really not enough. It depends on

the commitment of the supervisor. Either the site or the faculty supervisors' commitment level matters.

The mixed responses of participants about support from their programs show that the cultural competency of supervisors and faculty members may determine the quality and relevance of support available for international students.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore international students' practica and internship experiences in terms of fear, actual challenges, and supports from their training programs. The findings of this study provide detailed insight on how international students went through the process of their practica/internships and how these training experiences affected their counseling efficacies and competencies.

The researchers discovered that various fears and challenges that international students face in the practicum and/or internship training primarily came from their language barrier and their lack of understanding of the U.S. counseling system. Additionally, through interviews with ten international students, the researchers also found that the level of counseling self-efficacy these students experienced varied throughout their practicum/internship experiences. Counselor self-efficacy (CSE) refers to counselors' beliefs about their ability to perform therapy-related behaviors or to negotiate certain clinical situations (Larson & Daniels, 1998), which is an extension of Bandura's self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1994). Upon their arrival in the U.S., participants of this study experienced a significant decrease in their counseling self-efficacy; however, most of their counseling efficacy recovered after having positive counseling experiences during their training. Thus, to increase international students' counseling self-efficacy in their practicum/internship, as well as to ensure improved training, it is necessary for

counselor preparation programs to address the anticipated fears and challenges of the preparation period (i.e., orientation or prerequisite training) of the practicum/internship.

In this study, international counseling trainees, who had their master's level training in their home country, described their practicum/internship experiences in the U.S. as a change from an expectable environment to a new and unpredictable one. Although there is scarce research on the acculturation process of international students in counselor training programs, researchers suggest that international trainees experience their cultural transition to the U.S. as changing their sense of self and interactions in their environment (Mittal & Wieling, 2006; Ng & Smith, 2009). By reflecting on their challenges during practicum/internship, participants indicated that their counseling practices were affected by the cultural change regarding perceptions about themselves and their counseling abilities.

In addition, a majority of participants reported that their fears and concerns became trivial, and that their counseling efficacy recovered as their practicum/internship continued. This result is in accordance with previous research findings. According to previous studies, practicum training was found to contribute to an increase in counselor self-efficacy (e.g. Larson et al., 1992; Melehert, Hays, Wilijnen, & Kolocek, 1996) for both beginning and advanced counselor trainees. Also, regardless of the level of experiences, counselor trainees exhibit feelings of fears and anxiety at the beginning of training (Thompson, 1986). Stoltenberg, McNeill, and Delworth (1997) explained that entry-level trainees experience high levels of performance anxiety due to a lack of counseling skills, lack of self-efficacy in their ability regarding counseling performance, and the concern about receiving negative evaluations by clients and/or supervisors. However, as participants gained experience through training, their anxiety level decreased and their perceptions of competence in certain counseling skills increased. Although international

students' practicum/internship experiences have unique characteristics, they may travel similar developmental paths as general counselor trainees. Therefore, if international students anticipate that they will follow the natural process of counseling trainees' development, their level of readiness and confidence in counseling practicum/internship will increase, which in turn will affect their training effectiveness. This point should be highlighted in the preparation process of international counseling students' practicum/internship training.

### **Implications & Limitations**

A major implication of this is a better understanding of the professional development of this population, as well as the real experiences of international trainees regarding practica/internships, which may contribute to increasing counselor educators' multicultural awareness and understanding. From the findings and discussion of this study, international students did have fears and face challenges mainly due to the level of their language proficiency and understanding the American culture including the counseling systems. However, thanks to the support from programs and sites participants positively perceived, their developmental paths, called counseling self-efficacy, appear on the right track.

To increase the readiness of international students, counselor training programs need to provide systematic support for this population. Participants responded that effective supports from their program were aligned with multicultural understanding and sensitivity about international students. In addition, providing practical information, such as information about practicum/internship sites, the American counseling system, insurance or welfare systems, and cultures was another key factor to help international students increase their practicum/internship readiness.

Furthermore, this study may contribute to an issue of advocacy for international students and provide some suggestions for counselor educators, counselor training programs, and site supervisors, in that, what aspects they need to pay more attention to and in what ways they can help international students experience better practicum/internship training. In the preparation period for international students' practica/internships, such as orientation sessions or prerequisite training, they need more information regarding their practice sites, American counseling systems, American cultures, and ways of building relationships with non-academic people to decrease their fears. Encouraging international students to advocate themselves can be another important implication of this study. Proactively asking questions, as well as seeking information and support they need are suggested for international students. International students should also have their feelings of fears about expected challenges and decreased counseling self-efficacy in the beginning of the practicum/internship experiences be normalized. In addition, during the practicum/internship period, significant supports from supervisor and peers, both emotional and practical support in counseling, may help international students adjust more easily to the site and environment, thereby effectively function as trained counselors, which in turn, would result in recovering their counseling competency and developing as professional counselors. Taken all together, as the enrollment rate of international students in CACREP accredited programs increases, counselor educators and faculty members can help to ensure positive training outcomes by understanding the experiences of international students in their practicum/internship process.

Although the researchers gathered in-depth information from ten international students during the interviews, our sample represented limited nationalities, mostly from South Korea. Another limitation is that the researchers only explored students' perspectives; therefore, it is



unknown whether faculty members, site/university supervisors, co-workers, or clients would have reported similar experiences. Lastly, there may be researchers' biases as the first and second authors were also international students. Moreover, as international doctoral students working in the same field, the researchers were able to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural issues in the analysis. This insider status was a potential source of subjective bias (Sato & Hodge, 2009). However, the researchers countered this through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing to establish trustworthiness and rigor (Maxwell, 1992).

Future studies are needed to represent more diverse populations in terms of gender, region, and ethnicity/nationality. Furthermore, the researchers studied a retrospective recall, so there is no way of knowing how accurately the participants remembered their practicum/internship experiences. Although Rhodes et al. (1994) explained that gathering information over time is more fruitful, the researchers also acknowledge that conducting interviews during the practicum/internship process could provide more descriptive and specific details. Lastly, language barriers were the most commonly reported fear and challenges of participants in the beginning of their practicum and internship. The authors can assume that the fear associated with their limited language proficiency was decreased as participants gained more counseling experiences in the U.S. based on the results. However, it would be beneficial if there are empirical studies that focus on the effect of language or verbal communications in counseling from the clients' perspectives toward counselors who are limited in English.

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# Using Art-Based Multicultural Interventions to Reduce Counselor Trainees' Ethnocentrism

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This qualitative research explored the use of the Cultural De-Centering Activity-Visual (CDCA-V) as a means of challenging culture-centrism in a graduate-level multicultural counseling course. Results indicated that the CDCA-V provoked students to question their received norms about religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and/or social class.

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*Keywords: multicultural education, arts-based learning, instructional strategies*

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*Creating the collage really put it in front of me the person I have become and how that differs from my upbringing. (A participant)*

A major purpose of multicultural counselor education is to help students know their cultural assumptions, thereby reducing the risk of imposing them on future clients. In particular, the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development's Multicultural Counseling Competencies (Sue, Arrendondo, & McDavis, 1992) assert that, "Culturally skilled counselors are aware of how their own cultural background and experiences have influenced attitudes, values, and biases about psychological processes" (Arredondo et al., 1996, Item I.A.2). It is a task of counselor preparation to develop trainees' sensitivity to their own beliefs and attitudes about culture by becoming cognizant of how their current perceptions have been influenced by cultural background. Such a challenge requires a sound research-based pedagogy that triggers cultural decentering (Heppner & O'Brien, 1994; Smith, Constantine, Dunn, Dinehart, & Montoya, 2006). This requires learning experiences that are active and engaging (Dewey, 1938).

Toward that end, counselor educators must design innovative teaching strategies for transforming student cultural self-awareness.

### **Multicultural Counselor Education and Cultural De-centering**

Multicultural counselor education can be an epistemology-expanding experience in that it can move individuals from an objective reliance on cultural givens as universal truths to a recognition of cultural relativism. Thus, cultural givens move from absolutes to stories told by a community about how to live well. Greater cognitive complexity is required to live in a multicultural world, as individuals must confront variations on religion, sexual orientation, gender, race and ethnicity, to name some examples. High cognitive complexity can be defined as the ability to take multiple perspectives on issues and to be aware of the assumptions from which one is operating. Low cognitive complexity, by contrast, is the tendency to take a single perspective on an issue, relying on one set of assumptions for answers. Greater cognitive complexity allows a person to question the assumptions from which she or he operates and to consider alternate possibilities. It increases choice, mitigating the tendency to rely on automatic, often culturally-derived answers to questions of what is right or good. Cognitive developmental theory plots the movement from lower to greater cognitive complexity (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Kegan, 1998; Perry, 1998). In order to increase their complexity, individuals need to experience conflict, or dilemmas, about their ways of deciding what is good and right.

One expression of low complexity is the notion of ethnocentrism. It is one of the foci of multicultural counselor education. Ethnocentrism consists of a person's experiencing her or his culture as the only reality. It is characterized by an unquestioned acceptance of one's cultural norms as true and universal. In this article the term ethnocentrism will be used interchangeably

with the broader notion of culture-centrism, which incorporates gender, religion, sexual orientation, social class, disability, and ethnicity (McAuliffe, 2013). It follows that a pedagogy that has a strong impact on such a solipsistic stance and its attendant ethnocentrism would be desirable. Such pedagogy would challenge a person's cultural embeddedness in a single worldview (Kegan, 1998). It would offer a whole new way of knowing, one that considers alternate perspectives rather than strict adherence to inherited norms. To achieve this end, the teaching approach would emphasize a major experiential component as experience, accompanied by opportunity for reflection and deep processing, as an integral part of the learning process (Kolb, 1984).

Experience-based education is particularly rooted in the thinking of John Dewey (Dewey, 1938). Dewey called for educators to engage students with active, experiential methods. Those methods can be called "constructivist" (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011) in that they put the learner at the center of the action. The student is seen as a person who constructs meanings rather than receiving them without question from an authority (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004). Experiential interventions that advance multicultural education should invite students to challenge their own ethnocentrism, recognize the impact of cultural upbringing, and identify the experiences that have affected their current perceptions. Such multicultural counseling interventions have not received sufficient attention in the counselor preparation literature. The focus has instead been on multicultural counseling itself (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002). It was the purpose of this research to extend knowledge of counselor preparation practices in the area of cultural alertness.

## **The Cultural De-Centering Model**

One example of a theory-based experiential teaching method for reducing culture-centrism is the Cultural De-Centering Activity (CDCA) (see Appendix) developed by McAuliffe & Milliken (2009). It is based on the developmental theory of Robert Kegan (1998). Kegan's developmental theory emphasizes the importance of presenting learners with contradictions to their received ways of knowing. The CDCA asks individuals to "de-center" from their cultural assumptions and to instead authorize chosen beliefs separate from the received cultural context. Research on the CDCA (McAuliffe, Grothaus, Michel, & Jensen, 2012) revealed that conventional and post-conventional thinkers could be distinguished from each other by their level of cultural de-centeredness in the responses on the CDCA.

The CDCA begins by asking the individual to name a received belief, from family, religion, or community. Then the individual is asked to name an opposite view, which represents Kegan's (1998) "culture of contradiction." The third question asks, "What is the basis for the original belief?" The individual is then asked to name her or his current belief, followed by the epistemological question regarding how she or he came to this belief. Such responses might indicate a received/conventional source of knowing or a relatively self-authorized (Kegan, 1998) one. The final question asks the students to set learning goals that might help them move in the direction of becoming more self-authorized, de-centered thinkers (i.e., less likely to see the world through their culture's lens).

## **Artmaking and Cultural Decentering**

Although the verbal dimension of the CDCA activity stimulates personal inquiry into cultural self-awareness, the authors of the current research proposed that visual methods could provide a value-added dimension to the CDCA. For that purpose, the Cultural De-Centering

Activity-Visual (CDCA-V) was created. Artmaking is an experiential learning activity that engages cognitive, emotional, and sensorial modes to transform ideas into symbolic and metaphoric language, resulting in a tangible product. As applied to multicultural counselor preparation, incorporating purposeful art-based learning strategies has been found to increase learners' appreciation of difference and capacity for compassion (Heck, 2001). Art-based challenges to ethnocentrism can ask counselor trainees to question the reality and origin of accepted cultural norms in a way that may be more engaging and accessible, especially for the visual and kinesthetic learner. Visual learners learn best by seeing graphics or watching a demonstration, rather than listening. Kinesthetic learners handle information through actually doing an activity rather than reading about it or hearing it (Dunn, Griggs, Olson, Beasley, & Gorman, 1995).

Ethical and effective inclusion of art-based experiential learning in counselor education may be guided by research regarding the artmaking experiences routinely included in the multicultural education of graduate art therapy students. One foray into using artmaking to increase multicultural competence was described through personal experience by Coseo (1997). She wrote:

Artmaking provided a way to uncover stereotypes I was not consciously aware of, and proved to be a valuable tool in exploring and revealing [my] deeply held and denied feelings about African Americans. By removing barriers of denial, the art allowed me to gain a difficult and frank view of prejudices and stereotypes held.

(p. 156)

By reflecting on her imagery, Coseo (1997) recognized how her cultural beliefs were inherited from family and reinforced by community and society. This vivid recognition is the basis for



using artmaking to reduce ethnocentrism. Doby-Copeland (2006) focused on cultural self-awareness by having art therapy trainees visually represent their responses to initial encounters with diverse others, especially identifying their stereotypes. To do this, she described a process of creating countertransference drawings and personal cultural symbols as a way to illuminate deeply-held implicit beliefs.

Another educational artmaking strategy that increased multicultural competency involved having students produce a layered collage followed by a reflective discussion (Linesch & Carnay 2005). Specifically, trainees first used a piece of cardboard with collage images that represented their cultural and professional identity (“layer of identity”). Afterward, they layered the collage imagery with a “filter” of tracing paper. Students then were encouraged to visually respond to the underlying image by altering the tracing paper and naming themes that emerged, which the authors called the “layer or filter of culture.” On the second day, preceded by a film and discussion, students were asked to add a piece of construction paper to create a “layer of fear,” which encouraged students to explore their fears and resistances to cultural diversities. On the third day of the course, students were asked to develop a “layer of change.” This process aimed at uncovering and challenging culture-related biases, fears, and resistances.

#### **Development of the Cultural De-Centering Activity – Visual (CDCA-V)**

The original CDCA is depicted in the Appendix. Instead of using words, the layered collage technique developed by Linesch and Carney (2005) was used to provide a more direct, experiential process, one that might have more vivid impact on participants’ ethnocentrism due to its access to primary visual sensory processes in the brain (Sousa, 2011). The power of primary sensory experiences in learning is described by Jarvis (2012): “We experience the world through our senses... ; they are...us ‘touching’ the world directly” (p. 84). These experiences are

opportunities for meaning-making if they go beyond sensations through reflection. The visual arts-based component represented the primary experience and the subsequent reflection activity addressed the meaning-making that participants might do around culture-centeredness. This research was designed to explore the potential for a visual arts-based multicultural activity to trigger cultural de-centering in counselor trainees.

### **Research Design and Method**

A social constructionist research paradigm guided this grounded theory research study. Grounded theory provides a systematic method for generating theory from the perspective of the participants (Creswell, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and social constructionism emphasizes the narrative among people that creates knowledge (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researchers selected this method of inquiry for several reasons. A qualitative research design is useful when there is little information available (Creswell, 2009). Research about using art-based instruction in multicultural counselor preparation appears to be non-existent. Additionally, qualitative researchers attempt to understand the topic of interest through the meaning participants attribute to a process (Creswell, 2009). The researchers value the voices of participants in constructing knowledge about their experience of using art-based methods in multicultural education. Further, the research was conducted in the context of the participants' natural environment, the classroom, rather than a contrived setting, another benefit of this research method.

Because qualitative researchers inherently bring personal qualities that influence how data is collected and analyzed, researchers are obligated to be reflexive throughout their inquiry to offer valid results (Charmaz, 2009). Due to the nature of this research and the potential impact of cultural factors on student participant responses, deep descriptions of the cultural backgrounds of the authors are offered. One researcher was a white, middle-aged, heterosexual male originally

from the Northeastern United States and from an Irish Catholic background. He is the author of a textbook on culture and counseling and the creator of the CDCA. He is a counselor educator at a public university that is located in the Southeastern United States. Another researcher was a white, middle-aged, heterosexual, cis-gender female from a rural mountain Southern Baptist community in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. She is an art therapy and counseling educator in a graduate program in the Southeastern United States. The third researcher was a white, heterosexual, cis-gender female raised in a large city in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States and from an English/Scottish Protestant background. She has been an art therapy educator and researcher and is currently a faculty member in a university in the Southeastern United States. To promote researcher sensitivity and trustworthiness, the researchers in this study discussed assumptions and biases throughout data collection and analysis, triangulated data sources and investigators, included thick description of participant responses, established an audit trail, and employed an external auditor.

### **Data Collection**

Prior to data collection, this study protocol was reviewed and declared exempt by two Institutional Review Boards. Researchers adhered to the American Counseling Association's (ACA) Ethical Codes (2014) and the American Art Therapy (AATA) Ethical Principles (2013) for research. Criterion sampling was used to choose the students enrolled in a master's level social and cultural issues in counseling course who completed the CDCA. Twenty graduate students enrolled in a mid-Atlantic university who attended the three-hour multicultural class on the day the CDCA-V instruction was delivered participated in this research. Students were informed and permitted to opt out of participating in this research study. Demographic data was

not collected on students who agreed to participate. Students did not receive a grade on this assignment.

Prior to attending a multicultural issues counseling course, students completed the written version of the CDCA assignment (McAuliffe & Milliken, 2009). Then, for the first part of the CDCA-V procedure, participants were provided cardstock, tracing paper, tape, glue, pencil, markers, colored pencil, and magazines. The art materials were selected to provide participants with a high degree of structure. Contemporary popular magazines provided included images of males and females and people of varying age, physical abilities, and race, as well as images that could be viewed as portraying heterosexual and same-sex couples. Although the physical properties of magazine images set some limits on participants' ability to be expressive, setting boundaries with media is an important way to allow learners to safely contain emotional expression (Hinz, 2009).

Based on their prior written responses to each of the CDCA prompts, students completed the first part of the procedure. Students were told:

1. "Create a collage or drawing that depicts the strong, deeply held beliefs that you were taught about race or ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and gender. Use symbols and imagery to represent and expand your written responses." (This represented received knowledge.)
2. "On top of your collage, layer and secure a sheet of tracing paper. On the tracing paper, use drawing and collage materials to depict the alternate position to your inherited view. Use symbols and imagery to expand your written responses." (This represented a contradiction to the received view.)

3. “Secure a third layer of tracing paper to the top of your collage. Add words and images reflecting your current perspectives about race/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and gender.” (This represented either a student’s challenge to the received views or conformity to those views.)

During the second part of the procedure, participants formed small groups for discussion. During the small groups, participants were given the following directions to discuss:

1. “What stands out now after doing the activity and discussing it?”
2. “What experiences led to your layers of change, if you changed your views?”
3. “Consider the imagery that you have included. What beliefs and positions are most visible? Which are hidden?”
4. “How was doing the art activity different from the written exercise?”
5. “What did you learn about yourself through doing the art exercise?”

Following the small group discussion, every participant was asked to construct a written response to each of the questions above.

### **Data Analysis**

The research team, comprised of two university faculty members, analyzed the written responses. Data analysis followed the grounded theory procedures described by Corbin and Strauss (2008) and began with each team member individually completing open coding of all 20 written responses to the CDCA-V activity. The open coding process required each researcher to thoroughly read written responses and assign a conceptual label to abbreviate and represent the researcher’s interpretation of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Research team members reviewed each other’s open codes and met several times to determine axial codes; they then arrived at a consensus of selective codes. Memos were generated throughout analysis to

document the decision-making process. The auditor, a university faculty member and expert qualitative researcher, reviewed the audit trail and coding procedures for verification. The final codebook consisted of four themes.

## **Results**

Data analysis revealed four major themes. The first two themes, Benefits of Artmaking and Difficulties of Artmaking, relate to the process of artmaking. The last two themes, Questioning Received Norms and Influences on Relativism, relate to the process of cultural de-centering (see Table 1).

### **Benefits of Artmaking**

This first theme addressed the central question of the research regarding the added value of visual representation for triggering cultural decentering. *Benefits of Artmaking* was defined as participants' recognition of the emotional power of their visually representing beliefs. This theme illustrated the supremacy of primary brain processes in stimulating awareness and learning (Jarvis, 2012). Four subthemes accompanied the theme of Benefits of Artmaking, namely those related to visual imagery, sharing, personalization, and visual representation.

**Visual imagery as a stimulus for thinking.** Here participants identified the power of the senses, in this case visual imagery, for vividly evoking cultural values and beliefs. This phenomenon occurred through the experiences of both original drawing and selecting instructor-provided images. For example, one participant said, "The art activity helped [me] to think of what certain beliefs looked like in real life." Through creating visual illustrations, participants translated their abstract ideas about culture into viewable, concrete images.

Artmaking was also a memory trigger. Participants noted that scrutinizing magazine images in order to get ideas for representing their beliefs helped them to identify those beliefs, making

them more personally relevant. Several participants noted that artmaking engages the brain in an immediate and vital fashion. One participant wrote, it “adds a creative component, use(s) a different part of your brain. Certain images register different things you might not have thought about.” The power of visualizing cultural values was expressed by one participant thus, “Creating the collage really put it in front of me the person I have become and how that differs from my upbringing.”

**Enhancing openness through discussion and reflection.** The second subtheme to Benefits of Artmaking was learners’ attributions about the importance of reflection and discussion in making more complex meaning of their art-stimulated recognitions. In other words, once the image was created, participants recognized the impact of reflecting on the image through communicating their discoveries with others.

Participants indicated that sharing visual representation through discussion enhanced two experiences. First, it triggered reflection on the meanings and implications of the expressed values, as in, “I learned more about myself and my views though the discussion of the art/writing.” Second, it reduced learners’ feelings of isolation and “aleness” regarding their inherited and self-authored beliefs about culture. Sharing their artwork seemed to promote feelings of acceptance by group members, as in, “What stands out for me after discussing the collage is that I am not alone in some of the things I was taught.”

Table 1  
*Analysis of the Cultural De-Centering Activity Visual (CDCA-V)*

| Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Definitions                                                                                                                                   | Examples                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Benefits of Artmaking</p> <p>Subthemes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Imagery as a Stimulus for Thinking</li> <li>2. Enhancing Openness through Sharing the Tangible Images</li> <li>3. Experiencing Deeper Personalized Learning</li> <li>4. Making Visible Representations of Importantly-held Beliefs about Dimensions of Culture</li> </ol> | <p>A person's recognition of the emotional power of visually representing beliefs.</p>                                                        | <p>"The art activity helped to think of what certain beliefs looked like in real life."</p> <p>"Adds a creative component, uses a different part of your brain. Certain images register different things you might not have thought about."</p> <p>"What stands out for me after discussing the collage is that I am not alone in some of the things I was taught."</p> <p>"The art activity evoked more emotion and felt more powerful with the images."</p> <p>"The art activity was much deeper."</p> <p>"I realized I have completely covered what I was taught by my family. I don't feel I did it on purpose."</p> |
| <p>Difficulties of Artmaking</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <p>The individual variations in usefulness and/or threat of doing art, with some expression of discomfort.</p>                                | <p>"It was difficult to find/think of images and symbols to convey my thoughts."</p> <p>"I felt that my views were too complex to accurately portray through images."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <p>Questioning Received Norms</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <p>Consistently taking positions that are based on self-determined criteria rather than using an external authority's frame of reference.</p> | <p>"I am very ashamed of many of my inherited beliefs."</p> <p>"From an early age, I was taught questioning anything is bad; but I've done more of it than anyone I know."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <p>Influences on Relativism</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <p>Exposure to many voices that led to broadened perspective.</p>                                                                             | <p>"Education and personal experiences with those different than me and living in different places/countries."</p> <p>"Opening up to others, sharing experiences and friendships with people who are different from me."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |



**Experiencing deeper, personalized learning.** In this third subtheme under the Benefits of Artmaking, participants compared the impact of the visual component with the verbal version of the CDCA. Trainees stated, “The art activity allowed me to see more culture norms that I had been taught than I could remember during the written [version]” “The art activity evoked more emotion and felt more powerful with the images” and “The art activity was much deeper.” Another learner wrote, “. . . it was hard to translate the ideas in my head to paper, but I felt that it was much more personal, and can tell much more of a story than my written activity. I had to think very deeply about my beliefs, and where they stem from.”

**Discovery of hidden beliefs about dimensions of culture.** The fourth subtheme was defined as declaring one’s culturally-related beliefs. This open declaration of values echoes Simon, Howe, and Kirschenbaum’s (1972) classic third step in values clarification, namely prizing one’s values. Creating and reflecting on the art piece provoked participants to recognize the hiddenness of their beliefs about gender, religion/spirituality, race/ ethnicity, and marriage equality, in particular. One participant noted, “My opinions on racial things are much more hidden.” Another stated, “I realized I have completely covered [up] what I was taught by my family. I don’t feel I did it on purpose, but more because that’s not me as a whole anymore.” Another wrote, “What is hidden is what I was taught and what I no longer agree with.”

### **Difficulties of Artmaking**

The second theme, Difficulties of Artmaking, by contrast, was defined as the participants’ views on the challenge of doing art. Two of the difficulties of artmaking that participants described included (1) being able to visually express complex ideas with the available materials and (2) fearing judgment about their artwork. Some felt hampered by the visual medium. One wrote, “It was difficult to find/think of images and symbols to convey my

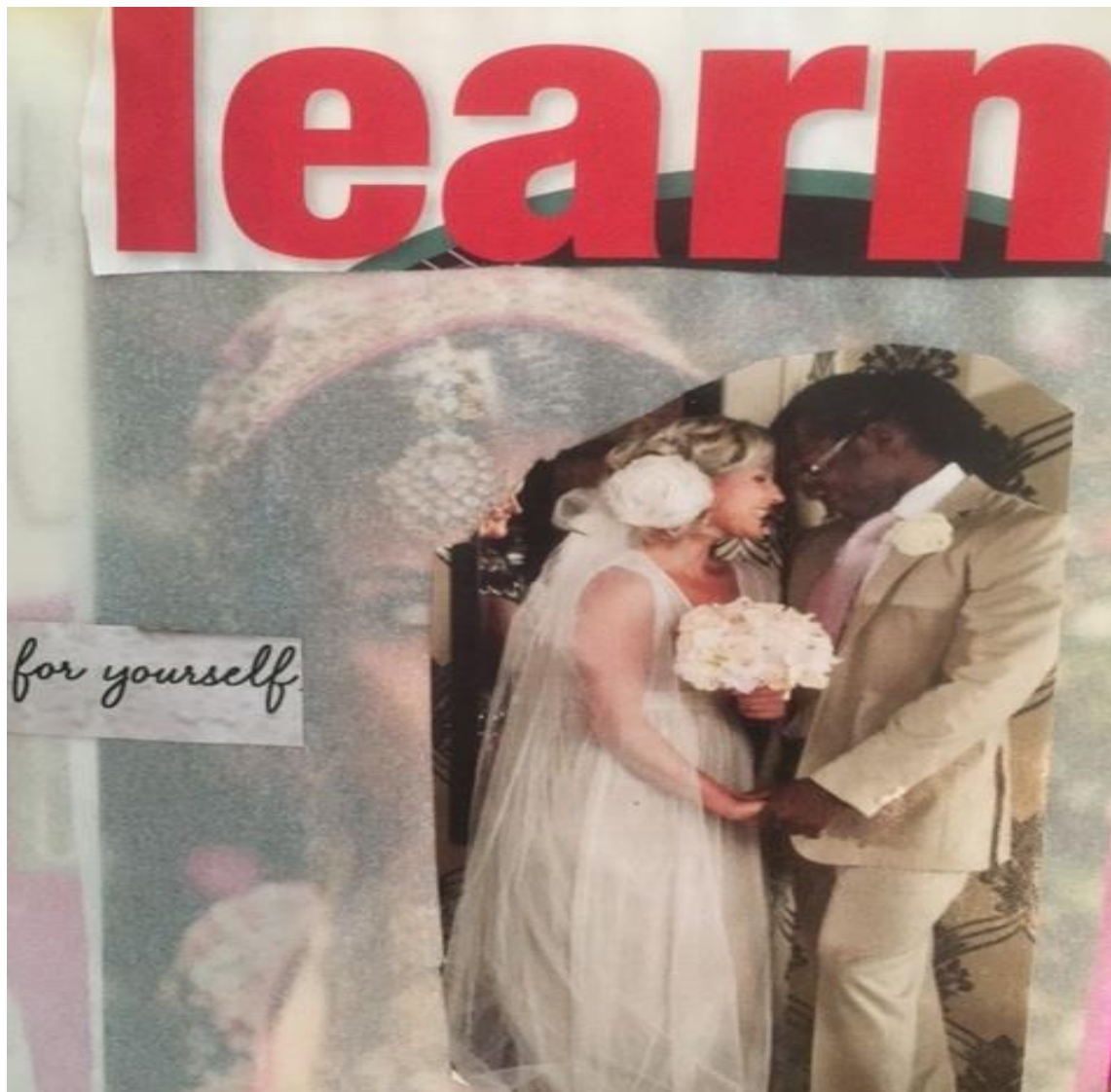
thoughts.” Another declared, “I preferred the written activity. I felt that my views were too complex to accurately portray through images. I had a hard time turning abstract ideas into concrete images.” Another found artwork too limiting for her or his taste: “This art activity was different from the written activity because I found it harder to do. I felt my beliefs were too complex to be put in pictures.” Some found the materials lacking, as in, “I felt limited by the lack of magazine choices” and “I think that the activity was good although very limiting since there was (sic) not enough magazines with a variety of things.”

The second difficulty in artmaking lay in the concern about being judged. Participants expressed concern that their artwork would be misconstrued if viewed without explanation. For example, one participant stated, “I feel my poster made sense when I explained it to my group. However, I feared if someone simply looked at my poster they wouldn’t understand all I was trying to say in it.”

### **Questioning Received Norms**

The third theme, *Questioning Received Norms*, was defined as consistently taking positions that are based on self-determined criteria rather than using an external authority’s frame of reference. Participants were consistently able to reflect on and then question the importance of their received cultural norms. Some examples of this questioning were, “I am very ashamed of many of my inherited beliefs” and “From an early age, I was taught questioning anything is bad; but I’ve done more of it than anyone I know.” Another participant wrote, “I learned that although I’m proud of who I am now, I’m very ashamed of things I was taught” and “. . . [In doing the first phase of the exercise] I had to blatantly express views that I may no longer agree with and feel shame over.” Other similar comments included, “After doing this activity what stands out to me is that what I was taught in school and church [while I was]

growing up was very close-minded.” The following comment indicated one participant’s conscious shift to a more self-authorized way of knowing: “I learned that I’ve separated myself and my beliefs a lot from how I was raised and become my own person slowly, but there is more to come.” There were 13 such comments wherein participants named and challenged inherited cultural beliefs. Thus most of them had already distinguished their own possible perspectives from the views they had received from family, religion, and community (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Collage representing *Questioning Received Norms*. This figure illustrates a participant’s current perspective about race/ethnicity and relationships/marriage.

## **Influences on Relativism**

The fourth theme, *Influences on Relativism*, was defined as participants' noting the positive impact of being exposed to alternate values and cultural perspectives, resulting in their having a more culturally de-centered outlook. Participants specifically identified the positive effects of education, meeting diverse others, some religious experiences, and open-minded family culture on increasing their cultural relativism. Here are samples of participant identification of such culturally de-centering influences: "Education and personal experiences with those different than me and living in different places/countries" and "Opening up to others, sharing experiences and friendships with people who are different from me and seeing the world through a different lens."

Religion and family were two such influences. In the area of religion, there were two divergent trends, religion of origin that increased cultural relativism and religion that reinforced received ethnocentric knowing. In the area of family effects, those participants who had an open-minded family culture were more likely to be culturally de-centered. One participant said, "I didn't realize how open minded I was raised. My parents raised me pretty much without bias, I was taught that race doesn't matter, that all religions are valid (I come from an agnostic/atheist family), that being gay is ok and that traditional gender roles would never hold me back . . ." and "I was trying to figure out where my parent's (sic) open-mindedness came from that they passed down to me. I'm not totally sure, but I was raised to be very accepting and open. It has really benefitted me." Again, there are implications for individualized training, which will be discussed later, based on the level of relativism that a student brings to multicultural counselor education.

Grounded in the themes extrapolated, a theory of the effect of an art-based experiential learning activity on counselor trainee multicultural education was constructed (see Figure 2).

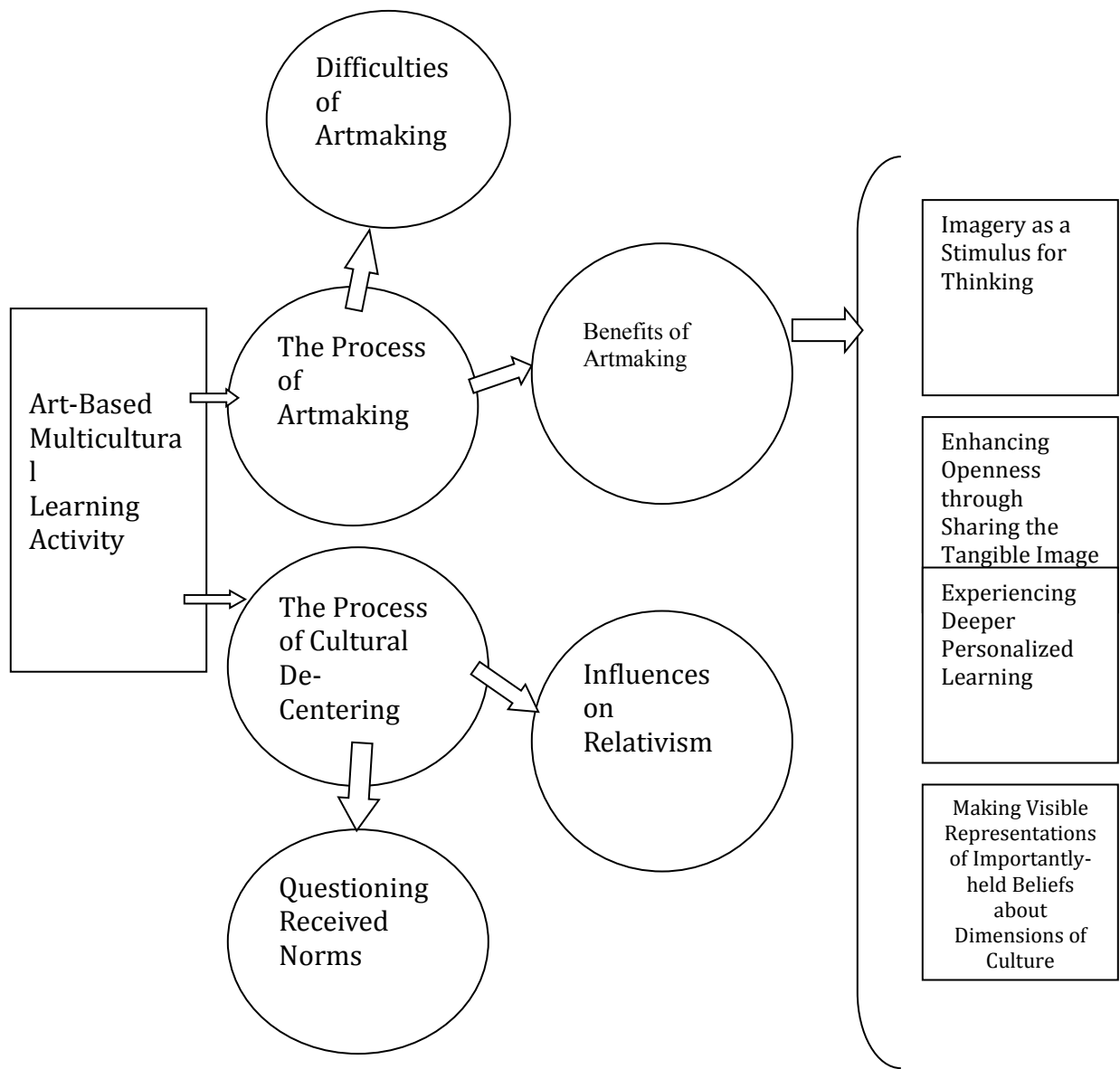


Figure 2. The effect of an art-based multicultural activity to reduce counselor trainee's ethnocentrism: A theory

## Discussion

Introducing art-based instruction in multicultural education evokes two overarching processes, the process of artmaking and the process of cultural de-centering. The first two themes, Benefits of Artmaking and Difficulties of Artmaking, are both related to the overall process of artmaking. The second two themes, Questioning Received Norms and Influences on Relativism, relate to the process of cultural de-centering.

### The Process of Artmaking

Both the value of artmaking and the struggle to make art were noteworthy.

**Benefits of artmaking.** Benefits of Artmaking theme is defined as a person's recognition of the emotional power of visually representing beliefs. Generally, counselor trainees responded to the use of collage, a highly structured approach that bypasses the usual apprehensions about artistic skill (Westwood, 2007), in a way that prompted a comfortable exploration of dimensions of culture. Artmaking, and collage specifically, provides a non-threatening way for trainees to uncover and explore unconscious bias around dimensions of culture and counselor trainee ethnocentrism (Doby-Copeland, 2011). Counselor trainees, by reflecting on the visual evidence in the collage, had the opportunity to identify previously hidden perceptions and biases and consider how these perspectives developed. Providing art-based multicultural interventions has the potential to confront and reduce counselor trainees' ethnocentrism.

The four subthemes illuminate specific dimensions of how the art-based activity was beneficial for the learner.

***Visual imagery as a stimulus for thinking.*** The first subtheme pointed out the power of participants visually representing culturally-related values to enhance memory and provoke

thought. Sorting and selecting images can stimulate memories (Johnson & Sullivan-Marx, 2006) and collage provides an opportunity for reminiscence (Stallings, 2010).

In that vein, the CDCA-V invited students to consider their cultural upbringing through generating their own pictures or selecting prefabricated images. Most learners incorporated both. Participants acknowledged that such imagery was a stimulus for their reflective thinking. Through the process of selecting and/or creating images representative of cultural beliefs, learners were challenged to consider how these images represented their culturally-related views, both received and self-authorized. Participants initially had an intuitive resonance with an image, perhaps not fully understanding their selection and only later attaching new meaning when there was an opportunity for reflective writing and group discussion. Culturally-related artmaking thus serves as a vivid stimulus for personal reflection, which subsequently can be used for further insight and opportunities for group discussion.

*Enhancing openness through sharing the tangible images created.* The second subtheme of the Benefits of Artmaking theme reflected the potential of the art product to enhance the effectiveness of discussion. Creating and sharing art in a group experience accelerates intimacy and group cohesiveness (Riley, 2001). In Riley's view, the tangible image not only becomes the stimulus for discussion, it also allows the creator of that image control how much he or she would like to verbally share with group members. This control factor is important, as open discussion of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and spirituality can be challenging for new counselor trainees. Having some control over what is shared is important to establishing a classroom culture of safety and trust.

*Experiencing deeper, personalized learning.* The third subtheme parallels Hughes' (2009) findings about including an arts-based learning activity in a leadership and management

course. As with this study, her students commented that, “these activities often get to deeper issues than any verbal response would” (Hughes, p. 84). This may be due to the “unique role of images in information processing . . . (and that) images appear to be more intimately linked to the individual experience than the verbal labels naming these experiences” (Lusebrink, 1990, p. 27). In Craik and Tulving’s (1975) classic formulation, deep processing requires engaging meanings rather than merely accumulating data. Deep processing, sometimes called deep learning, is characterized by connecting ideas to pre-existing meanings (“familiarity”) and personal contexts, making analogies to other knowledge, and moving from specifics to the patterns that they imply. Deep learning is associated with the ability to apply knowledge to real-world problems.

***Making visible representations of importantly-held beliefs about dimensions of culture.***

The fourth subtheme was defined as declaring one’s beliefs about dimensions of culture. The collage served as a tangible record for learner reflection on the transformation from inherited cultural beliefs to their current beliefs. Such reflection can provoke learners to question deeply held beliefs, that is, visual representation invites the learner to examine the beliefs that are now made visible (Larrivee, 2000). Students’ initial art pieces, created early in the multicultural course, could serve as formative, or beginning, evaluation of current cultural self-awareness and self-understanding. During the course, students will experience challenges to such initial views. At the conclusion of the course, students then have the opportunity to reflect on their earlier piece or to create a second piece for comparison. The comparison could illuminate changes in students’ perceptions about dimensions of culture and comfort level with discussing race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and the like.



**Difficulties of artmaking.** Artmaking was not universally successful nor was it appreciated by all participants. The fourth theme, Difficulties of Artmaking, emphasized the struggle required for artmaking. This theme was defined as individual variations in the usefulness and/or, conversely, the discomfort of making art. The power to deepen and personalize learning through artmaking that was appreciated by some participants made others uncomfortable. As mentioned earlier, experiential learning, including arts-based learning, has the power to challenge and confront the learner's current perceptions and awareness of self. On the other hand, it "involves a certain degree of psychological risk" (Fier & Ramsey, 2005, p. 33). The protocol for the activity, consisting of recognizing past inherited beliefs, creating a visible object reflective of those beliefs, and discussing them with a peer group, can be experienced as threatening.

Counselor educators are responsible for considering the ethical dimension of strategies they include. Some considerations should include the student learner's culture, comfort level, and learning style (Morrissette & Gadbois, 2006). Some participants struggled with visual thinking and expressing complex ideas, noting that they felt they could more adequately convey their thoughts through the CDCA written version. Deaver and McAuliffe (2009) found that some counseling interns who used reflective visual journaling found visual thinking problematic, noting, "It was very difficult for them to imagine their thoughts and feelings as images" (p. 625). Those researchers suggested that the novelty of creating imagery requires some "trust in the process." They proposed optimistically that with time and continued effort, visual thinking could improve (Deaver & McAuliffe, p. 630).

In addition to being daunted by making visual representation, other participants feared judgment about their art product. Some felt limited by the availability of provided materials.

Although attempts were made to capture a broad range of images of culturally diverse individuals in the magazines made available for collage, participants still felt limited by what was offered. Perhaps this is a reflection of the limited depictions of cultural minorities in print media or possibly the lack of researchers' diligence in providing an adequate quantity of images representing all of the dimensions of culture participants sought to include in their collage. For such an art-based experiential, it becomes the educator's responsibility to search for an abundance of images representative of diversity within all dimensions of culture with specific attention to cultural minorities.

### **The Process of Cultural De-Centering**

The data revealed effects of the activity on students' relationship to culture. The final two themes indicated that these counselor trainees were able to think for themselves regarding their values. Participants had moved toward cultural relativism (Bennett, 1993). Cultural relativism is defined as the understanding that behavior can only be understood within a cultural context. In this study, instead of thinking that what they had been taught was the only way to think, they could step outside of the learned cultural norms to consider alternate views.

**Questioning received norms.** The third theme, Questioning Received Norms, was defined as "consistently taking positions that are based on self-determined criteria rather than using an external authority's frame of reference." This finding suggests that these master's level counselor trainees recognized that they didn't have to follow cultural or family dictates to decide on their values. They were ready to reject, reconstruct, or affirm inherited cultural attitudes. Such ability parallels Bennett's (1993) notion of ethnorelativism. They were able to question inherited norms, separate and de-center from their inherited cultural assumptions, and intentionally shift to a perspective of their own creation (Kegan, 1998). That is a major epistemological achievement.

It contrasts to the opposite, ethnocentric, tendency to treat cultural values as the only way to think. With this capacity to decide on values for themselves, a counseling student would be less likely to impose cultural norms on clients or judge them by their own received view in such areas as religion, gender, and sexuality.

**Influences on relativism.** The fourth theme, Recognizing Influences on Relativism, referred to students' knowing what they had been taught through culture. There were two general variations on participants' upbringing. Some participants had been raised in ethnocentric and/or intolerant environments. Others experienced more open minded environments in their families and communities. The latter group reveals that many counseling students might already be open to alternate cultural perspectives, before the completion of a course in multicultural counseling. They were ready and open to messages about cultural diversity.

This group of students was less culture-bound, already appreciating social diversity. These already-relativistic students may need less education on the values of multiculturalism. They did not have to be convinced that diversity is a value. Instead, the course can focus on their learning the particulars of cultural groups, and encouraging these students to engage in social justice actions. Students who are already relativistic are more likely to begin to engage in tolerance and oppression-reducing actions (McAuliffe et al., 2011). Such movement has been characterized by D'Andrea and Daniels (1999) as a move from "passionless thoughtfulness" to "principled activism." Given the difference in cultural relativism among these counseling students, counselor educators might have to aim at two different goals. For the more ethnocentric students, basic teaching on the value of tolerance might be called for. At the other end of the continuum, the cultural relativists might be encouraged to engage in advocacy actions.

In practice, counselor educators can maximize group discussion and activities so that the more culturally de-centered students might model cultural relativism to those whose background is more culturally bound. Peer modeling for openness to multiculturalism in class through peer sharing is a powerful vehicle for student change toward relativism, even more potent than teacher-centered influences (Perry, 1998). Students thus teach other students by sharing their open-mindedness.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Including Arts-Based Learning in Multicultural Counselor Education**

In this study, the CDCA-V was an effective strategy for counselor trainees to visually examine their emerging thinking regarding their cultural beliefs, and to recognize what factors influenced those changes from inherited to self-authored. The research results imply that using the CDCA-V as an instructional strategy may deepen and personalize the learning, assist learners with visualizing what their beliefs look like, provide a safer way to discuss sensitive topics in a peer group, and produce a tangible representation of current beliefs on which to reflect later. Additionally, the visual version of the CDCA may be a more accessible tool for visual and kinesthetic learners. In general, the CDCA-V may be an engaging way to enhance multicultural counselor training.

Although the benefits of artmaking to evoke cultural awareness have been noted, there remain some cautions that ethical counselor educators should note. Morrissette and Gadbois (2006) cautioned counselor educators who employ teaching strategies that invite self-exploration and reflection, such as is inherent in experiential learning, of the possibility of evoking student anxiety and provoking unintentional consequences. Counselor educators who include such activities should be trained in both group process and experiential-based teaching (Westwood,

1994). This warning is particularly necessary with arts-based activities. Educators who include arts-based activities should have some knowledge of the psychological properties of art media as well as understanding of the creative process.

### **Limitations**

This grounded theory research may be limited by the researchers' subjectivity and experience in multicultural counselor education and art-related teaching, the dual role of the instructor as researcher, the limited cultural dimensions of the researchers, and the participant noted limitations in magazines offered. Verification procedures implemented to promote credibility through methodological rigor included explicating researcher assumptions and biases, triangulating data types and analysts, providing thick description of context, establishing an audit trail, and external auditing. Although researchers attempted to provide magazines that included images of culturally diverse individuals, individuals of varying race, gender, sexuality, age, and ability, participants noted that the quantity of these images were inadequate. Another limitation of this study is the lack of depth of demographic data collected. The characteristics of the participant sample limit the transferability or generalizability of the results. Another possible limitation lies in the fact that participants were students attending a required graduate level course for credit. Although they did not receive a grade on this assignment and were informed of their right to opt out of the research, their visual and written responses to the activity may have reflected a student's desire for a favorable response from the course instructor and researchers. Additionally, the authors' similar cultural backgrounds may have affected student responses and comfort with completing the CDCA-V.

## **Conclusion**

Although the importance of multicultural education in counselor training has been well established, developing and studying the impact of experiential instructional strategies for promoting cultural self-awareness has been limited. During a multicultural counseling class, the CDCA-V, which adds a visual component to the established CDCA, provoked students to question inherited beliefs and acknowledge the factors that influenced developing open-mindedness. Beyond the traditional CDCA, the visual component was described as stimulating additional thoughts, promoting open dialogue during small group sharing, deepening and personalizing learning, and making beliefs about culture visible. Recognizing that the inclusion of art-based learning activities is not universally appreciated, and may produce unintended consequences, counselor educators are encouraged to select multicultural training experiences that attend to students' learning styles, offer optional approaches to the activity, seek training in the experiential methods offered, and solicit feedback about students' experiences.

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## Appendix

### Cultural De-Centering Activity (McAuliffe, 2013)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>I.      Directions for Column 1.<br/>In the boxes below, name some strong, deeply held beliefs, values, or customs that you were taught through home, school, or religion in each of the categories. These beliefs, values, or customs may or may not be ones that you currently hold. Write one for each category. Put them in Column 1 in your own words.</p>                     |                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p>II.     Directions for Column 2.<br/>In the second column, “Alternate Perspectives,” write an alternative belief, value, or custom for each box, one that differs from the one that you were taught. (For example, boys might have been taught that men should be the primary income provider for the family. An alternative perspective is that men can be stay-at-home dads.)</p> |                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p>III.    Directions for Column 3.<br/>In the third column, describe your current perspectives. What do you think <u>now</u> in each area? It can be the same, slightly different, or very different from the perspectives in columns 1 and 2.</p>                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p>IV.    Directions for Column 4<br/>Write your reasons for each of your current perspectives. What has contributed to your current beliefs? How strongly do you adhere to these beliefs?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p><u>Column 1</u><br/><b>BELIEF OR<br/>CUSTOM<br/>TAUGHT TO ME<br/>EARLY ON</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <p><u>Column 2</u><br/><b>ALTERNATE<br/>BELIEF OR<br/>CUSTOM</b><br/>(Name an alternative belief, value, or custom, one that is different from and challenges the inherited one.)</p> | <p><u>Column 3</u><br/><b>MY CURRENT<br/>PERSPECTIVE IN<br/>EACH AREA</b></p> | <p><u>Column 4</u><br/><b>THE BASIS FOR MY<br/>CURRENT<br/>PERSPECTIVE</b><br/>(How you came to know your current view, e.g., experience, reasoning, source of evidence, considerations)</p> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                             |                                                     |                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| <p><u>Column 1</u><br/><u>RACE/ETHNICITY</u><br/>What I was taught based on my and others' race/ethnicity. (Be as specific as possible. E.g. ethnic customs, community expectations, attitudes about members of other groups; often learned through family and community.)</p> | <p><u>Column 2</u><br/><u>ALTERNATE</u></p> | <p><u>Column 3</u><br/><u>CURRENT POSITIONS</u></p> | <p><u>Column 4</u><br/><u>REASONS FOR THEM</u></p> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                             |                                                     |                                                    |
| <p><u>Column 1</u><br/><u>RELIGION</u><br/>Beliefs or customs I was taught from the religious/ spiritual tradition in which I was raised:</p>                                                                                                                                  | <p><u>Column 2</u><br/><u>ALTERNATE</u></p> | <p><u>Column 3</u><br/><u>CURRENT POSITIONS</u></p> | <p><u>Column 4</u><br/><u>REASONS FOR THEM</u></p> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                             |                                                     |                                                    |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                             |                                                     |                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| <p><u>Column 1</u><br/><u>GENDER</u><br/>What I was taught based on or about being male or female (e.g., about roles, career, proper behavior.) Be as specific as possible:</p>                                                                                                | <p><u>Column 2</u><br/><u>ALTERNATE</u></p> | <p><u>Column 3</u><br/><u>CURRENT POSITIONS</u></p> | <p><u>Column 4</u><br/><u>REASONS FOR THEM</u></p> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                             |                                                     |                                                    |
| <p><u>Column 1</u><br/><u>SOCIAL CLASS</u><br/>What I was taught as a member of my social class about how to think or behave (e.g., how to communicate, career aspiration, manners, style, etc.) and/or about lower, lower-middle, middle, upper-middle, and upper classes</p> | <p><u>Column 2</u><br/><u>ALTERNATE</u></p> | <p><u>Column 3</u><br/><u>CURRENT POSITIONS</u></p> | <p><u>Column 4</u><br/><u>REASONS FOR THEM</u></p> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                             |                                                     |                                                    |

| <u>Column 1</u><br><u>SEXUAL</u><br><u>ORIENTATION</u><br>What I was taught about being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered. | <u>Column 2</u><br><u>ALTERNATE</u> | <u>Column 3</u><br><u>CURRENT</u><br><u>POSITIONS</u> | <u>Column 4</u><br><u>REASONS FOR THEM</u> |
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| Finally, below or on a blank page, write a paragraph on your reactions to doing this activity—your feelings and thoughts.         |                                     |                                                       |                                            |

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# Therapeutic Relationship and Outcome Effectiveness: Implications for Counselor Educators

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Counselor and client pairs from a university training clinic were analyzed, and therapeutic relationship was the strongest predictor of counseling outcome effectiveness as it progressed across time. In this quantitative study, therapeutic relationship accounted for 25% of the overall variance in outcome effectiveness. The results of this study support the idea that the therapeutic relationship is positively related to counseling outcomes and can be intentionally improved across time.

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*Keywords: counselor education, mindfulness, outcome effectiveness, supervision, therapeutic relationship*

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Counseling is a helping profession in which a wide variety of client goals are addressed through a therapeutic relationship between counselor and client (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2010; 2014, Section A; Duncan & Moynihan, 1994). The therapeutic relationship can be defined as the quality of the bond between therapist and client, as well as the degree of agreement on the goals, methods, and overall approach to therapy (Miller & Duncan, 2004). The therapeutic relationship has been identified as a reliable and substantial contributor to client goal attainment, also called outcome effectiveness (OE), in thousands of studies (Duncan, Miller, Wampold, & Hubble, 2010; Orlinsky, Ronnestad, & Willutzki, 2004). Although the connection between therapeutic relationship and OE has been established, there is a paucity of research regarding the in-vivo factors and behaviors that can be used by counselors to intentionally foster the therapeutic relationship and create OE (Okiishi et al., 2006; Tannen & Daniels, 2010). Ongoing research regarding the intricate links between therapeutic relationship

and OE is warranted, and tangible factors that allow counselors to intentionally build the therapeutic relationship should continue to be isolated.

Counseling is an empirically-supported method for achieving outcome effectiveness, regardless of the theory, technique, or method used (Ahn & Wampold, 2001; Chambless, 2002; Duncan et al., 2010; Hauser & Hays, 2012; Lambert, 2013; Luborsky, Singer, & Luborsky, 1975; Shapiro & Shapiro, 1983; Smith & Glass, 1977; Wampold et al., 1997). Specifically, counseling has been shown to produce better outcomes than no mental health intervention (Luborsky et al., 1975; Shapiro & Shapiro, 1982; Smith & Glass, 1977). Lambert (2013) conducted a comprehensive review of meta-analyses from 1971 to 2010 and concluded that clients who enter counseling are more likely to experience goal attainment than those who do not receive mental health treatment. Overall, counseling is an effective way to help clients reach their goals.

Although we know that counseling is effective, and therapeutic relationship is intimately connected to OE, current research has just begun to explore exactly how this phenomenon occurs. Reese, Norsworthy, & Rowlands (2009) explored the relationship between therapeutic relationship and OE using the Partners for Change Outcome Management System (PCOMS) in which the Session Rating Scale (SRS; a measure of therapeutic relationship) and the Outcome Rating Scale (ORS; a measure of OE) were administered to clients at each session. Counselors used the information from the ORS and SRS to inform their practice. Reese et al. found that counselors who used the PCOMS system created significantly greater OE, but the way in which therapeutic relationship progresses across time and the point at which therapeutic relationship is the strongest predictor of OE is still unknown.

Counselor Educators are responsible for teaching theories of OE to counselors-in-training, and two theoretical frameworks have been highly supported: empirically-validated treatment and common factors theory. Supporters of empirically-validated treatment assert that the two main components of OE are the client's presenting problem and the use of an empirically-validated treatment (American Psychological Association [APA], 1995; Chambless et al., 1998; Ebner-Priemer, 2015; Fondacaro & Harder, 2014). Conversely, advocates of common factors theory assert that several universal components (e.g., client factors and therapeutic relationship) are present in all effective counseling experiences (Budd & Hughes, 2009; Duncan et al., 2010; Grencavage & Norcross, 1990; Rosenzweig, 1936).

Although both theories have offered some structure for understanding OE, neither theoretical framework has gained full support in the counseling field. However, a common component of both frameworks is the therapeutic relationship (Budd & Hughes, 2009; Chambless & Hollon, 1998; Duncan et al., 2010; Hauser & Hays, 2010; Rosenzweig, 1936). The very definition of counseling describes the counselor and client joining together in a relationship (ACA, 2010). In common factors theory, the therapeutic relationship has been found to account for up to 35% of OE (Thomas, 2006) and was the single most frequently reported common factor noted amongst researchers and theorizers (Grencavage & Norcross, 1990). In empirically-validated treatment, the therapeutic relationship is the vehicle through which a counselor implements any empirically-validated treatment, and the therapeutic relationship is strengthened when counselors and clients agree on the particular treatment employed in counseling (APA Task Force, 2006; Bordin, 1979; Chambless & Hollon, 1998; Fireman, 2002; Miller & Duncan, 2004).

The therapeutic relationship is a key component to strong outcomes for counselors-in-training. Grant (2006) reported that Counselor Educators were responsible for teaching counselors-in-training how to build, maintain, and repair the therapeutic relationship in order to work with complex clients. Consequently, time should be dedicated throughout counselor training courses to teach ways in which the therapeutic relationship can be intentionally fostered with clients.

### **Counselors-in-Training and the Therapeutic Relationship**

It is important to note that the therapeutic relationship builds over time, and outcome effectiveness generally increases as therapeutic relationship increases (Miller et al., 2006). Additionally, therapist level of training, age, or theoretical orientation does not directly relate to client outcome effectiveness (Beutler et al., 2004; Duncan et al., 2010; Miller, Hubble, & Duncan, 2007; Okiishi et al. 2006). Counselor Educators need to know the ways in which counselors-in-training can use therapeutic relationship to facilitate OE, and additional factors that might contribute to this relationship should be explored.

Additional research regarding therapeutic relationship and OE in neophyte counselors could contribute to improved counselor education techniques. Crits-Christoph et al., (2006) trained five inexperienced counselors (1-3 years post-licensure) on alliance-fostering therapy. The researchers found that these counselors' clients experienced significantly-improved quality of life across time. Reese et al. (2009) applied the PCOMS program to counseling students, and encouraged additional research on this population. It is important to explore the relationship between therapeutic relationship and OE in a sample of counselors-in-training in order to better understand the connection between these variables at this level of experience.



The purpose of this study is to explore the nuanced relationship between the therapeutic relationship and OE in master's-level counselors for purposes of informing counselor education practices. Two research questions have been created. First, what is the relationship between therapeutic relationship in each session and OE? It was hypothesized that therapeutic relationship within each session would be positively related to OE. Second, at what session is therapeutic relationship the greatest predictor of OE? It was hypothesized that therapeutic relationship at the last (i.e., third) session would be the greatest predictor of OE because therapeutic relationship typically builds over time. The variables that will be used to answer the research questions are therapeutic relationship at session one, therapeutic relationship at session two, therapeutic relationship at session three, and OE.

## **Methods**

Power analysis conducted using G\*power were used to determine that a total sample of 77 counselor and client pairs across three sessions were needed in order to have power of .80, alpha of .05, and a medium effect size (.15  $f^2$  and .25  $f$ ). A medium effect size has been reported in the therapeutic relationship literature (e.g., Crits-Christoph et al., 2006) and OE literature (e.g., Horvath & Symonds, 1991) as a substantial indicator of effect.

## **Participants**

Data for 77 counselor-client pairs across three sessions were collected from an existing database in a counselor training clinic at a state university in the southeastern United States. The counselors were master's-level students in their first year, second semester of training; undergraduate students served as the clients. This database consisted of 414 potential participant pairs, but only 95 met the study requirements: each counselor-client pair must have a minimum

of three sessions, all three sessions must have at least 45 minutes of counselor-client interaction, and all data for each session must be complete.

A random number sequence from 1 through 95 was identified, and the first 77 pairs were included in the final dataset. Of the 77 counselor and client pairs included in the study, 8 counselors were in the database just once, 16 counselors were included twice, 9 counselors were included three times, 1 counselor was included 4 times, and one counselor was included 6 times. Each time any counselor was included in the database, it was with a different client.

The majority of clients met with their counselors three times due to clinic requirements, but counselor and client pairs who only met with one another for a total of three sessions (i.e., the third session was also the termination session) did not provide adequate sample size. Therefore, counselor and client pairs that met for 3 to 13 sessions (mean=5.6,  $sd=2.2$ ) were included, although data for just the first three sessions were used for this study to maintain consistency.

Sixty-six of the counselors (85.7%) were female, and 11 (14.3%) were male. Fifty-seven counselors (74%) identified as Caucasian, 19 counselors (24.7%) identified as African American, one counselor (1.3%) identified as Asian American. Twenty-two counselors reported their ages ( $M=23.2$ ,  $SD=3.3$ , range 22 to 35). The demographics of the sample were representative of the population of counselor trainees in this program.

Similar to counselors, the majority of the 77 clients were female ( $n=56$ , 72.7%); 21 clients (27.3%) were male. The clients identified primarily as Caucasian ( $n=49$ , 63.6%), followed by African American ( $n=20$ , 26%), then Hispanic ( $n=3$ , 3.9%), Asian American ( $n=2$ , 2.6%), Middle Eastern ( $n=1$ , 1.3%), Multiracial ( $n=1$ , 1.3%), and other ( $n=1$ , 1.3%). Age was reported by all 77 clients, and the average age was 21.8 years old ( $SD=4.8$ , range 18 to 54).

## Measures

Clients completed the Outcome Rating Scale (ORS) at the beginning of each session and the Session Rating Scale (SRS) at the end of each session with their counselor. The scores were then entered into the clinic database. IRB approval and counselor/client consent were obtained to use the database for research purposes. The researchers adhered to the ACA (2014) Code of Ethics at all times. The measures used in this study form the basis of the PCOMS system as mentioned above (Duncan, 2012; Reese et al., 2009), and counselors used the information to proactively address deficiencies in the therapeutic relationship or outcomes during clinical practice. However, they did not formally integrate the data using any computer software or standardized approach.

**Outcome effectiveness.** The ORS is a general measure of client wellbeing and was used to measure the variable of OE. Miller and Duncan (2004) created the four-item ORS as a general measure of client wellbeing in individual functioning, interpersonal relationships, and social performance. The total client ORS score for each session was calculated by adding together each of the four-item scores to create a score ranging from 0 to 40. Adequate construct validity has been determined through correlations with measures such as the Outcome Questionnaire-45 (Bringhurst, Watson, Miller, & Duncan, 2006; Miller, Duncan, Brown, Sparks, & Claud, 2003), as well the ability to differentiate between a clinical and non-clinical sample (Miller et al., 2003). Additionally, the ORS has been found to have high internal validity (Cronbach's alpha .93 or above; Bringhurst et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2003).

To determine client OE for the current study, the client's ORS score at first session was subtracted from the ORS score at third session, which indicated the amount of change toward the goal during their time in counseling and determined the effectiveness of counseling. This

resulted in a number between 40 and -40. Larger positive numbers indicated high total OE or greater movement toward achieving one's goals regarding overall functioning, while a value of zero indicated no change in OE. Negative numbers indicated movement away from goals or unhelpful client change.

**Therapeutic relationship.** Similar to the ORS, the SRS 3.0 is a succinct, four-item, client-completed measure of therapeutic relationship developed by Miller, Duncan, and Johnson (2000). Using the SRS, clients report the level of respect and understanding within the relationship, agreement with the therapist on goals and topics, agreement with the therapist on approach and method, and an overall rating of the session (Miller et al., 2000). Duncan et al. (2003) found a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .88 to determine that all four items work together to form a global assessment of therapeutic relationship.

An independent study conducted by the Center for Clinical Informatics on 15,000 SRS administrations was used to find an internal reliability coefficient alpha of .96 (Miller & Duncan, 2004). Duncan et al. (2003) explored validity of the SRS by correlating 420 SRS scores with the Helping Alliance Questionnaire II and found a Pearson product-moment correlation of .48 ( $p < .01$ ). This indicates the two measures assess similar, but unique constructs. Predictive validity has been demonstrated through positive correlations between the SRS and client OE (Duncan et al., 2003; Miller & Duncan, 2004; Miller, Duncan, Brown, Sorrell, & Chalk, 2006).

### **Data Analysis**

The data were collected from a preexisting Microsoft Excel database and directly imported into the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 21 (SPSS) for analyses. Descriptive statistics were completed prior to running the main analyses to identify the nature of the data and to explore the demographic characteristics of the sample. There was limited

information about counselor age, but there was no other missing data, as complete data sets were a criterion for inclusion in the study.

Pearson correlations were used to determine test-retest reliability of each administration of the ORS and the SRS (see table 1). Correlations ranged from .57 to .89. The correlations between ORS 1 and 3 and SRS 2 and 3 were significant ( $p < .001$ ). Lower correlations indicate greater change between administrations, and supports the sensitivity of the instruments. Test-retest reliability might be high when no significant change has been experienced in the counseling process.

Table 1

Reliability Coefficients for Assessment Measures

| Assessments     | Pearson r | Significance |
|-----------------|-----------|--------------|
| ORS 1 and ORS 2 | .57       | 7.473        |
| ORS 2 and ORS 3 | .63       | 6.253        |
| ORS 1 and ORS 3 | .42       | 0.000        |
| SRS 1 and SRS 2 | .68       | 1.315        |
| SRS 2 and SRS 3 | .87       | 0.000        |
| SRS 1 and SRS 3 | .69       | 5.079        |

## Results

### Research Question One

For the first research question (i.e., what is the relationship between therapeutic relationship in each session and OE) a linear multiple regression with therapeutic relationship at first, second, and third sessions predicting OE was used (see table 2). Before running the

regression, the data were checked for the necessary assumptions. Independence of observations was confirmed ( $d = 2.360$ ). Multicollinearity was not a concern (VIF= 1.995-4.401, tolerance=.227-.501). Additionally, linear relationships between OE and therapeutic relationship as session one, two, and three were identified; OE was normally distributed, and the analysis was conducted.

Table 2

Summary of Linear Multiple Regression Analysis for Therapeutic Relationship on Outcome Effectiveness

| <u>Variable</u>              | Outcome Effectiveness |         |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|---------|
|                              | <i>T</i>              | $\beta$ |
| Therapeutic Relationship 1   | -3.947                | -.565** |
| Therapeutic Relationship 2   | .963                  | .202    |
| Therapeutic Relationship 3   | 2.405                 | .512*   |
| $r^2$                        | .250                  |         |
| <i>F</i> for change in $r^2$ | 8.090**               |         |

Note: \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .001$

The overall regression model was significant ( $F=8.090, p=.000$ ). The model explained 25% of variance in OE ( $r=.500, r^2=.250$ ). Therapeutic relationship at first session significantly, negatively predicted OE ( $\beta = -.565, t=-3.947, p=.000$ ), and therapeutic relationship at third session significantly predicted OE in a positive direction ( $\beta = .512, t=2.405, p=.019$ ). However, therapeutic relationship at second session did not significantly predict OE ( $\beta = .202, t=.963, p=.339$ ). As therapeutic relationship at first session increased, OE decreased by .565, and as therapeutic relationship at third session increased, OE increased by .512. As such, the hypothesis was partially accepted; therapeutic relationship within session one and three is related to OE, and therapeutic relationship at session three is positively related to OE.

### **Research Question Two**

For the second research question (i.e., at what session is therapeutic relationship the greatest predictor of OE) a stepwise multiple regression (with multicollinearity analysis) was used to predict OE from therapeutic relationship in each session (see Table 3). The multicollinearity analysis was necessary because it was expected that therapeutic relationship in each session would be related. Therapeutic relationship at first, second, and third sessions was loaded into the regression at the same time using a stepwise entry method. As such, only significant predictors were used in the final model, providing a more accurate portrayal of the variable relationships (Allen, 1997).

Table 3

Summary of Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis for Therapeutic Relationship on Outcome Effectiveness

| Variable                     | Outcome Effectiveness |         |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|---------|
|                              | <i>t</i>              | $\beta$ |
| Therapeutic Relationship 1   | -3.831                | -.534*  |
| Therapeutic Relationship 3   | 4.774                 | .666*   |
| $r^2$                        | .240                  |         |
| <i>F</i> for change in $r^2$ | 11.683*               |         |

Note: \* $p < .001$

Before running the regression, the data were checked for the necessary assumptions. Independence of observations was confirmed ( $d = 2.407$ ). Additionally, multicollinearity was not a concern (VIF= 1.895, tolerance=.528). Finally, a linear relationship between therapeutic relationship and outcome effectiveness was identified, and the analysis was run with the data in its original form.

The overall model was significant ( $F=11.683, p=.000$ ) and explained 24% of the variance in OE ( $r=.49, r^2=.240$ ). Therapeutic relationship at second session was non-significant and did not load into the final model. Therapeutic relationship at third session loaded highest and significantly predicted OE in a positive direction ( $\beta = .666, t=4.774, p=.000$ ), and therapeutic relationship at first session loaded second-highest and significantly predicted OE in a



negative direction ( $\beta = -.534, t = -3.831, p = .000$ ). As therapeutic relationship at third session increased, OE increased by .666; as therapeutic relationship at first session increased, OE decreased by .534. As such, the hypothesis was accepted; therapeutic relationship at third session was a stronger predictor of OE than therapeutic relationship at first or second session.

## **Discussion**

It was confirmed through this study that therapeutic relationship is the strongest positive predictor of OE as it progresses over time. Overall, therapeutic relationship accounted for approximately 24% of OE. The current findings align with previous findings in which therapeutic relationship was expected to account for anywhere from 10% (Tracey, 2003) to 30% (Miller, Duncan, & Hubble, 1997) of OE.

### **Therapeutic Relationship Across Sessions**

It was found that high therapeutic relationship at the first session was negatively related to OE, therapeutic relationship at the second session was not significantly related to OE, and therapeutic relationship at third session was positively related to OE. The relationship between therapeutic relationship at session one and OE seems complicated, but can be explained through previous research findings and the findings of the preliminary analyses. First, OE was calculated by subtracting a client's ORS score (a measure of general wellbeing) at session one from ORS at session three. As such, OE indicates the extent to which clients' wellbeing improved across three sessions.

In the preliminary analyses, it was found that clients with ORS scores above the clinical cutoff at session one had significantly lower OE scores. Mathematically, this makes sense because higher ORS scores at session one left less room for growth and improvement at session three. It was also found in preliminary analyses that, for this sample, ORS scores at session one

were significantly correlated with SRS scores at session one; as ORS increased SRS increased. Clients with high ORS scores at session one also had high SRS scores at session one, and high SRS scores at session one were negatively related to final OE. The negative relationship between therapeutic relationship at session one and OE was present because clients with high therapeutic relationship at session one also had high ORS scores at session one and less overall room for improvement on OE.

Unlike sessions one and three, therapeutic relationship at session two was not a significant negative or positive predictor of OE. DeRubeis and Feeley (1990) found that therapeutic relationship at session two did not predict reduction of depressive symptoms in a sample of 25 clients. Feeley, DeRubeis, and Gelfand (1999) also found that therapeutic relationship at session two did not predict outcomes in clients with depression. It is possible that session two simply builds upon session one, and prepares clients for more significant change in session three.

Finally, in the current study, session three was the strongest predictor of OE. At this point in counseling, therapeutic relationship had significantly improved from the first session for the general sample. In preliminary analyses, it was found that the final ORS scores at session three were significantly lower for those who initially scored below the clinical cutoff, but the total difference between ORS at session one and ORS at session three (i.e., OE) was greater for those who scored below the clinical cutoff at intake. As such, it can be concluded that, by session three, those who scored below the clinical cutoff on ORS at session one had experienced larger OE, and those who did not score below the cutoff had experienced steady, yet smaller, gains in OE across sessions. Additionally, the greatest increase in therapeutic relationship was from session one to session three, and OE was calculated using the difference in ORS scores

from session one to session three. It is possible that therapeutic relationship at session three was the most significant predictor of OE because the majority of clients had experienced the majority of their changes in therapeutic relationship and OE by the third session.

Overall, Miller and Duncan (2004) explained that early increases in therapeutic relationship were strong predictors of increases in OE. However, the researchers also explained that as therapeutic relationship increases, so does OE, and vice versa. As such, it is also possible that therapeutic relationship at sessions four and beyond would have been stronger predictors of OE than session three. However, that information was not collected for the current study. Overall, the current study supports the notion that therapeutic relationship is significantly related to OE, and counselors-in-training should take care to build therapeutic relationship with their clients in each successive session, regardless if it is initially high or low.

### **Limitations**

Clients completed the SRS at the end of each session in the presence of their counselor, and it is possible that some clients might have rated the therapeutic relationship higher due to the desire to please or be liked by their counselor. One of the four items on the SRS allowed the client to rate the extent to which the material they wanted to discuss was addressed in session. However, during session one, counselors were instructed by the clinic director to complete specific intake paperwork, which limited counselors' abilities to address the topics most important to the client. As such, SRS scores for session one might have been lower than SRS scores for sessions two and three due to intake paperwork requirements.

Although the reliability and validity of the ORS and SRS have been supported through empirical research (e.g., Bringham et al., 2006; Duncan et al., 2003; Miller et al., 2000; 2003; 2006; Miller & Duncan, 2004), there is still some question about the psychometric properties of

these instruments. For example, Halstead, Youn, and Armijo (2013) questioned the reliability of the ORS and the sensitivity of the instrument, as it is often administered on a weekly basis. The authors indicated that the reliability alpha of .85 could be considered insufficient in high-stakes testing, but Duncan and Reese (2013) indicated that the definition of sufficient can be relative and based upon the purpose of the research. Additionally, lower test-retest reliability could indicate higher sensitivity to change across sessions. Regardless, Halstead et al. (2013) and Duncan and Reese (2013) agree that the brevity of the ORS renders the instrument clinically useful, but reliability of the measures should be considered when interpreting data derived from this instrument.

An additional limitation for this study could be the result of collecting data from a limited, pre-existing database. As a result of meeting the stringent inclusion criteria, some counselors were included in the database multiple times with several different clients. It is possible that the inclusion of multiple counselors could have skewed the data.

In addition to the limited amount of counselors, the preexisting database only included 95 counselor and client pairs that met the stringent study criteria, and 77 pairs were chosen from those eligible pairs. This means that 337 counselor and client pairs were not included in this study, and 319 were excluded due to missing data or not meeting other criteria. It is impossible to determine whether those who were excluded from the final sample differed from those included in any significant ways.

### **Implications for Counselor Educators**

Therapeutic relationship at the first session was a negative predictor of OE in this study. It was determined that this was likely due to a high initial sense of client wellbeing and limited opportunity for clients to experience a large increase in OE across sessions. As such, counselors-

in-training should know that their first encounter with a client is important, but high therapeutic relationship at the first session might be associated with lower levels of mental health distress and less notable improvements in OE across time.

Although some clients enter counseling with a pronounced ability to trust the counseling process and embrace a strong therapeutic relationship, not all clients are so open to the process. Class time can be dedicated to teaching strategies that will allow counselors-in-training to establish an initial working relationship and continually improve the therapeutic relationship with each successive meeting (especially from session two to three). Counselors can learn concrete methods for building the therapeutic relationship in every session; even if the therapeutic relationship starts strong, it can always be improved.

Counselors can actively build the therapeutic relationship with clients by regularly discussing aspects of the relationship at the end of each session (Miller et al., 2006; Reese et al., 2009; Schmidt, 2014). In the current study, counselors-in-training used feedback from the SRS in order to guide their professional growth across time, and the therapeutic relationship did increase across time as a general trend. Although some have questioned whether clients would provide honest feedback directly to the counselor, Miller et al. (2000) reported that clients were generally open and honest with their therapists when completing and discussing the SRS at the end of session. As such, counselor educators can teach counselors-in-training to have open conversations with clients regarding the therapeutic relationship. Counselors might use immediacy to assess the therapeutic relationship (e.g., “How do you feel about our relationship and me as a helper?”). Alternatively, counselors can use a more formal measure such as the SRS to methodically gather information about the therapeutic relationship (Schmidt, 2004).

The four constructs measured with the SRS can help counselors-in-training identify concrete methods to continually improve the therapeutic relationship. The first item on the SRS can be used to start a conversation regarding the extent to which clients feel heard, understood, and respected (Miller et al., 2000). Sometimes, a lack of self-confidence, feelings of anxiety, and other sources of distraction can inhibit counselors from genuinely joining with their clients in the here-and-now. Buser, Buser, Peterson, and Seraydarian (2012) found that mindfulness techniques can help counselors focus on the present moment, actively attend to their clients, and experience thoughts and feelings in a nonjudgmental way.

Some mindfulness activities that might help counselors-in-training improve their attending behaviors can be practiced in class. First, students can be directed to sit quietly and notice three sounds in their environment. Then, counselors-in-training can be directed to notice three smells, and then three objects that they see. Alternatively, counselors-in-training can be guided to sit quietly and notice their breath. Counselors can spend three minutes meditating upon the sensation of breathing in and out; when other thoughts enter the mind they are acknowledged and dismissed nonjudgmentally, and focus is returned to the breath. Both of these activities help to clear the mind and orient the counselors-in-training to the present moment.

Another mindfulness exercise to improve attending behaviors might include a counselor educator providing each counselor-in-training with a raisin or other small food object. Counselors can be directed to hold the raisin and notice the color, texture, and smell. Then, they can place the raisins in their mouths and notice the texture, temperature, and taste. Counselors should be directed to stay present in the current moment, releasing all judgment and worries, and form an appreciation for the here-and-now.

Counselor educators can access a plethora of mindfulness activities in workbooks and on the internet in order to help counselors-in-training learn about this helpful technique for fostering the therapeutic relationship. Counselors-in-training can then replicate the mindfulness activities learned in class before sessions with clients. A parallel process might even occur in which counselors share mindfulness techniques with clients and practice them in session when appropriate.

Additional items on the SRS are used to determine if the counselor is addressing the goals that the client feels are most important in a way that works well for the client (Miller et al., 2000). In order to address this portion of the therapeutic relationship, counselors must learn to meet clients at their current developmental levels and trust the long-term nature of the counseling process; counselors might feel compelled to rush through the therapeutic process, but clients should be guided toward insight at their own paces. Experiential coursework (e.g., interactive video labs, role plays) can be used to help counselors-in-training with their pacing in session and their abilities to trust the long-term therapeutic process (Schmidt, 2014). Especially with role plays, students gain insight and provide feedback to one another from the perspective of the counselor as well as the client.

Counselor educators can explain to counselors-in-training that counseling is an art and a science. The client's unique life circumstances and presenting problems will inform an individualized treatment plan in which the therapeutic relationship is at the core, and empirically-validated treatments are intentionally implemented at a pace that is comfortable for the counselor and client. Counselors should use mindfulness techniques in order to be fully present with the client and should pull on past experiences to intentionally and creatively foster the therapeutic relationship.

## **Conclusion**

The results of this study and others (e.g., Miller et al., 2006) can be used to support the idea that therapeutic relationship improves across time, and is positively related to OE in later sessions. Counselors-in-training could explain to clients that they are likely to experience the greatest OE if they meet for more than one or two sessions. Counselor Educators should also advocate for counselors-in-training who typically see clients for just one session (e.g., a brief counseling setting or an employee assistance program). Administrators and supervisors should be informed that approximately one-quarter of client OE is related to an increase in therapeutic relationship across time with any particular counselor.

Counselors-in-training often feel as though they are not effective with their clients. Folkes-Skinner, Elliott, and Wheeler (2010) found that supportive education and supervision can help counselors-in-training understand the importance of the therapeutic relationship and build more confidence in their clinical skills. Counselor educators and supervisors should educate counselors-in-training about common factors theory, empirically-validated treatments, and the common link of the therapeutic relationship in producing OE. Counselors-in-training can be trained to utilize mindfulness skills, peer feedback, supervision, and continuous client feedback in order to intentionally build the therapeutic relationship with their clients. Future researchers should continue to explore additional counselor, client, and therapeutic factors that work synergistically to improve the therapeutic relationship and produce greater OE.



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# Using Films to Increase Cultural Competence in Working with LGBTQ Clients

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Melodie H. Frick, Heather Thompson, Russ Curtis

There is a dearth of research on effective strategies for teaching counselors-in-training how to work more effectively with LGBTQ clients. Experiential learning activities, such as watching films, can increase students' knowledge of their attitudes and beliefs about themselves and culturally diverse clients. This qualitative study explored, in the context of a sexuality and counseling course, how 27 students' awareness, knowledge, and skills were influenced by the use of two films, *For the Bible Tells Me So* and *Normal*, which illuminate the experiences of LGBTQ individuals and their families. Results and implications for counselor educators are provided.

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*Keywords: experiential teaching, LGBTQ, cultural competence, films, counselor education*

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Counselor educators are positioned to train students to work effectively and empathically within diverse populations such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities. To accomplish this, counseling training must be informed by evolving cultural competencies, including issues involving sexual orientation and gender identity (Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling [ALGBTIC], 2009; ALGBTIC LGBQQIA Competencies Taskforce [ALGBTIC], 2013). And, while counselor educators are required to include multicultural material in all courses (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014), students often report feeling inadequately trained to work with LGBTQ clients (Bidell, 2005; 2013; Graham, Carney, & Kluck, 2012; Rock, Carson, & McGeorge, 2010).

Research indicates that students express more confidence in working with issues related to sexuality when they receive specific sexuality training (Miller & Byers, 2008; 2010), and it is recommended that more specific training related to sexual orientation and LGBTQ needs should be added to counseling curriculum (Biaggio, Orchard, Larson, Petrino, & Mahara, 2003; Dillon

et al., 2004; Frank & Cannon, 2010; Goodrich & Luke, 2010; Israel & Hackett, 2004; Long & Serovich, 2003; Luke, Goodrich, & Scarborough, 2011). Moreover, it has been suggested that all counseling programs should require at least one graduate level counseling sexuality course, with a focus on LGBTQ issues, because all counselors will work with non-heterosexual clients and the intense personal reflection required to work effectively with LGBTQ clients cannot be adequately piecemealed into other courses (Bidell, 2013; Irving, 2014). Not all counseling programs, however, offer courses specific to sexuality counseling (Kocarek & Pelling, 2003; Mallicoat & Gibson, 2014), and there is a dearth of research on effective strategies for teaching counselors-in-training how to work more effectively with LGBTQ clients (Chavez-Korell & Johnson, 2010; Walters & Rehma, 2013).

Experiential teaching methods have been found to be effective in enhancing diversity awareness (Lazloffy & Habekost, 2010) and cultivating clinical skills from theoretical knowledge (Knecht-Sabres, 2010; Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012). Therefore, the intent of this qualitative study was to explore, in the context of a sexuality and counseling course, how if at all, students' cultural competence (awareness, knowledge, and skills) was influenced by the experiential teaching method of using films that illuminate the experiences of LGBTQ individuals and their families.

### **Experiential Teaching**

Counselors-in-training must increase their awareness, knowledge, and skills about their personal values and biases, clients' worldviews, and culturally appropriate interventions in order to become culturally competent counselors (Chao, Wei, Good, & Flores, 2011; Hipolito-Delgado, Cook, Avrus, & Bonham, 2011). To accomplish this, counselor educators can use experiential learning activities to increase students' knowledge of their attitudes and beliefs

about themselves and culturally diverse clients (Council for Accreditation and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2009). Experiential activities that incorporate student reflection on the connection between one's self and those who are culturally diverse are one of the best ways to impact student learning (Arthur & Achenback, 2002; Collins, Arthur, & Wong-Wylie, 2010; Fawcett, Briggs, Maycock, & Stine, 2010).

Experiential teaching methods move beyond didactic teaching methods by broadening students' learning from readings and lectures to lived experiences (Villalba & Redmond, 2008) in order to create cultural sensitivity (Kim & Lyons, 2003; Laszloffy & Habekost, 2010). Experiential learning methods expand what students learn cognitively and move them into more affective learning, thus increasing their self-awareness of what personal beliefs impact their professional roles as counselors (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011; Loya & Cuevas, 2010). Further, experiential learning methods provide students a medium to learn through others' lived experiences (Laszloffy & Habekost, 2010; Perry & Southwell, 2011), develop empathy for diverse clients (McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012; Villalba & Redmond, 2008; Walters & Rehman, 2013), and bridge the gap between theory and practice (Knecht-Sabres, 2010; Yardley et al., 2012).

The use of films is one form of experiential teaching that has been found effective (Armstrong & Berg, 2007; Johnson, 2011; Koch & Dollarhide, 2000; Pierce & Wooloff, 2012; Stinchfield, 2006; Villalba & Redmond, 2008; Whipple & Tucker, 2012) and used in various counseling courses (e.g., ethics, multicultural counseling, group counseling, and theories). Films provide a means of contact with unfamiliar populations and controversial issues from a safe distance (Chavez-Korell & Johnson, 2010; Higgins & Dermer, 2001), allow students to practice observational skills, and are catalysts for class discussions about best counseling practices (Dave

& Tandon, 2011; Villalba & Redmond, 2008). Coupled with watching films, classroom discussions and reflective journal writing help students process their emotional responses from the experiential activities, and transfer their personal reactions into professional application (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Whipple & Tucker, 2012).

Films also enable students to practice and increase empathy (Gerdes, Segal, Jackson, & Mullins, 2011; Roell, 2010) because they allow students to respond to the character's experience which triggers their imagination and affective associations and increases their cognitive understanding and emotional experiences (Ahn, Jin, & Ritterfeld, 2012; Igartua, 2010). Further, watching films and processing cognitive and affective responses are active learning methods that increase diversity awareness (Loya & Cuevas, 2010; Villalba & Redmond, 2008) and improve perceptual, conceptual, and executive skills (Higgins & Dermer, 2001; Oh, Kang, & De Gagne, 2012; Warren, Stech, Douglas, & Lambert, 2010). Thus, students are better able to collect and observe data (perceptual skill), understand data in a coherent manner (conceptual skill), and influence clients based on what was observed and understood (executive skill).

### **Film Selection**

The use of films with LGBTQ content and characters has been recommended as a method of teaching about sexual orientation and the needs of the LGBTQ communities (Bidell, 2013; Long & Serovich, 2003). For this study, two films were chosen that depicted potential challenges individuals and families experience (e.g., family and community reactions, religious views, etc.) in the process of coming out or transitioning. At the time of this study, the authors noted that it was difficult to find films that encompassed these experiences for all members of the LGBTQ communities; therefore, the selected films provide examples of what individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, or transgender may experience. *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karslake,



2007) is a 98-minute documentary about the lives of five Christian families whose children are lesbian or gay. This film reveals the lived experiences of each family and offers diverse interpretations of spirituality and sexuality by clergy and leaders from various religious backgrounds. The intention of using this film was to open dialogue about the following: (a) how religion and sexuality play a part in LGBTQ clients' lives, including societal support and oppression; (b) how personal values may play a role when working with clients and their families; and (c) how to work effectively and ethically without imposing these values and beliefs (ACA, 2014).

*For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karslake, 2007), however, does not depict members of the transgender community and students need additional information about contextual factors (e.g., psychological, political, historical) that influence transgender identity development (ALGBTIC, 2009; Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002; Preston, 2011). Therefore, the second film, *Normal* (Busch, Brokaw, Pilcher, & Anderson, 2003), was selected to provide an example of what a person might experience during transition, including emotional responses, clothing choices, voice modulation, and changes at work, home, and in the community. This 108-minute film is a fictional portrayal about a Midwestern family whose father figure decides to pursue sexual reassignment and the reactions from family members, co-workers, and the church community. This movie also portrays the evolving family dynamics around the father's decision, all of which are important for counselors to be aware of when working with transgender clients and their families.

### **Method**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how, if at all, watching the movie, *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karslake, 2007), influenced students' perceptions of the LGBTQ

communities and what families experience when a child or family member is gay. And how, if at all, watching the movie, *Normal* (Busch et al., 2003), influenced students' perceptions of the transgender community and how families cope with a family member going through transition. The authors adhered to ACA Code of Ethics research guidelines (ACA, 2014) and used the consensual qualitative research (CQR) method to conduct a rigorous analysis of participants' experiences and make judgments about the meaning of the data (Hill et al., 2005). The essential elements of CQR include the use of: (a) open-ended questions to capture participant experiences; (b) judges who analyze the data independently and work together as a team to reach general consensus; (c) an external auditor who evaluates the findings generated by the primary research team; and (d) data analysis procedures that generate domains, core ideas, and cross case analysis (Hill et al., 2005).

### **Participants**

The recommended strong sample size for CQR is at least 8 - 15 participants (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Hill et al., 2005). The participants in this study were a convenience sample of 27 individuals; 24 women and three men. Twenty-four participants identified their ethnicity or race as Caucasian, one identified as African-American, one identified as Hispanic, and one identified as Latin. Their ages ranged from 23 – 56 ( $M = 35$ ). Participants were graduate students from counseling ( $N = 19$ ), social work ( $N = 4$ ), psychology ( $N = 3$ ), and college student personnel ( $N = 1$ ) programs, and all were enrolled in one of two sexuality courses taught by the first author; one course was offered at a university in the Midwest, the other at a university in the Southeast.

## **Research Team**

It is imperative for researchers to discuss their positionality and characteristics that may influence study design, data collection, and analysis (Merriam, 1998). The team responsible for data analysis included the three authors, who are three faculty members in a CACREP-accredited counseling program. The research team discussed their assumptions about the use of films in facilitating professional competence in counseling and their beliefs about qualitative research. All team members use films in their courses and believe based on experience and student feedback that this method of instruction serves to enhance students' understanding of the material taught in classes. All three members also agreed an important reason for facilitating this study is their commitment to integrating student feedback in their evidence-based teaching strategies. Additionally, the authors discussed their assumptions that students may not receive adequate training for working with LGBTQ clients by having only one cross-cultural course or limited references across counseling curriculum, and their biases that students need additional training to better serve this client population. Discussions about assumptions and biases toward this particular type of teaching tool and student outcomes were ongoing. All team members previously conducted qualitative studies using CQR. Prior to beginning data analysis, members reviewed the Hill et al. articles (1997; 2005) and the general procedures for CQR analysis.

## **Instruments**

Research questions and questionnaires were developed after an extensive review of the literature as recommended by the CQR founders, Hill et al. (1997). Two interviews were conducted prior to the study and questions were revised based on those interviews (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). As is recommended, data was collected twice from each participant (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005).

**Questionnaires.** The research team worked together to generate a series of open-ended questions in a semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix for pre/post questionnaires) to solicit participant perspectives on two films. Students completed surveys on their thoughts, feelings, and reactions about LGBTQ clients and their families, the provision of counseling to LGBTQ clients and families, and general reactions to the films immediately before and after viewing each film. Participants also received demographic forms attached to the questionnaires. Participants were asked to indicate age, gender, ethnicity/race, and graduate program (e.g., counseling, social work, psychology, or college student personnel). Participants also were asked if they had previously viewed each film.

**Reflection Journals.** In an effort to gather a more in-depth understanding of student perspectives and better ensure credibility of the findings, students were encouraged to fully elaborate on their perspectives and reactions to the films in a reflective journal. Students submitted their journal reflections at the end of the week in which each film was viewed. A final reflection summary paper with reflective prompts about both films was submitted at the end of the course.

## **Procedure**

After approval from both university institutional review boards, the students were provided with an informed consent form at the beginning of the course explaining the purpose of the study and their rights as participants, emphasizing that their grades would not be influenced by participation (or non-participation) in the study. Pseudonyms were used in place of participants' names to protect their anonymity. Additionally, students were informed that the film material could be considered controversial and that the purpose of showing the films was not to change their personal or religious beliefs, but rather to create dialogue about what their

clients may be experiencing and processing in therapy sessions. Further, students were instructed that class discussions were voluntary and a safe place to discuss thoughts and reactions to the films' content, and that additional support would be provided for anyone that needed to process his/her experiences, individually (i.e., meet with the instructor, other faculty, or support services). The films were shown during two class periods where participants were provided questionnaires before and after the films. Class discussions followed each film; a film was watched during the first half of a three-hour class and then students processed their reactions, questions, and how to apply what they watched to counseling situations. Participants also wrote weekly reflections to further process their thoughts and feelings, and then submitted summary papers of these reflections at the end of the course.

### **Data Analysis**

Consensual qualitative research (CQR) methodology was used to derive meaning from the data through a process of individual analysis followed by group consensus (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). At each stage of the data analysis process, the first two authors coded data independently before meeting to reach consensus. The third author served as an auditor who evaluated the data analysis. Although three coders are recommended, two coders are considered acceptable (Hill et al., 2005). Data analysis was done in two phases. *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karslake, 2007) was analyzed first. Domains, core ideas, and cross-case analysis was completed before analyzing data from *Normal* (Busch et al., 2003). The same data analysis procedures were used for each film.

### **Domain Coding and Core Ideas**

Team members worked independently to generate domain codes for each film. As a group, emergent domains were discussed and ultimately consensus was reached. The domain

codes served as the conceptual frameworks for housing segments of data (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). Domain codes were continually analyzed to best capture core ideas from the data. Next, the team independently generated concise descriptions of the clustered data within each domain. The team then met and worked toward consensus. Condensed descriptions were then compared to the original narratives to ensure that the data were free of assumptions and interpretations.

### **Cross Case Analysis**

For each film, team members worked independently to identify commonalities among core ideas that could be grouped into similar clusters of meaning. Once team consensus was reached, tallies were generated to determine the frequency. The terms general, typical, and variant are used to describe the frequency of each category (Hill et al., 2005). A general category refers to all or all but one of the cases, a typical category refers to more than half of the cases, and a variant category includes more than two but less than half of the cases. Categories with less than three cases were not included in the analysis.

### **Quality and Trustworthiness**

The research team addressed credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Morrow, 2005) to enhance the rigor of this study. In an effort to promote credibility, the following steps were taken: biases and expectations were discussed and noted; an auditor checked and provided feedback on the domains, core ideas, and categories generated and tallied by the first two authors; and participants' reflective journals and summary papers were used to triangulate the findings. Dependability was achieved by maintaining a thorough audit trail of procedures, data collection, and analysis: team members worked independently to read surveys and generate domains, core ideas, and cross-case

categories; as a group, members discussed domains, core ideas, and cross-case categories with the intent of developing a consensus; tallies were used to determine the frequency of cross-case occurrences; and how decisions were reached by the team (Merriam, 2009; Morrow, 2005). Additionally, efforts were made to increase transferability by providing demographics of participants, descriptive quotes from the data, and a clear description of procedures undertaken (Hunt, 2011). Further, the research team addressed confirmability by discussing their assumptions and biases, maintaining an audit trail to promote transparency of the process, and having ongoing discussions to ensure emerging themes were directly supported by the data (De Stefano, Atkins, Noble, & Heath, 2012).

## **Results**

Final consensus among the research team identified three themes for both films: *emotional reactions*, *new awareness*, and *counseling applications* (see Table 1). Following CQR guidelines (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005), a general category represents all or all but one of the cases ( $n = 27$ ); a typical category represents at least half of the cases ( $n = 13$ ); and a variant category represented less than half but more than two of the cases ( $n = 3 - 12$ ). Following, findings are presented separately for each film.

Table 1

*Themes and Frequencies of Participants' Responses*

| <i>Themes For the Bible Tells Me So</i> | Frequency    |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------|
| Emotional Reactions                     | Typical (23) |
| New Awareness                           | Typical (15) |
| Counseling Applications                 | Typical (18) |
| <i>Themes Normal</i>                    | Frequency    |
| Emotional Reactions                     | Typical (17) |
| New Awareness                           | Typical (18) |
| Counseling Applications                 | Variant (12) |

*Note.*  $N = 27$ . Typical = category applied to at least 13 or more of the cases; variant = category applied to fewer than half of the cases.

**For the Bible Tells Me So**

**Emotional Reactions.** Of the three domains, the film had the most impact on participants' emotions, with 23 participants reporting having both positive and negative emotional reactions to watching the film. One participant stated "I felt moved. I was amazed to see how opinions can change with knowledge and how supportive some families were," while another stated "change and progress is happening faster than I expected. [I am] thankful for the language to integrate in future discussions with others." Conversely, a participant responded "I feel like sobbing. There is so much about my sexuality I have not worked through," and another participant felt "angry that people can be so judgmental." Finally, one participant reflected that "my heart was made receptive to new thinking." With these mixed emotions, participants also reported changes in their perception of the intersection between religion and the LGBTQ



communities, and how this new awareness would aid them when working with LGBTQ clients and their families.

**New Awareness.** After watching the film, 15 participants reported having a new awareness of experiences faced by the LGBTQ communities, including how religious beliefs can be used in the form of support or oppression. One participant reported before watching the film that he believed “organized religion contributes to oppression,” and after watching the film stated “I feel less prejudice against Christianity because I realize it is not the religion that is the source of bigotry...I especially appreciated the interviews with the priests, reverends, and the Bishop who beautifully articulated a loving stance...from the holy text.” Another participant reported “[films] like this help develop awareness of issues surrounding homosexuals...I learned a lot from [the film]...personal beliefs should not infringe on others’ rights to be who they are and develop without discrimination.” Further, one participant stated “[I] never thought about gay marriage before [watching the film]. Now I think that God would honor any two people who loved each other and wanted that commitment.” These new perceptions guided participants in new ways to use counseling interventions that would be effective when working with LGBTQ clients and their families.

**Counseling Applications.** Eighteen participants articulated ideas of possible counseling practices after watching the film, such as fostering increased acceptance, using psychoeducation materials, identifying supportive people and systems, acknowledging discrimination, and advocacy. One participant explained “[my] ideas of how to talk with families has completely changed. I realize the need for support and psychoeducation...I look forward to being less fearful of this work.” In addition, one participant suggested wanting to “provide a safe environment and

identify internalized messages of homophobia...discuss healthy self-image and assess for safety and suicide.” Further, one participant reported feeling

better equipped to work with families with compassion...understand the role that fear and beliefs play in parents....be aware of groups who are disdainful toward LGBTQ and their effects on clients....address homophobic remarks, correct myths/stereotypes to create a safe space....engage in community....psychoeducation to promote acceptance.

After watching *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karslake, 2007), participants experienced positive and negative emotional reactions, an increased awareness of what lesbian and gay children and their families experience when sorting through societal and cultural interpretations of religious text and the coming out process, which produced ideas for possible counseling interventions when working with LGBTQ clients and their families. Participants also reported emotional reactions, new awareness, and counseling applications after watching the film, *Normal* (Busch et al., 2003).

## **Normal**

**Emotional Reactions.** After watching *Normal* (Busch et al., 2003), 17 participants reported having an emotional reaction and many identified having more feelings of compassion. One participant responded that watching the film “gave me empathy and compassion for transgender individuals that I didn’t have previously.” Another participant said “I have more compassion now. [Before watching the film] I wanted to judge transgender individuals as perverts or just confused. The [film] really helped communicate that to feel complete a change is necessary.” Additionally, one participant stated she was “moved with emotion...stirred my compassion...bravery to come out to loved ones is beyond my comprehension....Being who you should be is greater than any rejection you might encounter. That is phenomenal.” Further, one participant reported that she “felt deeply moved...the movie changed me; moved me from pity to

admiration. I needed to be humbled so that my compassion did not become condescension.” Some participants reported that they needed to take a closer look at their preconceived ideas about transgender individuals, such as a person may want to go through transition at any age, not just in their 20s. One participant explained “I found myself semi-uncomfortable. I had many stereotypes of what transitioning looks like and these were challenged....These emotions were unexpected for me.” In addition to emotional reactions, participants reported having a new awareness of the transgender community.

**New Awareness.** Compared to the other two themes (i.e., emotional reactions and counseling applications), 18 participants reported the film most increased their awareness and knowledge of the transgender community and the transition process. One participant stated prior to watching the film that she was “not sure I have any thoughts [on transgender individuals]” to after watching the film thinking “it’s more than just the clothing they wear. No one would make this decision...if it wasn’t a very big part of who they are.” Similarly, prior to watching the film a participant reported thinking she did not “know much about [transgender individuals] other than feeling like they are in the wrong body and want to use the bathroom of the sex they are...[I] wonder if they are homosexuals too,” to after watching the film thinking that it is “heartbreaking what they go through....my biases have been shattered and I feel hope for those with gender confusion.” Another participant stated she had an “increase in awareness of the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation,” and another participant explained the film “heightened my awareness of the internal struggle, family process, and community reactions...I need to overcome my own gender stereotypes and preconceived notions.” Some participants noted their new awareness included new empathy for what transgender individuals experience. One participant responded that the “movie challenged me to better empathize with a population I

would truly labor to understand,” and another participant explained that by feeling the “pain from each character’s point of view,” that she can “understand a little more what it might feel like...builds empathy and understanding of the range of reactions and emotions a person might have.” This increase in awareness also aided participants in identifying ways of counseling transgender individuals and their families.

**Counseling Applications.** After watching the film, 12 participants identified counseling interventions they can use when counseling transgender individuals and their families, such as fostering acceptance, the need to identify or create clients’ support systems, offering psychoeducation materials about going through transition, and monitoring for suicidal ideation. One participant stated wanting to “prepare individuals and their families by educating [them] on what to expect....Help families who want to stay together identify ways to make it work.” Another participant wanted “to be sure not to position the gender change as the client’s entire story.” In addition, one participant wanted to “understand each person’s perspective in the family...find support systems, and discuss the risks of coming out [as transgender].” These choices of professional counseling interventions, coupled with their increased compassion and awareness of what transgender individuals may experience when going through transition, were gained by watching *Normal* (Busch et al., 2003). Moreover, by watching both films about real-life experiences and fictional portrayals of the LGBTQ communities, participants expressed having expanded what they learned from class readings to better understanding how to effectively work with LGBTQ clients and their families in counseling sessions.

### **Discussion**

This qualitative study examined if the experiential teaching method of watching topic-specific films in a sexuality and counseling course would influence students’ awareness,

knowledge, and skills in working with LGBTQ clients and their families. Participants' responses indicate that watching the films *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karlsruhe, 2007) and *Normal* (Busch et al., 2003) in a sexuality course are useful experiential teaching methods that serve to increase students' cultural competencies (ALGBTIC, 2009; Chao et al., 2011; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011; Long & Serovich, 2003). This study's findings support previous research that revealed that observing films helped counseling students by eliciting reactions about themselves and others (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Koch & Dollaride, 2000; Walters & Rehman, 2013), expanded their cognitive learning into affective learning (Ahn et al., 2012; Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Igartua, 2010), and increased their empathy (Gerdes et al., 2011; Koch & Dollaride, 2000; Roell, 2010; Villalba & Redmond, 2008) for the LGBTQ communities. Further, processing the films' material through class discussions and reflective journals and papers increased students' diversity awareness and sensitivity (Dave & Tandon, 2011; Laszloffy & Habekost, 2010; Loya & Cuevas, 2010; Villalba & Redmond, 2008), and helped them to process their emotional reactions and new perceptions into new professional application (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Whipple & Tucker, 2012). The findings from this study also corroborate the position that experiential learning methods help students develop new professional behaviors (i.e., executive skills) by improving how students observe and gather information (i.e., perceptual skills) about themselves and others, and how to make sense of clients' lived experiences with their new awareness and knowledge (i.e., conceptual skills) (Higgins & Dermer, 2002; Oh et al., 2012; Warren et al., 2010).

Based on these findings, it appears that students who had emotional reactions (i.e., increased affective learning) and/or an increased awareness of the experiences of LGBTQ individuals were able to translate these into counseling interventions for LGBTQ clients and

their families. More participants had an emotional reaction to watching *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karlsruhe, 2007) than watching *Normal* (Busch et al., 2003). One possibility for this is that it presents value-laden material and intense scenes of both support and hatred for the LGBTQ communities. Additionally, students may respond more to documentaries (e.g., *For the Bible Tells Me So*) than fictional portrayals (e.g., *Normal*) with recognizable, cisgender actors who are not from the LGBTQ communities. Notably, after watching these films class discussions evolved from how to avoid imposing personal views on LGBTQ clients, to how to avoid imposing personal views on those who are not accepting or welcoming of members of the LGBTQ communities, thus promoting ethical counseling practices (ACA, 2014). The authors suggest counselor educators use class discussions to process emotions triggered by images seen in the films and guide students through the process of turning emotions and new awareness into effective counseling interventions when working with clients (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Dave & Tandon, 2011; Higgins & Dermer, 2002; Oh et al., 2012; Warren et al., 2010; Whipple & Tucker, 2012). This guidance models for students how counselors can help clients with the same skills in regulating emotions, synthesizing new information with previously held beliefs, and effective decision making skills aimed toward beneficial counseling outcomes.

More participants reported an increased awareness after watching Busch's et al., (2003) *Normal* than watching *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karlsruhe, 2007). Prior to watching *Normal*, some participants stated they did not know much about the transgender community, which could suggest why there was a larger increase in awareness as compared to responses after watching *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karlsruhe, 2007), where all participants reported knowledge and/or experiences with lesbian and gay individuals. There were fewer counseling applications reported, however, after watching *Normal*. It is possible participants needed more time to

synthesize their emotional reactions and new awareness of experiences faced by transgender individuals and their families before identifying possible counseling interventions and best practices (Chavez-Korell & Johnson, 2010; Villalba & Redmond, 2008). Counselor educators can expand students' awareness into transferable counseling interventions by using class discussions, skills-based training, and other experiential activities such as role-plays, community interviews, and discussion panels that include transgender individuals (Long & Serovich, 2003; Pearson, 2003; Preston, 2011). Additionally, students can have class discussions and assignments to increase their knowledge about local and national support networks (Carroll et al., 2002; Chavez-Korell & Johnson, 2010), community resources, and psychoeducational materials they can provide clients. This may include information on the transition process, coming out to family, friends, co-workers, and the community, and acknowledging the outcome may not be as positive as the ending in *Normal*, and what interventions could be taken to address loss and grief.

### **Implications for Counselor Educators**

It is important for counselor educators to understand that the students comprising their classes can range from ultra conservative to extremely liberal in their values related to marriage, family, religion, and politics and these values may be deeply entrenched depending upon the environment in which they were raised and educated. And, it is important that students feel safe to share their ideas and life experiences by hearing from counselor educators that all perspectives are valued, ridicule from others is not acceptable in the classroom, and that students have additional support (e.g., speaking with the professor, other faculty, or support services) if they need to process what they experience in class discussions. Thus, whether using the aforementioned material in a class devoted strictly to teaching about LGBTQ issues or

incorporating it into an existing class (e.g., cross cultural), the authors have found the following practice helpful in increasing the likelihood that the purpose of showing and processing these films is more easily understood and fully considered. First, ask students to briefly write about situations when they were unfairly judged or ridiculed. Then ask students to write about situations when they unfairly judged or ridiculed others, even if they were quite young at the time. Once students complete these two brief written assignments, ask them to discuss their insights and how this may relate to learning about LGBTQ clients and their issues. The authors have found that this exercise tends to decrease potential defenses and preconceived notions students may harbor about LGBTQ client issues by appealing to the larger argument that judgment in general, at least for professional counselors, is typically not conducive to successful client outcomes.

The authors also have found it useful to make students aware that the class may be filled with students who have a wide range of potentially conflicting beliefs and values related to religion, politics, abortion, right to die, and LGBTQ issues, among many other topics, but a part of the responsibility of being a graduate student is to be able to rationally and intentionally consider issues from multiple perspectives so that tentative decisions can be based on a broad body of knowledge, not just opinion. And, it should be mentioned that thinking systemically does not necessarily mean they have to sacrifice their values, unless with new evidence they see fit to do so. Moreover, discussions should include how to effectively and ethically work with clients whom students hold negative impressions or beliefs by seeking supervision and additional training to prevent harming the client and counseling relationship (ALGBTIC, 2013). Using these strategies to position or “front-end-load” the purpose of viewing and processing these two films does not guarantee that students will engage in completely peaceful and respectful



discussion, but the authors have found that it reduces defenses to the point where productive discussion can be facilitated.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Although this study provides insight into how the use of experiential teaching methods may enhance counselor-in-training competency with LGBTQ clients, it is not without limitations. One limitation of this study was the use of a convenience sample that lacked diversity which may have biased the results. Additional limitations that could be addressed in future research include assessing the effectiveness of these films in more than two sexuality courses, comparing films with members of the LGBTQ communities (e.g., bisexual, queer) that were not included in this study, assessing students' comfort and skill levels in working with LGBTQ clients while practicing in a counseling lab after watching films, and comparing various experiential activities to determine the most effective method (e.g., films, role-plays, group activities, etc.) in increasing students' cultural competence in working with LGBTQ clients. In addition, field studies need to be conducted to determine if students who view these two films build stronger therapeutic alliance with LGBTQ clients, the key ingredient to successful client outcome, relative to students who are taught with other types of sensitivity training modalities.

### **Conclusion**

At its most fundamental level, the role of the counseling profession is to help clients live more authentic and meaningful lives in accordance with clients' own values and goals. Counselor educators can play a pivotal role in this process by continually seeking effective teaching methods that expand counselors-in-training awareness of personal biases. The use of two films, specifically *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karslake, 2007) and *Normal* (Busch et al., 2003), have proven useful as an experiential teaching method in a sexuality course. The authors

hope in presenting these findings is that the impact of using these films increases students' awareness and fosters their growth as effective counselors for members of LGBTQ communities.

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Appendix  
Questionnaires (Pre/Post)

**Pre** *For the Bible Tells Me So:*

1. What are your thoughts about LGBTQ sexual minorities (i.e., individuals who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer)?
2. What are your thoughts about providing counseling to LGBTQ individuals?
3. How do you believe religion plays a role in your view of sexual minorities?
4. What do you believe religious families experience when their children are gay?

**Post** *For the Bible Tells Me So:*

1. After viewing the film, what are your immediate reactions?
2. Did the film shift your view about religion and homosexuality; if so, in what direction?
3. How can you use what you learned from the movie when counseling LGBTQ clients and/or their families?

**Pre** *Normal:*

1. What are your thoughts about transgender individuals?
2. What do you believe families experience when a family member transitions into another gender?
3. What are your thoughts about providing counseling to transgender individuals and/or their families?

**Post** *Normal:*

1. After viewing the film, what are your immediate reactions?
2. Did the film shift your view of transgender individuals; if so, in what direction?
3. How can you use what you learned from the movie when counseling transgender clients and/or their families?

**Author Note**

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# A Journey Toward Feminist Supervision: A Dual Autoethnographic Inquiry

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The purpose of this study was to explore our development as new supervisors learning to apply feminist supervision principles. Autoethnography was used to analyze author histories and learning processes over the course of one academic semester. Using personal narratives and critical reflections, we investigated our work of supervising beginning-level supervisees from a feminist perspective, and embodying our developing feminist supervisor skills and identities. Our inquiry was informed by our encounters with supervisees, supervisors, and each other. Basic definitions of supervision and feminist supervision frame the study, and results are shared in light of current research and theory.

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*Keywords: feminist supervision, clinical supervision, autoethnography*

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For both novice and expert counselors, the words *clinical supervisor* may evoke images of knower and known. To supervise the work of another suggests we know something – or at least, are able to see something – that supervisees do not. Assuming this epistemological stance of knower – in therapy, supervision, or research – requires choice and invites self-awareness and reflexivity. To supervise from a feminist stance invites critical reflection on this knower-known dichotomy and requires even greater attention to context, subjectivity, difference, power, and mutuality.

Although researchers have explored various tenets of feminist supervision (Gentile, Ballous, Roffman, & Ritchie, 2009; Mangione, Mears, Vincent, & Hawes, 2011; Nelson, Gizara, Hope, Phelps, Steward, & Weitzman, 2006; Szymanski, 2003), there exists a lack of research exploring doctoral student supervisors' experiences of feminist supervision with beginning-level supervisees. Furthermore, this has yet to be completed using autoethnographic methodology, a self-critical, emotional, and relational writing process (de Preez, 2008; Meekums, 2008). We



believe that such an endeavor will enrich and extend our knowledge of the scope and context of feminist supervision across supervisor and supervisee developmental levels. To that end, the questions we sought to explore in this autoethnographic project were the following: How do we undertake this process of becoming a supervisor who is feminist? What does it mean to be a feminist supervisor with beginning-level supervisees, and what does it look like for us? How can we embody and claim this identity as a supervisor who is feminist? To explore these, we first turn to the basic definitions of supervision and feminist supervision.

## **Supervision**

### **Clinical Supervision**

Clinical supervision has been defined as “a process whereby consistent observation and evaluation of the counseling process is provided by a trained and experienced professional who recognizes and is competent in the unique body of knowledge and skill required for professional development” (Haynes, Corey, & Moulton, 2003, p. 3). In this manuscript, we focus exclusively on supervision conducted by doctoral students (ourselves at the time of the study). Doctoral students face unique challenges as beginning-level supervisors. Because they have yet to establish a strong supervisor identity, they may struggle with a certain sense of role shock (Watkins, 1990, 1993, 1994). Furthermore, it may be difficult for them to manage multiple roles, establish a supervisory stance, navigate their own self-doubt, and manage dynamics with other supervisors (Gazzola, De Stefano, Thériault, & Audet, 2013). Although researchers (e.g., Gazzola et al., 2013; Watkins, 1990, 1993, 1994) have clearly identified the struggles of student supervisors, they have yet to explore these from a feminist theoretical framework, which adds an additional lens through which to view the supervision enterprise. Although both the feminist and non-feminist supervision literature address many of the same areas (e.g., relationship, power,

diversity), feminist supervision scholarship and practice tends to do so in a more deliberate way with particular sensitivity to social context.

### **Feminist Supervision**

Feminist supervision has been defined as “a collaborative relationship that is characterized by mutual respect, genuine dialogue, attention to social contextual factors, and responsible action” (Szymanski, 2003, p. 221). However, defining a feminist approach to clinical supervision is complex, in part because feminist discourse extends beyond gender to include race, culture, class, sexuality, and other intersecting facets of identity (Falender, 2009; Gentile et al., 2010; Nelson et al., 2006). The most commonly cited themes of feminist supervision include a focus on relationship; an attempt to balance power despite the evaluative nature of supervision; an effort to model social activism; and attention to various forms of diversity, oppression, and privilege (Falender, 2009; Gentile et al., 2009; Green & Dekkers, 2010; Mangione et al., 2011; Murphy & Wright, 2005; Nelson et al., 2006; Prouty, 2001; Szymanski, 2003, 2005).

The discrepancies between the traditional definition of supervision and the feminist definition of supervision illuminate the tension existing for supervisors, especially student supervisors seeking to establish their identities. Furthermore, our initial review of the literature left us with the awareness of a disconnect between theory and practice. For example, there is disagreement between supervisors and supervisees on the extent to which supervisors utilize feminist supervision practices (Green & Dekkers, 2010). Mangione et al. (2011) found that despite the presence of feminist values among many participants, discussions of power and the relationship in supervision were uncommon, and supervisees desired more of these discussions from their supervisors. Thus, with conflicting epistemological definitions of supervision and a lack of guidance on how feminist supervision interventions are practiced, student supervisors

may be lost as to how to approach concretely feminist supervision or whether a feminist approach can even be adequately operationalized.

Supervision can be a paradoxical endeavor (e.g., empowerment and evaluation), yet we are encouraged not to shy away from the resulting tension. Richardson (2000) pointed out that “one’s subjectivity is shifting and contradictory, not stable, fixed, and rigid” (p. 9). In reality, there is no consensus on what feminist practice in supervision should look like. In fact, some argue that it is imperative that supervisors first “embrace the tensions, uncertainty, and discomfort inherent to a discussion of the potentially conflictual issues of race, culture, feminism, and privilege” (Nelson et al., 2006, p. 107) before attempting to delineate one model of feminist multicultural supervision. Thus, although student supervisors may feel lost trying to navigate and practice supervision from a feminist stance, it is important that they lean into and embrace the emerging tensions. As doctoral students and new supervisors, we found ourselves struggling to navigate the multifaceted tensions associated with supervision and feminism. To be with the tension and discomfort with integrity and curiosity, we decided to conduct an autoethnographic study where we could nurture our voices, explore subjective ways of being and knowing, practice and hone our skills, and navigate the complexities of supervising from a feminist perspective. Our research questions were as follows: (a) What is the process of developing as feminist supervisors for two doctoral students?; (b) In what ways do we achieve or fall short of the tenets of feminist supervision?; and (c) How do we come to think of ourselves as both supervisors and feminists in this context? It is important to note that while at times we desired to uncover concrete behaviors we could point to and say, “This is feminist supervision” we began this investigation expecting more shades of gray and questioning ourselves, “Is this

feminist supervision?” Thus, our goal in this study was to highlight processes rather than attempt to define a set of best practices.

### **Methodology**

In autoethnography, the researcher analyzes personal stories and experiences to understand herself as part of a culture (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011) – in this case the culture of counseling and counselor education in the United States. McIlveen (2007) said “autoethnography offers practitioners a means of contributing to theory and practice while remaining genuine to their individual self and practice contexts” (p. 308). In autoethnography, the practice of writing as a method of inquiry and discovery is empowering and rigorous (Richardson, 2000; Wright, 2009; Wright & Cunningham, 2013). The researcher’s subjectivity is seen as a legitimate source of knowledge and yet there always remains more to be known (Meekums, 2008; Richardson, 2000). In the current study, we took a personal narrative approach to autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011) and disseminate our results alongside current literature on related feminist supervision concepts.

The question of where to begin is one that both novice and seasoned researchers often face with varying degrees of anxiety. Through the use of autoethnography, the researcher can use her experience as an entry point by connecting theory and practice (McIlveen, 2007), a prominent practice in both feminist theory and autoethnography. With this theory-practice awareness, we stepped into a supervisory role for the first time and wanted to try to do more than claim a feminist stance; we wanted to ensure we were practicing from one. We are all always in a state of becoming, but our particular place as soon-to-be counselor educators was thick with potential and tension and struggle. The weight of knowing our voices would soon have access to more spaces through teaching, supervising, and writing seemed to require that we critically

reflect on what we were saying and whether we were bearing the responsibility of these new roles sensitively and ethically.

### **Participants**

At the time of the study, we were both doctoral student supervisors, responsible for supervising an average of five master's-level supervisees in a mid-sized, southeastern university in the United States. MJF identified as a 30-year-old White woman and JLT identified as a 32-year-old White woman. Although this study developed over about one year, the data collection and analysis was concentrated in one semester, approximately 15 weeks in duration. Although they were not direct participants in this autoethnographic inquiry, our supervisor and our supervisees were in relationship with us – our supervisor a White woman and our supervisees Black, White, and Latina women and men.

### **Data Collection**

There were both deliberate and organic processes at work since our initial inquiry into feminist supervisor development began. Our exposure to foundational writing in feminist theory and therapy began in our core and cognate coursework in our doctoral program, highlighting our beginner developmental positions as both feminist scholars and supervisors. Although the results from this study extend the entirety of our lives, we relied on two primary data points throughout our autoethnographic journey: (a) focused conversations with each other and (b) reflections in our individual journals. First, through our frequent conversations (at coffee shops, walking trails, classrooms, therapy rooms), we sought mentorship from each other about how ethically to mold this interest into an inquiry project. We also respectfully discussed and examined our relationships and experiences with others: families of origin, supervisors-supervisees, teachers-students, mentors-mentees, counselors-clients, and friendships (Kassan, Fellner, Jones, Palandra,

& Wilson, 2015). We sought refuge in each other through mutual empathy even when we could not save one another from the self-doubt we encountered as we stumbled in our supervisory development. We could and heartily did celebrate with one another when we felt empowered and felt our supervisees becoming empowered as well. We soothed each other with validation and laughter when the barrage of inner questions became too loud. We listened to one another and verbalized our mutual admiration, and we challenged each other to more fully embody the values we cherished.

Second, we used journals to document and reflect upon on our lives and past developmental experiences related to feminist supervisor development. We referred back to our coffee-shop notes when reflecting individually. In our individual journals, we established early learning goals aligned with feminist supervisor behaviors (Szymanski, 2003), and reflected upon our progress. We posted questions to ourselves which we first posed in our documented conversations. Some of these questions included the following: How do we balance the collaborative nature of feminism with the gatekeeping role of a supervisor? How do we provide structure, safety, and guidance, and, at the same time, allow space for supervisees to exercise their own voice and power? How do we work from a feminist perspective in a hierarchical structure? How do we work within our professional identity/role, while at the same time, remain critical of it? How do we teach beginning-level supervisees, while at the same time, be open to their knowledge and their experiences? We were mindful to document only major themes of our discussions and not individual details in order to protect the privacy of those close people in our lives who most influenced our identity development and areas for growth.

## **Procedures**

Before beginning the study, we discussed and acknowledged our training and socialization that we were encouraged to carry as truths. Our inherited assumptions were (a) beginning-level supervisees need more structure in the form of direct instruction; (b) we, as supervisors, have a duty to be gatekeepers of the profession and ensure only capable and psychologically healthy individuals graduate from our program; and (c) supervisors need to assume – and be comfortable with – a level of power. Throughout our process, we continually pondered these assumptions, attempting to raise our own levels of critical consciousness and personal integrity. After we had analyzed our narratives, we asked a former supervisor who worked with us during the data collection phase of the study to review this manuscript to verify and validate the authenticity of the accounts. She agreed to review the manuscript and her feedback helped to clarify parts of the study and affirmed the veracity of the personal experiences shared below.

## **Data Analysis**

Several months after the conclusion of our supervisor roles as doctoral students, we revisited our collected data. We separately reviewed our notes and individual journals and each selected our most relevant or poignant narratives. Next, we contrasted our narratives to the themes which emerged from our literature review and decided to organize our results around four major themes of feminist supervision: (a) the supervisory relationship, (b) power, (c) multiculturalism, activism, and social justice, and (d) evaluation. We wrote final reflections after reading the narratives to provide closure to the analysis. By presenting our autobiographical results alongside the literature review, we represent our positions as doctoral students immersed in the dominant discourses of the field while excavating our own subjectivity within them.

Before transitioning to the results, we provide background information on ourselves as individuals to contextualize and illuminate our results. (Throughout the remainder of the manuscript, we include italics to describe our experiences. Quotations marks and indentations denote direct citations from our journal entries.)

## **Results**

### **Background Information**

As previously stated, an important component of autoethnography is the ability to contextually situate theory within the framework on one's life. Similarly, the practice of feminism relies heavily on contextual variables (Szymanski, 2003). Thus, we begin our results with descriptions of our life entrances into this realm.

*MJF: I am 21 years old, sitting in the orientation session of the counseling graduate program I have entered at considerable risk and expense. The decision to move from my small southern town to attend graduate school in a large, urban, Midwestern city was difficult and full of familial tension. One of my professors informs me that from here on out, I will be continually assessed by my professors and supervisors who will meet at the end of each semester to discuss my suitability to be a counselor. This process is called gatekeeping. By choosing to remain in the program I am providing my informed consent to undergo such scrutiny for the protection of future clients. I move through graduate school feeling watched and judged.*

*Later, I am 23 years old and I am starting to define my clinical interests. I am fascinated by people's experience with work but few training sites integrate mental health and career counseling in a way that fits with my professional identity. Mostly it seems that people want to tell job seekers what they're doing wrong, how to find work the "right way," and how to move up a corporate ladder. I don't know it yet, but my working-middle class background will*



*marginalize me at times in this counseling specialty which embraces an upper-middle class mentality. During practicum, I paid out of pocket for the supervision I required. Paying to bring in a qualified supervisor was the only way to work in this specialty and also maintain my credentials and identity as a counselor.*

*Toward the end of my Master's program, I accepted a position at my top choice internship site. Not only am I doing counseling, I am also receiving clinical supervision at no extra cost to me – a notable improvement. By landing this training opportunity I feel I've proven to some naysaying faculty that career counseling requires real clinical skill and good supervision. However, supervision quickly comes to feel like a nightmare of accusation, judgment, correction, and scrutiny. The kind of counselor (and person) I was and wanted to be seemed to be unacceptable. My supervisor used the metaphor of flipping real estate to describe clinical supervision. "Just when you get them the way you want them, all fixed up, it's time to let them go." This offhand comment during a coffee break validated exactly how I'd felt as a supervisee: I was an object to be fixed, flipped, bought, and sold.*

*JLT: It is impossible to write about my earlier experiences as a supervisee without nesting them within the context of my overall identity and life history. I am a white, educated woman who grew up in a small town in the northern United States. Looking back, I am 5, 9, 13, 19... I earnestly desire to be a "good girl," and therefore, accepted by others. I quietly introject the broad societal expectations of females (modest, polite, self-sacrificing) without questioning them or even being aware of their implicit and insipid influences. When forced to stand in some conviction, I realize that "I don't really know what my voice is."*

*Venturing into my doctoral training, I am in my early 30s, and I still carry this "good girl" façade with me, remaining rather conflict avoidant and eager to please. One very*

*influential faculty supervisor challenges my notions of what it means to be a strong woman, to stand in paradox and ambiguity, and to act with the interesting blend of confidence and humility. I watch her closely, puzzled by the way she seems to embrace feminist ideals without even mentioning them. At 31, she challenges me to speak and does not rescue me when I falter. At 32, she explores existential crises with me, acknowledging the vulnerability in our shared humanity. At 33, she holds the space while I directly confront her with my anger. For one of the first times, I notice myself becoming more comfortable questioning authority (including her) and associated hierarchical systems. I feel different somehow, stronger. Throughout this process, I also am learning what it means to become the authority figure – the supervisor.*

### **The Supervisory Relationship**

A safe and supportive relationship is a foundational component of feminist supervision (Mangione et al., 2011; Prouty, 2001). Intentional focus on collaboration and mutuality through directly addressing and examining hierarchical factors in the supervisory relationship distinguishes this from less collaborative approaches (Falender, 2009). This mutuality can begin with informed consent and collaborative goal development. Mangione et al. (2011) found that although reflexivity about the supervisory relationship characterizes a relational supervision, none of the dyads in their study discussed the relationship explicitly during observed sessions. Through individual interview data they found, “While there was reflexivity about the supervision, there was almost none about the relationship, and many supervisees clearly yearned for more of that” (p. 152).

*MJF: Moving into the supervisory role was not something I took on lightly. I knew that, at the very least, I did not want to replicate the objectifying experience I had during my counseling internship. I began my supervision work as conscious of feminist practice as one*

could be. I could recite the empirical literature and constructs to anyone who cared to hear it. I created an agenda for my initial sessions: sign the consent to record, sign the professional disclosure statement, build rapport, explore thoughts/feelings about supervision, describe supervisor's approach to and goals for supervision, discuss supervisee's learning goals for supervision, discuss evaluation, review expectations for clinic logistics and procedures. All of this is discussed in the first hour. Asking the supervisee about learning goals in the first session of their first supervision experience seems important to do, but it turned out my supervisees weren't sure what goals they were supposed to have. I think they have an excellent point as this is their very first encounter as supervisee. Seeing such a task-oriented list intended to structure the building of an egalitarian relationship seems almost comical to me, but at the same time, leads me to wonder how my authenticity is perceived by the supervisee. One asks me directly about my reference to feminist supervision in my professional disclosure statement and I share some textbook definitions which I am beginning to internalize. My intuition tells me she knows I am genuine in my intentions for this relationship to be mutually empowering and supportive of her growth, but this remains my only evidence.

*JLT: I struggle to reconcile the hierarchical nature of supervision and the relational nature of feminism and somehow bridge the gap toward feminist supervision. Reflected in my journal,*

*In my mind, feminist supervision is centered on an egalitarian relationship... but I feel as though supervision is fundamentally non-egalitarian. The very premise that supervisors evaluate supervisees and – essentially – hold their careers in their hands is non-egalitarian... Thus, my relationships with my supervisee aren't egalitarian.*

*My dissonance grows and predominates my sessions. At the same time, I am studying relational depth for my dissertation, and researchers (e.g., Lambers, 2006, 2013) have highlighted the poignant and transformative impact of relational depth in the supervisory relationship. I aspire to create meaningful relationships with my supervisees by respecting who they are as individuals, supporting them through the ups and downs of counseling, and encouraging their emerging counseling styles. However, I cannot deny the hierarchical nature of supervision and I struggle with the tension therein. Supervisors of other non-feminist models of supervision might capitalize upon the expert role within a hierarchical supervisor-supervisee dynamic, essentially telling supervisees what to do. Developmentally, I realize that this may be important for supervisees at times, and yet, I also strive to practice humility, honor supervisees' experiences, and foster an atmosphere of open dialogue. In practice, then tension between all of these strivings leaves me continually questioning and reflecting upon my intentions at any given point in time.*

## **Power**

The literature on feminist supervision highlights power analysis in the relationship as a crucial component of feminist supervision (Mangione et al., 2011; Murphy & Wright, 2005; Szymanski, 2003, 2005). Since the personal is political, it follows that addressing power in the supervisory context may begin to affect the acknowledgement of unequal power outside of supervision, leading to social change - a foundational goal of feminist practice. This is in contrast to a non-feminist acknowledgement of power differences which may be more limited in impact.

Empirical evidence reveals that power analysis may not play out as explicitly in feminist supervision as feminist theory would indicate it should. Murphy and Wright (2005) acknowledged that both supervisors and supervisees have power in the supervisory relationship

and sought to directly examine supervisees' experience of power in supervision. Supervisees acknowledged awareness of their own positive use of power, reported that supervisors' positive use of power promoted supervisee growth (e.g., empowering supervisee, promoting an atmosphere of safety), and reported few experiences with negative uses of power by themselves or their supervisors (Murphy & Wright, 2005). Mangione et al. (2011) found that supervisors tended to downplay the importance of power, and that power was not discussed in the sessions they observed. In regard to a truly collaborative, relational supervisory relationship, Mangione et al. (2011) said, "Actually naming the issue of power and the unequal power status is essential" (p. 163). Hoover and Morrow (2016) found that supervisees at a feminist-multicultural training site questioned whether true shared power was possible in the supervisory context, even though they felt their supervisors generally aspired to the ideal.

*MJF: I found that my self-efficacy, or empowerment, as a supervisor went up and down depending on both my perception of my supervisees' growth or stagnation and my perception of my peers' assessments of my supervisees. My work as a supervisor was being assessed by people who I was convinced were far more competent than I. There was no shortage of parallel process in the various roles and relationships I held as a supervisor-in-training. Like my supervisees, I was struggling to learn and apply new skills (awkwardly, in most cases). My supervisees and I were like novice dancers learning to work together. I felt I was given the role "to lead" – in my perhaps overblown sense of responsibility I tried too hard, not always listening to my partner, focused too much on myself. I was, at times, rigid, controlling, in my head, and not in my body. At other times, there were moments of connection and rhythm between myself and supervisees that I hoped would positively shape our development as individuals and as a supervisory dyad. Even so, I felt my attention to the feminist behaviors as outlined in my learning goals was paying*

*off as well as could be expected. These goals were taken directly from the Feminist Supervision Scale (FSS; Szymanski, 2003) and were helpful in guiding my intentions and behaviors early in the semester. Two referred specifically to power: (a) Model accountability in the use of power and (b) Attend to power relations in the supervisory context. These behaviors were at times made explicit by me (e.g., asking supervisees directly about their sense of empowerment as counselors and supervisees) and at other times were implicit (e.g., asking women supervisees to voice their thoughts and impressions in group supervision when men were unknowingly dominating the discourse). The conscious effort I once placed on “doing feminism” began to become internalized, to the point that I felt able to just be a feminist supervisor. Contemplating the doing-being dialectic is nearly always useful when I’m feeling the need to shift my perspective or approach. As someone who defaults to doing, reminders to just be are empowering.*

*JLT: My early experiences of becoming a supervisor are wrought with questions about power. I exist in the relational-cultural theoretical tension between power over and power with (Miller, 2008). I continually try to navigate the tension between confidently owning what feels like a powerful supervisory role and ensuring that my supervisees have a voice and the space to develop their own authentic counselor identities. My pre-semester assumptions reflect this tension.*

*Supervisors shouldn’t capitalize upon this (abuse power) and yet at the same time, they shouldn’t work to eradicate it too early either (abdicate power). Rather, they need to be sensitive to supervisees’ needs at any given point in time, responding promptly when supervisees need them, and yet at the same time, encouraging appropriate independence.*

*I wane back and forth between feeling powerless (not firmly guiding supervisees when needed) and too powerful (directing supervisees too much). At some point in the semester, I begin to reconcile and stand in the tension amongst supervision, feminism, and power.*

*I am realizing more and more that power doesn't have to be scary or manipulative or 'bad' by any means. I think that assuming my own sense of power means that I can be more relational and understanding. I can send the message that 'I am very invested in your process and will hold you to a high – yet fair – standard based on what you tell me you need. I value you and want to help you become your best self.' I think there's a lot of power in that.*

### **Multiculturalism, Activism, and Social Justice**

Feminist supervision is focused on more than issues related to gender; all forms of cultural difference are acknowledged. Falender (2009) noted, “Although most traditional definitions of supervision allude to the power differential, they typically omit attention to oppression, privilege, and social context, which are central to feminist models” (p. 27). Diversity and social context (DSC) is a core dimension in Szymanski’s (2003) definition of feminist supervision and is relevant to theory, case conceptualization, and both the therapeutic and supervisory relationships. Nelson et al. (2006) described several personal experiences discussed by supervisors around the intersection of feminism and cultural diversity. They acknowledged a great deal of what they called “feminist silence/white privilege” which results from fear of oppressing others and a desire to remain safe from conflict. Historically, feminism relied on assumptions of a universal experience of being a woman which created barriers to addressing issues of race (Nelson et al., 2006).

*MJF: Despite my best intentions, I have participated in the violence of feminist silence/white privilege. In preparing this manuscript, JLT and I wrote our narratives separately from the literature review. We struggled with how to approach an autoethnography but decided to write in an organic, reflective, and unstructured way in our journals. Our training as writers favors linear, “logical,” and detached analyses. Upon reading our reflections, we noticed our narratives fell nicely into sections like The Supervisory Relationship, Power, and Evaluation. But Multiculturalism? Silence. We are complex cultural people who openly acknowledged and broached our and our supervisees’ identities, so why and how did we have nothing to say on this topic? We are two cis, straight, White women. Perhaps multiculturalism, a core facet of feminist supervision practice, was an afterthought for us. Perhaps it was so interwoven into our conversations about power that we failed to see it as its own important and distinct issue. As someone who is always wanting to think and act my way through things, perhaps being more explicit and mindful of multiculturalism seemed to be something that I couldn’t do much about. As long as I broached the fact of multiculturalism – for client, counselor, and supervisor – I was doing a “good enough” job. If this was, indeed, the unconscious process happening in my development, it falls too short of fulfilling the multicultural intent of feminist practice and I like to think that I wouldn’t accept “good enough” from a supervisee who I knew was capable of greater depth and complexity. The absence of this facet in my narrative speaks loudly and challenges me to seek greater accountability in this domain.*

*JLT: I re-read my journal again. Surely I reflected on multiculturalism, right? I am humbled by my lack of reflection in this area. I realize, once again, the extent of my privilege and the importance of continuing to reflect upon how I am incorporating – or failing to incorporate – tenets of multiculturalism in my supervision practice. I feel somewhat defeated by this insight,*



*and yet at the same time, it motivates me to be much more attentive and aware in the future. My shortcoming in this area is noted in the limited scope of my reflection here as well.*

Activism and social justice are defining characteristics of feminist supervision (Falender, 2009; Gentile et al., 2009; Green & Dekkers, 2010; Szymanski, 2003, 2005). Szymanski's (2005) conceptualization includes the feminist advocacy and activism dimension, "which refers to educating supervisees about feminist issues and feminist therapy and to encouraging active involvement in social change aimed at eliminating oppression and improving women's lives" (p. 731). Green and Dekkers (2010) suggested that if supervisors are not explicit about their social activism, supervisees may be unaware of this critical component of a true feminist practice. Gentile et al. (2009) focused much of their attention on the importance of supervisors' modeling and mentoring outside of the supervision session, stating that supervision must be expanded to "include those activities that can promote social change through inquiry and action" (p. 140). They suggested supervisors can take an educator role on social justice issues, mentor students in social justice research, and be involved in the training and continuing education of other supervisors. Falender (2009) agreed, stating that "through modeling social activism, by engaging in social policy and public service, supervisors model for supervisees future roles through addressing oppression and privilege" (p. 35).

*MJF: Like Multiculturalism, none of our narratives or past experiences fit clearly into the domains of activism and social justice. How can this be? We are women who consider ourselves feminist clinical supervisors and here we are skimming over a core principle. We may try to tell ourselves that focusing on activism and social justice with novice counselors-in-training is not developmentally appropriate. Perhaps we can justify a hyper focus on basic clinical skills training. Claiming something is not developmentally appropriate can be a cop-out.*

*It is like the Get Out of Jail Free card of clinical supervision when not applied thoughtfully. It is clear that modeling my activism and bringing it into supervision was and still is my biggest area for growth. As someone who wishes to study advocacy as a primary role of therapists, the relative weakness of my practice in this area humbles and challenges me. The clinical tone of my reflections in these areas show how far I've yet to grow. I have clearly not embodied these ideals – they exist only in my imagination – this process is showing me the many ways I am still enacting my socialization and failing to question my privilege.*

*JLT: I continue to grapple with the premises of social justice and activism – from the lenses of both supervision and feminism. I find myself quietly observant, closely watching others who seem to intuitively embrace social justice practices and live them in their everyday encounters. I realize that this is yet another journey for me: learning to embody my own social justice inclinations and practice them with personal integrity.*

## **Evaluation**

Falender (2009) pointed out the competing roles of the feminist supervisor as someone who must provide both challenge and support, and protect clients while focusing on the supervisee. She addressed issues of evaluation, particularly when supervisees are not meeting performance standards. In order to avoid potential disempowerment when supervisee performance is deemed unacceptable, formal, written procedures about evaluation should be provided to supervisees at the beginning of the supervised experience, similar to an informed consent process between counselor and client. This gives supervisees as much information up front as possible, and provides some assurance of due process if performance standards are not met (Falender, 2009; Mangione et al., 2011). Interestingly, none of the supervisees in Murphy and Wright's (2005) study described evaluation in negative terms, perhaps indicating that

instances of negative use of supervisor power around evaluation did not occur for these participants. The supervisees in Hoover and Morrow's (2016) study remained always aware of the evaluative nature of supervision in their social justice oriented practicum which at times led them not to disclose certain thoughts or defer to their supervisors even when feeling overextended.

*MJF: Even though evaluation is an ongoing process from the moment students begin a counseling program, the intimacy and intense attention that happens in individual supervision, as well as the summative evaluation that results in a passing or failing grade, is a unique and often disorienting experience (for both parties as I am beginning to learn). I was intentional about acknowledging my evaluative role with my supervisees in our first sessions. I noted the paradox in claiming to work toward an egalitarian relationship at the same time holding the supervisees to meet certain levels of competencies based on an evaluation form neither of us created. I couldn't help but remember my own experiences of being evaluated "lower" than some of my peers in my early counselor development, despite feeling like I was fighting for the right to be an authentic counselor. No doubt this informs my desire to give counselors as much room as I can give them while still upholding standards. I find myself wanting to apologize for these narrow, Eurocentric standards but know that this would undermine a system. I have faith in the system because it produced me and assures me that it exists for the protection of clients – hard to argue with. How much of my faith in this system is due to my White privilege? Questioning such a system is questioning some of the most sacred and established tenets of our profession.*

*JLT: Gatekeeping is difficult for me. My musings at the beginning of the semester highlight this difficulty.*

*When I do evaluations with students, I encourage them to tell me what they think, and based on their perceptions, I will change their scores on various components of the evaluation. At the same time, though, I would imagine that at some point I am going to need to wield my power if I need to step into the gatekeeping role. How is feminist supervision applied in those types of cases? Can it be applied? I'm having trouble holding these tensions together.*

### **Conclusions**

Student supervisor voices have been missing from the literature and need to be represented if we truly want to understand supervisor development (Kassan et al., 2015). Through this autoethnographic project, we have made progress in bridging a theory-practice gap, at least within ourselves, but also found glaring holes in our awareness and in our practice which highlight ways in which we can reenact the very oppressive structures which feminist practice aims to disrupt. We failed to translate our knowledge of intersectionality to practice – adhering to siloes of race and gender. This project highlights some first steps of expanding our awareness and shines a light on where we need to focus moving forward. We hope that our honesty and intentionality will prove useful to readers who are just starting their trajectories as feminist supervisors. Our introspective intentionality took effort and risk as we confronted our resistance to some feminist supervisor behaviors and learned to embrace others. We can accept and acknowledge our power as supervisors while also critiquing the knower-known dichotomy, which can be easily exaggerated in a supervisory context. We have not found a way to be supervisors without power, but believe we can use it positively without the diminishing the power of the supervisee who also brings her subjectivity to the relationship.

Both supervisors and supervisees desire authentic, egalitarian supervisory relationships. Mangione et al. (2011) “saw a sense of connectedness, energy, and zest in the more collaborative, authentic, reflexive relationships” (p. 159) they studied. By striving toward the ideals of feminist practice in supervision, supervisors and supervisees may be able to achieve more meaningful and transformative supervisory relationships, which could have implications for the therapeutic relationship as well (Mangione et al., 2011). Supervisors, however, are ultimately responsible for starting conversations with supervisees about power and cultural differences, which can open the door to authenticity and mutuality (Falender, 2009; Mangione et al., 2011; Nelson et al., 2006). As students ourselves, we felt both powerless and powerful in terms of hierarchy – somewhere between rank of faculty and student. As we move forward in our careers, our rank will be less ambiguous and we will need to be even more vocal about questioning and shirking “power over” so that we can create “power with” our supervisees (Miller, 2008). Examining and confronting the structures and norms of clinical supervision is a worthy and risky practice and in doing so we potentially open up to deeper levels of authenticity. We hope that our contributions through these autoethnographies shed light on important processes that may be useful to other developing feminist supervisors.

*MJF: I can say that this project has generated both internal and external knowledge. The process of reflecting, writing, and sharing is productive and important for supervisors. The transformations that occurred as I utilized autoethnography feel foundational, like I cannot unlearn what I have learned here. The relational connection and mutual experience of undertaking this self-analysis with a friend and colleague deepened the experience even further. My long-standing preferences for hyper-independence, privacy, and solitude are not changed but writing about the struggle to embrace vulnerability and connection is proving to be a valuable*

*one. Seeing my strivings and intentions on paper makes me slightly more accountable to myself and the people with whom I work. In some ways, I feel further away from my ideal image of a feminist supervisor, but at least I am beginning to see my shortcomings. I am starting with myself and asking myself the questions I intend to ask supervisees (Bauman, Acker-Hocevar, & Talbot, 2012). I am “locating the researcher in the research” (du Preez, 2008, p. 509).*

*JLT: Deciding to step forward with this autoethnography in a more public manner has been a bit of a painstaking decision for me. As I perused my written reflections, I heavily contemplated the implications of such self-disclosure. However, in the midst of such weighty consideration, I identified the core fear: vulnerability. Interestingly (and not surprisingly), my own struggle parallels the heart of the feminist striving, as individuals across sexes and genders, across races and ethnicities, across socioeconomic divides and religious differences, find the courage somewhere within to stand in greater authenticity and speak their voices. I am reminded of feminist Audre Lorde’s (2007) words, “I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood” (p. 40).*

## **Moving Forward**

The research questions and corresponding methods used in this study allow for limited generalizability, but carry the potential for a meaningful impact to some readers. One notable limitation is that the current study is focused solely on supervisors’ experiences. By claiming a feminist stance and sharing our process with our colleagues, we risk misrepresenting feminist supervision altogether, particularly due to the ways in which our White privilege permitted us to perpetuate silence around key feminist practices. We invite more feminist supervisors to share their developmental process so that we can better understand the ways in which oppressive,

dominant practices can be transformed. Future researchers may consider investigating the experiences of entry-level supervisees who work with feminist supervisors, as well as look at co-constructed narratives between supervisor and supervisee working within feminist frameworks (Pack, 2013). The FSS (Szymanski, 2003) offers a quantitative measure that can be used in a number of creative ways to structure future research on feminist supervision practice.

*MJF: My history has placed me near the center of dominant culture and my choices have led me to explore the margins, but I have yet to take up residence in one place. My horizons of exploration continue to broaden and I am becoming comfortable existing in multiple locations. Holding this tension is part of the work as a critical feminist scholar. I will do this through ongoing self-examination and honesty and through questioning assumptions around the training of new counselors. Perhaps this project is my attempt to seek accountability and connect emotionally with an anonymous reader (Wright, 2009). There is both safety and risk in that (Pack, 2013). I know, though, that I alone carry the responsibility as the one with more power in the supervisory dyad to acknowledge my own and my colleague's subjectivity with care. This effort has thus far been fruitful in supervision. By naming and claiming a feminist supervisor identity I have experienced deeper and more honest work with supervisees. I have learned more than I imagined I would, and been humbled in more ways than I can express.*

*JLT: Toward the end of the semester, I realize that this, my journey into feminist supervision, has just begun. However, I come to a pseudo-conclusion.*

*At this point, the best way I have found to navigate the tensions amongst feminist supervision, developmental supervision, egalitarian and hierarchical relationships, etc. is to step into my power and my voice, and yet at the same time, continually acknowledge*

*and reflect upon (oftentimes with supervisees) this power as it manifests in my direction at any given point in time.*

*In this manner, I stand in the tensions of feminist supervision and endeavor to continually raise my own level of critical consciousness by respectfully questioning the pre-established structures around me; examining and monitoring my own supervision intentions; acknowledging my limitations in knowledge and practice; and continually striving to supervise with greater humility, empathy, and transparency.*



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# Voices from the Desks: Exploring Student Experiences in Counselor Education

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The purpose of the qualitative study was to explore the themes that counselor education master's students perceived as impacting their experience within a counseling program. Counselor education master's students provided their perceptions of what they attributed to helping or hindering their progress. Themes identified as impacting their experiences were academic environment, finances, job preparation, self-care, life role balance, support, mentoring and advising, and personal growth. Recommendations are provided for counselor educators to consider when structuring programs and interacting with master's students.

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*Keywords: counselor education, master's students, qualitative research*

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Successful graduate students must possess complex survival skills including the ability to establish relationships with faculty, meet academic expectations, engage in extra-curricular professional development experiences and manage the time and money expected to complete the degree (Benshoff, Cashwell, & Rowell, 2015; Fischer & Zigmond, 1998; Lightfoot & Doerner, 2008; Smallwood, 2004). Counselor education graduate programs also require the acquisition of complex clinical skills, personal growth, and the demonstration of emotional wellbeing (Delaney, 1997; Furr & Carroll, 2003). These secondary expectations can become overwhelming when one considers stressors and demands common among graduate students. While master's students experience challenges pursuing a degree in counseling, learning how to be a professional counselor can result in positive factors such as personal insight, enhanced meaning, and deep life satisfaction (Hayes, 2014). The purpose of the current study is to explore the complexities of the master's student experience in counselor education, using a qualitative method to allow students to voice their lived experiences both in and outside of the classroom.

## **The Graduate Student Experience**

The literature highlights a number of broad areas that students find important in their graduate counseling experience. These include traditional academic preparation, securing employment, receiving supportive mentoring and advising, as well as managing the multiple work/life roles, and fulfilling financial obligations (Doran, Kraha, Marks, Ameen, & El-Ghoroury, 2016; Fischer & Zigmond, 1998; Inman et al., 2011; Mazumdar, Gogoi, Buragohain, & Haloi, 2012; Weidman et al., 2001). Graduate school entails a socialization process requiring students take on new responsibilities and identify with the role and expectations of being a graduate student (Gansemer-Topf, Ross, & Johnson, 2006; Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Professional socialization includes investment of personal, professional development activity, and traditional in and out-of-class academic work (Weidman et al., 2001). Traditional academic knowledge acquisition can be stressful for counseling graduate students, especially real-life scenarios, fieldwork, and research skills (El-Ghoroury, Galpur, Sawaqdeh, & Bufka, 2012; Furr & Carroll, 2003; Steele & Rawls, 2014). Graduate students must socialize to the ethics, values, and culture of a profession (Boyle & Boice, 1998; Golde, 1998; Weidman et al., 2001). This socialization can be more complicated than traditional academic learning, especially when student expectations are inconsistent with the realities they later encounter (Golde & Dore, 2001; Wells et al., 2014) or when personal values collide with that of the program or institution (Nyquist et al., 1998).

Obtaining employment after graduation has been identified as a critical but sometimes overlooked aspect of graduate school (Fischer & Zigmond, 1998). Writing, communication, and networking skills are a vital part of preparing to obtain employment (Fischer & Zigmond, 1998). Faculty should not assume that students who perform well in a program naturally possess the

knowledge and skills needed to secure a job. The profession of counseling has readily-available theories and practices to help clients move forward in pursuit of a meaningful career; however faculty often fail to apply these concepts with their own graduate students (Ishler, 2015).

Advising and mentoring is highly important among graduate students in terms of both quantity and quality of service provided (Hesli, Fink, & Duffy, 2003; Schlosser, Knox, Moskovitz, & Hill, 2003; Taylor & Neimeyer, 2009). In general, mentoring appears to be linked to master's student satisfaction and persistence (Gardner, 2010; Hollingsworth & Fassinger, 2002). In a study of 1,219 graduate students, Maton et al. (2011) found that mentoring was the strongest predictor of student satisfaction, and thus the potential for students to successfully complete their degree. Similarly, Cohen and Greenberg (2011) reported that graduate students were more likely to persist through the graduate program if they felt respected by faculty and treated as an important part of the institution. Interactions with faculty in and outside of the classroom and a consistent relationship with one's advisor were also important in retention (Cohen & Greenberg, 2011). Schlosser, Knox, Moskovitz, and Hill (2003) highlighted the benefit of both the quantity and quality of advisement among psychology graduate students. Supporting those findings, Johnson, Johnson, Kranch, and Zimmerman (1999) found that positive university climate (i.e., respect, trust, high morale, opportunity for input) impacted student performance and development.

In addition to traditional academic expectations, students are often unaware of the personal growth expectations that are key to progression through graduate programs (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Merriman, 2015; Williams, Hayes, & Fauth, 2008). Counseling programs require students to explore their own mental wellbeing and history of crisis and life struggle (Hayes, 2014). Learning basic counseling skills (i.e., empathy, reflection, genuineness, and self-

reflection) can be an intensely challenging yet rewarding experience (Coll, Dumas, Trotter, & Freeman, 2013; Hayes, 2014). Personal counseling services and other personal growth activities help students build a foundation of mental health that supports competent and effective practice (Irving & Williams, 1999).

Graduate school roles and responsibilities often compete with personal life responsibilities, causing considerable stress (Mazumdar et al., 2012). For traditional students, this can require navigating developmental tasks of young adulthood, including developing autonomy, independence, and meaningful relationships, while developing an identity consistent with their chosen profession (Committee on the College Student Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, 1999). Non-traditional students who re-enter the workforce after having had children or return to school after an extended period of time struggle with challenges typically associated with mid to later-life (Cohen & Greenberg, 2011; Isaac, Pruitt-Logan, & Upcraft, 1995).

For older or nontraditional students, developmental tasks include managing family and personal responsibilities, caring for dependents, and meeting financial obligations, as well as coping with medical concerns (Brus, 2006; Luzzo, 2000). These tasks can be particularly intense for women with cultural expectations to put the needs of family members first, sometimes resulting in anxiety and depression (Leyva, 2011). The support of family and friends has also been found to moderate the relationship between stress and satisfaction with graduate school (Lawson & Feuhrer, 2001) and are more important than the social support offered by program faculty (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992).

Self-Care practices have been widely cited as an important part of the developing counselor's skill set (Coll et al., 2013; Roach & Young, 2007). Self-care reduces compassion fatigue, improves stamina, and supports ethical practice (Simpson & Falkner, 2013). In many

ways, wellness and self-care have “taken center stage” in professional counseling (Myers, Trepal, Ivers, & Wester, 2016, p. 29). Faculty provide little time teaching graduate students how to prioritize academic responsibilities in the context of self-care and other life-roles (McKinzie, Altamura, Burgoon, & Bishop, 2006; Peluso, Carleton, & Asmundson, 2011).

For many graduate students, financial issues are viewed as a source of significant stress (Benshoff, Cashwell, & Rowell, 2015; El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). Student debt can have direct implications on living conditions and transportation and makes it difficult to engage in recreation and other coping activities that can reduce stress (Doran et al., 2016; El-Ghoroury, Galper, Sawaqdeh, & Bufka, 2012; Shen-Miller et al., 2011). Financial stress related to graduate school can also postpone important life decisions or developmental milestones (Doran et al., 2016).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The challenges faced by counseling students extend well beyond the classroom environment and are therefore not always obvious to counselor educators. Normative developmental challenges, personal growth, self-care, and financial wellbeing are issues that exist within the context of graduate school. If unmet, the unique needs of graduate students can result in attrition (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000), a costly outcome for both the student and institution (Lightfoot & Doerner, 2008; Nesheim, Guentzel, Gansemer-Topf, Ross, & Turrentine, 2006). These challenges can impede student’s ability to learn which has implications for their work with future clients.

Counseling students are the primary sources of information to help graduate faculty understand what is most important to students as stakeholders in their educational experience (Hinchey & Kimmel, 2000). Research has suggested that the student perspective is vital to exploring dynamics underlying student success (Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Nesheim et al.,

2006; Tinto, 1993), and that student satisfaction can predict achievement and retention (Haworth, 1996; Nerad & Miller, 1996). A majority of the existing research in this area explores the experience of doctoral students and fails to address master's students, particularly in counselor education (Golde & Dore, 2001; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). In response, this study addresses the research question, "What is the experience of master's level counseling students?" The purpose of this study was therefore to more deeply understand both the challenges and rewards of counselor education from the master's student perspective.

### **Method**

This qualitative study explored the experience of master's counseling students using an open approach for inquiry. This provided a description of the complex experience of participants within counseling master's programs across the country and reduced the researchers' imposition of their own constructs through use of a quantitative study. While most qualitative studies have small sample sizes, a large-scale qualitative approach using a university web-based survey system allowed the researchers to collect a variety of perspectives from counseling students regarding what influenced their experience while minimizing students' discomfort discussing particularly sensitive issues (Protivnak & Foss, 2009).

Large-scale qualitative study can be appropriate when the purpose is broad or exploratory in nature (Dinham & Scott, 1999; Sandelowski, 1995; Sobal, 2001). The authors modeled their study after their large-scale qualitative study of the experience of doctoral students (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Privacy of participants and efficiency of data collection were also reasons to choose this method. Participants responded to open-ended questions to provide a rich accounting of the experiences. This method permitted the development of themes that were consistently reported throughout the data (Charmaz, 2005). Questions were generated to reflect the researchers'



experiences of conversations that were common among master's counseling students and were consistent with similar studies (Cusworth, 2001; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). These questions were: (a) What has been the most difficult part of your graduate studies in counseling? (b) What has been the most helpful part of your graduate studies in counseling? (c) What compromises have you made in your personal life or values in order to achieve your graduate degree in counseling? and (d) What additional information or related supports would be helpful for you in your graduate studies in counseling?

### **Participants**

The researchers solicited participants by using the American Counseling Association (ACA) student member list and two national counseling listservs. The sample consisted of 224 gender and racially diverse students from all five Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) regions: 32.1% (n=72) from the southern region, 27.2% (n=61) from the north central region, 17.0% (n=38) from the north Atlantic region, 10.3% (n=23) from the western region, 10.0% (n=22) from the rocky mountain region, 1.8% (n=4) from Alaska & Hawaii with 1.8% (n=4) non-respondents. Of the participants, 75.9% (n=170) were Caucasian, 6.7% (n=15) were African American, 5.8% (n=13) were Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, 2.2% (n=5) were American Indian or Alaska Native, 2.2% (n=5) were multiracial, 1.3% (n=3) were Asian American, 0.9% (n=1) was Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; 0.4% (n=1) was Arab American; and 2.6% (n=6) did not respond. Program type included 72.3% (n=162) in Clinical Mental Health/Community Counseling Programs, 15.6% (n=35) in School Counseling Programs, 6.7% (n=15) in Marriage and Family Counseling Programs, 2.7% (n=6) in Student Affairs/College Counseling Programs, 0.9% (n=2) in Rehabilitation Counseling Programs, and 0.4% (n=1) each enrolled in a separate Addiction Counseling, Career Counseling, and Pastoral

Counseling programs. A total of 4.0% (n=9) did not respond. Women composed 77.6% (n=174) of the group. 66.1% (n=148) were enrolled in a program accredited by Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

### **Researchers**

The researchers have over 25 years of combined experience teaching in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. The first author is a counselor educator at a university in New England area. She is a licensed professional counselor who teaches courses within the clinical mental health counseling program and serves as the program coordinator. The second author is a counselor educator at a mid-western university, and a licensed professional clinical counselor and licensed school counselor who serves as the chairperson of the department. As counselor educators in departmental leadership roles, the authors regularly receive informal feedback from their own master's students as well as program-generated student satisfaction surveys relating to the experiences of master's students. Further, the researchers had conducted a similar qualitative study of the experience of doctoral students (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). This line of inquiry led to numerous formal and informal conversations with other counselor educators about the experience of counseling master's students. Therefore the researchers recognized how their own experiences would inevitably impact their interpretation of the data (Patton, 2002). The researchers obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from their universities and ACA ethical codes were followed.

### **Data Collection**

The researchers randomly selected 2,000 student members of the ACA. The students were sent a letter of invitation to participate and it included a link to a university web-based survey system. The original mailing resulted in a response rate of 9.3% (i.e., 186 respondents

and 71 non-deliverable email addresses). Participants who responded and reported that they were doctoral students were excluded from the analysis. The final sample of 224 master's students was achieved after the researchers sent two additional mailings to the sample of ACA student members and an additional announcement on both the Counselor Education and Supervision Network (CESNET) listserv and the Counselor Education Students Nationwide listserv, COUNSGRADS.

### **Data Analysis**

The researchers independently conducted thematic analysis and coded the responses by emerging themes. Data analysis included creating a code list with various types of response data, a line-by-line assignment of codes, followed by data-derived themes using a structured constant comparison method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, Patton, 2002). The researchers compared and discussed the themes. The participant data reflected an overlap and repetition of ideas, allowing for the development of meaningful grouping of themes that reflected the experience across participants. Analytic bracketing was used to monitor the personal attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of the researchers, to effectively avoid imposing personal sense of meaning on the data analysis (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). Bias was minimized through independent coding. For triangulation, an investigator outside the study independently reviewed the results and discussed with the researcher her perspective regarding how the themes were being coded and grouped based to reflect the data. The participant responses were continuously examined with attention to remaining accurate to the perspectives of the participants.

### **Trustworthiness**

The researchers used strategies to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of the data. These included constant comparison and taking analytic notes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The

researchers also used two current master's students to review the data for accurate analysis. Analytic field notes were utilized to increase the credibility of the analysis and the trustworthiness of the results. The researchers continued with data analysis until a thick description of participants' experiences was achieved. An electronic record of the emerging themes was maintained throughout the research process to establish dependability. During the data analysis, the researchers discussed their perceptions about their own experience as students and the experiences of their current master's students. The researchers held the assumptions that the themes of master's students would be similar to the themes that were found in their study of counselor education doctoral students (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). The researchers attempted to bracket their assumptions and avoid the inclusion of personal biases when identifying emerging themes.

### **Findings**

Analysis of data revealed five distinct themes: (a) academic environment (b) mentoring and advising, (c) personal growth, (d) life role balance (e) and finances.

#### **Academic Environment**

Traditional academic work, practical fieldwork, and online work were indicated as important elements in students' perceptions of what is challenging in graduate school. This theme captured thoughts about the structure of coursework, program requirements, preparation for entering the program, development of one's counseling specialty through academic work, and planning for future employment. This theme also included conflict with faculty or students in relation to academics, as well as issues related to workload, professional writing, dress, and religious values.

While some students struggled with the discipline or skills needed to succeed academically, many believed that coursework lacked depth. One student indicated “we write too much and discuss too little” while others stated that some assignments “seem useless... like busy work” and “routine and uncreative.” At the same time, students reported appreciation for fieldwork, program flexibility, online opportunities, and faculty expressions of respect for students in the classroom. One participant referred to an impressive depth of learning:

All the self-reflection we are required to do as part of integrating the material we study. I am roughly halfway through my program and have already been changed on a fundamental level, which has changed my relationships and refined the way I approach life in general.

Participants shared a belief that the graduate program should assist in preparing them to obtain a job through professional development/socialization into the field of counseling and connections to employers. A participant remarked about the benefit of being “involved with professional organizations and advocacy groups on a local level” as contributing to their career success following graduation. Participants also desired to understand the realities of a career as a professional counselor:

We would have been assisted greatly if we would have been given a more realistic picture of what actually working as a counselor is like. The counseling field is not simply graduating and then working as a counselor; it is a progression of professional levels of accomplishment and licensure.

There was an expressed need for “openness about the field of mental health counseling and the limitations and roadblocks LMHCs will face once out of graduate school.”

Indeed, counseling licensure emerged as a significant concern in this theme. One participant indicated, “Getting a license was never really stressed or specified in my estimation.” In some cases, coursework did not meet state standards for licensure. Even if coursework was sufficient, some participants felt that programs failed to help students bridge the gap between education and practice, especially in terms of credentialing.

At the same time, one participant remarked on the support he or she felt during this critical transition:

For my final semester, an alumni started a Facebook page in which all counseling students from our University can join. It has been helpful the last half of my final semester in that it provides information about loan forgiveness, upcoming counseling skills/techniques/therapies, seminars/training and other useful information for counselors.

[This has been a] great way to network.

Another participant shared that “when finishing my program, it would have been helpful to have a collaborative discussion providing suggestions on how to go about pursuing further aspirations, such as PhD, licensure, [and] requirements for working with specific clientele.”

Other students experienced conflict between the program and religious beliefs and practices. One participant reported feeling concerned about the religious affiliation of the university and a lack of diversity among students. Conversely, students with strong religious affiliation did not always feel supported:

There have been numerous negative comments regarding Christianity/Christians in particular classes (certainly not in most). I attempted to respond to these comments but quickly felt that it was not welcomed by the instructor. So, I just sucked it up and went along. I felt you could have any perspective on a situation except a Christian perspective,

again, in some classes. In these situations, I felt outside of the blanket of diversity, but gained the perspective of someone in a minority.

In addition, one participant struggled with program scheduling that did not permit them to participate in a religious holiday or other activities related to their faith tradition. One participant indicated that the conflict forced their choice to prioritize graduate school over faith practices:

I am a practicing Catholic, and I have had class during Holy Thursday and Good Friday, which are very special holy days in the Church. Since my classes were intensive, if I missed a class, I would be missing a lot of work, so I have had to choose school over my faith life. Also, I often feel discriminated against for my traditional religious views, and I don't feel like my religion is as tolerated as other lifestyles and beliefs. I feel like I can't speak up about where I stand on issues for fear of getting kicked out of the program.

### **Mentoring and Advising**

The theme of mentoring and advising referred to the supportive relationships of the participants with faculty and peers. Personal growth was linked to good mentoring: “The faculty who have challenged me to think” and “approachable faculty that is willing to mentor and offer support.” Participants valued the support provided by faculty: “my faculty advisor is amazing. She is willing to help even when she is not the professor teaching the class.” Faculty investment in student growth was clearly valued by the students. One participant indicated “the faculty is amazing and most of them show a definite interest in my success” and other stating “most helpful part of my program has been having such excellent professors who went out of their way to assist me and my classmates.”

On the other hand, others had difficulty with advising: “The most difficult part has been my relationship with my advisor who is difficult to deal with and does not appear to be

understanding.” Another participant lamented being assigned “a faculty advisor who is very much hands-off related to assisting me in course planning. I’ve felt very much along trying to figure out how to manage course profession and future career planning.” Others stated a desire for “a more aggressive approach by the faculty advisors to be pro-student, assisting the students to both schedule and plan needed coursework as well as preparing for post graduate experiences” and “a mentoring program would be incredibly helpful.” Another participant suggested “removing professors who don’t care and are just phoning it in until retirement.”

In spite of the challenges of poor advisement, some participants adapted positively: “My advisor was notoriously not available. This was frustrating in the beginning, however I quickly learned that the entire faculty was very approachable and I received excellent advising from several faculty.” Similarly, one student expressed a desire for “more faculty and/or student mentoring... this is good/bad in that having the freedom I did created not only a space where I felt lost and unsupported – but also built initiative and resiliency.”

Peer mentoring was also repeatedly noted as valuable, for example, “I feel supported and cared for by the people I have met in school” and the value of “having very supportive classmates who go out of their way to help one another.” A participant stated, “My relationship with the other students in the program has been invaluable. Everyone is so supportive and caring toward one another and we all encourage and support each other through the program.” In contrast, other students reported that they relied on peer support for guidance: “We had to navigate the system by ourselves. There was almost nonexistent faculty advising.”

### **Personal Growth**

The theme of personal growth referred to students’ development of personal reflection, confidence, and compassion. Participants remarked on the personal work that often accompanies



counseling graduate school: “My own personal growth and development has been incredibly rewarding. I feel that my own work and challenges have given me an incredible amount of insight and resiliency. I feel very lucky to continue to work in such a challenging field.”

Participants were surprised by the amount of personal growth involved in an academic program: “At the beginning, I was not expecting the amount of personal growth I was going to go through. This has been somewhat difficult.” Similarly another participant shared, “the most difficult part has been doing my own self-work, as required by the program. Self-work is hard and it takes a lot of effort to make changes.” Other participants echoed those remarks, “the most helpful part has been my own self-growth: if one engages fully with the course material, it’s like being in full-time self-therapy.” Another participant stated, “I have spent a lot of time re-inventing myself. A new identity requires reevaluating everything.” One participant remarked, “Gaining self-awareness, while incredibly beneficial, has been a difficult process. Exposing myself to peers and remaining genuine was hard in the beginning of the program.”

Personal development also extended well beyond the classroom: “Transformation. I am less concerned about what others think about me. I am walking my own path and, regardless of the lack of any outward success I am happy to be forging my own unique path.” Lastly, participants linked personal growth with future practice: “My program in general just helped me be more aware of myself and what I need to work on...before I could help others.” Another stated that through “all of the required introspection...my levels of understanding and compassion rising commensurately, both for myself and others.” Similarly development both within themselves and applied to their relationships was an experience of being a counseling student:

The most helpful part has been the slow process of discovering myself through applying my studies to myself. I have learned a great deal about myself and, in turn, open up to being able to better empathize with the people I will be helping.

### **Life-Role Balance**

The theme of life-role balance referred to parenting, partner relationship issues, and social connections. The theme also included postponement of developmental decisions and the impact of graduate school on work performance. In this theme, participants reported problems caring for their own wellness needs including health care, social activities, and spiritual interests.

Tasks and activities related to parenting were frequently sacrificed for graduate school responsibilities:

The most difficult part was trying to fit in school, work, and family – husband, four children, five grandchildren, two parents dying, taking care of now widowed father-in-law who has dementia, and son-in-law going to Iraq, helping daughter with their children on the weekends. I ended up quitting my job, which then brought financial hardship.

Similarly, one participant stated, “(I) compromised my...family life in regards to not being there during milestones of my child.” Similarly, a participant said, “I have also missed out on a lot of family time and time with my disabled son over the last 5 years. Another stated, “I have sacrificed time with my children. This is unavoidable, and my choice. It was worth it. I hope.” Other social connections were also negatively impacted by graduate school: “I am unable to spend the amount of time I would like to with my family and friends. I have lost friends who don’t understand the time and dedication necessary for graduate school.” There were multiple examples of serious relationship strain. One stated, “I ended a serious romantic relationship to complete my degree when it became obvious that I was not going to have support from my

partner. I have placed school as my number one priority.” Sadly, another student shared, “My marriage has been pretty much destroyed. What started out as something that was agreed on, ended up being too much.”

Developmental tasks were also delayed. One participant reported that she “gave up dating.” Graduate school also impacted work performance: “Balancing (midnight shift) full-time job with school/homework/practicum/internship. My full-time job also requires my presence on random days/hours throughout the day, which interrupted my sleep. On top of that I was dealing with a medical ailment.”

Specific self-care strategies and techniques were shared by participants, such as incorporation of leisure activities and exercise, as well as ways of coping with illness, stress, loss of motivation and burnout. Participants expressed the need for personal time and reported on experiences of attending counseling. Unfortunately, it appeared that some participants compromised self-care in an effort to meet the demands of their programs. One participant indicated that a primary challenge was “managing to fit self-care into an already packed schedule. Often self-care would be left out.”

For some students, the profession’s emphasis on self-care was beneficial. One participant indicated: “The most helpful part of my studies was being around peers and faculty that understood the emotional, mental, and academic stress I was going through.” It appears that the pressure of graduate school helped some participants to learn “about stress-reducing techniques like meditation, deep breathing, muscle relaxation and employing them.” Another participant further suggested “a mandatory self-care course for during and after graduate school at least once a year, to ensure that all students have a good understanding of healthy self-care.” A number of participants emphasized the need for students to have personal counseling, calling for a “resource

for finding recommended and reputable mental health professionals in our area that cater to graduate students.”

One participant stated, “I think therapy for students should be provided and mandatory.”

## **Finances**

Finances appeared to have a significant impact on the graduate student experience for many participants. Elements within this theme included tuition, living costs, savings, and commuting costs. Participants remarked their frustration with lack of funding, “I am in debt up to my eyeballs”, “I have exhausted my savings”, and “I worry about paying the loans back with the low salary in this field.” Similarly other stated, “getting this degree has been brutal, and it will be years before my wife and I can pay off our student loans to buy a home and start a family.”

Participants indicated that student loans and graduate assistantships were insufficient in helping them meet financial needs. Many participants reported exhausting savings and taking on financial burdens that required working excessively to make ends meet during school, and anxiety about recouping losses after graduation:

Balancing (midnight shift) full-time job with school, homework, practicum, [and] internship. My full-time job also requires my presence on random days/hours throughout the day, which interrupted my sleep. On top of that I was dealing with a medical ailment, which I had prior to starting the graduate program. Finally, the thought of having to pay back all the loans that I borrowed.

The sacrifices students made in relation to finances were remarkable. One stated, “I had to work full time and go to school full time to make ends meet, that added a lot of stress to my

life.” Sacrifices included moving in with family, bypassing vacations, working multiple jobs or leaving lucrative careers: `

I gave up a 6 figure job to pursue this as a career, not to mention, benefits, bonuses ... because this is what I feel I am called to do... I am a midlife career changer who is now in debt to the tune of 45,000.”

In addition, relationships appeared to suffer due to financial burdens. One participant stated, “I went significantly into debt. It put strain on my relationship with my spouse.”

Other participant shared the sequence of associated financial difficulties that contributed to other problems:

I was unable to get sufficient loans and worked out a living arrangement that in the end fell through. The cascading events put me over \$10,000 in credit card debt, without a car (it was stolen), without a home, and in a tumultuous relationship.

Participants suggested in multiple ways that financial assistance such as scholarships and grants and graduate assistantships would have been helpful. One participant indicated that the program prohibited students from full time employment, while another found unpaid internships particularly challenging. For many participants, obligations that interfered with their focus on their program such as paying for their mortgage, transportation, childcare, and eldercare complicated graduate studies in ways that were not always understood by the program faculty.

### **Discussion**

This study provides master’s students’ perspective regarding the aspects of the graduate counseling student experience, including both challenges and rewards. Participants provided large amount of data that contributed to the development of the five themes that support and expand upon prior findings in the literature. While many participants valued the high degree of

faculty expertise and meaningful challenges in the classroom, a number of participants in this study described their coursework and counseling program as lacking rigor. Previous research supports the perspective that students are more likely to persist if they feel that they matter, and if excellence is expected and then recognized (Schlossberg & Warren, 1985).

Participants in this study reported that the experience participating in fieldwork was significant in their graduate school experience. This finding reflects the power of integrative learning experiences wherein students learn to apply theory to practice. Participants described a variety of experiential “doing-centered learning” that was beneficial to their graduate school experience (Conrad, Duren, & Haworth, 1998, p. 71) is also critical in evaluating learning outcomes in counselor education (Furr & Carroll, 2003).

Related to their academic training, specifically towards the end of their programs, participants had concerns about understanding the licensure process, and finding employment after graduation. It is important that students are assisted with the process of obtaining licensure and preparing to be competitive in the job market. For example, students can learn the relative strengths and weaknesses of a license in a particular geographical region or employment setting and how that would impact a student’s marketability as a professional counselor.

Participants repeatedly referred to the importance of faculty to demonstrate respect for students’ perspectives in the classroom. Indeed, graduate counseling students – traditional and non-traditional students - have a variety of life experiences relevant to counselor education. Counselor educators should model respect for the experiences, skills, and perspective that master’s students bring to the classroom, as these experiences can inform and enrich classroom discussion. In addition, counseling program administrators should consider the benefits of program flexibility and online opportunities as they were reported to be helpful for participants.

Some students indicated that a master's degree would not be possible without program accommodations for the needs of students with considerable work and family responsibilities.

It was surprising that references to faculty and advisement did not include any aspect of the overall department climate (i.e., departmental leadership, conflict between faculty, interdisciplinary competition for resources). Department climate, including environmental safety, and developing a culture of caring and respect, has been linked to doctoral student satisfaction (Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Brus, 2006; Protivnak & Foss, 2009; Veilleux, January, Vanderveen, Reddy, & Klonoff, 2012). It is possible that master's students' reduced time spent within a department could shield them from broader aspects of the department that can be problematic.

In this study, participants often referred to the help and encouragement of graduate program classmates and mentors. This is consistent with other studies showing the relationships with classmates as a factor in creating a more positive graduate school experience (Cohen & Greenberg, 2011; Haskins et al., 2013). Indeed in comparison with other disciplines, students in counselor education programs can have unique opportunities to connect with other students more authentically through counseling role plays and pertinent self-disclosure related to counseling. Mentoring was often referenced as helpful whereas poor advisement had the potential for causing great difficulty. These supportive relationships are helpful for graduate students to cope with stress (Clark, Murdock, & Koetting, 2009).

Participants in the current study found personal reflection, growing confidence, and increased compassion as important aspects of their training. Completing a master's program often involves a challenging personal transformation that often results in personal growth and development (Bruss & Kopala, 1993). For counselors, self-awareness is particularly important

for practice (Williams, Hayes, & Fauth, 2008). Similar to some of the participants in this study, personal counseling and other wellness strategies appeared to be beneficial for overall functioning and self-efficacy (Hermon & Hazler, 1999; Prosek, Holm, & Daly, 2013; Roach & Young, 2007). This is consistent with a study by Ruggiero, Rabino, Richards, and Martin (2013) who found that students who experienced increased self-knowledge and compassion also had increased levels of counseling self-efficacy.

Issues outside of the graduate program impact students' graduate school experience (Furr & Carroll, 2003). Findings suggested that parenting concerns, partner relationship issues, financial concerns, and social connections were particularly challenging. Graduate student persistence was reported to be higher in students with supportive partners, children, and parents (Cohen & Greenberg, 2011). The strength of the relationships with family is significant to counseling students as it can reduce stress (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Roach & Young, 2007) and promote stamina in practice post-graduation (Freadling & Foss-Kelly, 2014). Participant's remarks about their perceived need to postpone developmental decisions were a unique finding, as it is not often discussed in the literature.

Consistent with Protivnak & Foss (2009) study of counselor education doctoral students, master's participants also compromised self-care. Promotion of wellness in counselor education is important in avoiding impairment and maintaining stamina (Roach & Young, 2007). For example, activities like meditation have been found to help clinicians self-nurture, manage stress, and maintain social connectedness (Boellinghaus, Jones, & Hutton, 2013). Yoga, meditation, and qigong have also been used in counselor education resulting in beneficial personal and professional outcomes (Christopher, Christopher & Dunnagan, 2006). Other mindfulness practices have been recommended for increasing student self-efficacy in counseling practice



(Greason & Cashwell, 2011). It is useful to consider the types of activities that could be incorporated into the academic coursework, encouraged by faculty advisors, or led by peers through student organizations such as Chi Sigma Iota.

Given the rising cost of tuition and current economic stressors, it is not surprising that financial pressures were commonly noted as a significant concern among study participants. The stress of financial issues was similar to a study of graduate psychology students wherein finances and debt were highly rated as a significant stressor, second only to academic coursework (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012). Other research by Hyun, Quinn, Madon and Lustig (2006) suggested that graduate students' financial needs were relevant to their mental health. Unfortunately, faculty are often unaware or dismissive of the financial issues of their graduate students.

### **Implications for Counselor Educators**

The results of this study lead to a number of implications for improving counselor education, from the perspective of master's students. The perception of the students can be helpful for counselor educators to understand the factors that impact graduate counseling students. Student success completing the program and obtaining employment is impacted by both personal factors and their experiences with the counseling program (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000).

Upon first contact with the Counseling program faculty, students would benefit from information regarding funding opportunities within the program and university (Protivnak & Yensel, 2017). Counselor educators can advocate for greater financial support for graduate students by developing new graduate assistantships and working with alumni to develop new scholarship. Counseling program can host trainings on financial success strategies while students are enrolled in graduate school and distribute information options for managing student

loan debt after graduation (i.e., loan forgiveness for service in high need and underserved areas).

Students nearing graduation are often anxious about job prospects and early career decisions. Discussions about employment should begin early in the program. Addressing these issues during the last semester of internship can be too late to reduce anxiety and sufficiently prepare students. Early in the program, students should identify personal career goals and create a plan for achieving those goals. In this way, counseling students can leave the program with more direction, confidence, and a competitive edge in the job search process. Counselor educators can integrate information about credentialing into the entire curriculum so that students have clear expectations about how they will transition into the workforce.

Physical and mental health related issues clearly impact graduate counseling student experiences. Counselor educators or advanced counseling students (i.e., doctoral students) can provide workshops, resources or referrals related to making healthier life choices, effectively managing time, increasing professional stamina, and advocating for oneself (Roach & Young, 2007). To help address work-life balance, counselor educators can help students or advisees clarify values and prioritize life roles (Newgent & Fender-Scarr, 1999). Counselor educators can also model appropriate work-life balance and communicate their commitment to personal development outside of their professional role (i.e., not sending or responding to emails at 2 a.m.). In addition, counseling programs could aim toward a family-affirming culture where opportunities for the involvement of families/partners are encouraged, and the student's sources of support are blended, extended, and strengthened.

To bolster mentoring and advising, counselor educators can proactively outreach to students rather than waiting for students to come to them. Administrators within a counseling program (i.e., program director, department chair) should regularly monitor all students to

identify those who are disconnected or do not have proper mentorship (Hazler & Carney, 1993) and then provide advising or assign them to another faculty who will provide mentorship. Advanced students or student organization leaders can help with student outreach through formal mentoring programs, social events, or learning opportunities that build connection and community within the program.

Counseling programs encourage students to become reflective practitioners who can integrate and apply complex knowledge and skills within their own value system and personal counseling style (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Schon, 1983). It is often through supportive faculty relationships that students can develop a deeper appreciation for the work of counseling and therefore increasingly identify as a professional counselor. Counselor educators can create opportunities for reflection and personal growth, emphasizing the intrinsically rewarding aspects of the counseling program (i.e., greater insight, self-knowledge). For example, the program orientation might include a student self-assessment of self-care and healthy personal adjustment, to set the stage for a self-reflective journey through the graduate program (Ruggiero et al., 2013). The formal orientation and other co-curricular supports can help students clarify roles, processes, and expectations to help students successfully transition to the graduate counseling student role (Hesli, Fink, & Duffy, 2003).

Although this study highlights the perceptions of master's counseling graduate students experience, it is not without limitations. The qualitative approach provided an opportunity for students to voice their perspectives; however it became apparent during data analysis that the broad nature of the questions introduced challenges in distilling the wide variety of experiences into common themes. Future research should refine questions to provide more focus. Researchers could extend the research questions by asking not just what was beneficial for the

experience, but how it specifically benefited the student. In addition, internet-based participant solicitation using membership and listservs can result in a participant group that is more motivated or engaged in extra-curricular activities (i.e., because all participants were ACA members or members on a counseling listserv). In this way, the important voices of master's students who were disengaged or disaffected might not be included in the data. Future research should continue to explore issues important to students through quantitative studies to examine issues related to mentoring and advising with more specificity – such as how student and faculty perceptions differed or how counselor educators responded to such student issues or concerns.

Counseling master's students are faced with a variety of challenges. The themes of this study – academic environment (b) mentoring and advising, (c) personal growth, (d) life role balance, and (e) finances provide a narrative of the experience of master's students in counseling, contribute to the counselor education research base, and provide issues for counselor educators to consider when advising, teaching, and leading within their counselor education programs. To continue to improve counselor preparation, counselor educators have an obligation to hear, evaluate, and respond to the experiences voiced by our master's students.

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# Experiential Learning: Teaching Research Methods with PhotoVoice

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Despite of the emphasis on scientist-practitioner model and evidence-based practice, limited research knowledge and experience among counselors continues to be a concern. In an advanced research methods course, PhotoVoice was utilized as an experiential learning tool to facilitate student engagement as participants and researchers. Processes, successes and challenges are discussed.

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*Keywords: counselor education, pedagogy, research methods, PhotoVoice*

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Research is an integral part of counselor education, yet the majority of peer-reviewed counseling articles from the past decade were non-empirical (Minton, Morris, & Yaites, 2014). In fact, research and program evaluation is one of the eight common core areas mandated by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Program (CACREP, 2009). Further, the American Counseling Association's (ACA) *Code of Ethics* underscores counselors' ethical responsibility to utilize current evidence-based practices that are theoretically sound and culturally appropriate to base their treatments and interventions (ACA, 2014). This means that different treatments for similar issues may differ drastically depending on a person's cultural milieu. This requires counseling professionals to be versatile in the approaches utilized to treat individuals, which further complicates matters in regard to how to best train counseling students to be competent consumers and producers of research (Dukic, 2015; Generali, Foss-Kelly, & McNamara, 2011; Wester & Borders, 2014).

The complexity of counseling requires the ability to exercise problem solving and decision-making (McAuliffe, 2011) while recognizing that individual experience informs one's

reality. This complexity aligns with the constructivist paradigm, because the constructivist paradigm aims to understand how individuals understand their social world, which also requires researchers to engage in reflexivity. Thus, counselors actively engage in examining their knowledge, ideas, and beliefs, all of which are often influenced by one's sociopolitical context (Patton, 2015). We contend that the constructivist paradigm should be taught in research methods courses to support student application of knowledge. By doing so, students engage in reflexivity throughout the learning process while also exploring how others make sense of their reality. Herein, we review literature on the challenges faced within the counseling profession with regard to research competency. This is followed by a detailed presentation and discussion of PhotoVoice (PV), which was used within the classroom to address the gap between practice and research.

The ACA (2014) and many counseling researchers have embraced the scientist-practitioner model, which promotes engagement in rigorous research to provide best practices to clients and advance the profession (Hays, 2010; Kitchener & Aderson, 2011; Thomas & Rosqvist, 2011). However, in order to appropriately consume and engage in research, counselors in training must learn about research methods. Doing so will equip counselors to produce scientific knowledge and critically analyze and evaluate scientific research findings to inform practice, develop effective interventions, and evaluate and enhance treatment and program outcomes (Thomas & Rosqvist, 2011).

Despite the emphasis on the scientist-practitioner model, the limited research competency among counselors is a persistent issue in the counseling profession (Borders, Wester, Fickling, & Adamson, 2014; Generali et al., 2011; Murray, 2009; Okech, Astramovich, Johnson, Hoskins, & Rubel, 2006; Wester, Borders, Boul, & Horton, 2013). For example,

Okech et al. (2006) found that counselor educators in CACREP-accredited doctoral counselor education programs possessed varying levels of research training competence, which likely reflects the inconsistent and varied research training doctoral students receive. More recently, Borders et al. (2014) reported that there is a wide range of variation in terms of level, intensity, and quality of research training doctoral students receive. For example, Borders et al. (2014) found that among the 60.5% of programs sampled, counselor educators did not teach qualitative research methods content. Also the content focused more on historical methods instead of newer approaches to qualitative research. Thus, some counselors are better equipped with knowledge of research methods than others. In addition to knowledge of research methods, doctoral level counselors must be competent in conducting research. Some CACREP-accredited doctoral program graduates fail to translate and apply research training to actual research activities as faculty. This may, in part, be due to insufficient hours of research training, inadequately designed and instructed research training courses or lack of faculty-student research mentoring (Borders et al, 2014; Lambie & Vacaro, 2011; Lee, Dewell, & Holmes, 2014; Okech, et al., 2006; Wester & Borders, 2014).

Varying levels of research competence among counselor educators who graduate from CACREP-accredited programs may also be due to variations in the implementation of the CACREP standards (Borders et al., 2014; Okech et al., 2006). For example, CACREP standards state doctoral students are expected to demonstrate their expertise through scholarly publications and presentations (CACREP, 2009, Section II, B.1), but one study found that less than one third of counselor education doctoral students published scholarly articles (Lambie & Vaccaro, 2011). Counseling researchers contend that counseling students need to engage in research early in their program (Lambie & Vaccaro, 2011; Rehfuss & Meyer, 2012), which

may be achieved through consistent implementation of the CACREP research training standards.

Inadequately training counselor educators creates a cycle that inhibits the growth and potential of counseling research that informs practice. A content analysis of peer-reviewed counseling articles from the last decade revealed that over two-thirds were non-empirical (Minton, Morris, & Yaites, 2014). Further, the empirical articles lacked theoretical frameworks, utilized inappropriate research designs, had sampling errors, and relied on simple statistical analyses (Minton et al., 2014), all of which reflect low research competency among counselors and counselor educators. Given that counselors engage in research to inform practice, this lack of research quality and competency among doctoral students and counselor educators is problematic.

Despite CACREP's (2009) assertion of the importance of counselor exposure to various research methods (e.g., quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods), literature indicates a gross lack of qualitative research in counseling publications as well as counselor training research courses (Minton, et al., 2014; Borders et al., 2013). Lack of knowledge among counselors of various research paradigms and methods exacerbates the gap between research and practice. Further, counselors often feel that positivistic research is incongruent with counseling values (Lee et al., 2014; Thorpe, 2013), and training in qualitative and mixed methods research would alleviate this tension. Post-positivist research paradigms, like constructivism, provide counselors the opportunity to engage in knowledge production that is congruent with their counseling values (Berrios & Lucca, 2006; Huber & Savage, 2009; Lee et al., 2014; Reissetter et al., 2004). For example, counseling philosophies stress the importance of being able to understand and work within a client's sociopolitical context (Woo, Hensfield, &

Choi, 2014). Research methods like PV, rooted in the constructivist paradigm, provide a mechanism for counselors to produce knowledge with clients/research participants grounded within their sociopolitical context with the goal of creating social action (Wang & Pies, 2004).

To address the gap between research and practice, the first author developed a research methods course that provided students with experiential learning opportunities. Experiential learning involves students being directly involved with phenomena to translate material learned within a classroom to real life settings (Hoshmand, 2004). While counseling researchers acknowledge the potential benefits that students gain from engaging in experiential learning, there is limited research on incorporating experiential learning in the teaching of research methods (Mobley & Davis, 2013; Rehfuss & Meyer, 2012). Thus, educators are tasked with the duty to explore the ways in which experiential learning can be integrated within courses to bolster research competency among students. Herein, we (the course instructor and two graduate students) reflect on the integration of a modified version of PV (Wang & Burris, 1997). PV was used to promote understanding of research methods in a course designed for doctoral level counseling students and master's level psychology students.

### **PhotoVoice**

To our knowledge, there is no literature on the use of PV as a pedagogical tool for counseling research methods courses. There are a few publications on the use of PV in counseling research and counselor training where counselors have used PV with counseling students to develop empathic skills (Lenz & Sangganjanauvanich, 2013) or to explore doctoral student experiences with the comprehensive examination process (Koltz, Odegard, Provost, Smith, & Kleist, 2010).

Rooted within the constructivist paradigm, PV is a community-based participatory research method that involves individuals actively making meaning of the world around them (Wang & Burris, 1997). More specifically, individuals involved in the study engage as both participants and co-researchers to identify and describe their concerns to facilitate conversations about community issues to increase awareness and to take sociopolitical action (Wang & Burris, 1997). To identify concerns, community members take photographs of their everyday life to communicate their life experiences and perceptions. Photographs are then used to facilitate group discussion and action. PV is not rule bound; thus, participants can shape the PV process in a way that is meaningful to them. More specifically, participants take photographs of whatever they choose, and collectively, they direct the group discussion and determine the way in which the photographs are used. PV raises awareness and encourages action through the development of critical consciousness (Freire, 1972), which represents the conceptualization of one's sociopolitical context and the capacity to engage in individual and collective action to address inequality. Participants' sharing their own experiences helps create a context in which people learn to identify and understand how shared historical and social patterns impact their lives (Wang & Pies, 2004). Sharing one's story encourages participants to create narratives in reaction to dominant narratives that contribute to oppression (Rappaport, 1995). Thus, the discussions that emerge among participants enable them to actualize personal and community change. For example, the photographs may be disseminated to policy makers to help bring about the desired changes (Wang & Pies, 2004). For example, Wang and Pies (2004) worked with community members to understand concerns about family, maternal and child health. They disseminated their PV results with the State Maternal and Child Health agency, which helped the agency to expand its priorities to include the concerns

of the community. While the specific changes vary based on the focus of each PV study, the goal typically focuses on second-order change, which addresses the causes that contribute to the problem of interest (Jason, 2013). Thus, within a counseling context, the change sought may concern social justice advocacy including, but not limited to, community mobilization and informing public policies.

While PV is more commonly used in community settings (Wang & Burris, 1997), it has also been translated into classroom settings (Choi & Fandt, 2007; Lichty, 2013; Mulder & Dull, 2014). PV facilitates engagement in the classroom where students become active participants in their own learning and development. As participants, individuals take photographs on a mutually agreed upon topic based on a theme or prompt that is determined in advance. The theme or prompt is intended to serve as the research question for the study. For example, counseling students may be interested in conducting a needs assessment using PV with a local community to better address the community's needs. Within this context, students may work with community members to take pictures of barriers that need to be addressed as well as challenges that may be utilized to address the barriers. In addition to taking a photograph, participants generate a descriptive interpretation of their photograph. Then, participants come together to share and discuss their photographs and interpretations in a focus group. As co-researchers, participants work together to analyze the data and disseminate the research findings (Cook & Buck, 2010). As with other qualitative research, data can be analyzed in various ways (e.g., thematic analysis, narrative research), but the decision of how data is analyzed is based on how the researchers and participants want to represent their data.



## **PhotoVoice in an Advanced Research Methods Classroom**

A modified version of PV was integrated into a graduate level research methods course, designed for doctoral level counseling students and master's level psychology students, at a teaching focused university in the Midwest. The purpose of incorporating PV into the research methods class was to teach students qualitative research methods by having them actively engaged in the research process. The aim of qualitative research is to learn about processes that involve learning about people's experiences and how they think and make meaning (Patton, 2015). Therefore, qualitative research approaches lend itself to participatory research methods like PV, which allow researchers and participants to learn from diverse perspectives. By participating in the process of PV, students were involved in the project as both a researcher and participant. According to Patton (2015), participants who engage in participatory research like PV learn and engage in evidence based inquiry where they gain skills in "problem identification, criteria specification, and data collection, analysis, and interpretation" (p. 221). Therefore, students went through the entire research process where they learned how to generate a research question, collect data, analyze data, and write up their findings. Throughout the process, the entire class generated the research questions, and how they were answered and presented. Independently, students developed their own analytic framework to analyze and write up their findings.

**Classroom demographics.** All students enrolled in the Advanced Research Methods course, a semester-long class, were expected to participate in the PV process as part of the course requirement and were given credit for participation. However, the points awarded for participation were low; thus non-participation did not significantly impact student grades. Due to small cohort sizes within both the counseling and psychology programs and similar

expectations of research knowledge and production, counseling doctoral students and psychology master's students complete the same research methods course. The classroom was made up of eight graduate students with half of the students in a counseling doctoral program and the remaining half in a psychology master's program. The students in the CACREP accredited counseling doctoral program were training to earn the Doctor of Education in Counselor Education and Supervision and master's students were enrolled in a Master of Arts in Psychology program. Notably, all students who were not licensed counselors intended to seek counseling licensure upon graduation.

**Materials and procedures.** PV was introduced to students on the first day of class as one of the areas in which students were to be evaluated. The introduction included presenting information on the history of PV, its various uses with sociopolitical minorities, and a rationale for why it was being used in class. Following the first class session, students were assigned to read multiple articles that utilized PV in different contexts. Booth and Booth (2013) was one such article that introduces PV as a research method that is suited for diverse populations, including people with intellectual disabilities. In their study, PV was used with mothers with intellectual disability so that service providers better understood their lives, what is important to them, and to identify the shared priorities among the women as a basis for group action. Students also learned about various research paradigms and their associated research methods (e.g., experiments, quasi-experiments). Throughout this initial process, students were encouraged to consider appropriate uses of each research method and its associated strengths and weaknesses.

Once students were provided with an overview of various research paradigms and research methods, the PV process began. Students went through the PV process three times during the course of the term. Each process was referred to as a cycle, which involved the

following steps: (1) identify a research question (2) generate a photograph and interpretation, (3) discuss the photographs and interpretations in a group discussion, (4) transcribe group discussions, and (5) analyze qualitative data. Notably, the analysis overlapped with other steps, because students began the analysis after the first group discussion and continued to work with the data throughout the term. Each step within the PV cycle is detailed below.

For each PV cycle, students narrowed the aim of the cycle by generating a single research question to answer with one photograph and interpretation. To identify a single research question for each cycle, students brought potential research questions to class. Students discussed research questions to determine a single research question through consensus building. Students chose to generate broad research questions that would allow each of them to share information about their own lives. The research questions used for the three cycles focused on student experiences which were (1) What are my obstacles and barriers?, (2) What obstacles have I inherited?, and (3) How do I make sense of my gender identity? Notably, the third research question was informed by numerous LGBTQ events held on campus during the semester. Throughout the course of the academic year, the university encourages instructors and student organizations to integrate issues of diversity to promote awareness in their work. During the course, the university invited an artist, whose work focused on LGBTQ issues, to exhibit his work and meet with students. The LGBTQ student organization co-hosted multiple events with other student organizations during the semester. Some students within the class were involved in the campus activities and they suggested focusing on a topic that relates to LGBTQ issues. The other students agreed and they discussed possible research questions until they all agreed upon “How do I make sense of my gender identity?” Students had approximately 7 to 14 days to answer the research questions through a photograph and

interpretation, which were posted on the course Blackboard (2015) website. Blackboard (2015) is a course management system that offers an online platform for students and instructors to create virtual learning community. During the course, each student uploaded photographs and posted their interpretations of photographs in advance, which were available to other students to view and read prior to the class. Once photographs and interpretations were posted, student posts were visible to the entire class.

Students were allowed to take photographs of whatever they deemed appropriate with the exception of illegal activities and images that would identify people outside of the classroom setting. When students wanted to take a photograph of a person outside of the classroom, they took pictures that would not identify the individual. For example, one student took a photograph of a person's hand, which did not allow us to identify the subject of the photograph. The student's interpretation of the photograph described a barrier he experienced and the role of his family in supporting him through the struggles. Another student shared a photograph of her mailbox. Her interpretation conveyed her struggles with racism, with a specific story about her mailbox being vandalized.

After each photograph and interpretation was due, students engaged in a group discussion to share their photographs and interpretations and to engage in dialogue and critical reflection with their peers. All photographs and interpretations were not discussed due to time restrictions, but typically two or three photographs and interpretations were discussed in a 90 to 120 minute time period. Students either volunteered to discuss their own photograph and interpretation or they identified a peer's photograph and interpretation that they wanted to discuss. Photographs and interpretations chosen for discussion were projected on a large screen. Students sat in a semi-circle to view the projector and each other. First, the chosen

photograph was projected on a screen, and students were given the opportunity to view the picture for a few minutes and share initial insights. After the photograph was viewed, a student volunteered to read the associated interpretation. Then, the photographer provided additional context about his/her picture, which facilitated discussion among students. Students asked the photographer questions, shared their own interpretations, and shared their own life experiences in relation to the photograph and interpretation being discussed. For example, when discussing racism experienced by racial minorities, students first discussed racism in society generally but then moved to discussing their experiences with racism within the university setting. Some students shared related experiences with discrimination based on sexual orientation and disability status. However, after sharing their struggles after each group discussion, students shared resources and identified strengths that they possess that help them get through barriers.

During the group discussion, the first author served as the facilitator. During the first focus group, student had to be probed by the facilitator, with questions asking for more information in regard to comments they raised. However, little to no probing was needed in future sessions. Students used field notes to document interesting areas for further exploration and clarification to be raised during the group discussion and note nonverbal expressions (Patton, 2015). Some students documented clarifying questions that were shared during the group meeting, but students most often documented nonverbal expressions. For example, students documented when they sensed others were uncomfortable by noting behaviors like lowered eye gaze. In some instances, students also documented their own reactions to the group discussion. Students specifically did this when their views differed from others in class. For example, when discussing gender identity, students who strongly opposed the LGBTQ community dominated the group discussion, while others documented

how they felt in reaction to the prejudicial beliefs students felt comfortable sharing. After each focus group, students posted their field notes on Blackboard (2015). Thus, students could utilize their own field notes and retrieve other students' field notes to assist in data analysis.

All group discussions were audio recorded which were transcribed verbatim. Students took turns transcribing, but they all utilized Poland's (1995) process for transcribing. Transcribers listened to the audio recording while typing each word stated and sounds like sighs and pauses. Next, students reviewed each other's transcript while listening to the audio recording to ensure the transcript was accurate. Throughout the transcription process, students did not edit the verbatim accounts including alterations to sentence structure. All transcriptions were posted on Blackboard (2015) for all students to utilize during the analysis process.

During the course of the term, students learned about different types of qualitative analyses including thematic analysis. To analyze the data, students utilized thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and coded data in Dedoose Version 5.0.11 (2014). Students were taught Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of analysis. Phase one involved students familiarizing themselves with the data by reading and re-reading the data and field notes. During the second phase, students generated initial codes. Once the data were initially coded, the third phase involved students searching for themes requiring them to broaden their focus of the data. Students considered how different codes might be combined or altered to form an overarching theme. They also reviewed their themes using Patton's (2015) criteria for internal and external homogeneity to ensure all themes were coherent with clear boundaries. During the fifth phase, themes were refined to then define and label the themes. The sixth phase involved producing a report of the results. Students completed the analysis independently but were

encouraged to discuss their coding framework with their peers. Notably, all students were required to write a brief report that documented the PV process in APA style, which included all components of an empirical manuscript.

**Integration of PV with other course concepts.** While the PV process exclusively focused on qualitative research, students also learned about quantitative research approaches couched in various research paradigms. Early in the course, students learned about the similarities and differences between qualitative and quantitative research approaches, which were repeatedly highlighted throughout the course, particularly during the PV process. For example, students generated open-ended questions when determining the aim of the PV cycle, but in many instances they presented close-ended questions. This provided opportunities to discuss when close- and open-ended questions would be most appropriate. They also learned, through practice, how qualitative and quantitative analyses differ. Throughout the term, students utilized the qualitative PV research method but were consistently engaging in a quantitative analysis of the data. More specifically, students wanted to count the number of times a particular word or phrase was used or the number of times a certain topic was discussed. By going through the PV transcripts as a class, students were able to discuss the richness of the data. Students who utilized a quantitative analysis shared their findings with the class, which were then compared to the qualitative findings. The comparison allowed students to learn how the process of analysis differs as well as the quality of the results. More specifically, the qualitative analysis yielded richer data on processes while the quantitative data presented a numerical representation of the number of times a word or phrase was used. This process also helped students think through instances where it would be appropriate to utilize a qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis and a mixed analysis.

Students also reflected on the PV process throughout the course. In addition to the PV process, students were required to independently propose a method and analysis plan for an original empirical research study. The doctoral students used the assignment to develop their doctoral capstone project while the master's students developed their thesis or a topic that would help them at their internship site. Students utilized their classroom experience to first determine their research paradigm while also considering their areas of interest. Most students initially wanted to align themselves with the constructivist paradigm. However, their initial shift toward constructivism was challenged when they wanted to utilize quantitative research methods that leaned toward the positivist paradigm. When forced to think independently about research, students began to grapple with their identity as researchers. However, it encouraged students to continue thinking about the PV process and other qualitative research methods so that their research questions and paradigms were aligned with an appropriate research method.

Earlier in the course, students learned in detail about the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process and what is required to successfully gain IRB approval for various types of research designs. Thus, we discussed how IRBs require researchers collecting data in group settings to convey to participants, in person and in the consent process, that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in group settings (Portland State University Institutional Review Board, n.d.). Students hoped that after only a few group meetings participants would feel comfortable with the group setting, allowing them to share sensitive information. However, they learned that certain topics, like LGBTQ issues, would likely require an extended period of time for participants to start to feel comfortable discussing their thoughts and experiences.



## **Challenges with PhotoVoice in the Classroom**

Though PV was a positive experience for students, there were some challenges with the process. Early in the term, some master's and doctoral level students shared, during multiple class meetings, that they were anxious being in a research methods course and had little knowledge of why they were required to complete a research methods course. Counseling students viewed their program to be focused exclusively on practice, not research and generally grappled with the connection between practice and research. Students also felt disconnected from the instructor, a community psychologist, because the students wanted to become counselors; some students said that they identified psychology with research but not counseling. Relatedly, according to Lee et al. (2014), research and statistics courses are sometimes taught by non-counseling faculty, which indirectly communicates to students that research and statistics are not a part of the counselor identity. Throughout the course, students were reminded of the importance of research in counseling through examples of evidence-based practices. Students may also have felt disconnected because they had not engaged in research before the class and the class was the last class they had to complete before completing their doctoral internship and capstone or master's level internship. Thus, they completed most of their degree without being exposed to research, which may implicitly convey that research is not important.

Another challenge that came up throughout the course concerned tension among students with differing opinions. For example, when discussing gender identity during one PV cycle, half of the classroom repeatedly stressed the importance of traditional gender roles while the other half reported feeling silenced. PV requires participants to open up to others in the group. However, if participants do not feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, the purpose of

PV is lost. Thus, for maximum benefit, participants must engage in the PV process with a group that they felt comfortable sharing personal information with. At the time, attempts were made to discuss the Belmont Principle of Justice (US Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.) and one student stressed that ACA's 2014 Code of Ethics prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In future courses, the ACA's 2014 *Code of Ethics* will be included as required reading for students to refer to when engaging in discussion that involve sexual and gender minorities as well as other marginalized groups.

### **Conclusion**

While research and program evaluation is one of the eight common core mandates of CACREP standards (CACREP, 2015), limited research experience among master's and doctoral students is an area of concern in the field, especially in regard to qualitative research (Berrios & Lucca, 2006). Thus, future research should explore the impact of integrating post-positivist paradigms, like the constructivist paradigm, on teaching research methods courses. When doing so, it may be beneficial to empirically compare outcomes between classes that utilize experiential learning like the PV process with research methods classes that do not. Tracking student research productivity from the time they take the research methods course to graduation may be one way to examine the outcomes of such a course. However, student engagement in research may heavily rely on faculty mentorship and competence with research. Therefore, training programs may also want to consider evaluating the research production of both its faculty and students including former students as one indicator of research competency. For programs in which both faculty and students do not engage in research, programs may consider encouraging or even requiring students to engage in research with faculty. This would likely be challenging given the various demands faculty and students already face, but

programs should consider offering smaller class sizes for courses that integrate research engagement or course releases for faculty and course credit for students engaging in research for a community organization. Doing so would provide students real life experience with research that may enable them to competently consume research and conduct research independently.

We believe that the incorporation of experiential methods, particularly using research methods rooted in the constructivist paradigm, may alleviate the challenge of varied and sometimes limited knowledge of research among counselors. The constructivist paradigm better aligns with counseling values that stress context and diversity and thereby may be more accessible to students. Engaging in research during the course of a research methods class is one way to ensure that students gain knowledge and experience in research. Through the use of PV, master's and doctoral students engaged in the processes involved in a qualitative research project as both participants and researchers. Documenting this process with our successes and challenges intends to continue discourse on strengthening the training of counselors.

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# Counseling Students' Perceptions of Journaling as a Tool for Developing Reflective Thinking

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While much has been written about the potential benefits of journaling for counseling students, less is known about whether students themselves view this purportedly learner-centered practice as beneficial. This study explored the phenomenological experiences and writings of four counseling students in a CACREP-accredited program at a mid-sized public Midwestern university who kept a journal during an addictions counseling course. Participants indicated that journaling led to greater self-awareness and provided opportunities to practice the reflective thinking they will need in their counseling careers. The findings are useful to counselor educators who may be considering implementing or modifying journal or other reflective thinking assignments in their courses.

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*Keywords: journaling, reflection, reflective thinking, self-awareness*

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A primary goal of those training counselors is to foster students' abilities to reflect (Burgess, Rhodes, & Wilson, 2013). Through reflection, individuals learn from experience (Kolb, 1984), become more self-aware (Moon, 2006), and get better at improvising in professional scenarios (Binder, 1999). After interviewing 100 counselors at various stages of their careers, Skovholt and Rønnestad (1992b) concluded that reflection is the central process by which counselors grow as professionals. However, little empirical research exists on the process of reflection or how to teach it. This study investigated students' perceptions of one reflective writing assignment completed in a CACREP-accredited counseling program in the upper Midwest.

## Review of the Literature

Reflection is a process used for the critical assessment (Mezirow, 1991) of issues that do not have clear solutions (Schön, 1983). Schön (1983) argued that the ability to reflect is the

hallmark of the professional. He distinguished two types of reflection: reflecting by looking back (reflection-on-action) and reflection in the moment (reflection-in-action). He contended that training programs for professionals must be redesigned so students learn how to reflect-in-action just as they learn other skills related to the profession (Schön, 1983, 1987).

In Kolb's (1984) four-stage model of learning, reflection is the tool that allows learners to make meaning of past experiences and sets the stage for the development of new ideas and approaches. Mezirow (1991) identified three forms of reflection: content reflection, process reflection, and premise reflection. Content reflection is what takes place when a learner critically assesses a perception, thought, feeling, or action. In process reflection, the learner reflects on how she carried out the process of perceiving, thinking, feeling, or acting, and assesses her effectiveness. Finally, in premise reflection, the learner critically examines the assumptions and beliefs that informed the way she approached her perception, thought, feeling, or action. Mezirow (1991) contended that premise reflection is the deepest and most meaningful form of reflection, and is the means by which adults transform the way we look at and relate to the world.

Counselors can derive many benefits from incorporating these three forms of reflection into their work. These benefits include greater awareness of the self as it relates to one's interactions with clients (Hubbs & Brand, 2005), the capacity to improvise in a counseling session (Binder, 1999), and the power to ward off stagnation and professional impairment (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992b). In fact, educators such as Skovholt and Rønnestad (1992a) and Bennett-Levy (2006) argued that for counselors, the ability to reflect is not simply a benefit, but a necessity. Skovholt and Rønnestad, who carried out several studies of counselors at various stages of counselors' careers, concluded that ongoing personal reflection is the primary means by which practitioners continue to develop throughout their careers (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992b;



Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001). The researchers conceptualized reflection as making the difference between a counselor having “20 years of experience or one year of experience 20 times” (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001).

Because reflection is an essential skill in the counseling profession, it stands to reason that developing reflective thinking skills should be one of the primary goals of a counselor education program. The reflective portfolio, or journal, has emerged as the method most frequently used for fostering reflective practice in educational settings for social science and healthcare professions (Norrie et. al, 2012). However, for the many benefits reflective journaling brings, there are also a number of potential downsides. For example, journaling requires some level of self-disclosure. The American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics states that students in counselor education programs be informed of “training components that encourage self-growth or self-disclosure as part of the training process” (ACA, 2014, F.8.a). An issue that is separate from but related to self-disclosure is confidentiality. Sutton, Townend, and Wright (2007) questioned how instructors would respond to student journals that contain indications of physical abuse, sexual abuse, or unethical treatment of clients.

In addition, while reflection is most useful when learners are exploring uncertain or confusing thoughts or feelings, the conventions of the graduate school classroom dictate that students’ work must be assessed by some yardstick of completion and/or quality (Parikh, Janson, & Singleton, 2012). Hargreaves (2003) suggested that mandatory assessment of journal entries forces students to write “a narrative that they and their assessors each recognize as a legitimate reflection of an idealized professional scenario” (p. 201) rather than writing honestly. Other less controversial aspects of journaling assignments, such as structure, length, and number of entries, can also pose challenges. Students are busy people, and those who are required to keep a journal

for class often do so in addition to other assignments. In their study of 41 students in an agricultural education program, Greiman and Covington (2006) found that a lack of time was the students' most commonly cited barrier to journaling. Finally, when instructors assess journal entries, they are likely to discover students have a wide range of reflective abilities, with few students able to reach the deepest levels of reflection (O'Connell & Dymont, 2011).

There is a limited existing research on the usefulness of reflective writing in post-graduate counseling and clinical psychology programs. A search of the literature using the keywords journaling, reflection, reflective practice, counseling, and counselor education revealed four studies, all qualitative in design and reliant upon participant self-report. Three of the studies were authored by individuals with institutional ties to the student group being studied. Bennett-Levy et al. (2001) studied two cohorts of Australian clinical psychology students who completed self-practice and self-reflection in a cognitive therapy course. This work was an ungraded yet required element of the course. Participants reported that exposure to others' reflections helped them place their personal experience within a broader context. They also reported a considerable amount of resistance at the beginning of the course largely due to the personal nature of the exercise (Bennett-Levy et al., 2001). One potential limitation of the study is that five of the six authors were members in the first student cohort. Although the researchers took steps such as member validation and other forms of triangulation, there is a possibility that the researchers' biases as course participants impacted the conclusions they drew from the data.

In their study of 19 cognitive behavioral psychotherapy students in the United Kingdom, Sutton, Townend, and Wright (2007) identified several benefits of journaling, including the opportunity for emotional catharsis, a means for reaching deeper levels of empathy, and an opportunity to engage in self-reflection and track growth over time. The researchers concluded

that despite ethical issues related to self-disclosure and assessment, and the open question of how much support faculty members should provide, reflective journaling “has the potential to be a valuable tool” (Sutton, Townend, & Wright, 2007, p. 400). Again, the identities of the researchers provide a potential limitation for these findings. One author was the leader of the program being studied, and another was a graduate of the program.

Noting the potential limitations some students might experience with written journaling, Parikh, Janson, and Singleton (2012) sought to capture the phenomenological experiences of seven master’s-level counseling students who created two video journals during the first semester of their school counseling internship. Compared to written journals, participants felt that the video journals allowed them to be more authentic because they could communicate at two levels (verbal and non-verbal) and also knew the assessment of their work would not include a critique of their writing skills (Parikh, Janson, & Singleton, 2012). Again, existing and possible future relationships between the researchers and participants indicate a potentially significant limitation for this study: The first and second authors, who analyzed the qualitative data, supervised the students during their internships and graded their journals.

Finally, in their study of six master’s-level counseling students who kept a journal during their internship experience, Schmidt and Adkins (2012) found that participants viewed reflection as a significant tool for fostering growth in this environment and a skill they can improve over time. Individualized feedback from faculty members comprised an important means of this support and challenge, and it contributed greatly to whether participants perceived the journaling assignment to be beneficial for their learning (Schmidt & Adkins, 2012). Although the study’s authors had taken courses with some of the same faculty members as the research participants, this study is not marked by the same limitations related to the researchers’ identities as the

previous studies. However, like other studies discussed here, the relatively small number of participants poses a potential limitation for its findings.

Despite the existence of several studies examining students' experiences of journaling in training programs, there remains room for further exploration. In particular, there is a need for studies in which investigators lack both institutional ties to the programs being studied as well as existing or future relationships (evaluative or otherwise) with the study participants. In the present study, research was conducted by a master's-level student who did not attend the participants' university and had no role in evaluating their coursework. The present study couples phenomenological exploration of participants' experiences with analysis of participants' journal entries. It has the potential to offer important new insights on master's-level counseling students' perceptions of whether journaling is an effective tool for promoting reflective thinking.

### **Methods**

The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of master's-level counseling students' experiences keeping a reflective journal as part of their required coursework. Specifically, did students perceive the journal to be a forum for practicing and demonstrating reflective thinking? Did they believe that keeping a journal for class had any impact on their level of self-awareness? In short, how well (or poorly) did students' lived experience keeping a journal align with their professor's expectations for the assignment? Furthermore, how might an understanding of these perceptions impact the way counselor educators structure journals and other reflective practice assignments in their courses?

#### *Method of Inquiry*

This study used a phenomenological design to capture participants' experiences and perceptions of journaling (Parikh, Janson, & Singleton, 2012; Schmidt & Adkins, 2012). The

intended outcome was to develop a rich description of students' experiences keeping a journal as part of their course requirements. Researchers collected data in a number of forms. Each participant completed an online survey and sat for one individual interview. The researchers also reviewed students' journal entries and their instructor's feedback on this writing. By analyzing students' thoughts and feelings on keeping a journal alongside the learning outcomes demonstrated in those journals, the researchers sought to develop a rich, multi-faceted description of the experience of journaling from students' perspectives.

### *Participants*

Participants were recruited from a pool of 28 master's-level counseling students who completed an addictions counseling course in the summer of 2013. These students were enrolled in a CACREP-accredited counseling program at a mid-sized public university in the upper Midwest. None of the researchers or authors were affiliated with the participating students' university or its counseling program. Four students participated in the research. Three were female and one was male. Two participants chose the clinical mental health emphasis, one chose student affairs and college counseling, and one chose school counseling. Three participants identified as Caucasian/White, and the fourth identified as Hmong. All four participants were between 26 and 30 years old.

The addictions counseling course was required for all students, and for most, it was one of the final content courses they took in their master's program. As part of the course, students chose a behavior and attempted to change it during the term. They attended at least four open recovery meetings, submitted online discussion posts, and kept a weekly journal. The instructor evaluated journals using a rubric, and the journal comprised 25 percent of the students' grade. Seventy-five percent of students in the class (21 of 28) received an A on the assignment.

### *Participant Recruitment*

Sampling was purposefully homogeneous (Creswell, 2012): Each person in the sample pool was a master's student in a professional counseling program who completed the addictions counseling course in the summer of 2013. Within this pool, researchers attempted to gather a variety of perspectives by selecting participants randomly. The students received an invitation to participate from their course instructor. After a limited number of the randomly selected students agreed to participate, the researchers extended the invitation to all students who had taken the course. Follow-up recruitment efforts included additional emails from students' addictions counseling professor and internship professor, as well as an in-person recruiting visit by the primary author. Of the 28 class members, four students agreed to participate in the research.

### *Data Collection*

All participants gave their written consent prior to their participation. Before their individual interviews, participants completed an online survey to provide demographic data and basic information on their current and past experiences with journaling. Each participant sat for one 30-45-minute semi-structured interview in the counseling lab of the students' university. The interviewer posed each of the listed interview questions to each participant. Based on participants' survey and interview responses, the interviewer posed follow-up questions to develop a detailed understanding of each student's subjective experience with journaling.

Participants also consented to release their class journals, including feedback from their instructor. Journals ranged in length between 2600-6300 words, and between 7-14 entries. The average number of words per entry ranged from 300 to 450. One journal was hand-written and the other three journals were typed. All four participants were part of the 75% of the class who earned an A on their journals. The instructor provided additional written feedback for three of the

four journals. This feedback was not available for the fourth journal because the student submitted the journal late.

### *Data Analysis*

#### **Interviews.**

The primary author transcribed each interview. After all transcriptions were complete, the primary author and a department staff member from the primary author's home university completed open and axial coding to develop a list of themes from the interview data. These coding procedures provided the researchers with a systematic process for identifying assigning meaning to collected data and moving toward larger themes and patterns (Creswell, 2012). Both coders were upper-level master's students who had previously completed coursework in research methods and assisted with department faculty members' research projects. First, the coders independently reviewed the interview transcripts and developed an initial list of open codes. The goal of this first coding pass was to distill each unit of data into a summative word or phrase (Saldaña, 2014). The coders met to discuss their respective lists. When a code appeared on both coders' lists, it was added to a separate, final list of open codes. When there was disagreement, the coders returned to the interview transcripts to demonstrate and discuss the presence or absence of a particular code and determined by consensus whether to add the code to the final list.

Next, each coder independently reviewed the final list of open codes. They separately developed a list of axial codes under which they could group one or more of the open codes. These axial codes, which were longer phrases or full sentences, captured both the face-value and the underlying meaning of the interview content (Saldaña, 2014). The coders met to compare their lists of axial codes and combined them into a single list. Finally, they discussed and

determined by consensus which of the axial codes could stand alone or whether some codes should be combined. The outcome of the process is a list of categories (previously axial codes) and themes (previously open codes). These categories and themes provide a phenomenological description of students' experiences of journaling in their addictions counseling course and in their master's program as a whole, as described to their interviewer.

### **Journal Entries.**

Paired with data from surveys and individual interviews, data from the analysis of journal entries helps complete the picture of participants' overall experiences with journaling. The primary author and the department staff member who coded interview transcripts also analyzed participants' journal entries. They used a coding system developed by Wong and colleagues (1995) that was based on Mezirow's (1991) model of reflection. They used this information to identify each participant's highest level of reflection as well as his or her most frequently reached level of reflection. The two coders piloted the process by individually reading each journal entry for one of the participants and determining whether each journal entry demonstrated non-reflective, reflective, or critically reflective thinking. They then met to discuss the labels they had assigned and their reasons for doing so. Disagreements were resolved by returning to the journal entries to cite a specific passage or passages, discussing differences, and reaching a consensus. Following the pilot, the coders used the same process to assign levels of reflection for each entry in the other three journals individually and collaboratively.

### *Trustworthiness of the Data*

This study employed a number of strategies aimed at increasing trustworthiness. Interviews were conducted by a master's-level counseling student who had no institutional affiliation with the participants' home university and had no role in assigning participants'



grades or determining their fitness for graduation. Two forms of triangulation were employed in this study. The first was triangulation among methods of data collection. While individual interviews were the primary form of data, data were also collected through an online survey and through participants' journal entries. The second was triangulation of investigators. Both the primary author and a department staff member coded the interviews individually and then reached a consensus on their findings (Patton, 2002). A similar process of triangulation was used to analyze students' journal entries. Prior to beginning data analysis, the two coders met to describe and discuss their own thoughts and feelings regarding journaling and reflection in both academic and personal contexts.

## **Results**

### **Participants' Phenomenological Experiences of Journaling in an Academic Setting**

Analysis of participants' interviews initially uncovered 16 themes emerging from the data. Upon further analysis, these 16 themes were collapsed into five larger categories. See Table 1 for a list of these categories and themes. The following sections present each category with supporting data from participants' interviews. For the purposes of these results and subsequent discussion, *journal* refers to the academic assignment, while *reflection* refers to the intrapersonal and sometimes interpersonal process of deriving new learning from past experience. Participants' interview responses and journal passages are labeled with pseudonyms. However, where spoken or written comments could provide clues to participants' identities, pseudonyms have been omitted to protect anonymity.

#### **Category 1: benefits and drawbacks.**

Participants expressed that keeping a journal was important and useful for learning. They used their journals to process the new ways they were thinking, feeling, and behaving as a result

of the behavior change assignment. In summing up the experience, one participant wrote, “I learned a lot about how I need to continue working on reaching out to others and asking for help (big things I don’t like to do)!” Participants indicated that the journal assignment reflected their program’s goal of increasing self-awareness and engaging in personal growth.

Participants also acknowledged the difficulties of reflection. Participant Two explored resistance to journaling in the context of clinical practice, and arrived at this insight: “I don’t journal, and I haven’t really ever journaled except for class. It’s something that I encourage clients to do... It’s kind of funny that I ask other people to do it... but I don’t do it myself.” Participants mainly described their barriers to journaling in terms of time and extra work; however, some responses indicated that there may be emotional barriers underlying these surface concerns. Participant One offered this hypothesis: “If you’re not willing to go into certain areas... that’s where most people get frustrated, I think. Because they’re like, I don’t want to do this, so I’m going to block all of this, and I don’t have anything to write about because there’s no issues!”

### **Category 2: experiential learning.**

A commonly expressed sentiment was that the content and quality of participants’ reflections was intrinsically tied to richness of their experiences. Participant One summarized it this way: “Writing kind of put it together, but the experience brought it out.” Participants wrote about many aspects of the behavior change experience, including attending recovery meetings and interactions within their family systems. Participants described using their journals to reflect on their personal thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in the context of what they were learning in the classroom and through their exposure to individuals in the recovery process. Participant Four recalled, “[Attending meetings] gave me a lot more compassion because I would see [people at

the meetings] and think, no, I can do this for an assignment. They have to do this for their whole life.”

### **Category 3: developmental nature.**

Participants revealed that the journaling assignments they completed during their program helped them grow as reflective thinkers. They spoke of their journals as a chronological record of their learning: “When you do it over time...you can look back and see where you were before and where you are now” (Participant Two). Participant Four expressed that recorded reflections are valuable because re-reading the journal can spur additional reflection and learning: “I’m able to re-read [my journal] and look at different layers of myself that I think can be kind of hard if you don’t really keep track of that file system in your head.”

As advanced students in their program, the participants demonstrated an awareness of their growth as reflectors over time. Participant One stated, “Through reflecting over the last two and a half years, I’ve been able to learn how to reflect and do it effectively. And do it to a point where it’s not as challenging as it used to be and it’s more meaningful.” Participant Three conceptualized this developmental process as a shift in audience: “What I struggled with when I first started the program was just like, OK, I’m writing something for my professors to read ... It was probably in [my] group [counseling course] when I finally... was like, I’m not writing for them, I’m writing for myself.”

Participants spoke of their journals as helping to reinforce the knowledge and skills they need to be successful practitioners. One participant discussed how reflection helped address potential sources of countertransference: “I went out of my spring semester with a goal of reflecting and really digging deeper for the remainder of the program to ensure that I was viable for clients... I went into this semester kind of, ‘I need to do this. I’m going to do this.’” Another

shared that at its heart, the participant's approach to journaling was the practice of reflection, a key counseling skill, in writing: "In the program we talk a lot about, when we're with our clients and stuff, 'Say what you hear, say what you see, and say what you feel.' And so I think I focused on [that]" (Participant Three).

#### **Category 4: individual preferences.**

Interview data revealed a belief that in journaling assignments, the student is at the center. As such, it is important for students to be able to individualize their work. For example, while most participants chose a typed, modified-APA style, mirroring other written assignments, one participant chose to handwrite the journal instead: "Typing would have gone faster and probably longer, but there's... something therapeutic of just having that actual contact with what you're writing." Participants were unanimous in their preference for an assignment structure that supported expressiveness and personal choice: "There were guidelines provided, and it was easy to see that you could write about, you know, get in those guidelines and yet write about what was personal and important to you" (Participant Two).

Most participants expressed satisfaction with their instructor's choice to provide summative feedback. One stated, "I think turning it in all at once and then getting the feedback afterwards, you can look back and see all, you know, from the beginning to the end, you're more likely to do that" (Participant Two). However, Participant Three would have preferred formative feedback: "I think if we were to get feedback earlier on and see, like, oh, I didn't really think of it that way or that didn't really pop up to me, would have been helpful for me during the whole process of it." Participants spoke appreciatively of their professor's choice to respond to their journal entries in a personal way. Participant Four recalled how the professor "made a comment

that was something like, your experience has helped me come to terms with something she was experiencing ... It's, like, wow, she really just connected with what I wrote.”

**Category 5: ethical considerations: audience awareness.**

Participants reported some costs to sharing their reflections, which for most resulted in some level of self-censorship: “I think [having an external audience] does take away from how personal you can be with it ... I guess it's like how much can you trust other people or even yourself when you're writing it out” (Participant Three). Participant Four shared: “I wanted to make sure it was my thoughts, but it was still graduate-level writing. And that's probably what prevented me from writing down my, you know, my initial gibberish.” However, self-censorship was not universal, as Participant One expressed: “[The journal] gave me a place to express my feelings unfiltered... Writing, I always feel like I'm able to just spit it out. And I didn't filter or buffer anything I was thinking at the time.”

Table 1  
*Categories and Themes in the Phenomenological Data*

| Category                                      | Theme                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Benefits and drawbacks                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Reflection provides a “time out” that leads to deeper thought.</li> <li>b. Journals are a place to describe and label thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.</li> <li>c. Journaling increases self-awareness, particularly awareness of areas for growth.</li> <li>d. Struggle is part of the process. Reflection is difficult for both emotional and practical reasons.</li> </ul> |
| 2. Experiential learning                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Rich experiences provide multiple sources for reflection.</li> <li>b. Participants generated meaning by layering different facets of their experience.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 3. Developmental nature                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Written journal entries provide a record of reflective thought over time.</li> <li>b. Revisiting past journal entries facilitates additional reflection.</li> <li>c. Participants became better reflectors over the course of their program.</li> <li>d. Reflection supports personal growth</li> <li>e. Reflection supports growth as counselors.</li> </ul>                   |
| 4. Individual preferences                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Number of entries, length of entries, and journaling format varied for each participant.</li> <li>b. Preferences regarding instructor feedback varied.</li> <li>c. The structure of this journaling assignment facilitated personal writing, which participants welcomed.</li> </ul>                                                                                            |
| 5. Ethical considerations: audience awareness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Tension exists between sharing and confidentiality.</li> <li>b. Self-censorship is a reality.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

## **Level of Reflection in Participants' Journals**

Data from journal entries revealed that each participant demonstrated reflective thinking on a regular basis, and each reached the level of critical reflection in at least two entries. Twenty-nine percent of journal entries (12 of 41) failed to meet the threshold of reflective writing. Much of the non-reflective writing was descriptive, such as this account of an Al-Anon meeting: "There was an even amount of men and women but I noticed how half of the circle was women and the other side was men. There was also a very strong odor of cigarette smoke in the room, which was slightly distracting." Another proportion of non-reflective writing was introspective, in which a writer describes inner thoughts and feelings without critique (Mezirow, 1991). For example: "I spent about an hour researching and calling local agencies to find open recovery meetings. I felt angry and disappointed; no progress and wasted an hour. I wanted to give up."

Forty-nine percent of journal entries (20/41) met the criteria for reflective writing. Instead of simply demonstrating awareness, reflective writing records new learning stemming from that awareness (Mezirow, 1991). This passage demonstrates reflective thinking: "I have noticed that I am disciplined. Yet, I wonder how true that is. Yes I can give up [the banned behavior], yet I see I have replaced [it] with a different one with similar consequences."

Finally, twenty-two percent of journal entries (9 of 41) met criteria for critically reflective writing, which Wong et al. (1995) described as an analytical assessment that is based on experience, draws upon more than one source of information, and is placed in a broad context. Each participant produced at least two journal entries with such content; for example: "This last fifteen minutes could have been a very critical point in my life... I have a better understanding of how [the risk] could be much greater if I had an addiction. How grateful I am."

## Discussion

### Participants' Perceptions of Journaling

The results of this study show that for this group of master's-level counseling students, journaling was an effective means of fostering reflective thinking and self-awareness. These results reflect the findings of Schmidt and Adkin's (2012) study of a similar population. Participants in the current study expressed a personal understanding of the importance of reflective thinking in the counseling field. When asked why counseling professors assign journals in their classes, all four participants responded that the assignment was a tool for practicing reflection, deepening awareness, and/or fostering personal growth. Additionally, at least one participant recognized how keeping a reflective journal was practice for the reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983) that is necessary for effective counseling: "If ... I feel myself kind of just distancing myself from a client or a situation, I have to sit in it and kind of, what is going on? ... By giving myself a chance to reflect on it, I am able to access whatever that reaction was" (Participant One). These findings differ from those of Sutton, Townend, and Wright (2007), whose study of 19 cognitive behavioral psychotherapy students revealed that students were somewhat uncertain about the purpose of their journal assignment and would have benefitted from further explanation at the beginning of the course.

### *Evidence of Reflective Thinking in Participants' Writing*

Participants regularly demonstrated reflective thinking and critically reflective thinking in their journal entries. Entries that demonstrated no reflective thinking were the minority – less than 30%. In contrast, almost 50% of journal entries demonstrated reflective thinking, and the remaining 22% demonstrated critically reflective thinking. These findings provide a counterpoint to literature indicating that highly reflective thinking is uncommon in students' work (O'Connell



& Dymont, 2011). One potential explanation for these contradictory results could be the different populations of students; in this present study, all four participants were older than 25, had already earned undergraduate degrees, had self-selected into a field that heavily emphasizes reflective thinking (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992b), and were at least two years into their program. Thus, they may have been more willing and able than students in other, less reflection-centered fields to produce reflective writing as part of their coursework.

#### *Benefits of Descriptive and Introspective (Non-Reflective) Journal Content*

While reflective thinking is clearly an important learning outcome for students' journals, results of this study suggest that even non-reflective journal entries can be beneficial for students' learning and growth. Many of the participants produced journal entries that, in whole or in part, provided a record of their observations. A good example, quoted previously, is a participant's description of an Al-Anon meeting. The participant described the gender makeup of the people in the room and how attendees self-segregated by gender. The participant also described the smell of cigarette smoke that clouded the room. While on the surface this writing is descriptive, and it fails to meet Mezirow's (1991) criteria for reflective writing, it still has value. It provides insight into characteristics and behaviors of some people who choose to attend recovery meetings, as well as an awareness of the environment. For counselors, observations provide an important source of data (Hill, 2010). It is why this group of students had been taught to "say what you hear, say what you see, say what you feel;" advice that they later applied to their journals.

Introspection is another form of non-reflective writing that appeared in journals. Although labeling feelings and other forms of introspective writing are not truly reflective, they are important avenues toward the self-awareness and self-knowledge that are required for

effective and ethical counseling practice (Hubbs & Brand, 2005). Perhaps not surprisingly, the participant who wrote about frustration about finding a meeting is the same participant who spoke in the interview about a personal goal to become more comfortable talking about feelings. Thus, for this participant, the journal became an important tool for furthering progress toward a self-identified goal.

#### *The Relationship Between Experience and Reflection*

Results from this study support Kolb's (1984) assertion that reflection is spurred by direct experience. Participants mined reflections from a multitude of experiences, including recovery meetings, moments of relapse or near-relapse, and interactions with family members and friends. In addition, journal entries demonstrated Kolb's ongoing cycle of experience-reflection-experience. For example, in the sentence, "I thought about the guys from AA when I was out with my friends and started to have a craving," the participant reflected on one facet of that experience (attending a recovery meeting), which led to in new insights, which the participant later recalled in a different experiential context (social interaction).

#### *Instructor Feedback: Benefits and Varying Preferences*

Participants expressed varying preferences for feedback. While one participant would have preferred formative feedback, the other three were satisfied with summative feedback. Several months after handing in their journals, most participants voluntarily recalled specific instructor comments. These clear memories imply the presence of learning through a one-on-one connection, in writing, between student and instructor, which participants clearly valued. Participants commented that re-reading their journals, which often happened while reviewing instructor feedback, led to new understandings. Thus, for instructors assigning a journal for class,

it could be wise to build in a mechanism to encourage students to review their journal entries so that they can continue to learn from their own reflections and experiences.

### *Desire for Freedom of Expression*

Participants' preferences were for less structure in the assignment rather than more. It is possible that in the current study, this preference reflected the fact that participants had already completed several journals in previous courses and thus felt prepared for, and appreciative of, a less structured assignment that emphasized personal expression over meeting an exhaustive list of criteria. Participant Four indicated some understanding of how the program's journal assignments might have evolved toward fewer criteria as students moved toward graduation: "Maybe [our professor] allowed us that freedom because we had just completed our second year in the program ... So maybe it was kind of a scaffolding technique that they do."

### *Practical, Personal, and Ethical Challenges*

Using a journal in an academic setting does have its challenges. Participants cited limited time as a practical concern. These findings mirror those of Greiman and Covington (2007), whose participants cited difficulty finding time to journal as the most common barrier they encountered. Perhaps worth further study is a participant's previously cited hypothesis about how concerns such as limited time may disguise deeper issues with the journaling process. Instructors assigning journals may be wise to explore underlying reasons students may not be comfortable with journaling assignments.

Notably, for all that has been written about the potential difficulty in evaluating students' journal entries, participants in this study expressed few concerns with the process. When asked their opinion about the journal comprising 25% of their overall grade in the course, participants' reigning sentiment was that it was appropriate because the journal was such an important aspect

of the course. They also indicated that the rubric made sense and allowed them freedom to write about what mattered most to them rather than “just answering to make sure they check that box” (Participant One).

Self-censorship was evident for some. For one participant, self-censorship was connected to concerns about trust: “Finding that balance of, well, what do I want to share and what do I want to keep with myself... Because I trust my professors, I’m like, ‘OK, well I can give this much to them’” (Participant Three). Notably, even though the participant feels a sense of trust, the outcome is not complete openness, but rather a lesser degree of self-censorship. Not all participants reported censoring themselves, however. One participant was clear that writing offered a kind of freedom of expression that was not available in other forums such as in-class dialogues or online discussion board posts. This range of approaches warrants further consideration. Differences could be related to personality factors, levels of comfort with writing, past experiences with journaling (in both personal and academic settings), and more.

#### *Limitations and Directions for Further Research*

The results of this study provide a phenomenological snapshot of four master’s-level counseling students’ experiences keeping a journal for a content course in a CACREP-accredited counselor education program. The findings reinforce some of the existing literature, such as concerns about self-disclosure. In other areas, such as the quality of reflection, the findings challenge the existing literature. For example, these participants’ journal entries consistently demonstrated reflective thinking and critically reflective thinking. In addition, participants’ interviews and journal entries indicate that non-reflective journal content, such as description and introspection, may be more valuable to student learning than previously thought.

However, there are a number of limitations. Despite multiple recruitment strategies, this study had a small sample size. All participants were volunteers who described themselves as reflective individuals and received full points on the assignment. This study would have benefitted from the viewpoints of additional participants who did not identify as reflective and/or did not receive full credit. Despite measures to protect confidentiality and a lack of ties between the researchers and the participants' university, such students may have declined to participate out of concern that their critical viewpoints could have been traced back to them and have a negative impact on their success in their graduate program.

With research indicating that counselors think reflectively throughout their careers (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992b), this study has important implications for how counselor educators approach reflective thinking. The participants' experiences and writings suggest it is important for instructors to design high-quality experiential learning opportunities for students to reflect upon. In addition, the preferences of these advanced master's-level students indicate instructors may want to tailor the assignment structure and method of giving feedback based on students' level of familiarity with reflective writing.

The results indicate many directions for further research. Specifically, more knowledge is needed of how counseling students develop as reflective thinkers, and how and whether assignments such as journals contribute to this growth. Counselor educators would continue to benefit from greater knowledge of how best to incorporate this skill development in their training programs. Possible areas for future investigation include instructor feedback on students' journals and its impact on student satisfaction and learning, to what degree (if any) re-reading journals deepens student learning, and the use of journal and other reflective assignments in content courses versus clinical courses.

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## Appendix

### Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me about the behavior change experience you completed as part of your Addictions Counseling course this summer.
2. What was it like to keep a journal during the experience?
3. How did you decide what you were going to write about in your journal?
4. You were asked to cover many topics including the successes and challenges of your behavior change, reflections on the recovery meetings you attended, and experiences within your family system. How did that go for you?
5. In what ways, if any, did keeping a journal contribute to your learning?
6. If you had to take the class over again, would you do anything differently with your journal?
7. Your journal was evaluated using a rubric, and it comprised 25% of your overall grade. What are your thoughts on how your journal was evaluated?
8. Tell me about any other feedback you got from your professor on your journal.
9. What do you think are some reasons counseling professors assign journals for their courses?
10. Anything else you'd like to share?

### Author Note

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# Forming a Professional Counselor Identity: The Impact of Identity Processing Style

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This study examined the impact of identity processing style on professional counselor identity development. 136 masters students in a CACREP-accredited counseling program completed a survey with measures of counselor identity and identity style. Results of the study signify that differences in identity processing style have an impact on the development of a professional counselor identity. The use of both informational and normative processing styles appear beneficial in forming a professional counselor identity, though the informational style alone was indicative of a professional counselor identity beyond identity commitment. The diffuse/avoidant style seems least suitable for developing a professional counselor identity.

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*Keywords: counselor identity, identity style, professional development, professional identity*

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Facilitating a professional counselor identity is a central goal for training programs in Counselor Education (CACREP, 2014; Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss, 2010). The formation of this counselor identity includes a process of engaging with values, attitudes, and actions championed by the profession, and ultimately working to integrate such values, attitudes, and actions with ones larger identity system. As trainees enter the counseling profession they represent a vast array of life experiences, beliefs and values, and worldviews. While affirming such diversity of our counselor trainees, counselor educators are responsible to foster certain values, attitudes, and actions that unify the profession in its service to a diverse society and world (ACA, 2014; Kaplan & Gladding, 2011). While the development of a professional identity is often a strenuous task for all counselors-in-training, clear differences exist among trainees regarding their enthusiasm and willingness to engage in this process. Identity style theory (Berzonsky, 1989) offers a particularly useful framework for identifying trainee's different

approaches to this task. The identification of different approaches to the task of forming a professional counselor identity can assist counselor educators and supervisors in tailoring interventions to the needs of particular trainees. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Bersonsky's (1989) identity processing styles on the development of a professional counselor identity during master's level counselor-training.

### **Counselor Professional Identity**

The professional identity of counselors has been recognized as a salient area of focus in the counseling profession for some time (Gale & Austin, 2003; Hanna & Bemak, 1997; Kaplan & Gladding, 2011; Mellin, Hunt, & Nichols, 2011; Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990). This focus has manifest in two distinct but related arenas of interest: a) the identity of counseling as a unified profession (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011; Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014; Mellin et al., 2011; Reiner, Dobmeier, & Hernandez, 2013), and b) the development of individuals' professional counselor identities (Auxier, Hughes, & Kline, 2003; Gibson et al., 2010). These two arenas mutually inform one another, with the identity of the profession being shaped by the individuals it represents, and the professional identity of individuals being cultivated by the larger professional body they belong to.

The collective identity of the counseling profession has been marked by its humanistic roots (Hansen, 2003; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 1999), emphasis on empowering relationships that facilitate human development and wellness (Eriksen & Kress, 2006; Kaplan et al., 2014; Mellin et al., 2011), and a contextual and culturally sensitive approach in counseling practice (ACA, 2014; Eriksen & Kress, 2006; McAuliffe & Eriksen, 1999; Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990). The distinction of this collective identity has been a central theme in the profession's struggles regarding the medical model and diagnosis of mental disorders (Eriksen & Kress, 2006; Hansen,

2003), the growing demand for empirically validated and empirically supported therapies (Hansen, 2006, 2012), and the articulation of the counseling professions unique and valuable contribution to the mental health needs of society (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011; Kaplan et al., 2014; Mellin et al., 2011; Reiner et al., 2013). The profession's struggles to articulate and maintain a collective identity in the face of these challenges often effects a parallel process in counselor-trainees, who likewise experience confusion regarding their own professional identities. While a period of identity confusion is developmentally appropriate for counselors-in-training, a significant responsibility remains with counselor educators, supervisors, and other leaders of the profession to cultivate those core elements that both unify and distinguish our profession (Calley & Hawley, 2008; Kaplan & Gladding, 2011; Reiner et al., 2013).

The development of a professional counselor identity involves a process of exploring and working to integrate the professional values, attitudes, and behaviors proffered by the counseling community with ones' larger identity system (Auxier et al., 2003; Gibson et al., 2010). Gibson et al. (2010) describe this process as involving three transformational tasks: (a) the development of a personal definition of counseling, (b) the adoption of responsibility for professional growth, and (c) the recognition of professional identity as interlinked with larger systems (ie., the professional counseling community and larger systems of practice). Navigating these transformational tasks, students experience significant fluctuations in confidence and emotion as they cycle through conceptual and experiential learning opportunities while processing evaluative feedback from faculty, supervisors, and peers (Auxier et al., 2003).

As students' identity systems experience the pressures associated with counselor training, their commitments in other identity domains are called into question and renegotiated (Grotevant, 1987). General domains of identity commonly researched across populations

include: (a) religious ideology, (b) political ideology, (c) life philosophy and values, (d) family relationships, (e) gender roles, (f) friendships, (g) romantic relationships, and (h) recreation (Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1995; Bennion & Adams, 1986). Additional arenas of focus often explored include ethnic and sexual identity domains (Degges-White & Meyers, 2005; Hoffman, 2004; Phinney, 1990). While these domains are by no means exhaustive, they begin to show the array of identity elements that may undergo renegotiation while students are in counselor-training programs. The integration of professional values, attitudes, and behaviors into ones identity system is clearly a challenging task. While models of counselor identity development proffered by Auxier et al. (2003) and Gibson et al. (2010) are helpful in identifying the experiences of students engaged in the process, they do not account for differences among students in their approach to this task of professional identity development. Berzonsky's (1989) identity style theory is a helpful framework for understanding different approaches to this task. By differentiating student's approaches to the task of forming a professional counselor identity, counselor educators and supervisors will be able to tailor interventions to the unique needs of each student.

### **Identity Style**

Berzonsky's (1989) identity style theory postulates three different processes used by individuals when approaching identity related challenges (diffuse/avoidant style, normative style, and informational style). The *diffuse/avoidant style* represents a disposition towards putting off and avoiding identity related decisions until such decisions are required by external pressures. Use of the diffuse/avoidant style is associated with hedonistic values, power, and self-enhancement strategies (Berzonsky, Ciecuch, Duriez, & Soenens, 2011), lower levels of emotional intelligence (Seaton & Beaumont, 2008, 2011b), and lower levels of self-actualization

and self-transcendence (Beaumont, 2009). When faced with external problems and stressors, those utilizing a diffuse orientation tend toward avoidant-oriented coping strategies (Berzonsky, 1992b; Beaumont & Seaton, 2011), and an immature defense style that distorts reality to reduce anxiety (Seaton & Beaumont, 2011a). Furthermore, Berzonsky and Ferrari (2009) found that diffuse-oriented individuals are strategic in their avoidance of problems that might provide self-relevant feedback and rely on social cues to convince others that they possess desirable characteristics.

The *normative style* reflects a tendency to embrace those identity standards held by significant others when subject to identity related pressures. Consequently, identity commitments made by norm-oriented individuals tend to occur prior to significant personal exploration of alternatives (Berzonsky, 1989; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Berzonsky & Neimeyer, 1994). Values associated with the normative style include tradition, conformity, and security (Berzonsky et al., 2011), which result in a generally closed disposition toward values and actions that may threaten core areas of the self (Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992; Lile, 2013, 2015). When faced with external pressures, norm oriented individuals are inclined toward problem-focused coping strategies (Beaumont & Seaton, 2011), and a neurotic defense style that alters personal feelings without dramatically distorting external reality (Seaton & Beaumont, 2011a).

The *informational style* represents a propensity to seek out and evaluate information regarding identity-related decisions before making commitments. Values favored by informational-oriented individuals include universalism, benevolence, and openness (Berzonsky et al., 2011), manifesting in greater exploration and openness to new experiences (Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992; Lile, 2013, 2015; Seaton & Beaumont, 2008). The use of an informational style is associated with higher emotional intelligence (Seaton & Beaumont, 2008, 2011b), self-

actualization and self-transcendence (Beaumont, 2009), and personal wisdom (Beaumont, 2011). Specific areas of personal wisdom related to the informational style include cognitive, affective, and reflective wisdom, mindfulness, savoring beliefs, introspection, and an awareness of internal states (Beaumont, 2011; Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992; Berzonsky & Luyckx, 2008). When faced with external pressures, informational-oriented individuals tend to use deliberate, proactive, and problem-focused coping strategies (Berzonsky, 1992b; Beaumont & Seaton, 2011; Seaton & Beaumont, 2008), and a mature defense style that optimally integrates reality and personal affect (Seaton & Beaumont, 2011a).

The three identity styles developed by Berzonsky (1989) represent different approaches to the task of identity formation. While normally developing individuals are assumed to have access to each style outlined above, all are considered to have a primary style that they rely on most (Berzonsky, 1989). Differences regarding the style used when approaching the task of counselor identity development have significant implications for the successful integration of professional values, attitudes, and behaviors with ones' identity system. This study was designed to examine the impact of these various identity styles on the professional identity development of counselors-in-training.

### **Objective for this Study**

The objective for this study was to identify the impact of Berzonsky's (1989) identity processing styles on the development of a professional counselor identity during master's level counselor-training. Research thus far on the identity styles has indicated that the diffuse/avoidant style is least effective in facilitating identity development, while the informational style is most effective in facilitating this process. The following hypotheses are informed by these previous findings and anticipate consistent results within the domain of a professional counselor identity:

Hypothesis 1: The diffuse/avoidant style would negatively relate to a professional counselor identity. In contrast, the normative style, informational style, and identity commitment would positively relate to a professional counselor identity.

Hypothesis 2: Differences in professional counselor identity were expected for the identity styles; where the diffuse/avoidant style reflects the lowest level of professional counselor identity, the normative style reflects professional identity that is higher than the diffuse/avoidant style but lower than the informational style, and the informational style reflects the highest level of professional counselor identity.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Students attending a CACREP-accredited masters counseling program within a private university in the Northeast were invited to participate in this study. Of the 141 students enrolled in the program, surveys with sufficient data were collected from 136 students (122 female, 12 male, 1 transgender) ranging in age from 21 to 59 years ( $M = 30.13$ ,  $SD = 8.22$ ). This produced a 96% response rate. Those enrolled in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) accounted for 63% of the sample, while School Counseling (SC) students accounted for 36% of the sample. The majority of participants identified as Caucasian (81%), with 9% as African American, and 5% as Latin American/Hispanic. Remaining participants identified as Native American, Asian, or other.

### **Instruments**

**Demographic Information.** A short demographic questionnaire provided information regarding age, gender, race/ethnicity, number of counseling courses completed, area of concentration (CMHC or SC), and internship enrollment. For the last variable, students enrolled

in both practicum and internship were grouped together for comparison with those who had not yet reached the practicum/internship stage of their program. These demographic variables were used in examining differences among participants of the study.

**Professional Counselor Identity.** The revised Professional Identity and Values Scale (PIVS-R; La Guardia, 2009) was used to assess professional counselor identity. This scale calculates scores for two subscales (Professional Orientation and Values, and Professional Development), which can be combined to produce an overall professional identity score according to responses on 32 items (18 and 14 items respectively for each subscale). Sample Items for the scale include: “Client empowerment is a fundamental component in the counseling process” (Professional Orientation and Values), and “I feel confident in my role as a counseling professional” (Professional Development). These items are on a 6-point likert-type scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Cronbach’s alphas were computed for this sample, yielding scores of .73 for Professional Orientation and Values (POV), .78 for Professional Development (PD), and .82 for the overall scale.

**Identity Style.** The 3<sup>rd</sup> revision of the identity style inventory (ISI-3; Berzonsky, 1992a) was used to assess identity style. This 40-item measure produces participant scores in three identity style domains (diffuse/avoidant, normative, and informational), as well as a domain for identity commitment. Some example items include: “It doesn’t pay to worry about values in advance; I decide things as they happen” (diffuse/avoidant style); “Once I know the correct way to handle a problem, I prefer to stick with it” (normative style); “I’ve spent a lot of time and talked to a lot of people trying to develop a set of values that make sense to me” (informational style). Items are on a 5-point likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me). For this sample, Cronbach’s alphas were .67 for the diffuse/avoidant style, .60 for the



normative style, .65 for the informational style, and .64 for identity commitment.

Participants were ascribed a primary identity style based on the recommended procedures of Berzonsky (1992b), which indicated standardization of raw scores for each style scale in order to ascribe the participant's highest standardized score as the preferred identity style. The distribution of identity styles for the given sample were: 44 participants as primarily diffuse/avoidant (32%), 43 as primarily normative (32%), and 49 as primarily informational (36%). This distribution of participants is consistent with that found among other populations the ISI-3 has been used with.

### **Procedures**

A survey including the instruments described above was administered to students during classes across the counseling department. Approval from the Institutional Review Board was attained, and the researcher adhered to the ACA code of ethics during the study. An informed consent form preceded administration of the survey. Completion of the survey took approximately 20 minutes. No identifying information beyond demographic information was gathered in order to protect participant anonymity.

### **Data Analyses**

Preliminary analyses were conducted regarding the potential for interactions that age, number of courses completed, and internship enrollment may have with the identity constructs (identity style and professional identity). These involved correlational analyses for age and the number of courses completed with the identity constructs, as well as two separate multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) for internship enrollment with the PIVS and ISI-3 subscales respectively. These preliminary analyses enabled the researcher to control for these variables in subsequent analyses. In order to address the first hypothesis, correlational analyses for

professional identity and identity style constructs were considered. This was followed by a hierarchical regression analysis that controlled for the number of courses completed and identity commitment while examining the contributions of the normative and informational styles on professional identity. Finally, to address the second hypothesis an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was utilized to examine difference among the identity styles on professional identity. For this analysis internship enrollment was controlled for as a covariate. These analyses are presented in greater detail within the results section .

## **Results**

### **Preliminary Analyses**

#### **Intercorrelations for age and number of courses completed with identity constructs.**

To examine the potential impact of age and the number of courses completed, these variables were included in the intercorrelational analyses with the professional identity and identity style constructs. The results of these analyses can be found in Table 1. Age correlations were found with the total PIVS score ( $r = .16, p < .05$ ), normative style ( $r = -.16, p < .05$ ), informational style ( $r = .25, p < .01$ ), and identity commitment ( $r = .32, p < .01$ ). Intercorrelations for the number of courses completed were found with the PIVS total score ( $r = .32, p < .01$ ), professional development ( $r = .39, p < .001$ ), and identity commitment ( $r = .22, p < .01$ ).

**Internship enrollment differences among the identity constructs.** Considering the potential for differences among the identity constructs based on participants' enrollment in practicum/internship work, separate multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were conducted for the PIVS and ISI-3 subscales respectively. Due to differences in group size (46 enrolled in internship, 90 not enrolled), tests for homogeneity of covariance were conducted for each analysis. For differences on the PIVS subscales, Box's  $M$  was not significant,  $F(3, 210330)$

= 1.49,  $p > .05$ , enabling further examination of the results. A significant multivariate effect was found for internship enrollment on the PIVS subscales,  $F(2, 133) = 8.91, p < .001, \eta^2 = .12$ . A significant univariate effect was found for the PD subscale ( $F = 16.75, p < .001$ ), with those enrolled in internship ( $M = 59.74, SD = 8.43$ ) scoring higher in professional development than those who had not yet reached the internship stage of their program ( $M = 54.31, SD = 6.69$ ). No difference was found for the POV subscale regarding enrollment in internship. Internship enrollment differences on the ISI-3 subscales were then considered. After testing for

Table 1

Correlations between Age, Courses Completed, Professional Identity, and Identity Styles

| Variables                 | 1 | 2   | 3     | 4     | 5      | 6    | 7     | 8     | 9      |
|---------------------------|---|-----|-------|-------|--------|------|-------|-------|--------|
| 1. Age                    | — | .03 | .16*  | .10   | .14    | -.13 | -.16* | .25** | .32**  |
| 2. Courses complete       |   | —   | .32** | .09   | .39*** | .06  | .13   | .02   | .22**  |
| 3. Total PIVS             |   |     | —     | .76** | .81**  | -.06 | .23** | .41** | .38**  |
| 4. POV                    |   |     |       | —     | .23**  | -.01 | .11   | .40** | .24**  |
| 5. PD                     |   |     |       |       | —      | -.08 | .25** | .25** | .36**  |
| 6. Diffuse/avoidant style |   |     |       |       |        | —    | -.05  | -.16* | -.33** |
| 7. Normative style        |   |     |       |       |        |      | —     | .02   | .30**  |
| 8. Informational style    |   |     |       |       |        |      |       | —     | .40**  |
| 9. Identity commitment    |   |     |       |       |        |      |       |       | —      |

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

homogeneity of covariance, no multivariate effects of internship enrollment on the ISI-3 subscales were found,  $F(1, 134) = 2.17, p > .05$ .

### **Intercorrelations among Professional Identity and Identity Style Constructs**

Table 1 shows all correlations among the variables for the study utilizing a .05 alpha level for significance. Total PIVS scores were positively related to the normative style ( $r = .23, p < .01$ ), informational style ( $r = .41, p < .01$ ), and identity commitment ( $r = .38, p < .01$ ); the POV subscale scores were positively related to an informational style ( $r = .40, p < .01$ ) and identity commitment ( $r = .24, p < .01$ ); and the PD subscale scores were positively related to the normative style ( $r = .25, p < .01$ ), informational style ( $r = .25, p < .01$ ), and identity commitment ( $r = .36, p < .01$ ). No significant relationships were found between professional identity and the diffuse/avoidant style.

### **Hierarchical Regression Analysis**

To examine the predictive value of the identity styles (normative and informational) on PIVS total scores, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted controlling for the number of courses completed in step 1 and identity commitment in step 2. The normative and informational styles were entered in step 3 utilizing a stepwise method to evaluate the unique contributions of each style to the model. Results of this analysis can be found in table 2.

In step 1, the number of courses completed by participants significantly predicted PIVS total scores ( $\beta = .32, R^2 = .10, p < .001$ ). Then in step 2, identity commitment made a significant contribution to PIVS total scores after controlling for the number of courses completed ( $\beta = .33, \Delta R^2 = .10, p < .001$ ). Controlling for both courses completed and identity commitment in step 3, the informational style was predictive of PIVS total scores ( $\beta = .33, \Delta R^2 = .09, p < .001$ ), while

Table 2

## Hierarchical Regression for Professional Identity Overall Score

|                             | <i>R</i> | <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> | <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup><br>Change | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>β</i> | <i>t</i> |
|-----------------------------|----------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|
| <b>Step 1</b>               | .32      | .10***                |                                 |          |           |          |          |
| Number of Courses Completed |          |                       |                                 | .52      | .14       | .32***   | 3.89     |
| <b>Step 2</b>               | .45      | .20***                | .10***                          |          |           |          |          |
| Number of Courses Completed |          |                       |                                 | .40      | .13       | .25**    | 3.09     |
| Identity Commitment         |          |                       |                                 | .81      | .20       | .33***   | 4.11     |
| <b>Step 3</b>               | .54      | .30***                | .09***                          |          |           |          |          |
| Number of Courses Completed |          |                       |                                 | .45      | .12       | .27***   | 3.60     |
| Identity Commitment         |          |                       |                                 | .46      | .21       | .19*     | 2.25     |
| Informational Style         |          |                       |                                 | .75      | .18       | .33***   | 4.11     |

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

the normative style was not. The overall model accounted for 29.5% of the variance in PIVS total scores.

### Style Comparisons for Professional Identity

To examine style differences in professional identity an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted. Controlling for internship enrollment as a covariate, the professional identity total score (PIVS) was entered as the dependent variable with primary identity style as the independent variable. Bonferroni adjustments were used for the multiple comparisons. The analysis was significant for the covariate (internship enrollment),  $F(1, 132) = 7.63, p < .01$ . After controlling for internship enrollment, between-subject effects were additionally significant,  $F(2, 132) = 5.71, p < .01$ , with the diffuse/avoidant style ( $M = 136.96, SD = 9.43$ ) scoring significantly lower in PIVS total scores than both the normative style ( $M =$

143.65,  $SD = 11.67$ ) and the informational style ( $M = 143.62$ ,  $SD = 12.03$ ). No difference was identified between the normative and informational styles in PIVS total scores.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of identity style on the development of a professional counselor identity. In general, the diffuse/avoidant style was expected to reflect lower levels of professional counselor identity, with normative and informational styles expected to reflect progressively higher levels of professional counselor identity. Results of the study confirmed that the diffuse/avoidant style was unrelated to professional identity, while the normative and informational styles were both associated with the professional identity of counselors. While identity commitment accounted for the relationship between the normative style and professional identity, the informational style alone was predictive of a professional counselor identity beyond these commitments. As such, the hypothesized relationships were largely supported, with minor exceptions. These results and their implications for counselor training will be discussed further below, beginning with a discussion of the preliminary analyses.

### **Demographic Differences in Professional Identity**

Preliminary analyses revealed interactions of age, number of courses completed, and internship enrollment with participants' professional identity. Participants' age was positively related to their overall professional identity, indicating an increase in professional identity as students' age went up. This may reflect a more intentional decision making process about joining the counseling profession, and/or a greater investment in the profession due to life-stage responsibilities and pressures. Older students may experience greater pressure to commit and invest in their career in order to meet financial and/or relational needs in their lives. Research is

needed in this area to better understand the interaction between age and professional identity found in this study.

Participants' progress in their programs of study also yielded interactional effects with professional identity in this study. Reflected in both the number of courses completed and internship enrollment variables was a trend of stronger professional identity with progress within a program. This is good news regarding the impact of counselor training on the development of a professional counselor identity. Within this trend it is noteworthy that the increase in overall professional identity was accounted for by increases within the professional development subscale and not the professional orientation and values subscale. This seems to indicate that student participants for this study were more focused on the tasks and skills of professional practice while in training, and less concerned with assimilating the beliefs and values of the profession. Gibson et al. (2010) found that "New and prepracticum CITs [Counselors In Training] focused on their individual skills and qualities as defining their professional identities..."(p. 30), and that identification with the larger professional community of counseling tended to occur later in training. The findings of this study are consistent with those of Gibson et al. (2010) regarding an early emphasis on skills for practice. However, the transition to identifying with the larger professional community, as this involves the consideration of the beliefs and values of the profession as a whole, may be a process that unfolds after graduation for the participants of this study.

### **Identity Commitment and Professional Counselor Identity**

Identity commitment was hypothesized to positively relate to a professional counselor identity (Hypothesis 1). This hypothesis was supported, with identity commitment relating to the PIVS total score, and each of the POV and PD subscale scores. Moreover, identity commitment



was identified as a significant predictor of a professional counselor identity, accounting for 10% of the variance in PIVS total scores after controlling for the number of courses completed by students.

Identity commitment has long been understood as a central task in the process of identity development (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966), and results of this study clearly indicate that commitment remains central in the formation of a professional counselor identity. Interestingly, after controlling for identity commitment (and number of courses completed), the informational style alone was predictive of a professional counselor identity. This suggests that identity commitment accounts for the strength of professional identity among those relying on a normative style, but not for those utilizing an informational style. This finding highlights the importance of *how* identity commitments are made when considering the formation of a professional counselor identity. Unique to the informational style is a period of exploration (or considering meaningful alternatives) prior to making commitments. This exploration appears to yield distinct qualities associated with a professional counselor identity that supersede commitment alone. Use of the informational style has been associated with universalism and openness to new experiences (Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992; Lile, 2013, 2015; Seaton & Beaumont, 2008), higher levels of emotional intelligence (Seaton & Beaumont, 2008, 2011b) and self-transcendence (Beaumont, 2009). These qualities unique to the informational style are highly compatible with a counselor professional identity and may lend themselves to the exploration process.

### **Identity Styles and Professional Counselor Identity**

**Diffuse/avoidant style.** The diffuse/avoidant style was hypothesized to negatively relate to a professional counselor identity (Hypothesis 1) and to reflect the lowest professional

counselor identity scores of the three identity styles (Hypothesis 2). Hypothesis 1 lacked compelling support, with the results indicating negative but non-significant relationships for the diffuse/avoidant style with the PIVS total score, and the POV and PD subscales respectively. Rather than having a pronounced negative association with a professional counselor identity, these results suggest that individuals using a diffuse/avoidant style are more indifferent toward the development of a professional counselor identity and are not engaged in this task during their counseling studies.

The hypothesized differences in professional identity between the diffuse/avoidant and other identity styles was supported, with the diffuse/avoidant style significantly lower in the PIVS total score than both the normative and informational styles. These findings indicate that individuals utilizing a diffuse/avoidant style are least likely to engage in the development of a professional counselor identity. Likewise they are consistent with previous research that characterizes the diffuse/avoidant style as one that is generally avoidant of identity related decisions (Beaumont & Seaton, 2011; Berzonsky, 1992b; Berzonsky & Ferrari, 2009), and which utilizes an immature defense style under external pressure (Seaton & Beaumont, 2011a).

Counselor educators and supervisors seeking to promote a counselor identity among students oriented towards a diffuse/avoidant style may need to consider the strategic and avoidant nature by which these individuals cope with challenges (Beaumont & Seaton, 2011; Berzonsky, 1992b; Berzonsky & Ferrari, 2009) and seek to reduce anxiety (Seaton & Beaumont, 2011a). Being mindful of a student's defenses and working to minimize these defenses when promoting professional identity development will be important. At the same time, strategically developing interventions/assignments that minimize opportunities for inauthentic imitation will also be crucial. Finally, it is important to recall that while individuals have a dominant style, they

do have access to each identity style (Berzonsky, 1989). As such, counselor educators and supervisors need to look for those instances in which diffuse/avoidant-oriented students utilize other styles and effectively engage in tasks related to their professional identity. Highlighting and reinforcing these instances may be the most effective interventions available.

**Normative style.** Because of its tendency toward identity commitment, the normative style was expected to have a positive relationship with professional identity (Hypothesis 1). Additionally, the normative style was hypothesized to be higher in professional counselor identity than the diffuse/avoidant style, and lower in professional identity than the informational style (Hypothesis 2). Correlational results of this study largely support Hypothesis 1, indicating a significant positive relationship with an overall professional counselor identity, and the PD subscale in particular. No significant relationship was found between the normative style and the POV subscale. Norm-oriented students appear to engage in the development of specific skills and knowledge necessary for counseling practice while missing the consideration of values within the profession. Interestingly, the normative style was not predictive of a professional counselor identity after controlling for the number of courses completed and identity commitment. It seems that the inclination towards identity commitment is the driving force for engagement in professional identity tasks for norm-oriented individuals. These findings are consistent with previous research identifying a tendency for norm-oriented individuals to be closed to values that may threaten the self (Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992; Lile, 2013, 2015).

The expected differences in professional identity between the normative style and other identity styles was partially supported. The normative identity style was significantly higher in PIVS total scores than the diffuse/avoidant style. However, no significant differences were found between the normative and informational styles on PIVS total scores. Norm-oriented participants

for this study were significantly more engaged in professional identity formation than those utilizing a diffuse/avoidant style.

Counselor educators and supervisors seeking to promote counselor identity development in norm-oriented trainees might tend to the process these student's utilize in addressing counseling-related issues. While participants utilizing the normative and informational styles were equally high with regard to their professional counselor identity, use of the normative style appears to depend largely on identity commitments that may have been foreclosed on. This tendency toward foreclosure for those utilizing a normative style is well documented in previous literature (Berzonsky, 1989; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000; Berzonsky & Neimeyer, 1994). Facilitating a process of identifying and considering alternative positions on counseling-related issues, and helping norm-oriented students to suspend judgment in order to critically evaluate the alternatives, would be most appropriate. During this process, educators and supervisors need to be mindful of the significant emotional toll these students experience when considering alternative points of view. It is necessary to acknowledge these emotional challenges and encourage norm-oriented students to honestly reflect on these experiences. Counselor educators and supervisors also need to be aware of student defenses, seeking to understand and minimize them when intervening to promote counselor identity development. A goal toward fostering increasing flexibility and openness to different perspectives will be most beneficial in cultivating a professional counselor identity that is more fully integrated within the identity system.

**Informational style.** The informational style was expected to have a positive relationship with a professional counselor identity (Hypothesis 1), and to reflect the highest professional identity scores of the identity styles (Hypothesis 2). In support of Hypothesis 1, significant positive relationships were identified for the informational style with overall professional

identity, and the POV and PD subscales respectively. Those utilizing an informational style appear to engage in both the consideration of professional values and the development of counseling skills and knowledge. The informational style was the only identity style that predicted professional counselor identity after controlling for the number of courses completed and identity commitment.

The anticipated differences between the informational style and other identity styles was supported in part. The informational style was significantly higher than the diffuse/avoidant style in overall PIVS. However, no significant differences were found between the informational and normative styles regarding overall PIVS scores. Individuals utilizing an informational style are more engaged in professional identity formation than those utilizing a diffuse/avoidant style.

Counselor educators and supervisors working with informational-oriented students can directly foster the acculturation process by providing resources and opportunities for active engagement in the professional community (presentations/teaching, research, conferences). In addition, providing experiential opportunities for these students to flesh out their strengths and qualities in their new professional role will aid their professional development. When working with informational-oriented students, counselor educators can adopt an optimal role of support and guidance, trusting that these students are actively engaged in the process of professional identity development. Respecting the autonomy of such students is important to communicate this trust in their ability to make appropriate and informed decisions.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

There are limitations to this study to consider, principally regarding its single-measurement design and sample composition. The single-measurement design does not provide data regarding the development of a professional counselor identity over time. Longitudinal

research examining the impact of identity style on the development of a counselor identity, both during a training program and in the years following, would be helpful. Additionally, the generalization of this study's results is limited by the composition of this sample. The sample was derived from a single counseling program, and may reflect unique qualities and characteristics of this program's student demographic. Further research is necessary to adequately understand the impact of identity style on professional counselor identity across counseling programs and student populations.

Despite the limitations of this study, its results offer initial evidence for the role of identity styles in the development of a professional counselor identity. While the normative and informational styles reflected distinct strengths in this process, use of an informational style appears to hold the most potential for counselor identity development. The diffuse/avoidant style reflects the least potential for supporting this process. There is much to be gleaned from future studies examining the meditational effects of identity style on interventions that target counselor identity development.

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# The Impact of Dual Roles in Mentoring Relationships: A Mixed Research Study

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In the field of counselor education, mentors often are involved in varying roles with mentees, such as being mentor, dissertation chair, and or chair to the mentee. Due to the various roles, both the mentor and mentee need to recognize how each of these roles impacts the development of the mentee and the overall mentoring relationship. The purpose of our study was to examine the relationship between perceived dual roles of the mentor and the impact on the mentoring relationship. We found that counseling students and faculty who had experienced dual roles in their mentoring relationships had high career-related functions than did their counterparts who had not experienced dual mentoring relationships.

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*Keywords: counselor education, mentoring relationships, dual roles*

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According to Hodges (2009), “a mentor assists someone through a transition phase in the learning experience, providing advice and support as well as sharing their values and professionalism (p. 32).” Specifically, related to the counseling field, a mentor is defined as “someone with experience and expertise in the counseling field who is willing to share knowledge and offer advice to foster professional development” (American Counseling Association, 2012, p. 68). Mentoring relationships between students and faculty, at the graduate level, can lead to numerous benefits, both professionally and personally, and is a mutually beneficial relationship for both the mentee and mentor. Professionally, mentorship can assist with increasing employment opportunities, the development of professional skills, and overall professional development (Bova, 2000; Lechuga, 2011). Personally, mentorship has been associated with improved motivation, confidence, and self-esteem (Neary, 2000). In conjunction with the benefits previously mentioned for mentees, mentors often feel a sense of fulfillment that comes from sharing their experiences with others (Black & Zullo, 2008).

## **Counselor Education Literature**

### **Current Trends in Mentoring**

In the past 5 to 10 years, researchers have begun to delve into the mentoring needs of specific populations within counselor education because there has been more of a focus on diversity, social justice, and multiculturalism both within the profession and society as a whole. A common undercurrent relates to the lack of connection among students and faculty, universities, and the larger counseling profession (Haizlip, 2012; Haskins et al., 2013). Roach and Young (2007) recognized that many counselor education programs focus on the maturation of students through counselor education programs but pay little attention to the well-being—personally and professionally—of students as they develop into counseling professionals. This lack of attention can lead to early burnout and impairment of these young professionals. One way to create an atmosphere of wellness and self-care in students is to foster healthy mentoring relationships student-to-student and student-to-faculty. To this end, Boswell, Wilson, Stark, and Onwuegbuzie (2015) encouraged counselor education program faculty to create a mentor-friendly environment by encouraging faculty mentorship of students through formal or informal mentoring programs and supporting faculty mentorship of students through mentoring training.

### **Mentoring Needs of Students and Faculty**

Student and faculty interaction is vital for matriculation through higher education programs. Faculty help develop critical thinking and scholarly work through mentorship of graduate students and pretenured faculty. During the past 20 years, there has been an increase in the number of researchers focusing on addressing strategies and information related to successful mentoring relationships between graduate students and their respective mentors. Some universities have begun instituting structured mentoring programs for both faculty and students

(Beltman & Schaeben, 2012; Borders et al., 2011), with others using a variety of methods used within higher education to foster mentoring relationships between students and faculty. In counselor education, where dangers of counselor impairment necessitate the promotion and monitoring of wellness in counseling students (Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995), the mentoring relationship also may be used to model self-care (Johnson, 2002).

### **Needs of Pretenured Faculty**

Newly appointed assistant professors in counselor education experience significant stress and worry about their new roles and responsibilities (Borders et al., 2011; Briggs & Pehrsson, 2008; Eberman & Kahanov, 2011; Rayle, Bordes, Zapata, Arredondo, Rutter, & Howard, 2006). Magnuson, Norem, and Lonneman-Doroff (2009) completed a 6-year longitudinal study examining the needs and experiences of new tenure-track faculty members in counselor education. Four themes emerged from their research: (a) the positive and negative aspects of their work environment, (b) the assistant professor's sources of satisfaction and pleasure in their work, (c) the integration of both professional and personal development, and (d) the individual journey of each participant as they moved toward tenure and promotion. Magnuson et al. recommended both current and new counselor education faculty members consider the opportunity, or lack thereof, to develop mentoring relationships. Magnuson and her colleagues noted that when the participants experienced dissatisfaction with their position or university, it was usually linked to a lack of support by their colleagues. Hill (2004) suggested that this lack of collegial support leads to occupational stress, lower productivity, and decreased involvement with students and the program/department. At the departmental or program level, Hill suggested that counselor education programs help to increase the overall satisfaction, productivity level,

and wellness of new faculty through the creation of formal or informal mentoring programs, or assist in developing a university-wide peer mentoring program for all junior faculty.

Boswell et al. (2015) discovered several commonalities related to mentoring needs within each of three developmental levels (master, doctoral, and pretenured faculty). The master's level participants mentioned specific mentoring qualities such as the mentor being approachable, approaches to mentorship, and mentoring strategies such as providing specific feedback, as representing their most important mentoring needs. The doctoral participants noted the gender of the mentor as being important to the mentoring relationship. Also, two other needs were made apparent: (a) having multiple mentors and (c) having the mentor provide specific answers and advice to the mentees' questions and concerns. The pretenured counselor education faculty's needs included having a mentor who served dual roles for the mentee and who exhibited certain characteristics such as being approachable, having a personal connection with the mentee, and providing direct and honest feedback.

### **Mentor Functions**

Tepper, Shaffer, and Tepper (1996) created the Mentor Function Scale in order to measure psychosocial and career-related mentorship functions. Assessment of the overall functions of mentoring might assist with the comprehensive needs of mentees being met. The Mentor Function Scale (Tepper et al., 1996) has been used in adapted forms in the field of counselor education by various researchers (e.g., Black, 1998; Farrell, 2007).

A major focus of mentoring is centered on psychosocial and career development (Farrell, 2007; Johnson, 2007; Kram, 1983). Mentoring relationships evolve over time; therefore, the psychosocial aspect of the mentoring relationship develops after trust has been established. Faculty mentors address the psychosocial aspect of mentorship by providing feedback and

support about work-life balance; and understanding and navigating one's role as a student, clinician, or faculty member. Furthermore, mentee and mentorship teams that occur organically versus those teams that are assigned often have more increased psychosocial development (Boswell et al., 2015; Fagenson-Eland, Marks, & Amendola, 1997; Tenebaum, Crosby, & Gliner, 2001). Mentees who have formed a personal connection with their mentors are more likely to discuss non-career-related aspects of their lives and thoughts regarding self-doubt and competence, which leads to a greater focus on the psychosocial development of the mentee (Farrell, 2007). Although psychosocial advancement is an integral aspect of the mentee's experience, the career or professional development element remains the springboard for the existence of the relationship. The career-related functions of faculty mentorship, especially when working with doctoral-level mentees, center on time management, teaching and research obligations, and identifying significant goals that the mentee wants to achieve in his or her professional career. Faculty and students in counselor education programs receive career-related mentorship for clinical issues, teaching, service, research, and networking (Boswell et al., 2015). However, the emphasis on the psychosocial factors of mentorship for counselor education students and faculty makes sense given that the relationship is the foundation of the counseling profession (Farrell, 2007).

### **Multiple Roles**

Mentors often do more than facilitate learning and growth in their mentees. Mentors may serve additional roles of academic advisor, class instructor, clinical supervisor, administrative supervisor (in the case of teaching and research assistants), dissertation committee chair, co-author, and/or conference co-presenter. Ethical guidelines (see American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014, F.3.A; Association for Counselor Education and Supervision [ACES], 2003,

section 2.09) discourage clinical supervisors to serve in more than one role. Indeed, there is the danger that the mentor may become more friend than mentor (Warren, 2005) and lose his or her ability to provide unbiased evaluation (Johnson, 2007; Welfel, 2002) and serve as a gatekeeper for the profession (Welfel, 2002). Nevertheless, avoiding dual roles is not practical in academe (Borders & Brown, 2005; Warren, 2005; Welfel, 2002). In many cases, a mentoring role will evolve from one of these other roles as the relationship begins to take on career and psychosocial functions (Johnson, 2007). Bowman, Hatley, and Bowman (1995) provided the compromise that mentors should thoughtfully consider the ethics within each role rather than attempt to avoid dual roles all together.

Researchers exploring both supervision and mentoring have revealed that dual roles can be beneficial. In their study of the dual role of clinical supervisor and administrative supervisor, Tromski-Klingshirn and Davis (2007) discovered that 83% of supervisees did not view the dual role as a problem and 72.5% reported specific benefits, such as more time with the supervisor and greater efficiency. Pan, Sun, and Chow (2011) found that supervisor mentors have more knowledge of their mentee's needs and are better able to provide challenging project assignments and access to social networks. Building upon Wilde and Schau's (1991) earlier musing that "broadness may be an integral part of mentoring" (p. 177), Johnson (2007) posited that the overlap of roles yields better outcomes for trainees.

### **Purpose and Rationale of the Study**

In counselor education, mentors often engage in multiple roles with mentees (e.g., mentor, dissertation chair, clinical supervisor, professor) and, therefore, both the mentor and mentee need to recognize how each of these roles impacts the development of the mentee and the overall mentoring relationship. Although a number of researchers have examined the usefulness

and benefits of mentoring in higher education and, specifically, in counselor education (Arthur, & Russell-Mayhew, 2010; Briggs & Pehrsson, 2008; Buyukgoze-Kavas, Taylor, Neimeyer, & Guneri, 2010; Casto, Caldwell, & Salazar, 2005; Farrell, 2007; Taylor & Neimeyer, 2009; Walker, 2006), few researchers have studied the mentoring relationship and the impact of the mentor's engagement in dual, or multiple roles, through the use of the Mentoring Functions Scale. Thus, the purpose of our study was to examine the relationship between perceived dual roles of the mentor and the impact on the mentoring relationship. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What is the relationship between perceptions of whether they experienced a dual relationship with a mentor and scores on an adapted version of the Mentoring Functions Scale among individuals in counselor education programs?
2. What is the relationship between developmental status (i.e., master's-level student, doctoral student, or pre-tenured faculty) and perceptions of whether they experienced a dual relationship with a mentor?

We hoped that findings from this study would inform mentoring practices in counselor education programs. Previous researchers did not examine the impact of mentor dual roles on the mentoring relationship. The need exists to understand the outcomes of dual roles on the relationship and the mentee's perceptions of these roles on his/her development.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants, who were part of a larger study examining mentoring relationships in counseling programs, were selected via the following sources: (a) members of various counselor education listservs and (b) counseling students and alumni from the universities of each



researcher. To be selected for the study, the participant had to be either a graduate (i.e., masters- or doctoral-level) student in a counseling or counselor education program or a pre-tenured faculty member in a counselor education program. Further, the participant had to report being in a mentoring relationship wherein he/she was the mentee. Some participants reported having an assigned mentor, whereas other mentoring relationships were initiated by the mentee.

The sample consisted of 30 participants, of which 26 were female. The academic levels of these participants were masters ( $n = 11$ ), doctoral ( $n = 10$ ), or pretenured faculty ( $n = 9$ ). Further, their mean age was 35.07, with the distribution as follows: 6.7% were 18-24 years old, 36.7% were 25-31 years old, 33.3% were 32-38 years old, 10% were 39-45 years old, 3.3% were 46-52 years old, and 10% were 53+ years old. With respect to ethnicity, 83% of the participants were White and 17% were African American. The majority of participants reported that they attended or worked at a CACREP-accredited counseling program ( $n = 23$ ), with the remaining participants ( $n = 7$ ) representing a non-CACREP accredited program.

### **Instruments and Procedure**

**Qualitative research phase.** For the qualitative research phase, each participant underwent a semi-structured interview in order to determine (a) what differences exist in the mentoring needs perceived by the three sets of participants (i.e., participants who were enrolled in a master's program in counseling, participants who were enrolled in a doctoral program in counseling, and participants who identify themselves as junior faculty) and (b) how these participants experience their mentoring relationships. Each semi-structured interview involved the interviewer asking eight overarching questions and follow-up questions pertaining to the participant's mentoring needs and experiences. Each interview was audio recorded and then

transcribed. Member checking of each interview was conducted to enhance accuracy (i.e., internal credibility) and adequacy (i.e., external credibility).

Each transcript first was coded by the two researchers who had not interviewed the participant. The original researcher who completed the interview then coded the transcription independently, noting points of agreement and disagreement with other researchers. The coding agreement among the researchers ranged from 76% to 100%, with 93.7% being the overall average percentage of agreement between the researchers. The researchers discussed their respective rationales for each of the codes until consensus had been reached.

**Quantitative research phase.** For the quantitative research phase, the participants ( $n = 30$ ) completed an adapted version of the Mentoring Functions Scale (Noe, 1988) which comprised 16 items. The original Mentoring Functions Scale was a 21-item Likert-format instrument that helped researchers to assess the degree to which the mentor was providing vocational and psychosocial functions (Noe, 1998). However, Tepper, Shafer, and Tepper (1996) adapted Noe's (1988) original Mentor Functions Scale by selecting 16 of the original 21 items. The 16 items selected by Tepper et al. (1996) were the same 16 items utilized in the current study. Those 16 items included eight items to measure psychosocial mentoring functions and eight items to measure career-related mentoring functions. Participants in this study were asked to select the most appropriate response regarding their mentorship experiences using a 5-point rating scale; 5 represented *to a very large extent*, 4 represented *to a large extent*, 3 represented *to some extent*, 2 represented *to a slight extent*, and 1 represented *not at all*. Reliability and validity of the 16 items from the Mentoring Functions Scale reported a Cronbach's alpha of .88 for the psychosocial scale scores and .90 for the career-related scale scores of the Mentoring Functions Scale (Tepper et al., 1996). Other researchers have found internal consistency to be between .84 and .91 for the

psychosocial scale and between .79 and .86 for the career-related scale (Chao, 1997; Green & Bauer, 1995). Allen (1999) also found coefficient alphas between .94 and .93 for these two scales.

## **Research Design**

Because our study involved the use of qualitative and quantitative research approaches, it represented what is termed a *mixed methods research study* or *mixed research study* (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Specifically, our mixed methods study involved combining phenomenology (i.e., qualitative phase) and postpositivism (i.e., quantitative phase). This combination yielded what Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie (2014, 2015) referred to as *mixed methods phenomenological research* (MMPR)—specifically, a *concurrent MMPR*, which consisted of a dominant descriptive phenomenological phase and a less-dominant postpositivist phase (i.e., PHEN+quan). In descriptive phenomenology—as was the case in the current study—researchers focus on describing each participant’s lived experiences (Todres & Holloway, 2004). In the present investigation, phenomenological reduction (Giorgi, 2009) was enhanced by including three researchers in the study who had undergone transitions themselves from master’s program to doctoral program to serving as a junior faculty member. Each of these researchers, in turn, was able to play devil’s advocate whenever needed and were able to keep the other researchers on the team *honest* by posing difficult questions about various elements of the mixed methods research process (e.g., procedures, interpretations) and by promoting synergy. In contrast, a postpositivist stance was adopted, for example, to assess the degree to which the mentor of each participant was providing vocational and psychosocial functions, as well as to quantitize (i.e., convert qualitative data into numerical codes that can be analyzed quantitatively or statistically; Miles &

Huberman, 1994; Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003; Sandelowski, Voils, & Knafli, 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

### **Analysis**

In order to create a textural-structural explanation of the participants' lived experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989), a *sequential mixed analysis* (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003) was employed, which involved analyzing the data in a series of stages. First, utilizing constant comparison analysis (Glaser, 1965) and classical content analysis (Berelson, 1952), via the use of the software program, QDA Miner 4.0 (Provalis Research, 2011), the researchers coded chunks of words into meaningful units that described the contents of the segmented data, and they identified underlying themes *a posteriori* (Constas, 1992), which represented the participants' perceptions. Also, the researchers conducted debriefing interviews (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2008) for verification of the analysis.

After the coding process, the researchers employed data transformation in which the qualitative data (i.e., emergent codes) were quantitized (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003; Sandelowski et al., 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Specifically, each code was quantitized such that if a participant made a statement during her/his interview that was eventually unitized under one of the emergent codes, then a score of "1" was given to the theme for this response; a score of "0" was given otherwise. This dichotomization yielded what Onwuegbuzie (2003, p. 396) referred to as an *inter-respondent matrix* of themes (i.e., *participant x theme matrix*), which consisted only of 0s and 1s.

The next stage of the sequential mixed analysis (i.e., confirmatory analyses) involved using the inter-respondent matrix to assess the relationship between any quantitized codes (relating to a dual relationship with a mentor) and (a) their levels of mentee-mentor psychosocial

function via an independent samples *t* test; and (b) developmental status (i.e., master's-level student, doctoral student, or pre-tenured faculty) via an analysis of variance (ANOVA). This quantizing of codes, followed by a correlating of the quantitized codes with quantitative data, represented what Onwuegbuzie and Combs (2010) referred to as a *crossover mixed analysis*, whereby the analysis types associated with one tradition (i.e., quantitative analysis: independent samples *t* test, ANOVA) were used to analyze data associated with a different tradition (i.e., qualitative data: emergent codes).

### Results

The constant comparison analysis led to the identification of 28 codes, which then were organized into seven themes. The seven themes were: (a) *Relationship between mentor and mentee* (7 codes), (b) *Communication style or patterns* (2 codes), (c) *Preferred gender of mentor* (2 codes), (d) *Introduction of relationship* (3 codes), (e) *Mentee needs* (6 codes), (f) *Mentee Benefits* (3 codes), and (g) *Experiences as a mentee* (5 codes). Table 1 shows each of the codes and themes.

Table 1

*Constant Comparison Themes and Codes*

| Theme                                  | Code                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Relationship between mentor and mentee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dual roles</li> <li>Approachable</li> <li>Individual approach to mentorship</li> <li>Encouragement</li> <li>Desire to be approached by mentor/not have to ask</li> <li>Characteristic of mentor</li> <li>Personal connection/relationship</li> </ul> |
| Communication style or pattern         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide information (unsolicited)</li> <li>Feedback</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Gender                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gender/Gender of mentor</li> <li>No specific needs by gender</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Introduction of relationship           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mentor relationship initiated by mentee</li> <li>Relationship initiated by mentor</li> <li>Assignment of mentor not as beneficial</li> </ul>                                                                                                         |
| Mentee needs                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiple mentors</li> <li>Mentee seeking specific answer/advice</li> <li>Unmet expectations/needs</li> <li>Understanding politics</li> <li>Future/becoming need</li> <li>Peer mentoring</li> </ul>                                                   |
| Mentee benefits                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preparation for what to expect/real world application</li> <li>Current trends in the field</li> <li>Provides opportunities/resources</li> </ul>                                                                                                      |
| Experience as a mentee                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modeling</li> <li>Experience as a mentor</li> <li>Life balance-positive and negative examples</li> <li>Negative experience</li> <li>Desire/positive view of being challenged</li> </ul>                                                              |

These codes and themes then were subjected to a classical content analysis to determine their frequencies. These emergent themes emerged across all three sample groups (i.e., master's

students, doctoral students, and junior faculty). Also, with the exception of three code combinations out of the 84 combinations (i.e., 28 codes x 3 sample groups), the emergent codes emerged across all three sample groups. The classical content analysis revealed that by far the most dominant theme was *Relationship between mentor and mentee*. Interestingly, this theme contained the code of interest for the present investigation, namely, *Dual roles*. Indeed, this code was the second most prevalent code within this theme, after the code *Characteristic of mentor*.

Quantitizing of the emergent codes revealed that 46.7% of the sample members contributed to the *Dual roles* code, in contrast to 53.3% of participants who did not contribute to this code. That is, there was a fairly even distribution between participants who had experienced a dual relationship with a mentor—such as the mentor also being the instructor of one or more classes taken by the mentee or the mentee’s clinical supervisor, and those who had not experienced a dual relationship. These two groups were compared with respect to mentoring functions scale total scores, psychosocial scale scores, and career-related scale scores.

Using Onwuegbuzie and Daniel’s (2002) criteria for a standardized skewness coefficient and a standardized kurtosis coefficient, the mentoring functions scale total scores (standardized skewness coefficient = -1.13; standardized kurtosis coefficient = 0.62), psychosocial scale scores (standardized skewness coefficient = -1.25; standardized kurtosis coefficient = -0.88), and career-related scale scores (standardized skewness coefficient = -0.03; standardized kurtosis coefficient = -1.04), all suggested normality. Thus, a parametric analysis—specifically, a series of independent samples *t* tests—was used to assess overall mentoring functions, psychosocial functions, and career-related functions with respect to whether or not the participant had experienced a dual relationship with a mentor.

After applying the Bonferroni adjustment (cf. Chandler, 1995; Ho, 2006; Manly, 2004; Vogt, 2005) to control for the inflation of Type I error resulting from the conduct of three independent samples *t* tests (i.e., adjusted  $\alpha = .05/3 = .0167$ ), the first independent samples *t* test revealed that participants who had experienced a dual relationship with a mentor ( $M = 63.92$ ,  $SD = 6.78$ ) had statistically significantly ( $t [21.06] = 3.64$ ,  $p = .002$ ) higher mentoring functions total scores than did participants who had not experienced a dual relationship with a mentor ( $M = 51.69$ ,  $SD = 10.04$ ). The effect size associated with this difference, as measured by Cohen's (1988) *d*, was extremely large at 1.43. Additionally, although there was no statistically significant difference ( $t [24.52] = 0.77$ ,  $p = .45$ ) in psychosocial scores between participants who had experienced a dual relationship with a mentor ( $M = 31.79$ ,  $SD = 4.56$ ) and participants who had not experienced a dual relationship with a mentor ( $M = 30.38$ ,  $SD = 4.86$ ), participants who had experienced dual relationships ( $M = 31.46$ ,  $SD = 6.63$ ) had statistically significantly ( $t [23.91] = 4.02$ ,  $p = .001$ ) higher career-related scores than did their counterparts ( $M = 21.31$ ,  $SD = 6.24$ ). The effect size as associated with this difference was extremely large ( $d = 1.58$ ). Thus, it was the career-related functions component of mentoring functions that discriminated participants who had experienced a dual relationship with their mentors from their counterparts.

In order to address the second research question, a 2 (i.e., dual relationship experience vs. non-dual relationship experience) x 3 (i.e., master's-level student vs. doctoral student vs. pre-tenured faculty) chi-square analysis was conducted. This analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship,  $X^2(2) = 7.13$ ,  $p = .028$ . Specifically, only 18.2% of master's students who had experienced a dual relationship with a mentor, compared with 50.0% of doctoral students and 77.8% of pretenured faculty members. In other words, the experience of dual relationships increased as the sample members advanced in their career development. The effect



size associated with this difference, as measured by Cramer's  $V$ , was 0.49. Using Cohen's (1988) criteria, this result suggested a large effect size.

### **Discussion**

In this study, the researchers examined the role between the developmental roles of students and faculty in counselor education (master's, doctoral, and junior faculty) and their respective scores on the Adapted Mentoring Functions Scale and, more specifically, the relationship between dual roles in mentoring and scores on the Adapted Mentoring Functions Scale among individuals in counselor education programs. In a previous study, Boswell et al. (2015) found specific needs related to the developmental level of a mentee as they matriculated through a counselor education program. Of specific note in that study, the authors found that a mentor who had several roles in the mentee's professional career impacted the mentee the most at the doctoral level.

In the current study, researchers found that counseling students and faculty who had experienced dual relationships had high career-related functions than did their counterparts who had not experienced dual mentoring relationships. As such, the findings are consistent with past mentoring researchers who have noted that the mentoring relationship was key to a mentee's growth and professional fulfillment and satisfaction (Allen & Eby, 2004; Barker, 2006; Haggard & Turban, 2012; Strayhorn & Saddler, 2009). Often times, counselor education mentors move between various roles when working with students and other faculty mentees. Faculty mentors can play a variety of additional professional roles with mentees that are beneficial to the mentee's growth and professional development (Gottlieb, Robinson, & Younggren, 2007). These might include serving on the mentee's dissertation committee, hiring the mentee as a graduate or research assistant, or encouraging the mentee to teach or to co-teach an academic course within

the counseling program. Mentors who engage in dual, or multiple, roles for a mentee also aid in the academic success, matriculation, and professional growth of women and minority students (Davis, 2010).

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

The focus of our study was on the perceived impact of the dual, or multiple, roles of mentors on the mentoring relationship. Several limitations of our findings surfaced. These limitations affect the generalizability of our findings. First, the participants in our study were selected from a previous mentoring study. By using this selection process, our participants were not selected from a random sample. Future researchers may want to use a randomized sampling procedure. Second, the researchers in this study used the Mentoring Functions Scale to determine the degree to which the mentor was providing support and growth surrounding career and psychosocial functions of the mentee. The original Mentoring Functions Scale developed by Noe (1988) was for use with educational leadership student mentees. The Mentoring Functions Scale has been adapted for use with counselor education students (Farrell, 2007) but little has been done to validate the adapted questions. Future researchers may consider evaluating the revised Mentoring Functions Scale to ensure that it maintains the consistency and score-validity of the scale for use with different mentee populations. In addition, researchers may explore the development of a counselor education-specific mentoring scale in order to address the mentoring needs of students in this profession.

The variable of dual relationship with a mentor is a quantitized code, which resulted from transforming qualitative data from a previous study (see Boswell et al., 2015). This sample of 30 participants is low for extensive statistical analysis. However, qualitative research is designed to explore the unique experiences of participants rather than to produce generalizable results.

Additionally, the majority of participants were White (83%) and from the Southern region of the United States (50%). Future research should be conducted with a larger and more diverse sample. Finally, a sampling bias exists because participants in the initial study might have different perceptions than those counseling students and faculty who elected not to participate or who were not members of the listservs or institutions where solicitation took place. As such, caution should be used when making inferences about results.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations for Practice**

In sum, related to Research Question 1, researchers found that a mentors who served multiple professional roles impacted doctoral student mentees more than they impacted masters student and pretenured faculty mentees. Additionally, related to Research Question 2, participants in all three groups (masters, doctoral and pretenured faculty) who received mentorship from a mentor serving in dual roles reported high career-related functions than did their peers who had not received mentorship from someone acting in dual roles. Overall, our research supports previous literature suggesting that multiple roles in mentoring relationships are beneficial (Boswell et al., 2015; Bowman et al., 1995; Johnson, 2007; Pan et al., 2011). Taking into consideration the benefits of organically created mentoring relationships (Boswell et al., 2015; Cox, 2005; Fagenson-Eland et al., 1997; Tenebaum et al., 2001), counselor education programs might facilitate such relationships by strategically assigning advisees, teaching assistants, and research assistants. Use of formal mentoring needs instruments (see Boswell et al., 2015) and/or informal surveys of students' career and research interests could inform assignments most likely to develop into advantageous mentoring dyads.

Although ethics remain an issue whenever there exists a power differential in relationships—whether supervisory or mentoring—we agree with Bowman et al.'s (1995)

assertion that multiple relationships should not be avoided altogether. Rather, mentors should contemplate each role, its benefits and conflicts, the authority that they hold, and potential for misapplication or exploitation. Consultation with other faculty might assist in thinking through these issues. Mentors who serve dual roles should confer with colleagues in accordance with ethical codes (see ACA, 2014, C.3.e).

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# A Comparison Study of On-campus and Online Learning Outcomes for a Research Methods Course

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Using a pretest/posttest design, student learning outcomes were examined for online learning and on-campus versions of the same course taught by the same instructor. The course was a master's-level research methods course taught in a counselor education program. Although both groups of students (online and on-campus) scored significantly higher on the posttest than on the pretest, there were no significant differences in performance between the two groups. Similarly, examination of the students' course (teaching) evaluations did not reveal any significant difference in mean course ratings between the on-campus and online learning versions of the course.

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*Keywords: distance education, online education, educational technology, teaching efficacy, counselor education, learning outcomes*

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## Introduction

Higher education is becoming increasingly infiltrated by technology. The number of American college students enrolled in at least one online education course has reached the millions (Armstrong, 2011) and online higher education enrollment has been growing at ten times the rate of campus enrollment (Shea & Bidjerano, 2009). In 2010, it was estimated that over 6 million college students took at least one online course (Allen & Seaman, 2011). In 2012, over 30% of students enrolled in online learning courses were at the graduate level (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Specifically within counselor education, online learning is becoming increasingly popular. At the time of this writing, 20 universities had CACREP-accredited online counseling master's programs in which 50 percent or more of a counseling

program's curriculum was offered online or via online technologies (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs, CACREP, 2016a).

Rehabilitation counselor education has been implementing online learning methods for decades (Armstrong, 2003; Crimando, Flowers, & Riggan, 2004; Hampton & Olney, 2008; Sax, 2002). In 2006, it was estimated that over 54 percent of CORE (Council on Rehabilitation Education) accredited rehabilitation counseling programs offered courses via online education (Moore et al., 2006). It is likely that this number has only grown over the last decade, given the increasing prevalence of online learning in higher education. Despite the increasing amount of reliance on online learning, information about the efficacy of such education is scarce (Hampton & Olney, 2008). More information about the process and efficacy of graduate student online learning is needed (Holzweiss, Joyner, Fuller, Henderson, & Young, 2014), particularly related to counselor education (Ting & Gonzalez, 2013).

Online education is characterized by the separation of the teacher and learner(s) for the majority of the duration of the course (Ascough, 2002). Several models of online education exist including a fully distance, or digital, model (students and faculty never meet face-to-face) and a hybrid model (students and faculty meet face-to-face for a small, pre-determined portion of the course). As technology continues to improve, universities are including videoconferencing technology (where students and instructor can simultaneously connect with each other using audio and visual communication), which may continue to widen the modalities available for online learning (Mader & Ming, 2015). Online education offers many benefits to both instructors and students including diminished commutes, ease of access for learners who have career and family obligations (Ascough, 2002; Cook, 2007; Summers, Waigandt, & Whittaker, 2005), lower costs to the university and student (Anderson, 2008), higher accessibility of

education for students with disabilities and students who live in geographically rural areas (Main & Dziekan, 2012), and increased control for learners regarding how they consume the course information, based on personal needs and learning styles (Porter, Pitterle, & Hayney, 2014). Additionally, online education has been shown to require greater levels of student ownership and responsibility for learning the course material (Holzweiss et al., 2014; Porter et al., 2014; Rochester & Pradel, 2008; Ting & Gonzalez, 2013).

However, some challenges to online learning exist including student perceptions of isolation and lack of community (Cook, 2007; Lyke & Frank, 2012; Rochester & Pradel, 2008; Summers et al., 2005). Studies have highlighted the importance of instructor engagement and knowledge about online teaching and course material for gainful learning outcomes (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Holzweiss et al., 2014). Although training of instructors in both course material and online course delivery are crucial to positive learning outcomes, such training often does not take place effectively in higher education (Holmes & Kozlowski, 2014). Learner characteristics, such as motivation and technological comfort level, can also influence the educational outcomes and potential benefit of online education (Summers et al., 2005). Dropout rates have been shown to be greater in online learning environments (Njenga & Henry Fourie, 2010). Moreover, for courses and training programs that focus on helping relationships, concern exists about the transfer to an online environment of this type of skill-based learning (Ting & Gonzalez, 2013).

### **Online Teaching and Learning**

This distinct boom in online education has changed the landscape of higher education. A vast array of studies has been conducted in other fields, consistently showing no significant differences in student learning outcomes when online courses, hybrid courses, and on-campus courses are compared (Russell, 2001; Summers et al., 2005). Across undergraduate disciplines,

online learning has been shown to be a sufficient learning environment for students in terms of learning outcomes and knowledge retention (Chang & Chen, 2014; Frimming, Bower, & Choi, 2013; Porter et al., 2014).

Summers et al. (2005) compared learning outcomes for undergraduate nursing students taking online or on-campus versions of a statistics course. Students were assessed throughout the course with four exams and a cumulative score for those exams served as the learning outcome measure for the course. No significant difference was found between learning outcomes of the online and on-campus student groups. Another study by Lyke and Frank (2012) compared the cumulative course learning for undergraduate students enrolled in a general Psychology course (e.g., Theories of Counseling). Students self-selected either the online or the on-campus course and took a total of four quizzes over the course of the semester. Overall, no significant difference was found in learning outcomes between the online and on-campus groups.

However, practitioner programs that focus primarily on interpersonal skills and helping relationships, such as master's-level counselor training programs, have been left to ponder how online education fits in with the traditional model of on-campus instruction. Educational programs that train human service professionals have traditionally lagged behind other fields when it comes to integrating innovative technology and digital education into the training pedagogy (Karper, Robinson, & Casado-Kehoe, 2005). The counseling field is a "high-touch" occupation, one in which human relationships and interpersonal connections are crucial to the efficacy and value of the profession (Naisbitt, Naisbitt, & Phillips, 1999). With technology infiltrating the pedagogical nature of how we train practitioners to become adept at such a high-touch profession, research is needed to evaluate effectiveness. Counselor Education has little conclusive evidence regarding the efficacy of online teaching methods (Meder, 2013; Ting &

Gonzalez, 2013) regardless of course type (e.g., clinical and “high-touch” or didactic and content-focused). Given the current scarcity of data, further investigation regarding the efficacy of all types of Counselor Education core coursework is warranted.

### **Student Learning Outcomes in Counselor Education**

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016b) has stated that all counselor education programs must engage in ongoing evaluation regarding student performance on targeted learning outcomes. In other words, it is imperative that programs investigate and document that students are, in fact, learning the required material (Barrio Minton & Gibson, 2012) through multiple assessment measures over multiple points in time (CACREP, 2016b). With continued development of online counseling programs, this accreditation standard is particularly important as programs gauge the efficacy of online course delivery (Reicherzer et al., 2012). To date, a paucity of literature exists on this topic (Ekong, 2006; Hampton & Olney, 2008; Meder, 2013).

One doctoral dissertation used archival data to compare the learning outcomes (using the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Exam, CPCE) of 524 students who completed a master’s-level counseling program through one of three types of learning modalities: online, hybrid, and face-to-face (Meder, 2013). The face-to-face program was delivered in a fully on-campus format; the online program was delivered fully in a distance format with the exception of two courses which required an on-campus week intensive component where students met face-to-face for experiential learning; and the hybrid program was delivered via online learning for the core, didactic courses, while the experiential courses included on-campus meetings during four weekends over the duration of an academic semester.

The CPCE contains 160 items and eight subscales including human growth and development, social and cultural foundations, helping relationships, group work, career development, appraisal, research, and professional orientation. Meder (2013) found no significant difference in the total exam scores when comparing the online and on-campus groups. However, the online group scored significantly higher than the hybrid group on the exam total score. Results showed significant differences between the online and hybrid groups; the online group scored higher on five subscales of the exam (e.g., Social and Cultural Foundations, Group Work, Career, Professional Orientation and Ethics, and Human Growth and Development). Additionally, the online group scored significantly higher than the on-campus group on one of the exam's subscales (e.g., Human Growth and Development). Three of the eight subscales showed no significant difference between the three groups (e.g., Helping Relationships, Appraisal, and Research and Program Evaluation).

Meder's (2013) data showed no subscales in which the online group scored significantly lower than the on-campus or hybrid groups. The only significantly different score was found on the Human Growth and Development subscale, which showed that the fully online group scored significantly higher. While these results are preliminary, they provide some evidence of the efficacy of online instruction for counselor preparation.

No single study perfectly addresses all concerns about the validity of its conclusions. A variety of studies are needed to examine different hypotheses about the causes of the findings. For example, Meder's (2013) study results might reflect other (unstudied) differences between the students who were in the three types of groups. With the dearth of current outcome data comparing online and on-campus learning, it is imperative that counselor education research

focuses on this topic area in order to more fully understand how online learning may impact learning outcomes and overall training of master's-level counseling students.

### **Student Perception of Online Learning**

While efficacy and outcome data may be scarce, counselor education and rehabilitation counseling education researchers have focused more specifically on students' perceptions of student learning and engagement (Barrio Minton & Gibson, 2012). One counselor education program compared student perceptions of on-campus and hybrid course models for a career development course (Ting & Gonzalez, 2013). The hybrid course was held mostly online, but required four on-campus meetings over the course of the semester. The two types of courses matched in requirements, syllabus, textbook, and assignments. Generally speaking, both groups of students found their interactions throughout the course to be sufficient, although different. Results showed that students enjoyed both types of learning environments and felt as though they experienced sufficient course instruction over the semester. Ting and Gonzalez (2013) noted the importance of creating a community-like environment online in order to replicate what students received in the classroom. This notion has been echoed in cross-disciplinary research as a crucial component to supporting worthwhile and meaningful online education (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Openshaw, Schultz, & Millington, 2008).

A study completed with professional counseling students in the United Kingdom showed slightly different results in a study completed with over 200 students enrolled in either online or on-campus coursework (Blackmore, Tantam, & van Deurzen, 2008). This study found that online learning students were significantly more satisfied with course materials, were significantly more satisfied with their teachers, and spent significantly more time per week on course materials when compared with the on-campus students. Blackmore et al. (2008) showed



that no significant differences existed in those students who dropped out of each modality in terms of gender, age, dependents, geographical location, and financial status. Blackmore et al. (2008) discussed the importance of facilitating a learning community between students enrolled in the online courses in order to provide empathy, support, and feedback to other learners. This notion of creating a learning community and collaborative environment between the students has been repeatedly emphasized throughout the literature in this area (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Openshaw et al., 2008).

Moore et al. (2006) administered an open-ended survey to students in an assistive technology Rehabilitation Counseling course and found mixed results regarding student perception. Five positive themes emerged, including schedule flexibility, improved computer and Internet skills, positive interaction between classmates and exchange of ideas, useful course materials, and information exchange throughout the course. Three negative themes emerged including problems with technology, feeling disconnected from classmates, and the perception of too much course material (Moore et al., 2006). Generally speaking, students were able to find both positive and negative attributes to the web-based course delivery.

Murdock and Williams (2011) compared student perceptions of online or on-campus counseling theories courses using a learning community survey. Results showed no significant difference in students' perceptions of the learning experience. Both groups responded that they experienced a sense of community within the classroom, regardless of delivery modality. Also, both groups of students responded that they felt connected to the other students and the instructor, and felt a sense of responsibility with regard to learning the course material (Murdock & Williams, 2011).

Outside of counselor education programs, but pertaining to a content course taught in the curriculum, Summers et al. (2005) analyzed differences in course satisfaction between online and on-campus statistics courses. Significant differences were found on seven of sixteen items wherein online course participants rated these items significantly lower, showing less satisfaction. Four of these items were instructor-related, including: instructor explanations, instructor enthusiasm, instructor openness to students, and instructor interest in student learning. Three items were class-related, including: quality of class discussion, quality of questions/problems, and evaluation and grading. Interestingly, the same professor taught both sections of the course, which illustrates some of the challenges of meeting student needs and expectations in an online education environment.

Holzweiss et al. (2014) completed a qualitative inquiry with graduate-level students enrolled in a fully online higher education administration program, focusing on their perspectives of online, graduate-level learning. Using written, open-ended questions, several themes emerged including: (a) importance of critical thinking activity; (b) use of instructional technology; (c) importance of faculty engagement; (d) interactions and engagement with peers and instructors; and (e) sense of personal responsibility for learning. Overall, data showed that online graduate-level learning is potentially more intricate and nuanced and should match the developmental level of the graduate-level student in terms of complexity of thought and desire to co-create knowledge and understanding with peers and faculty (Holzweiss et al., 2014).

Overall, myriad contextual complexities exist when considering online teaching efficacy and how it relates to student perception of the course and the instructor (Summers et al., 2005). Research is needed to decipher more about the interaction of the student, instructor, and overall course factors that determine learning outcomes, student engagement in the learning process

(Lyke & Frank, 2012), and the critical components for successful graduate-level training (Holzweiss et al., 2014). In addition to further assessment of the efficacy of online teaching, future research in counselor education should also focus on these multi-faceted components.

### **The Current Study**

Ongoing investigation into the efficacy and usefulness of online course delivery in counselor education is crucial as the field continues to increase dependency on technology and digital instruction (Ekong, 2006; Reicherzer et al., 2012; Ting & Gonzalez, 2013). Although existing literature shows positive trends that support the continued use of online learning in counselor education, especially as it relates to positive student perception of this learning modality, outcome data related to the efficacy of online teaching modalities is scant, particularly when focused on graduate-level learning (Holzweiss et al., 2014). The current study investigated two research questions: (a) do differences exist in student learning outcomes for online and on-campus versions of a master's-level counseling research methodology course taught in a counselor education program, and (b) do differences exist in student course evaluations between the two modalities of course delivery.

### **Methods**

#### **Participants**

Participants included 40 master's-level counseling students in a CORE-accredited Rehabilitation Counseling program located in the southeastern United States. Twenty students were in the online learning group and twenty students were in the on-campus group.

The on-campus group of students, taught in the Fall semester of 2011, included seventeen females (85%) and three males (15%). Thirteen of the students identified as Caucasian (65%); four identified as Black/African American (20%); three identified as members of another racial

group or more than one racial group, or did not respond to the university's request for identification of racial background (15%). The mean age of students in the on-campus group was 32 years, with a range from 25 to 57 years. By decade, students in their 20's comprised 45% of this group; students in their 30's were 40% of the total; students in their 40's constituted 10% of the group; the remaining 5% included students in their 50's.

Demographics for the online group of students, taught in the Spring semester of 2014, were similar, although the majority of students were members of racial minority groups or unspecified racial groups. Fifteen students were female (75%), and five were male (25%). Nine of the students identified as Black/African American (45%); eight identified as Caucasian (40%); three identified as members of another racial group or more than one racial group, or did not identify racial background (15%). The mean age of students in this group was 31 years, with a range from 23 to 58 years. By decade, 40% of the students in the online group were in their 20's; 30% of the online students were in their 30's; 15% of the students in the online group were in their 40's; and 15% of the online students were in their 50's.

## **Procedures**

This study used data from an experiential class assignment designed to illustrate an example element of program evaluation. Students in both classes were required to complete a course pre-test and course post-test as one measure of learning outcomes for the course. Although completion of the pre-test and post-test was a required assignment, the actual scores on these tests were not factored into the students' grades in the course. This assignment was then discussed in class throughout the semester, to illustrate principles of program evaluation (such as how to measure change), instrument development and construction (such as how to minimize measurement error when writing multiple choice questions, and how to appropriately sample the

domain to ensure content validity), and selection of appropriate statistics for specific research designs (such as using correlated measures tools for pre/post-test designs). Although the study was already approved by the university's Institutional Review Board as exempt from review because it focused on assessing the efficacy of educational methods, data were de-identified before analysis to address potential concerns about a researcher other than the instructor viewing the scores for any given student without that student's express consent.

All students in both sections of the course completed the course pre-test. One student did not complete the course for personal reasons, and did not take the course post-test. Another student started the post-test and answered a few questions, but did not answer the rest of the questions, invalidating the resultant score. Neither of those students were counted in the results of this study; only the 40 students who completed both the pre-test and post-test were included. Information about demographics for the two students who were excluded from the study is not provided in this article, because (a) the sample size is so small that meaningful conclusions are not possible, and (b) there could be risk of identifying those students based on demographic characteristics, without their consent. Demographic data to describe the 40 students who completed both measures were retrieved from university records and summarized for this article, but were not connected in any way to specific student responses to the pre/post instruments or to the teaching evaluation results.

At the beginning of the respective semester (August 2011 or January 2014), the instructor emailed all students enrolled in the course and informed them of the course pre-test assignment, due the first week of class. The post-test was the final assignment for the course, due the final week of the semester. The pre/post measures were conducted through the online learning management system (e.g., Blackboard) for both groups. At the end of the semester, students

were also asked to fill out a standard department course evaluation, and these results were delivered anonymously to the instructor.

The same instructor, who had more than ten years of experience teaching research methods courses through both online learning and on-campus modalities, taught both courses. The instructor holds a master's degree in Counseling and Ph.D. in Rehabilitation Psychology with a minor in Psychometric Methodology. The instructor has published literature focused on how to teach research methodology to practitioners (Reid, 2014) and has served on the research committees of national organizations, including CACREP and the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC). The same basic course notes, course information, textbook, tests, and assignments were used with each group. In essence, both groups were delivered the same course material and held to the same syllabus expectations and deadlines. What differed was the course delivery method.

The online learning class members read online lectures and completed online tutorials. They were required to post weekly discussion responses and engage in online interactions with other classmates regarding the readings and other course assignments. The online learning class members used text-only modalities to communicate with one another for these assignments throughout the semester. The instructor also participated actively in the online forum discussions, primarily using a Socratic method to ask questions designed to help students discover answers for themselves.

The on-campus class met weekly for two and half hours, for traditional on-campus lectures and discussions regarding the readings and other assignments. The instructor also used a Socratic method with this group to actively engage the on-campus students in the learning

process. For both classes, the instructor was also available via phone or email for student questions and general communication about the course.

## **Measures**

The pre/post measure used in this study was a 100-item, multiple-choice exam developed by the instructor. This exam was derived from the textbook and course material that the instructor would be teaching over the course of the semester.

Additionally, course (teaching) evaluations were examined for information about student perceptions regarding their experience within the course. Course evaluations were 23 items long and based on a Likert-type scale with the following anchors: *5-Excellent*, *4-More than adequate*, *3-Adequate*, *2-Less than adequate*, and *1-Poor*. Sample questions included: (a) instructor presented a well-organized course, (b) instructor demonstrated thorough knowledge of the course material, (c) instructor used effective teaching methods, (d) instructor seemed enthusiastic about course material, and (e) instructor encouraged students to participate in class. A higher mean score reflects a more favorable evaluation.

## **Results**

Pre/post-test data were collected from each participant. Pretest results were collected before any lectures were delivered or posted and posttest results were collected at the end of the semester, approximately four months later. A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to compare the changes between pretests and posttests for the on-campus and online groups. Additionally, the course evaluation item ratings were averaged for each course and an independent samples *t*-test was completed to look for potential group differences in student perception of the course and instructor.

The first research question, is there a significant difference between the two teaching modalities in impacting the content knowledge gain for students over the course of one semester, was answered using a repeated measures ANOVA. Data showed that although there was a significant difference between the pretests and posttests for both groups [ $F(1, 38) = 149.276, p = .000$ ], there was no significant difference in scores between the two modalities [ $F(1, 38) = 1.251, p = .270$ ].

The second research question, does the mean evaluation score of the online learning participants significantly differ from the mean evaluation score of the on-campus participants, was answered using a two-tailed, independent samples *t*-test. Out of 40 participants, 36 completed the anonymous and voluntary course evaluations (19 of 20 on-campus students,  $M=4.2$ , and 17 of 20 online learning students,  $M=4.75$ ). Data showed no significant difference between the two modalities regarding the participant perception of the course, as rated in the course evaluations [ $t(34) = 1.436, p > .05$ ].

### **Discussion**

The field of counselor education is increasingly relying on online learning modalities (CACREP, 2016a; Moore et al., 2006) with 20 universities offering at least one counseling program in a learning format where at least 50% of their coursework is offered via online. Ongoing investigation into the efficacy of online course delivery in counselor education is crucial as the field continues this reliance on technology and digital instruction (Ekong, 2006; Reicherzer et al., 2012; Ting & Gonzalez, 2013). However, very little literature has yet examined whether student learning outcomes in online counselor education programs are equivalent to their traditional, on-campus equivalents (Meder, 2013). Overall, current literature shows positive trends that support the use of online learning in higher education, although some



of this research is based on an undergraduate learning experience (Chang & Chen, 2014; Frimming et al., 2013; Porter et al., 2014; Russell, 2001). However, research within the counseling field has shown positive results regarding student perception of this learning modality (Blackmore et al., 2008; Ting & Gonzalez, 2013). To add to the current body of knowledge specifically related to the field of counselor education, the current study investigated the academic outcomes of a master's-level research in counseling course by comparing learning outcomes for students in an on-campus and online versions of the same course.

Data showed no significant difference between the on-campus and online learning groups of students in their knowledge gains over the course of the semester. This finding adds validation to related studies that found no significant differences in learning outcomes between on-campus and online learning modalities (Chang & Chen, 2014; Frimming et al., 2013; Porter et al., 2014; Russell, 2001; Summers et al., 2005). While much of the previous research has focused on fields outside of counselor education, the current data is important because it focuses solely on master's-level counseling student and core counseling curriculum learning outcomes. The current results corroborate Meder's (2013) finding that no significant outcome difference existed between the types of teaching modality, and support the contention that online learning is an equally acceptable and efficacious teaching modality when compared with traditional, on-campus learning. These results also address an uncontrolled factor in Meder's study, by ensuring that differences in knowledge before taking the course were taken into account.

For both on-campus and online learning groups, a significant difference was found between the pretest and posttest scores. These data show that regardless of the teaching modality, students scored significantly higher on the course content measure after having taken the course. While this may seem perfunctory to report, the data show course efficacy in

promoting significant learning over the course of the semester. This type of outcome measure and documentation of learning is important for a wide variety of contexts, including program evaluation (Barrio Minton & Gibson, 2012; CACREP, 2016b).

The data also showed no significant difference between the means of the course evaluations of the modalities. The course means for the total evaluations were 4.26 out of 5 for the on-campus students and 4.75 out of 5 for the online learning students. While there was no significant difference between the two, both totals show a trend toward positive evaluation scores out of 5 possible total points, lending support to the conclusion that the participants perceived both course modalities as favorable learning environments. This finding relates to data found by Murdock and Williams (2011) who compared student perceptions between online and on-campus counseling theories courses and showed no significant difference in students' perception of the learning experience. Both groups responded favorably to the learning experience and stated that they felt connected to the other students and the instructor, and felt a sense of responsibility with regard to learning the course material (Murdock & Williams, 2011).

In the current study, student comments were also favorable for both modalities. In the on-campus course, students wrote the following: "very passionate professor"; "I enjoyed this class"; "I appreciated the instructor's enthusiasm, humor, and approachability". In the online learning course, students wrote the following: "the instructor is very compassionate and extremely knowledgeable"; "the instructor is excellent"; "this was a very informative course". While these comments are anecdotal, they provide some preliminary insight into the similarities of student perception of the course regardless of the teaching modality. The notion of an online community and the ability for the instructor to facilitate a strong learning environment is crucial for online learning to be successful (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Openshaw et al., 2008). Also,

data show that graduate students need to feel connected to the instructor and engaged in a way that requires and promotes critical thinking (Holzweiss et al., 2014). Although the current study did not investigate the perception of community, connection between members, or the role of the instructor specifically related to student satisfaction, these components would be an area ripe for future research, as there is currently a dearth of information regarding how graduate students learn online (Holzweiss et al., 2014).

### **Strengths and Limitations**

This study is one of few that focus solely on counselor education online learning outcomes. While the participant number is small, the data show compelling evidence that no significant differences in learning outcomes exist between on-campus and online learning modalities for this type of counselor education course. The pre/post measure was 100 items, which adds to the power of the study and the documented findings. The pretest/posttest design, with each student serving as his/her own control, helps control for differing baseline levels of knowledge or experience between groups. The data show overall significant growth in student learning over the course of one semester, as well as similarly favorable course evaluations between the modalities. This methodology shows promise for additional research in counselor education to document student learning outcomes in a variety of content areas, and to validate the use of online learning techniques in pedagogical development.

One potential limitation is that students were able to self-select into either the online or on-campus course modality. Over the course of their programs, students that identified as on-campus learning students had opportunities to take the Research course in either learning modality. This self-selection for some students into either the online or the on-campus course

offering may have confounded the results, as participants were not randomly placed into each type of course.

A second limitation is the potential influence of history or cohort effects, given that one version of the course was offered in 2011 and the other in 2014. This separation in time was required by constraints of matching instructor availability with the semesters in which the course was offered in the necessary format. At the time of data collection, the university was not able to offer the same course taught by the same instructor in both online and on-campus formats in the same semester.

Another potential limitation is the nature of the course material. Because a research methodology course is somewhat didactic in nature, it may lend itself more suitably to online course delivery than is the case with a more skill-based or technique development course (Ting & Gonzalez, 2013). More research should be conducted to compare online learning and on-campus versions of “high-touch” courses in order to assess for potential outcome differences (e.g., Group Counseling, Counseling Techniques, Multicultural Counseling, or Couples and Family Counseling courses). Additionally, campus-intensive formats are often used to supplement online courses that are skill-based. These hybrid-type formats should also be included in relevant studies to compare the wide variety of learning modalities, given that Meder (2013) found mixed results when comparing hybrid-format outcomes with fully online or on-campus formats. Additionally, Holzweiss et al. (2014) discussed the importance of master’s-level training to incorporate critical thinking skills that challenge adult learners. More research should be conducted regarding how online learning counseling courses are meeting this need. For example, comparing critical thinking outcomes of online learning incorporating a Socratic method versus outcomes when the instructor takes on just a didactic role would be important.

## **Conclusion**

Counselor education researchers must strive to adequately research any potential differences in efficacy relating to online learning. As the field continually moves toward the incorporation of online learning courses and fully accredited master's-level and doctoral programs, it is essential to examine whether types of instructional modality result in differences in learning outcomes for counseling students. Because the counseling field is a "high-touch" occupation, one in which human relationships and interpersonal connections are crucial to the efficacy and value of the profession (Naisbitt et al., 1999), any discrepancies in student perception of learning, as well as actual learning outcomes between teaching modalities must be identified. This study provides evidence of the equivalence of learning outcomes for on-campus and online learning instruction of the same counselor preparation course taught by the same instructor, but additional research is needed to replicate the study with other content areas and other instructors.

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