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Exploring the Professional Identity Development of Counselors-In-Training through Experiential Small Groups

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Exploring the Professional Identity Development of Counselors-In-Training
through Experiential Small Groups

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Amanda Christine DeDiego
December 2016

Dedication

Dedicated to my two precious, beautiful, and loving grandmothers; thank you for your wisdom,

faith, and unconditional love.

Acknowledgements

Offering gratitude and thanks to my partner, family, cohort, friends, committee, colleagues, mentors, and students.

I am so appreciative of all the help and support offered along the way.

Thank you.

Abstract

The concept of professional identity of counselors is a recent area of focus within the counseling profession. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs standards for counselor education programs of all specialties reflect the trend towards establishing a strong professional identity for counselors. One factor shown to be influential in professional identity development has been experiential learning opportunities, which allow counselors-in-training to develop an individual professional identity through application of educational content in real-world scenarios. The literature suggests experiential learning is a pivotal opportunity for professional identity development for entry-level counseling students. One opportunity for experiential learning, which may inform professional identity development, is the small group experience with the Group Counseling and Group Work requirements of the accreditation standards. The current study explored the small group experiences of entry-level counseling students enrolled in accredited universities. This study employed three, online hermeneutic phenomenological focus groups including nine participants as a method for discovery of the professional identity development within the small group experience. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of online focus groups yielded themes professional identity development and dual relationships. Discussion of themes and subthemes of parallel process and barriers to disclosure discovered through analysis, include illustration with exemplar quotes from participants. This dissertation offers discussion of findings, implications for practice, considerations for future research, and limitations of the current study.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The concept of professional identity of counselors is a recent area of focus within the counseling profession (Auxier, Hughes, & Kline, 2003; Bobby & Urofsky, 2011; Brott & Myers, 1999; Burkholder, 2012; Emerson, 2010; Hannah & Bemak, 1997; Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014; McLaughlin & Boettcher, 2009; Mellin, Hunt, & Nichols, 2011; Reiner, Dobmeier, & Hernandez, 2013). Following the "20/20 Initiative," a task group organized by the American Counseling Association (ACA) created to examine professional identity for counselors, focus of the counseling community has been to establish a unified definition of counseling to promote the counseling profession among other mental health care providers (Kaplan et al., 2014). The unified definition of counseling sparked research on professional identity and counselor education (CED) focus turned to professional identity development (Davis & Gressard, 2011; Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss, 2010; Kaplan et al., 2014; Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014). The 2016 revision of The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards for CED programs of all specialties reflect the trend towards establishing a strong professional identity for counselors. One factor shown to be influential in professional identity development has been experiential learning opportunities, which allow counselors-in-training to develop an individual professional identity through application of educational content in real-world scenarios (Auxier et al., 2003; Brott & Myers, 1999; Gibson et al., 2010; Moss et al., 2014).

In reflection of empirical research, CACREP (2009) incorporated experiential learning into the accreditation standards for core curricular areas required of all counseling programs. In the newly released 2016 CACREP Standards, removal of many pedagogical guidelines allowed

greater focus on learning outcomes. However, this inclusion of experiential learning continued within the recently released 2016 CACREP Standards. More specifically, the 2016 CACREP standards only require the inclusion of experiential learning activities in the Group Counseling and Group Work area of the core curricular areas in the form of experiential small groups representing direct experience in applying the counselor and client roles in a group context.

The Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW) highlighted the need for counselors to participate in the experiential small groups as a group member in order to facilitate advanced skills development (ASGW, 2000; Goodrich & Luke, 2012; Lennie, 2007; Ohrt et al., 2014). When CACREP adopted the ASGW guidelines and incorporated them in their standards for the Group Counseling and Group Work area, the standards had dual foci of skills development and professional identity development for counselors-in-training (CACREP 2009, 2016). The 2016 CACREP standards maintain the need for counseling student engagement in experiential small groups to achieve development of counseling skills and professional identity. Under the current CACREP (2016) standards, graduate programs in all counseling concentrations are required to provide a small group experience. Thus the goal of facilitating counselor skills and professional identity development through small groups within the Group Counseling and Group Work area are consistent for counselors in all concentrations trained in CACREP accredited programs.

Recently, the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) announced that all counselors seeking the National Certified Counselor (NCC) will soon be required to graduate from CACREP accredited programs (ACA, 2014b). Programs seeking CACREP accreditation to support student credentialing must implement student learning outcomes (SLO) outlined within accreditation standards. CACREP requires counseling programs to conduct ongoing evaluation

of student learning and performance in both skills development and professional counseling identity development (CACREP, 2009, 2016). CACREP standards provide clear SLOs and require programs demonstrate measurement of SLOs in order to maintain accreditation. However to allow programs creativity in pedagogy, the accreditation standards do not provide guidelines in how to track and evaluation SLOs (CACREP, 2016). Best practices dictate programs should employ instructional methods evidenced by empirical research. Anderson and Price (2001) highlighted the fact that counseling students enhance skills through participation in small groups. However, there is little empirical evidence of the professional identity development process occurring within the experiential small groups (Ieva, Ohrt, Swank, & Young, 2009).

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) describes learning as a process best measured through formative evaluation and the interactive experience of meaning-making (Kolb, 2015). ELT describes learning as the process of meaning-making occurring when learners interact with and reflect upon course content (Kolb, 2015). This fundamental process of developing individual understanding evolves as learners adapt and apply content to real-world circumstances. Given the emphasis of individual reflection and the process of navigating conflicts between the abstract content and the realities of practical application, ELT becomes a natural addition to clinically focused educational programs.

Considering the unique experiential component of the small group direct hours required under the professional identity development in the Group Counseling and Group Work area, a process-based evaluation method would be most appropriate to demonstrate the SLOs outlined by CACREP. Currently, there is little empirical literature that specifically examines how the experiential small groups contribute to professional identity development for counselors-in-training (Ieva et al., 2009). Considering the goal of counselor skills and professional identity

development within the core areas of…? Get specific again here, empirical evidence of the professional identity development process during the small group experience could inform best practices in all counseling specialties, in addition to providing a basis for development of a process-based evaluation tool useful in tracking CACREP SLOs.

Population for the Current Study

CED graduate programs foster counselors-in-training who subsequently serve the community, providing ethical and proficient mental health care for those in need. CED is composed of entry-level programs culminating in a master's degree or terminal degrees resulting in a doctoral degree (CACREP, 2016). The National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) recently announced changes to requirements for obtaining the credential of National Certified Counselor (NCC) to include a graduate degree from a CACREP accredited program (ACA, 2014b). Additionally, states are beginning to align with NCC standards to grant state licensure credentials for counselors, also requiring counselors to obtain a graduate degree from a CACREP accredited program (Bray, 2014).

Given these standards, CACREP has become the prominent accrediting body for counseling graduate programs. Accredited counseling graduate programs facilitate training of master's level counselors and doctoral level counselor educators (CACREP, 2014). Counselor development occurs through transformative experiences facilitating interpersonal and intrapersonal growth (Thiemann, 2013). Doctoral programs train students in advanced skills as students must demonstrate prior clinical training and experience in the field. The 2016 CACREP Standards for doctoral programs focus on advanced clinical training, clinical supervision, teaching, research, and leadership and advocacy within the counseling field. CED doctoral programs also foster development of professional identity in all aspects of the program

(CACREP, 2016). The requirements for doctoral students assume completion and proficiency in the areas identified with entry-level graduate programs for various counseling concentrations, in addition to demonstration of professional identity development.

Master's counseling programs represent entry-level professional training for those with minimal to no prior experience in clinical settings. Entry-level counseling students must meet criteria outlined in the CACREP (2016) standards to gain admission to an entry-level counseling graduate program. The interpretation of those standards vary by program but the requirements are the same for each program. Prospective counseling students should demonstrate: (1) career goals consistent with training received in counseling programs, (2) ability to perform academically at a graduate level, (3) potential suggestive of a later ability to build effective counseling relationships with clients, and (4) awareness and reflexivity in cultural considerations (CACREP, 2016).

Coursework aligned with the CACREP 2016 standards facilitates professional development (Coll, Doumas, Trotter, & Freeman, 2013). A shared definition of counseling formed under the goals and ethical standards of the profession guide CED and counselor development (ACA, 2014a; Whiteley, 1969). Entry-level students experience progressive evolution of knowledge, attitudes, and professional dispositions throughout their training in counseling programs (Grafanaki, 2010). During this process, counselors-in-training gain knowledge of the counseling profession and basic counseling skills through coursework prior to practicum and internship (CACREP, 2016). Early in counselor development, students experience anxiety and uncertainty, as professional identity is only beginning to evolve (Trotter-Mathison, Kock, Sanger, & Skovholt, 2010).

As awareness of the counseling profession grows, changes in personal dispositions marked by growth in traits, attitudes, and behaviors characterize professional identity development (Whiteley, 1969). Students prior to practicum, known as pre-practicum, experience high levels of self-doubt and uncertainty about their own clinical judgment, skills, and identity as a counselor (Woodside, Oberman, Cole, & Carruth, 2007). Early forays into clinical work reflect early counselor development, manifesting as strong dependence on the supervisor or professor, and low self-efficacy (Eichenfield & Stoltenberg, 1998; Stoltenberg et al., 1998).

Once entry-level students begin the practicum and internship process, clinical supervision facilitates development through critical incidents occurring during the counselor's first venture into counseling work in the field (Furr & Carroll, 2003). During supervision, students build self-awareness, independence, and the capacity to experience empathy for clients (Eichenfield & Stoltenberg, 1996). Internalization of counseling knowledge, preparing students for complex client issues, ethical decision-making, and development of clinical judgment characterize later stages of counselor development (Trotter-Mathison et al., 2010). Professional identity development occurs throughout the training received during entry-level counseling programs, however this later stage professional identity shows more clearly defined and demonstrated identity (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Upon completion of entry-level counseling programs, students demonstrate development of professional identity through completion of comprehensive exams (CACREP, 2016), and progress towards professional licensure and credentialing as professional counselors (Wallace & Lewis, 1998).

Theory

The Integrated Developmental Model

The process of counseling student development occurs both through clinical supervision and other informal sources of influence (Farber & Hazanov, 2014). Counselors develop skills and dispositions, which build to the ability to practice with autonomy, self-awareness, and a strong identity as a professional counselor (Stoltenberg, 1981). The Integrated Developmental Model (IDM) provides a roadmap for counselor development and identity beginning with admission to counseling programs and continues until the time of licensure for practice (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010).

Supervisees navigate three levels of development during the developmental process. In navigating these three developmental levels, supervisees gain autonomy and self-awareness, while decreasing anxiety (Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Delworth, 1998). High motivation and anxiety with heavy dependence upon the supervisor describe counseling students in the early levels of development according to the IDM (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Supervision, both formal and informal, during counselor training fosters development through the levels of the IDM increasing autonomy (Eichenfield & Stoltenberg, 1998; Farber & Hazanov, 2014). Supervisees who may experience roadblocks to early development, below requirements for admission to counselor graduate programs, could represent a Sub-Level 1 supervisee (Eichenfield & Stoltenberg, 1998).

As counselors develop through supervision in later levels of the model, insight and empathy for clients become a part of counselor identity (Eichenfield & Stoltenberg, 1998; Stoltenberg et al., 1998). Eventually the Level 3 supervisee demonstrates integration of personal ideals and ethical principles, as well as awareness of limitations of competency in practice

(Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). As a theoretical model, the IDM offers means of tracking and monitoring supervisee development throughout the training process (McNeill, Stoltenberg, & Romans, 1992). Development of professional identity is one piece of the developmental process outlined in the IDM (Stoltenberg, 1981). Development according to the IDM occurs both within formal clinical supervision, and in informal supervision settings such as mentorship or course experiences (Farber & Hazanov, 2014).

Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb (2015) developed Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) with consideration of prior influential educational theories including those developed by Lewin (1951), Dewey (1926), and Piaget (1973). Traditional behavioral theories of learning proved inadequate in supporting students' developing understanding of more abstract concepts (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). As opposed to previous cognitive theories driven by outcomes, Kolb (2015) described learning as a holistic process in which a student interacts with and develops her own understanding of the material. As such, Kolb (2015) postulated in order to support student learning, instructors needed to provide a combination of cognitive learning with applied manipulation and interaction with concepts. Impactful learning experiences required consideration for various learning styles and instructor teaching methods, considerations deviating from popular education models considering only student achievement and comprehension (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2011). From this need for broader considerations for learning style and student interaction with concepts, ELT was developed (Kolb, Kolb, Passarelli, & Sharma, 2014; Kolb, 2015).

ELT describes learning as a dynamic process of adapting content to the world and reconciling conflicts between abstract concepts and real-world experiences (Kolb et al., 2014). Impactful learning within a course, albeit ongoing after the conclusion of the course, thus

requires opportunity for the learner to interact with the material within a real-world environment (Kolb, 1964). The ELT process of learning occurs in stages (See Figure 2.1), creating opportunities for students with different learning styles to interact with and develop understanding of abstract concepts through experimentation (Bergsteiner, Avery, & Neumann, 2010). To guide students through the learning cycle requires a strong and supportive relationship between instructor and student (Kolb et al., 2014). The experiential learning cycle occurs as instructors guide student interaction with concepts in different ways and shift roles to facilitate the student learning process (Kolb et al., 2014).

To summarize the experiential learning process, Kolb (1964) described experiences in the classroom evolving through the following stages: concrete experience, abstract conceptualization, reflective observation, and active experimentation. Considering the emphasis placed on the student interaction with the material, measurement of experiential learning best occurs through examination of the learning process as opposed to objective measures of outcome (Kolb, 1964). Thus research framed in ELT would inquire as to the subjective learning process and student experience within a learning environment as opposed to examining objective learning outcomes.

Experiential learning theory and counselor education. Goodrich and Luke (2012) highlighted the relevance of the incorporation of experiential learning into the CACREP standards for training in group facilitation. In examination of efficacy in training of group facilitators, the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW) determined that counselors-in-training were lacking applied skills practice and practical experiences through courses using only didactic instruction. As such, ASGW called for the inclusion of experiential learning elements within group counseling training in counseling graduate programs. CACREP later

adopted the ASGW standards of group facilitator training, incorporating experiential learning elements in the group core area within the 2009 standards for all counseling programs. As such, students needed experiences both in practical skills application and experiential experiences as a group member in order to develop as counselors-in-training.

Theoretical Framework

Counselor development occurs through both formal clinical supervision and informal means of supervision, including mentorship and coursework (Farber & Hazanov, 2014). According to Auxier et al. (2003), professional identity development occurs throughout the counselor training process in several steps, one of which is experiential learning. Practicum and internship represent the later stages of counselor training (CACREP, 2016). However, students in early stages of training, or pre-practicum students, already begin to develop critical skills and dispositions of counseling, including early contemplations of professional identity (Woodside et al., 2007).

The IDM outlines the developmental process of the student, resulting in competent counseling professionals demonstrating self-awareness, autonomy, and expression of professional identity (Stoltenberg, 2005; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Supervision, both formal and informal, including individual and group experiences facilitates this process (Seegars & McDonald, 1963; Werstlein & Borders, 1997). Beyond formal supervision, participation in experiential learning is fundamental in the counselor development process (Farber & Hazanov, 2014).

ELT outlines the process of learning through experience (Kolb et al., 2014; Kolb, 2015).

In counseling coursework, ELT (Kolb, 2015) provides opportunity for counselor development through experiential learning opportunities, which serve as a catalyst for the counselor development process outlined in the IDM (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). This integrated theoretical framework of ELT within the IDM (See Figure 1.1) served as the foundation for the current study examining the experiences of students in the group counseling course fulfilling the required area of Group Counseling and Group Work (CACREP, 2016).
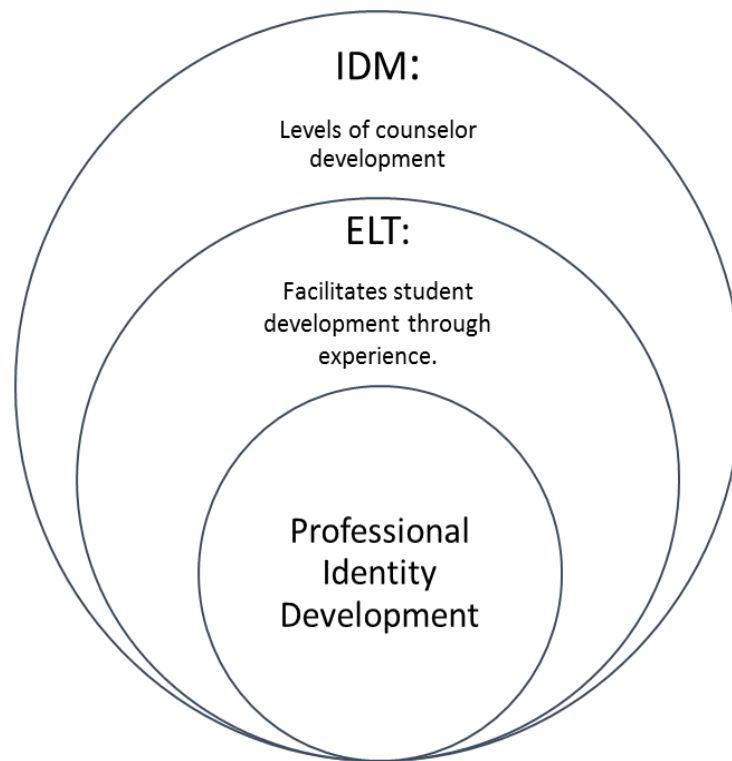
Figure 1.1. The theoretical framework for the current study supports examination of professional identity development as ELT (Kolb et al., 2001; Kolb, 2015) facilitates the development process outlined in the IDM (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg et al., 1998).

The Current Study

Statement of the Problem

Kaplan et al. (2014) identified professional identity development as an area for needed research to inform further advocacy for the profession, establishing a clear need for empirical research to inform best practices for counselor identity development in entry-level counseling programs. In alignment with current trends in the counseling field (Auxier et al., 2003; Bobby & Urofsky, 2011; Brott & Myers, 1999; Burkholder, 2012; Emerson, 2010; Hannah & Bemak, 1997; Kaplan et al., 2014; McLaughlin & Boettcher, 2009; Mellin et al., 2011; Reiner et al., 2013), the purpose of the CACREP 2016 core areas are to inform professional identity and skills development. CACREP (2009, 2016) provides programs with SLOs, called Key Performance Indicators (KPI), evaluated in order to maintain program accreditation. Whereas CACREP (2016) requires programs to use evaluation to demonstrate students gaining proficiency in skills and professional identity development in all KPIs, the process-based KPI in the Group Counseling and Group Work area requires process-based evaluation.

The Group Counseling and Group Work area uniquely requires experiential learning components in the form of a small process group, an aspect of counselor development shown to be influential in skills development, but lacking in empirical research regarding professional identity development (Ieva et al., 2009). Lack of empirical research regarding professional identity development creates a gap in the literature. This empirical research is necessary to create a foundation for development of process-based evaluations appropriate for the experiential KPIs in the CACREP (2016) standards. Thus, there is a need for further research as to the development of professional identity taking place during the experiential small groups within the group counseling course for entry-level counselors-in-training.

Kolb (1964) described learning as a dynamic process effectively examined through objective learning outcomes alone. In order to examine the efficacy and impact of experiential learning experiences, it is necessary to investigate the experiences of students navigating the experiential learning cycle (See Figure 2.1). Though empirical evidence measured through objective learning outcomes exists as to the efficacy of courses within the CACREP standards, there is a dearth in the literature providing insight as to the specific professional identity development within the experiential learning process for entry-level counseling students in the group course (Ieva et al., 2009). The objective of the CACREP standards is to facilitate counselor development of both skills and professional identity (2009; 2016). Given this objective, it is important to examine the professional identity development within the context of the experiential small groups.

The current qualitative study sought to address the problem of a lack of empirical knowledge related to the professional identity development of entry-level counselors-in-training. Given a lack of process-based formative evaluation appropriate for the area of professional identity development (Emerson, 2010), the CED field requires empirical research to offer a foundation of counselor developmental within CACREP accredited programs informing professional identity for budding counselors.

Purpose of the Study

Given a lack of process-based formative evaluation appropriate for the area of professional identity development (Emerson, 2010), and the unique experiential pedagogy identified in the small group experience within the Group Counseling and Group Work area, this study sought to contribute to the existing empirical knowledge of counselor identity development. Using hermeneutic phenomenological focus groups, this study sought to discover

the experiences of students who have completed the group course satisfying the experiential small group requirement as identified in the Group Counseling and Group Work area in the 2016 CACREP standards.

Further empirical knowledge regarding the professional identity development within the experiential small groups could inform best practices and create a foundation for process-based evaluation tools for professional identity. These evaluative tools are necessary for programs to demonstrate KPIs to maintain CACREP accreditation. Thus the purpose of this study was to understand through phenomenological online focus groups professional identity development of counselors-in-training enrolled in entry-level graduate programs within the experiential small groups required for the Group Counseling and Group Work area.

Research Question

The current literature offers little knowledge about professional identity development within the experiential small groups for entry-level counseling students (Ieva et al., 2009). A lack of empirical research warrants use of qualitative methods to provide descriptive data informing later development of process-based formative evaluation for professional identity development. Phenomenology seeks to explore experiences of participants (Moustakas, 1994); thus the research must create space for the participant to share her perspective of experience in her own way. To achieve this goal, typically hermeneutic phenomenological research methodology warrants a single research question with focus of exploration of a participant experience (Moustakas, 1994). In order to explore professional identity development within the experiential small groups for the group counseling course, this study employs the following research question: What are the lived experiences of entry-level students as they participate in the experiential small groups?

Definition of Terms

The following are terms common in the CED field used throughout this dissertation. The definition of these terms originate in the CED literature.

- Counselor Development: the progressive evolution of students in counseling programs resulting from training to equip counselors-in-training to fulfill professional standards of the counseling profession (Grafanaki, 2010).

- Counselor Education: the comprehensive training and preparation of counseling professionals of various specialties focused on facilitation of counselor development including ethical practice, competency, and professional identity (CACREP, 2016).

- Gatekeeping: ongoing monitoring and evaluation of students in alignment with professional competencies resulting in remediation to prevent students lacking competency from achieving licensure for practice (CACREP, 2016).

- Learning Styles: various orientations toward learning according to ELT (Kolb, 2015).

- Pedagogy: integration of materials and instruction guided by theory to provide focus and purpose to educational experiences (Giroux, 1988).

- Professional Identity: Unique attributes of counseling professionals integrating skills, dispositions, and personal connection with the roles and responsibilities of professional counselors (Gibson et al., 2010).

- Significant Learning: engaging and impacting learning experiences facilitating fundamental changes to students' world view with direct application to real-world context (Fink, 2013).

- Student Learning Outcomes: the desired result students expect from participation in a course representing a measured level of understanding of course material (Nygaard, Holtham, & Courtney, 2009).

- Transformational Tasks: experiences in which students apply abstract counseling concepts in real-world contexts to inform professional identity development (Gibson et al., 2010).

Delimitations

In order to frame the current study, delimitations provided boundaries for inclusion criteria, methods, and procedures. According to CACREP 2016 standards, all accredited counseling concentration programs should incorporate training in core areas common to all counseling specialties. Students who have gained admission into any entry-level counseling graduate program have demonstrated ability or aptitude in these areas; as such, they warrant inclusion as participants in this current study. These core areas include a Group Counseling and Group Work area, requiring an experiential learning experience in the form of participation in a small group. Although general focus of inquiry included professional identity development within the core areas identified within the 2016 CACREP standards, focus for this study was limited to the small group experience within the group counseling course fulfilling the KPI within the Group Counseling and Group Work Area.

Though individual programs sequence courses differently, every counseling student regardless of specialty is required to complete the Group Counseling and Group Work course in order to obtain a degree within a CACREP accredited program (CACREP, 2016). Program execution of the accreditation guidelines may differ; the experiential element of small group work remains consistent across programs and counseling specialties. Therefore, all accredited

CED programs would include an experiential small group qualifying master's students of any CACREP accredited university for inclusion in the present study.

The group counseling course included in all CACREP (2016) accredited entry-level counseling programs fulfill the requirements of the Group Counseling and Group Work area required for all counseling programs regardless of specialty. Although all aspects of the 2016 CACREP standards relate to KPIs facilitating professional identity development for entry level counseling students, this study primarily focused on the experiential small group experience maintained from the 2009 to the 2016 CACREP standards. Such delimitation stems from an identified dearth in the literature regarding the both professional identity development for counseling students and the experiences of students within the experiential small groups (Ieva et al., 2009).

This study limited participants to students enrolled in entry-level counseling programs seeking a master's degree. The researcher considered inclusion of doctoral students in the current study. Doctoral students have fostered professional identity development through various professional development activities, so it may be challenging to identify the specific professional identity development within the experiential small groups of master's level group counseling course. As doctoral students are required to demonstrate advanced understanding of all CACREP core areas (2009, 2016), it seems likely experiences beyond entry-level training informed professional identity development for students. Inclusion of doctoral students as participants may introduce confounding influences of other developmental experiences beyond the experiential small group. Thus, it is most appropriate to limit participants to only those enrolled in entry-level graduate programs to adequately address the purpose of the study and investigate the research question identified.

Additionally, to provide the most accurate examination of professional identity development within the experiential small groups, the study required participants have completed the group counseling course meeting the criteria within the Group Counseling and Group Work area in the previous academic semester. Participants having completed the course prior to one academic semester may have had other group counseling experiences informing professional identity development, including internship experiences and advanced counseling courses. While examination of student experiences further in counseling training than one semester beyond the group counseling course could provide general information as to professional identity development, there may ultimately be a lack of clarity in claiming the impact of the experiential small group as informing professional identity development.

As current trends within the profession encourage program accreditation according to the CACREP standards (ACA, 2014b), it is appropriate to limit participants to those enrolled in CACREP accredited graduate programs. The delimitation of inclusion criteria requiring participant enrollment in CACREP accredited programs insures basic uniformity in KPIs and standards fulfilled by the group counseling course. The CACREP (2016) standards do allow program opportunity to be creative in execution of KPIs. Some programs offer students opportunity to seek membership in a group outside of the course context. These community group experiences would be qualitatively different than small groups occurring with only student participants within the context of the course. For these reasons, the current study excluded students reporting community small group experiences, limiting the participant sample to only entry-level students who participated in a small group facilitated within the context of the course with only student group members. In order to explore professional identity development of

students, the current study included the delimitation of students who participated in small groups only within the context of the group course.

Some accredited programs employ online-based courses. The experiences of students enrolled in online-based programs would be qualitatively different than those students enrolled in location-based programs. Thus, it is appropriate to screen out participants from online-based programs. Thus in order to include entry-level students representing similar small group experiences, participants were limited to only those enrolled in location-based programs. In order to meet inclusion criteria for the current study, the student must have completed a location-based course fulfilling the Group Counseling and Group Work requirements including a small group experience facilitated within the context of the course within the previous academic semester.

Additionally, participants must have completed the group course with a passing grade demonstrating proficiency in the KPIs associated with this area (CACREP, 2016). Thus, inclusion criteria for the current research are:

(1) The participant must be a student enrolled in CACREP accredited master's program,

(2) The student must have participated in an experiential small group within the group counseling course within the past academic semester,

(3) The student must have earned a passing grade demonstrating proficiency in the Group Counseling and Group Work area,

(4) The student must have participated in the course within a location-based program as opposed to an online-based program, and

(5) The direct experience requirement for the course must have been facilitated within the context of the course, as opposed to separate experiences occurring in the community.

While the objective of qualitative research is not to generalize findings to a population (Ashworth, 2003; Flick, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994), these inclusion criteria assembled a participant sample representative of typical entry-level counseling students enrolled in CACREP accredited programs, which allowed findings to inform best practices, and evaluation measures appropriate for program use in professional identity development.

Limitations

As with any research, the current study recognizes limitations in consideration of method, population, and findings. The CACREP accreditation standards (2009; 2016) implore counselor educators to adhere to standards and demonstrate KPIs, one of which is incorporating a program-approved small group for ten hours over the course of one semester during the group counseling course. These guidelines leave flexibility for programs to determine the context and content of the small group experience. Although all entry-level counseling students experience membership in some small group during their training, the detail and context of the group may differ between programs.

Counseling students begin their graduate training with varied levels of exposure to clinical settings. Some counseling students may have prior experience working with counseling professionals and thus enter their training with some prior professional development through clinical experiences. Though this study focuses upon the influence of the experiential small group on professional identity development for counseling students, other developmental influences play a role in student professional identity. Excluding doctoral students as participants limited confounding influences of clinical experiences beyond typical training in entry-level counseling graduate programs. However, despite these exclusion criteria, it remains possible influences beyond typical counselor training could inform professional identity development

creating limitation to claims of the impact of experiential small groups on the development process of counselors-in-training.

The purpose of this study was to explore professional identity development of counselors-in-training enrolled in entry-level graduate programs within the experiential small groups required for the Group Counseling and Group Work area. However, qualitative methods are not generalizable to other members of the population (Ashworth, 2003; Flick, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative methods instead focus on exploration of experiences of a few members of a population to gain greater insight (Morrow, 2005). While the CACREP 2016 standards outline a 10 hour group experience within the Group Counseling and Group Work area, one limitation of the current study was the experiences of the participants in the experiential small groups may have varied in format depending on the program. While exploration of the student experience was valuable to inform further research and best practices, assumption of the experiences of other students in other programs being identical to those of the participants in the current study would be unfounded.

When exploring attitudes, beliefs, or developmental experiences, focus groups are a useful method to examine experiences taking place over time (Litosseliti, 2003). Use of the focus group method can offer more dynamic data different from data collected by individual interviews (Morgan, 1997). Specific to hermeneutic phenomenological focus groups, Morgan (1997) states focus groups are limited to verbal and self-reported data. Additionally, focus groups offer limited time for each participant to express their perspective, as well as create data representing less depth and more breadth of information. Considering these limitations of method, the researcher may express less certainty about the accuracy of accounted information from participants considering the influence of group dynamics (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Additionally, qualitative work is subjective. It is impossible to eliminate bias due to the subjectivity of the researcher in qualitative research (Vagle, 2009). Within hermeneutic phenomenology, phenomenology incorporating the interpretive lens of the researcher (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004), due to potential bias of the group and moderator influence and false consensus, the researcher cannot claim to be able to generalize findings (Litosseliti, 2003). Practicing reflexivity through bridling can provide insight as to the potential influence of researcher bias, and trustworthiness of data resulted from efforts to minimize influence of researcher bias (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004; Koch, 1996; Vagle, Hughes, & Durbin, 2009; Vagle, 2009). Bridling is the process of the researcher examining her positionality to focus on the participant perspective (Dowling, 2007). Bridling differs from bracketing used in transcendental phenomenology. Bracketing involves examination of researcher bias in order to create reflexivity (Dahlberg, 2006; Vagle et al., 2009). The purpose of bridling is to practice subjectivity in the ongoing awareness of the impact of the researcher lens on the analysis process (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004; Dowling, 2007; Vagle, 2009). Despite these considerations in methods, researcher subjectivity remained a limitation of the current study.

Having established the parameters of the current research; the review of the literature next offers foundations of CED, counselor development, group work, and the theoretical basis for the current research.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

In this chapter, I explore the literature related to counselor education (CED), counselor development, and professional identity. I provide a brief history of CED by examining the related counseling pedagogy as it pertains to graduate counseling programs. I then connect this to the experiential learning component of group counseling and group work. Also, I explore the literature related to counselor development and professional identity development for entry-level graduate students in counseling programs. Finally, I explore both the Integrated Developmental Model of supervision and Experiential Learning Theory as they pertain to professional identity development. These theories serve as the framework for the current study.

Counselor Education

CACREP, founded in 1981, creates and implements standards representing best practice in CED (Hollis & Dodson, 2000). The mission of CACREP is to promote professional competence for the counseling profession through standards of counselor training programs for a variety of specialties (CACREP, 2014). The most recent CACREP Accreditation Standards for counseling programs defines CED as the comprehensive training and preparation of counseling professionals of various specialties focused on facilitation of counselor development, including ethical practice, competency, and professional identity (CACREP, 2016). CED accreditation standards are designed to facilitate counselor development (CACREP, 2009, 2016). The definition of counselor development is the progressive evolution of students in counseling programs resulting from training to equip counselors-in-training to fulfill professional standards of the counseling profession (Grafanaki, 2010).

Teaching courses focused on counseling work is unique in that professionals must navigate complex issues in consideration of both individual values and professional ethics (Whiteley, 1969). Considering the unique challenges and abstract nature of counseling work, counselor educators must facilitate significant learning in order to affect counselor development in trainees. Significant learning in is defined as engaging and impactful learning experiences facilitating fundamental changes to students' world view with direct application to real-world context (Fink, 2013). In the context of graduate-level counseling courses, significant learning fosters cognitive complexity. This is necessary for new counseling professionals so that they can successfully navigate the responsibilities of counseling work with clients (CACREP, 2016; Fink, 2013).

Counseling Pedagogy

Pedagogy provides structure to educational experiences. Pedagogy broadly defined encompasses integration of materials and instruction guided by theory to provide focus and purpose to educational experiences (Giroux, 1988). In accordance with accreditation standards, models of counselor professional development based on learning theory inform program development and counselor training (CACREP, 2016; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). The overall goal of CED is to train students as counselors preparing them for professional practice, qualifying them for licensure and certification as professional counselors (CACREP, 2016).

Professional organizations play important roles in informing CED pedagogy and engaging in professional advocacy for the counseling profession. One such organization is the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC). Upon completion of counseling programs, NBCC provides credentialing for counselors (Wallace & Lewis, 1998). In addition to national credentialing, NBCC advocates for the counseling profession, and provides guidance for states in

determining criteria for counseling licensure (Bray, 2014). Acting as a professional advocates for reciprocity of licensure, NBCC recently announced that national credentialing for counselors of various specialties would require graduation from counseling programs accredited by CACREP, hoping that states align with NBCC standards for state licensure (ACA, 2014b). Several states have since adopted similar requirements in order to create portability of licensure for licensed professional counselors (LPC), establishing CACREP standards as the primary guidelines for CED pedagogy (Bray, 2014).

Accreditation Standards for Counseling Programs

Bray (2014) described new NBCC mandates requiring professional counselors who wish to achieve national certification graduate from CACREP accredited programs. Given this criterion for certification, it is necessary to explore historical and recent accreditation standards for CED programs. Since the origination of counseling as a profession, counseling programs have sought to establish guidelines for counselor development and pedagogy in counseling programs (Bobby, 2013). In 1981, CACREP set program standards to establish uniformity and quality in CED across counseling programs. CACREP continues to maintain this prominent role in counselor training programs. As the prominent accrediting body in CED, CACREP (2014) promotes a vision of excellence in counselor training through standards and procedures ensuring trained counselors provide competent services to clients (CACREP, 2014). CACREP guidelines for counseling graduate programs seek to foster a unified counseling profession, regardless of specialty, through instruction of students and evaluation of counselor development programs (CACREP, 2009, 2016).

In order to adapt to current events and needs within the counseling profession, CACREP periodically conducts revisions of CED standards (Urofsky & Bobby, 2012). Programs seeking

to maintain CACREP accreditation must demonstrate adherence to the most recent CACREP revisions (CACREP, 2014). As student learning is a critical outcome for higher education, CACREP provides student learning outcomes (SLO) to ensure accountability among accredited counseling programs offering unified training for all counselors regardless of specialty (Urofsky & Bobby, 2012). Higher education generally defines SLOs as the desired result students expect from participation in a course, representing a measured level of understanding of course material (Nygaard et al., 2009). The most recent revision of the CACREP standards (2016) outlined desired SLOs, called Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for CED graduate programs. CACREP (2016) standards focus on KPIs but do not provide specific method for which programs meet standards, which encourages innovation in CED training programs. To ensure uniformity in training standards, recent CACREP standards (2009; 2016) emphasize programs must create means to measure KPIs, which should align with pedagogical theory (Minton & Gibson, 2012).

The 2016 revision of the CACREP standards specifically encourage innovation of teaching methods within programs to meet KPI requirements, but overall emphasizes unified KPIs regardless of specialty to prepare graduates of CACREP accredited programs for counseling work in the field and promote a unified counselor identity (CACREP, 2016). The 2016 CACREP Standards offer six sections corresponding to areas of counselor development including: learning environment, professional counseling identity, professional practice, evaluation within programs, specialty areas, and doctoral-level studies. Each area provides KPIs aligned with standards for accreditation. One common theme throughout the core requirements, mirroring recent trends and research in the field, is focus on development of professional identity for counseling students (CACREP, 2016; Davis & Gressard, 2011). The professional identity section of the CACREP standards encompasses the core areas of all counseling programs,

regardless of specialty. One such area, and the focus of the current research, is the Group Counseling and Group Work area.

Group Counseling and Group Work Area

In the 2016 revision of the CACREP Standards, the Group Counseling and Group Work common core area of the professional counseling identity accreditation guidelines describe KPIs for counseling students of all specialties. These outcomes include: theoretical foundations, group dynamics, therapeutic factors, and types of groups within the counseling profession (CACREP, 2016). Similar to other core areas, ethics and cultural considerations within groups are included in the standards. Additionally, according to CACREP (2016) standards, students in the group class are to learn about group leadership, including characteristics of group leaders, skills for group facilitation, and factors involved in development of new groups. One unique aspect of the Group Counseling and Group Work area is the requirement of a direct experience (Anderson, Sylvan, & Sheets, 2014).

The Group Counseling and Group Work area dictates that students need to participate as group members in a small group activity for a minimum of ten hours within the context of one semester (ASGW, 2000; CACREP, 2016). The program must approve the format of the group experience ensure the experiences provides personal growth and reflection opportunities in order for students to gain experience as a group participant (CACREP, 2016). Historically, counseling programs utilize an experiential small groups to fulfill this requirement, offering experiential learning in a group context focused on personal growth (Anderson & Price, 2001; Goodrich & Luke, 2012; Ieva et al., 2009).

Overview of Group Work

Group work can be powerful, as participation in a group can serve as a transformational and influential process for group members (Torosyan, 2008). According to Shechtman (2007), the process of a group begins before the group members enter the group. A group leader must consider screening of potential members and employ careful group member selection to protect the safety of the group members, and create a group supportive of the group goal. The composition of members within the group can change the dynamics of the group, for example a homogenous group would have a qualitatively different discourse than a heterogeneous group, meaning the group dynamics differ with group members representing more diversity within the group (Macnair & Semands, 1998). Additionally, group leaders must be aware of cultural identity of both members and leaders in a group (Bemak & Chung, 2015).

Considering these factors, the leader must be mindful of protecting group members from harm, as group members play different roles in group which may become problematic to other members (Shechtman, 2007). Once the group begins, the group leader must facilitate the group to support development of therapeutic factors and facilitate exchange of feedback within the group (Shechtman, 2007; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). These factors help a group to traverse the stages of a group, representing opportunities for group members to grow.

Group Dynamics

The dynamics within the group largely shape the group experience is (Torosyan, 2008). Positives outcomes for group experiences are dependent upon the dynamics within a group (Robak, Kangos, Chiffriller, & Griffin, 2013). Specifically, influential dynamics include bonding among group members, the working alliance within the group among leaders and members, and the agreement of overall goals for the groups influence the trajectory of a group experience

(Robak et al., 2013; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Culture and worldview also play important roles in the connection and dynamics between group members (Bemak & Chung, 2015). Ultimately, facilitating shared social support among members of a group is dependent upon a combination of individual characteristics and group dynamics (Harel, Shechtman, & Cutrona, 2011).

The overall goal of the group process is to build cohesion and exchange social support among group members (Harel et al., 2011; Robak et al., 2013; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Social support can be promoted through attachment and bonding among group members (Harel et al., 2011). Sharing among group members increases cohesion and develops a working alliance within the group (Steen, Vasserman-Stokes, & Vannatta, 2014). The working alliance within the group also influences development of cohesion within a group (Shechtman, 2007). Working alliance is the strength of the bond among group members and between leaders and members (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Thus, the tasks completed within the group are not as important as the working alliance within the group (Robak et al., 2013).

Stages of Group

Any group, regardless of group type, traverse five group stages: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). As the group "forms" in the early stage, group members are reluctant to share and connect with each other. Avoidance of conflict and desire to keep peace within the group characterize the early stage of group (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Once the group begins "storming," the group members begin to engage in conflict (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). This conflict may be minimal, or more pronounced. The peace of the early stage is broken, and group members must connect and share more with each other through conflict. This conflict may be uncomfortable, but it helps group members learn to engage with each other on a deeper level (Steen et al., 2014).

Once group members reach deeper levels of sharing, the "norming" stage begins (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). In this stage, group members become more comfortable with sharing in the group and establish new group norms. These group norms create means for dialogue and interpersonal growth within the group (Shechtman, 2007). The "performing" stage occurs once group members are able to conduct the group according to group norms, sharing and connecting with each other comfortable as the group progresses in its purpose (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Groups may cycle through the stages of group more than once, or may return to previous stages of group. Additionally, groups may not always reach the later stages of group process (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Tuckman and Jensen (1977) discuss one final stage of group called the "adjourning" stage, occurring as the group reaches its conclusion and group members experience the ending of the group experience.

Therapeutic Factors

Many factors including group dynamics, culture, leadership, and composition of the group influence the group process (Bemak & Chung, 2015; Haley-Banez & Walden, 1999; Werstlein & Borders, 1997). Group leadership is extremely influential in the progress and experiences within a group as group leaders facilitate the group process (Haley-Banez & Walden, 1999; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Effective group leaders may help foster development of therapeutic factors within a group. Yalom and Lesczc (2005) describe therapeutic factors, which occur in groups and impact the process of a group. The therapeutic factors described by Yalom and Lesczc (2005) are: instillation of hope, universality, imparting information, altruism, the corrective recapitulation of the primary family group, development of socializing techniques, imitative behavior, interpersonal learning, group cohesiveness, catharsis, and existential factors.

Group Counseling

Counselors use groups in many settings to facilitate therapeutic processes and growth (Thomas & Pender, 2008; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Counseling experiences may include various types of groups. Group work occurs in a variety of setting. Yalom and Leszcz (2005) outline four basic types of groups: task, psychoeducation, counseling, and psychotherapy. A task group entails people who meet in order to achieve a singular goal, or task. Psychoeducational groups serve the purpose of sharing certain information with people connected to the topic. Counseling groups focus more on dynamics between group members, working to facilitate interpersonal and intrapersonal growth for the members. Psychotherapy groups focus more on individual development, supporting individuals in processing severe issues or mental illness.

Experiential Small Groups in Counselor Education

CED commonly uses group work in supervision (Werstlein & Borders, 1997) and in the small group experience within the group counseling course (CACREP, 2016). Counselor identity development occurs within both of these groups, although these groups occur in different stages of counselor development (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg, 1981; Woodside et al., 2007). Considering the unique elements within the experiential small groups in the Group Counseling and Group Work area, research has explored the many facets of the experiential small group experience. In particular, the small group experience is rich and offers a dynamic learning experience for students incorporating several areas of training (Anderson & Price, 2001).

Experiential small groups are helpful in teaching students about group leadership and group dynamics (Young, Reysen, Eskridge, & Ohrt, 2013). Ohrt, Ener, Porter, and Young, (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews with counselors conducting groups. The researchers

described the influence of groups on the training of counseling in group work. Counselors who participated in the study reported influences in training as group counselors citing practicum, observation of group leaders, supervision, and the experiential small groups. Participants reported the process and dynamics within the group were influential in counselor training. Specifically, Ohrt et al. (2014) found the role of the group leader influenced the experience of the members and the outcome of the group.

Investigating the student experience and impact of the experiential small groups, Ieva et al. (2009) conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 counseling students of different specialty programs. Students described impactful moments illustrating themes of personal awareness and development, professional development, and programming considerations for faculty. Students stated the experiential groups were impactful and should be required of all counseling programs to reinforce material and demonstrate the efficacy of groups in counseling through facilitator modeling.

St. Pierre (2014) sought to develop group training models for CED through a survey about program practices for group work training. More than half of participants reported the course instructor also lead the small group experience. Most respondents recalled in their small group experience students were able to act as a group member, whereas few reported having experience as a group leader. While the research determined the experiential group experience was meaningful in counselor development, inspiring both positive and negative strong long-term reactions to the experience; limited knowledge is available as to the experiences of students in the group course related to the effectiveness of achieving CACREP KPIs.

Anderson et al. (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with ten counselors-in-training seeking to better understand student experience in the group counseling

course. The researchers also explored reflective journals completed during the group course. Findings yielded themes throughout the group experiences. One subtheme discovered was the role of professional identity development during the small group experience. Group members expressed gaining understanding of their own sense of professional identity during the small group experience, considering theoretical orientation and understanding of the role counselors played in a group setting (Anderson et al., 2014)

Anderson and Price (2001) conducted quantitative surveys from 99 counseling master's students. The researchers sought to explore student attitudes about the small group experience in group counseling courses. Results of the surveys demonstrated evidence that the experiential component of the group course was necessary for skills and professional identity development. Student stated the experience was meaningful in the learning process, however dual relationships presented ethical issues in choosing a group leader.

Researchers have highlighted the small group experience as an influential aspect of training. The experiential small group component of the Group Counseling and Group Work area is a unique opportunity for exploration of the counselor development process (Anderson et. al., 2014). Though the format of the group experience may vary by program, the core experience of group membership is common for all entry-level graduate students enrolled in counseling programs (CACREP, 2016).

Association for Specialists in Group Work Standards

The Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW) is a division of ACA dedicated to counselors conducting and specializing in group work (Thomas & Pender, 2008). ASGW created standards in alignment with CACREP standards for counseling programs and the ACA (2014a) Code of Ethics (ASGW, 2000). The ASGW (2000) standards expand upon existing

ethical and CED standards to provide guidance to counselor educators and counselors specializing in group work. The purpose of the standards is to guide counselor graduate training programs informing curriculum development (Thomas & Pender, 2008). Asserting training standards should be consistent across specialties, the ASGW (2000) standards identify core requirements for all counselors, and requirements for those specializing in group work.

The core requirements include an experiential component similar to CACREP standards; minimum of 10 clock hours (20 recommended) in observation of and participation in a group as a member and/or leader. Specialization entails minimum of 30 clock hours (45 recommended) facilitating groups. According to ASGW, these standards represent the minimum training appropriate for competency in group work. In addition to ASGW standards, the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) guides group facilitators conducting experiential small groups for CED courses.

Ethical Considerations

Counselor educators must conduct training in an ethical manner, ultimately serving as role models for professional behavior (ACA, 2014a). While serving as small group facilitators or supervisors for small group facilitators, the professional identity development occurring specifically in experiential small groups may reveal professional and ethical issues relevant to the counseling profession (Goodrich & Luke, 2012). Some ethical considerations within the experiential small groups include addressing problematic group members. The experiential process allows students to express different interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects based on learning style, which may reveal potential gatekeeping issues. CACREP (2016) defines gatekeeping as ongoing monitoring and evaluation of students in alignment with professional competencies; enactment of the gatekeeping role results in remediation to prevent students lacking competency from achieving licensure for practice. The experiential small group

experience within the Group Counseling and Group Work area is one means of facilitating counselor development in accredited counseling graduate programs (Anderson & Price, 2001; CACREP, 2016).

Counselor Development

Development in any educational setting implies systematic change in succession over time (Grafanaki, 2010). Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) assembled a body of literature exploring changes undergone as one becomes a professional counselor. In effort to demonstrate a model of professional development specific to counselors, authors conducted a qualitative study deriving developmental themes in the CED process. As counselors-in-training develop, the journey of professional development facilitates integration of the professional and personal self to achieve professional individuation (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). This developmental process culminates through development of professional counselor identity and skills to effectively and ethically practice counseling in the field (ACA, 2014a; CACREP, 2016). To measure this developmental process, a clear link between assessment and student learning provides evidence of desired course outcomes (Haberstroh, Duffey, Marble, & Ivers, 2014). Evaluation of this learning process occurs through student learning outcomes (SLO).

Student Learning Outcomes

CACREP 2016 standards call for counselor educators to measure SLOs called Key Performance Indicators (KPI). According to accreditation guidelines, assessment of SLOs should align with pedagogy, so educational assessments should align with both SLOs and pedagogical theory employed in the course (Minton & Gibson, 2012). Empirical research that explores counselor development and pedagogy is necessary to inform best practices and to guide further development of accreditation and evaluative standards. For example, Levitt and Janks (2012)

conducted a Delphi study seeking input from experts in the field to establish best practices for program assessment of SLOs. Experts believed that CED programs must match assessments to the most recent SLOs outlined within the core areas of CACREP standards. Suggestions regarding designing assessments to measure SLOs often included subjective assessments, created to capture the learning process and to measure counselor competency.

Additionally, Haberstroh et al. (2014) evaluated means of assessing SLOs in CED. The authors asserted that programs must create and implement appropriate assessments to measure SLOs. Haberstroh et al. (2014) described matching measurement of SLOs based on program culture and values. Ultimately, CACREP (2016) standards specifically dictate SLOs but lack clarity on tracking and providing evidence of SLOs. Specifically, Haberstroh et al. (2014) discussed the necessity for programs to develop assessments related to counselor identity, skills for practice, and knowledge to demonstrate competency.

Finally, Minton, Morris, and Yaites (2014) conducted a review of literature related to pedagogy and counselor development. Only about nine percent of 230 peer-reviewed articles from counseling-related journals published were about counselor development and counseling pedagogy. A content analysis of the bounded literature presented themes of heavy focus on techniques and conceptual articles for master's students in counseling programs. Despite sharing of techniques, most articles published lacked clear application of pedagogical theory and measurement of SLOs for counselor development.

Despite varied conclusions about best practices in demonstration of SLOs, the limited empirical research related to counselor development consistently cites experiential learning opportunities as pivotal in counselor development (Auxier et al., 2003; Brott & Myers, 1999; Gibson et al., 2010; Letourneau, 2015; Luke & Goodrich, 2010).

Developmental Process for Counselors-in-Training

Coursework aligned with the CACREP 2016 standards facilitates professional development (Coll et al., 2013). Within the courses outlined in the CACREP 2016 standards, students experience progressive evolution of knowledge, attitudes, and professional dispositions throughout their training in counseling programs (Grafanaki, 2010). Master's counseling programs represent entry-level professional training for those with minimal to no prior experience in clinical settings. Entry-level counseling students must meet criteria outlined in the CACREP 2016 standards to gain admission to an entry-level counseling graduate program. The interpretation of those standards vary by program but the requirements are the same for each program. Prospective counseling students should demonstrate: (1) career goals consistent with training received in counseling programs, (2) ability to perform academically at a graduate level, (3) potential suggestive of a later ability to build effective counseling relationships with clients, and (4) awareness and reflexivity in cultural considerations (CACREP, 2016).

Counselor development occurs in phases throughout the CED process (Woodside et al., 2007). According to Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992), during the developmental process of professional training, counselors experience internal and external orientation to the professional community marked by decreasing rigidity of thinking about professional issues. Within this process, students develop skills and professional identity to transform from beginning students in early counseling courses, into advanced students navigating practicum and internship, and finally gaining competency as novice professionals at the culmination of counseling programs (Woodside et al., 2007). Early in training, students gain knowledge of the counseling profession and basic counseling skills through coursework (CACREP, 2016). Students prior to practicum,

known as pre-practicum, experience high levels of self-doubt and uncertainty about their own clinical judgment, skills, and identity as a counselor (Woodside et al., 2007).

Trotter-Mathison et al. (2010) described defining moments throughout the developmental process of CED. Apprehension and anxiety characterize early counseling development in counseling graduate programs as budding counselors begin to develop professional identity. In early courses and practicum, students learn through mentorship and supervisory relationships (Woodside et al., 2007). Students begin to confront preconceived understandings of the counseling profession. As awareness of the counseling profession grows, changes in personal dispositions marked by growth in traits, attitudes, and behaviors characterize professional identity development (Whiteley, 1969).

Once students begin the practicum and internship process, clinical supervision facilitates development through critical incidents occurring during the counselor's first foray into counseling work in the field (Furr & Carroll, 2003). During supervision, students build self-awareness, independence, and the capacity to experience empathy for clients (Eichenfield & Stoltenberg, 1996). Internalization of counseling knowledge, prepare students for complex client issues, ethical decision-making, and development of clinical judgment which characterize later stages of counselor development (Trotter-Mathison et al., 2010). Professional identity development occurs throughout the training received during entry-level counseling programs, however this later stage professional identity shows more clearly defined and demonstrated identity (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Further Trotter-Mathison et al. described more advanced students as having conquered the basic skills of counselors, beginning to internalize knowledge, growing more confident in challenging material, and exploring complicated issues in the profession. According to the researchers, advanced students

internalize multiple sources of new knowledge, resulting in development of an emerging professional identity.

Marking a need for understanding of counselor development after completion of counseling graduate programs, Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) explored counselor development in early years of professional practice. The authors found the supervision process builds reliance on external expertise. Eventually, as counselors learn from the supervision process, they gain expertise themselves growing more comfortable operating from a base of internal expertise and reflection. As budding counselors gain clinical experience, an ongoing reflective process is crucial to continued development (Stoltenberg et al., 1998).

The result of counselor development is a counseling practitioner growing in congruence and knowledge constructed from multiple sources (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Trotter-Mathison et al., 2010). According to the IDM (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg et al., 1998), the counselor development process is not limited to only the training received in counseling programs, but continues during early work in the field following completion. Counselors continue to develop clinical intuition representing an internal method of navigating complex professional issues. The result is a counselor with a unique sense of professional identity. Upon completion of entry-level counseling programs, students demonstrate development of professional identity through completion of comprehensive exams (CACREP, 2016), and progress towards professional licensure and credentialing as professional counselors (Wallace & Lewis, 1998). The Integrated Developmental Model outlines the developmental process for entry-level counselors as they complete training and work towards licensure as professional counselors.

The Integrated Developmental Model

CED programs foster professional identity development for counselors-in-training through clinical supervision during practicum and internship experiences (CACREP, 2016). Beyond formal supervision, during clinical training students often receive informal supervision from other sources including mentors, advisors, and coursework (Farber & Hazanov, 2014).

In formal supervision settings, clinical supervision best practices emphasize the importance of a theoretical foundation in supervision practices (ACES, 2011). As a theoretical model, The Integrated Developmental Model (IDM) of supervision outlines identity development occurring through the clinical supervision process (Stoltenberg, 1981). Empirical support validates the IDM and its associated measures as a theoretical approach to supervision and supervisee evaluation (McNeill et al., 1992). According to the IDM, the goal of supervision is to increase autonomy and facilitate development of skills and counselor identity until supervisees can practice independently (Stoltenberg, 1981). As clinical supervision occurs throughout the counselor development process occurring within CED programs, counselors ideally progress through three stages of development (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Stoltenberg (2005) stated supervisees require different supervisory techniques to facilitate their growth as they progress through the developmental stages (See Table 2.1).

Supervisee Stages of Development

In the first stage of development, the supervisee is typically a beginning entry-level supervisee early in a counseling program characterized by high motivation and anxiety about the counseling process (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg et al., 1998). According to Stoltenberg and McNeill (2010), the Level 1 supervisee typically has knowledge of counseling content, but minimal experience conducting clinical practice in counseling.

Table 2.1.

Three levels of the IDM as demonstrated by supervisee development and supervisor strategies

(Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg, 1981).

Developmental Stage	Characteristics of Supervisee	Supervision Strategies
Level 1	High motivation, high level of anxiety, lack of self-awareness, high dependence on supervisor	High level of structure, use of exemplars, instruction on skills, training to raise awareness, strengths-based approach
Level 2	Conflict between autonomy and dependence on supervisor, increased self-awareness, less imitation, seeks independence	Less structure, provides less direct instruction, focus on facilitation, offers conceptual viewpoints, parallel process, process counselor reactions
Level 3	Developing counseling identity, demonstrates insight, integration of own ideals and ethical standards, empathy for client grows, self-acceptance of strengths and limitations	Structure comes from supervisee, supervisor acts as consultant, challenges to avoid stagnation, use of confrontation

This supervisee has enthusiasm for the field and high motivation to help others. The supervisor working with the Level 1 supervisee focuses on growing self-awareness, fostering basic skills through a strengths-based approach to supervision (Stoltenberg et al., 1998). In order to facilitate supervisee growth, a supervisor may employ strategies of observation and role playing using a high amount of structure to facilitate supervision (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). The supervisee progresses to Level 2 as she becomes more autonomous and begins to focus more on the client, and less on her own experiences in the counseling session.

When a supervisee progresses to Level 2, she may become less motivated for counseling work as new and more complex skills counseling test her confidence (Stoltenberg et al., 1998). In Level 2, the supervisee begins to oscillate between dependence on the supervisor and independence in practice (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Empathy for the client grows as the focus of supervision is more on conceptualizing the client through understanding the client worldview. This process occurs toward the end of coursework and may continue into the beginning of post-master's supervision for licensure.

As the supervisee's self-awareness grows, she focuses less on imitation of the supervisor, and more on developing her own identity as a counselor seeking specific feedback from the supervisor (Stoltenberg et al., 1998). To support this supervisee, the supervisor decreases the amount of structure in supervision to allow the supervisee to exercise more autonomy, begin to confront the supervisee, and shift focus to conceptualization of the client as opposed to counseling skills development. Facilitating this process, the supervisor may use interpretive analysis exercises to enact a parallel process between client and supervisee growth (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010).

As the supervisee transitions from Level 2 into Level 3, she may begin to develop a theoretical orientation, demonstrate autonomy, and practice self-awareness in her own limitations as a practitioner (Stoltenberg et al., 1998). A Level 3 supervisee demonstrates advanced counseling skills, stable motivation for practice, and expresses healthy doubt with ability to cope with uncertainty. This supervisee may have several years of practice approaching full licensure, or may be a doctoral student in a CED program (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Professional identity in alignment with the skills, dispositions, and ethical standards of professional counselors characterize this stage. The supervisory relationship becomes collegial as the supervisee obtains autonomy yet seeks consultation exercising awareness of limitations as a clinical (Stoltenberg et al., 1998).

Some supervisees may demonstrate lack of interpersonal skills, communication, language, or cultural awareness below the level of that expected of an entry-level counseling student in a counseling program (Eichenfield & Stoltenberg, 1998). This Sub-Level I supervisee may gain admittance to counseling programs whose admission standards heavily consider grade point average and aptitude exams, as such skills are not reflected in these measures (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). A lack of pre-requisites characterized by low motivation, slow early development, and limited progress in counselor skills become roadblocks to development. The Sub-Level I supervisee may overcome these challenges, however if these characteristics represent unresolved personal issues the supervision may not progress without the student first seeking counseling supports (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010).

Counselor development occurring through experiences within a counseling program, measured by supervisee development through the IDM stages, results in counseling professionals capable of providing competent supports to clients in the community (Eichenfield & Stoltenberg,

1998). Each supervisee progresses at her own pace, but the CACREP (2016) Standards create structure and evaluation to facilitate and monitor professional growth. While clinical supervision in practicum and internship play vital roles in skills and identity development for counseling students, informal means of supervision, such as experiences in coursework, also facilitate the developmental process (Farber & Hazanov, 2014).

Professional Identity

While professional identity for counselors has been a popular topic of discussion within professional organizations, scholars have postulated about how to define, develop, and measure professional identity (Burkholder, 2012). For example, CACREP (2014) promotes practice which facilitates professional identity development for counseling students in hopes of outcomes leading to participation in continuing education, leadership within the profession, and ability to collaborate with interdisciplinary treatment teams representing the unique perspective of counseling. Considering the role of counselors among other healthcare providers, counselors face pressure to conform to a medical model of client care. However, a holistic and humanistic approach to client care are unique to counselors and differentiate counseling as a profession (McLaughlin & Boettcher, 2009). Within a school setting, the role of a school counselors differs fundamentally from the roles of other school administrators (Brott & Myers, 1999).

Struggle to establish counseling as a profession among other behavioral health providers and strong emphasis on professional identity development within the counseling profession has provided a need for scholars to discover clarity as to how to define and measure the construct of professional identity for counselors. Seeking exploration of professional identity specifically for school counselors, Brott and Myers (1999) explored self-conceptualization of counselors and the professional development process. In order to determine needs of the counseling profession

related to professional identity, qualitative interviews with ten school counselors explored views of the counseling profession and how counselors define themselves. Findings identified a need for differentiation of counselors among other supports in schools, allowing for more credence given to counselors supporting students in contributing to collaborative efforts in school settings.

Promoting exploration of the concept of professional identity for counselors, professional counseling organizations allocated resources to task forces developing, defining, and promoting a unified identity for counselors. For example, in effort to promote and clarify professional identity Bobby and Urofsky (2011) reported on behalf of CACREP that a clear sense of professional identity and definition of counselors as professionals was necessary in order to clarify scope of practice and direct continuing education. To highlight the importance of professional identity for counselors, the authors further asserted professional identity leads to establishment of counselors as separate and reputable professionals among other health service providers. Bobby and Urofsky (2011) asserted the importance for counselors to identify and subscribe to core values of counseling, outlined in the ACA Code of Ethics to define professional identity (ACA, 2014a).

The preamble of the 2014 ACA Code of Ethics identifies the core values of the counseling profession as well as the fundamental principles of ethical practice. The core professional values guiding counselor identity include a developmental approach to practice in observance of diversity and multicultural perspectives. The core values state counselors promote social justice, protect the integrity of the helping relationship, and conduct practice competently and ethically. The fundamental principles of counseling practice outlined in the 2014 ACA Code of Ethics include: autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, fidelity, and veracity.

Together, these core values and fundamental principles of counselors guide practice and inform professional identity.

Adding to the growing body of literature related to professional identity for counselors, Reiner et al. (2013) sought to advocate for the promotion of counselors among other health professionals. The authors explored how counselors perceive the impact of professional identity for counselors, conducting surveys with 378 counselors about their professional identity. Participants echoed a need for differentiation of counseling from other health professionals and a unified definition of professional identity for counselors regardless of specialty focus. The authors postulated a unified definition of counseling based on the core values of counseling (ACA, 2014a) could provide clarity of professional identity for practitioners regardless of specialty and further establish counseling as a profession. Findings offered further evidence a unified definition of counseling could support counselor identity development and advancement of the counseling field.

A Unified Definition for Counselors

Considering previous empirical evidence, counseling advocates identified need for a unified definition of counseling in order to promote the counseling profession through differentiation of counselors from other health professionals. In order to further define professional identity for counselors, Mellin et al. (2011) promoted need for a unified counseling definition for all counselors regardless of specialty. In order to explore this need, the researchers conducted a qualitative study exploring the professional identity of 238 counselors representing various specialties in the field. Thematic analysis demonstrated narratives of the participants identifying a common emphasis of wellness, prevention, and developmental considerations in counseling work with clients despite differences in specialties. This empirical evidence

supported the existence of a common counseling identity for counselors and thus warranted

development of a unified definition of counseling to promote professional identity.

In order to facilitate development of a comprehensive definition of counseling, Kaplan et

al. (2014) conducted a Delphi study consulting with prominent voices in the field from various

counseling specialties. Experts organized into workgroups sought to identify counseling in order

to define the work of counselors for the public and legislators determining licensure for

counselors. The resulting definition focused on the counseling relationship through emphasis of

client empowerment and diversity. 29 major counseling associations, including the ACA,

endorsed the definition established by the Delphi study. Thus with the completion of the study by

Kaplan et al., the counseling profession established a unified definition of counselors endorsed

by prominent leaders and organizations within the field. Incorporating a unified definition of

counseling, counselor educators seek to foster development of professional identity for

counselors-in-training.

Professional Identity Development

Following efforts in the development of a unified definition for counselors, defining

professional identity became the emphasis of professional development organizations. Bringing

further attention to professional identity, one of the primary goals for the 2016 CACREP

Standards is to facilitate development of strong professional identity for counselors-in-training in

order to promote a unified counseling profession identifying first with the core conditions of

counselors, then with professional specialty areas. Following this trend, research in the field

shifted focus to exploring professional identity development for counselors.

Conducting empirical exploration of professional identity, interviews and focus groups

conducted by Auxier et al. (2003) examined the training experiences of eight counseling students

in order to determine a theory of professional identity development. Analyses using grounded theory yielded three perceived steps students navigate in order to develop professional identity. According to the researchers, students participate in conceptual learning, experiential learning, and external validation testing individual professional identity resulting in counseling graduates with professional identity as counseling practitioners. Auxier et al. specifically cited the small group experience within the group counseling course as a component of the experiential learning process in counseling programs later informing counselor identity.

Exploring experiential learning as an integral process of professional identity development, Brott and Myers (1999) conducted qualitative interviews with ten school counselors. The students defined self-conceptualization of professional identity as being evident during processing and navigating conflicts for school counselors. Findings yielded a model of professional identity development centered on distinguishing counselors from other helping professionals to establish the role of counselors in interacting as collaborative member of service team for students. The participants cited experiential application of content within programs as impactful in maturation and development of identity as counselors. Thus the model developed by the researchers emphasized professional identity developing through maturation and experiential learning applying counseling concepts.

In order to further explore professional identity development, Gibson et al. (2010) conducted focus groups with 43 counseling students to examine the developmental process of counselors-in-training. The researchers proposed transformational elements of counseling programs informed professional identity development. Grounded theory guided the investigation of the lived experiences of counseling students in two CACREP accredited counseling programs. Offering evidence of professional identity development in counseling programs, analysis

revealed three areas of professional identity development experienced in counseling programs: defining of counseling, feeling individual responsibility for professional growth, and ultimately defining identity as a counselor within a systemic context.

Gibson et al. (2010) determined the most meaningful experiences for counselors developing individual professional identity were experiences in which students applied abstract counseling concepts. As participants identified application as meaningful experiences, the researchers defined these experiential experiences as transformational tasks within counseling program curriculum. Research demonstrates developmental experiences informing professional identity occur within counseling courses, but professional identity development also occurs through participation in professional development organizations. Professional identity development is often part of the mission for counseling development organizations, such as Chi Sigma Iota (CSI).

To determine how leadership opportunities in CSI impact development of professional identity, Luke and Goodrich (2010) explored professional identity development for counseling students. A qualitative study of fifteen early career counselors who has participated in CSI leadership during counseling graduate programs explored experiences contributing to professional identity development. The researchers interviewed 15 counselors early in their career who had participated in leadership through CSI during their counseling programs. Participants stated professional identity development was important to reinforce the core conditions of counselors and to help counselors prepare for clinical experiences after completion of counseling programs. Participants also cited experiential learning opportunities within counseling programs as integral in applying counseling concepts to practical settings, which then informed development of professional identity as students.

Having established empirical support for the importance of professional identity, Emerson (2010) recognized a lack of measurement and evaluation of professional identity development. Thus she explored measurement of professional identity development through her dissertation. Determining a lack of validated measures for counselor professional identity, she examined various constructs potentially included in professional identity. Her Counselor Professional Identity inventory offered a scale examining six areas of professional identity: history, philosophy, roles, ethics, professional pride, and professional engagement. Her pilot of her measure offered the conclusion professional identity is complicated and multi-faceted. Thus findings warranted further exploration of the process of professional identity development for counselors to better understand constructs of professional identity and how counseling pedagogy fosters development of professional identity.

In summary, to further explore professional identity development, empirical establishment of experiential experiences inspiring transformational elements (Gibson et al., 2010) and significant learning (Fink, 2013) lend to application of Experiential Learning Theory as means of facilitating professional identity development.

Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) describes learning as a process as opposed to other theories equating learning with a static outcome (Kolb, 2015). Kolb et al. (2001) described learning as a dynamic process incorporating the individual perspectives and experiences of learners. Behavioral and educational theorists influenced and informed Kolb (2015) in development of ELT.

Theoretical Influences

      Pragmatism. Dewey (1926) expressed a core belief of the necessity of connecting education in schools with environments in other contexts. He believed knowledge develops within the context of experience and social identity. In his discussion of the education system, Dewey (1938) described progressive education as adaptive in order to facilitate the learning needs of developing students over time. He criticized popular views of imparting knowledge, stating traditional approaches to education do not translate to practical skills serving student needs in the real world. Instead, Dewey's (1940) concept of progressive education emphasized experience, which he described as progressively organized. Thus he postulated education needed a basis in theories of behaviorism and experience, as the ultimate purpose of education is to facilitate social experiences to foster new meaning.

      Describing his pragmatic philosophy of education, Dewey (1964) stated two principles which guide education: participation in something worthwhile and meaningful, and perception of means and consequences. He claimed true education occurs in educational experiences that mimic real work environment. Thus to facilitate true learning, teachers must act not as authority figured, but as a guide seeking to know students' individual needs and aspirations allowing students some contribution and ownership of the learning experience. Kolb (2015) shared the value of individuality in students, emphasizing importance of educators considering each student's individual capacity for independent learning and unique world-view to guide the educational experience.

      Field theory. Lewin (1948) stated in order to understand society as whole, one must first consider individuals within the society. He explained divergence from social norms guide individual personality and behavior. Divergence from norms develops from learning experiences,

not innately. Lewin postulated people learn from life experience and form beliefs leading to conduct, which is adaptive based on interactions with others. According to Lewin, an individual sense of reality forms from perceptions of one's own experiences. Education is thus a journey of development of individual culture. Individual learning is a process of acculturation through experiences leading the learner to develop new values to govern later thinking and conduct. To guide learning, experience alone is not enough to create knowledge; the instructor must actively facilitate learning by using educational experiences to create new meaning.

Informed by systemic views and based in behaviorism, Lewin (1951) postulated field theory which is a method explaining causal relationships. Informing later educational theory including ELT, field theory described a constructive process for meaning-making dependent upon complexities rather than abstract general classifications. Within field theory, the goal of learning is to examine constructs with depth to discover the basis of behavior. Behaviorism is important in order to incorporate the context of the individual into the understanding what holistically comprises the individual.

Explaining the importance of individual experiences, Lewin (1948; 1951) described the life space of an individual as the culminating circumstances of personal history and social context. Incorporating life space into meaningful learning, it is thus ineffective and inappropriate to assume the same learning experience is meaningful for all learners. The complexity of human nature warrants a dynamic approach to learning incorporating the individual meaning-making process. Meaning making is thus a process of changes in cognitive structure resulting from challenge of individual beliefs and values. Ultimately changes in cognitive structure change motivation for future decisions, which results in applied knowledge.

Kolb (2015) considered the concept of life spaces in his design of learning styles and learning spaces. From this concept, Kolb et al. (2014) also discussed the importance of educators fulfilling various roles to create a unique learning experience respectful of individual student learning styles.

Developmental learning. Applying his developmental theory to a learning context, Piaget (1973) described learning as a developmental process, and thus learning represents a series of experiences leading to understanding of complex concepts. Within the developmental learning theory, educational value comes from experimentation, which enables learners to become productive and creative contributors to society. Education thus occurs best not through repetition and memory drills. Instead, learning is an active, developmental process throughout the lifespan. Kolb (2015) shared a developmental view of the learning process, informing his creation of the experiential learning cycle.

With considerations of theoretical influences including Dewey (1926; 1938), Lewin (1948; 1951), and Piaget (1973), Kolb (2015) developed ELT to guide educators in facilitating meaningful learning experiences in the classroom.

Basic Tenets

Describing the more basic core tenet of ELT, Kolb (2015) identified learning as a process, not an outcome. Based on theories of behaviorism (Lewin, 1951), learning is conceptualized as a process continuously formed and re-formed by behavior, rather than a static process with a constant outcome (Kolb 2015; Kolb et al., 2001). Within ELT, learning is the result of experience. The learning process is also holistic and thus through the educational process learners must reconcile and adapt abstract concepts in the classroom to real-world

circumstances (Kolb et al., 2001). ELT considers learning to be a dynamic process of interaction between learner and environment.

Ultimately, ELT describes learning is a transformational experience (Kolb, 2015). Thus, ELT is best applied through dynamic experiences incorporating many concepts in working experiences students can in turn reflect upon and from which they derive meaning (Bergsteiner et al., 2010).

The Experiential Learning Cycle

ELT considers experience and application of concepts the core of the learning process (Kolb et al., 2001). Thus, to facilitate significant learning, experiential educators must create opportunities for students to conceptualize, interact with, and transform learning experiences into meaningful knowledge applicable to environments beyond the classroom (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). In order to guide this process, Kolb (2015) postulated the learning process occurs in a cyclical nature by navigating various developmental aspects of interacting with an experience in the classroom.

Within ELT, the Experiential Learning Cycle provides a four stage model (See Figure 2.1) explaining how students with different learning styles can gain meaningful conclusions from experiential elements in teaching (Kolb et al., 2001; Kolb et al., 2014; Kolb, 2015). In these four stages, students must resolve creative tension during the learning experience in accordance with their individual learning style then achieve resolution of tension in the form of meaningful learning (Kolb et al., 2014).

ELT postulates learning occurs in four modes: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb et al., 2001).
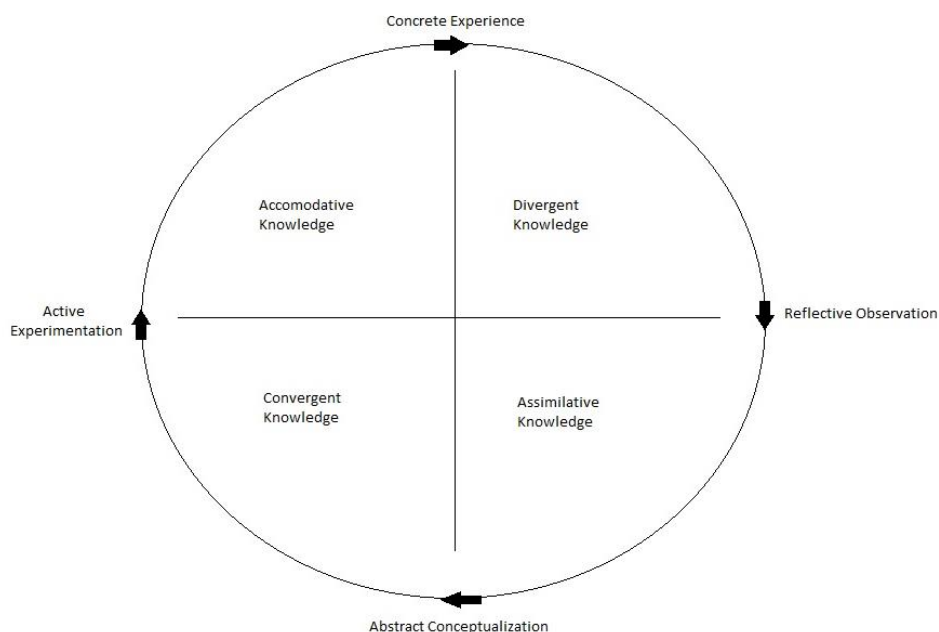
Figure 2.1. Experiential Learning Cycle within ELT (Kolb, 2015).

According to the Experiential Learning Cycle, learning begins with an immediate interaction with a direct experience, described as the concrete experience (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). In this phase the learner interacts with the learning concepts directly through a facilitated experience. Following the concrete experience, a learner must reflect on the experience, deriving new meaning by cognitively transforming the experience (Kolb et al., 2014). New application and implications for the experience occur during the abstract conceptualization phase of the cycle (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). In this phase, the learner assimilates the experience with her own understanding of the content.

From this assimilation, the learner then tests new understandings of the knowledge in the mode of active experimentation (Kolb et al., 2001). Thus the experiential educator may facilitate

experience-based learning derived from application of abstract concepts to real-world contexts, then the learner may make meaning and test new knowledge in a supported environment resulting in new understandings. This cycle repeats itself throughout an ELT-based learning curriculum (Kolb, 2015).

Considering the dynamic learning process described in the Experiential Learning Cycle, Kolb (2015) developed the concept of learning styles to incorporate the individual learning process of students.

Learning Styles

Considering the developmental and individualized conceptualization of the learning process in ELT, it would be incongruent to assume all students learn in the same way (Kolb et al., 2014). In order to facilitate experiential learning, instructors must identify and accommodate various orientations toward learning, known as learning styles (Kolb, 2015). Kolb and Kolb (2005) defined individual learning styles (See Table 2.2), assessed by the Learning Style Inventory (LSI). According to Kolb & Kolb (2005), the basic learning styles are: convergent, divergent, assimilation, and accommodative.

Corresponding to the Experiential Learning Cycle, the four learning styles serve the purpose of guiding experiential educators to create a dynamic learning experience incorporating the needs of various student learning styles (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Kolb (2015) described convergent styles as learners who rely on abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Convergent learners excel in learning environments incorporating problem solving and practical application of content. Kolb conceptualized convergent learners as students preferring deductive reasoning resulting in a single solution.

Table 2.2.

Four basic experiential learning styles described within ELT (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Kolb, 2015).

Learning Style	Learner Strengths	Dominant Learning Abilities
Convergent	Problem solving, decision making, practical application of content	Abstract conceptualization; Active experimentation
Divergent	Imaginative, connection to meaning and values, brainstorming	Concrete experience; Reflective observation
Assimilation	Inductive reasoning, theoretical thinking, generating explanation from experience	Abstract conceptualization; Reflective observation
Accommodative	Action-oriented, open to new experiences, takes risks	Concrete experience; Active experimentation

These students are more comfortable interacting with tasks, facts, and problem-solving as opposed to expression of emotion or social exchanges involving interpersonal conflict.

Kolb (2015) also described divergent learners, as opposed to convergent learners, as most dominant in the concrete experience and reflective observation portions of the Experiential Learning Cycle. Divergent learners are imaginative students focused on meaning-making and values in learning experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). These students are thus able to view problems from multiple perspectives and brainstorm to develop multiple solutions. Further, Kolb (2015) described assimilation style learners as exhibiting dominant abilities in abstract conceptualization and reflective observation. In summary, these learners have a natural talent for inductive reasoning and ability to integrate multiple sources of information into a single theory.

Similar to convergent learners, assimilation learners are more comfortable focusing on ideas and abstract concepts as opposed to interpersonal problems (Kolb et al., 2001). The assimilation learners root all learning in logic and precision of response. Kolb (2015) described accommodative learners exhibiting strength in concrete experience and active experimentation. These learners are action oriented, and adaptive to environmental factors. Accommodative learners deviate from theoretical approaches to problem-solving, preferring trial-and-error in collaborative groups to navigate learning (Kolb, 2015).

Completion of the Experiential Learning Cycle in the learning environment would ideally offer students of all learning styles opportunity to interact with course concepts in a format congruent with their learning style (Kolb et al., 2001). Understanding learners have different learning styles, experiential educators must consider how best to construct a dynamic and engaging learning environment to accommodate all student learners (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). One method of creating an inclusive learning environment is to focus planning of construction of

learning spaces, referring to the learning environment created within the classroom (Kolb et al., 2014).

      Learning spaces. Considering a dynamic and developmental approach to education, educators must match learning styles of learners and create dynamic and engaging learning spaces (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Learning spaces by design consider systemic influences, creating realistic application experiences to help learners develop application of skills and knowledge (Kolb et al., 2014). The concept of learning spaces allows educators to adapt ELT to fit the specific needs of the field of study (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). According to Kolb (2015), use of ELT in creating learning spaces vary based on the topic and major. Effective learning spaces will be genuine on the part of the instructor, respectful of learner experiences, focused on the learner experience, and open to the developmental process of the learner (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Kolb et al., 2014; Kolb, 2015).

The Experiential Educator

      As experiential educators, Kolb et al. (2014) demonstrated different roles instructors must fulfill to accommodate students with different learning styles. The authors postulated educators might respect and accommodate various learning styles by facilitating the various phases of the Experiential Learning Cycle. By incorporating the Experiential Learning Cycle in respect of diverse learning styles, the educators fulfill the roles of facilitator, subject expert, evaluator, and coach. These roles described by Kolb et al. (2014) represent shifting focus between the individual learner and the subject material. In fulfilling the facilitator and coach roles, the educator focuses on supporting the learner in experiencing, reflecting, and applying experiences within the course.

In these roles, the educator acts as a support while the learner directs the meaning-making process based on their own individual context (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Shifting focus to the subject material, in acting as subject expert and evaluator, the educator focuses on establishing a base of knowledge for the learners. In these roles, the educator might model application of content or help learners organize information according to the subject matter as a subject expert (Kolb et al., 2014). In acting as an evaluator, the educator must become more objective and support learners to achieve quality performance in the course and measurable levels of understanding (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Aligning with the tenets of ELT, the experiential educator considers learning to be a holistic process of discovery, requiring experiential application of content in real-world contexts (Kolb, 2015). Within CED, instructors use ELT to create a dynamics and engaging learning environment to enhance counseling curriculum. Murrell and Claxton (1987) stated CED is unique in that student involvement and integrative teaching strategies foster cognitive complexity and clinical intuition for counseling students. The authors encouraged counselor educators to employ the experiential learning cycle within ELT to guide activities in the classroom and foster counselor development.

Giordano, Stare, and Clarke (2015) discussed application of the experiential learning cycle in counseling courses. The authors gave the example of using actors for role-play activities in a substance abuse course, using the processing the interactions with the "clients" to help student develop empathy. The authors also suggest use of process groups to enhance counseling curriculum using ELT. Further, Swank (2012) used games as a means of facilitating experiential learning in the counseling classroom. She emphasized ELT as providing opportunity to support students in developing counseling skills, self-awareness, and self-efficacy as practitioners.

Finally, Ziff and Beamish (2004) postulated that experiential learning through art making in counseling courses offers a valuable opportunity for parallel process during counselor development. These examples illustrate use of ELT in CED, and how counselor educators incorporate ELT into counseling curriculum.

The ELT conceptualization of the learning process with the IDM, including a holistic approach to learning, considers examination of process as effective measurement of learning and thus relevant to the recent SLOs identified in the 2016 CACREP Standards. In order to examine professional identity development and learning through the experience of the small groups required in the Group Counseling and Group Work area, ELT as a component of CED programs facilitating the IDM provides an appropriate framework through which to conceptualize the learning experience.

Exploring Education through Research

Post-positivism was a movement which considered multiple means of observing and considering the world, embracing the natural bias and subjectivity of the researcher (Ashworth, 2003). Embodying the post-positivist approach to discovery, qualitative research seeks to discover the meaning associated with life events (Nelson & Poulin, 1997). Consideration of multiple perspectives, flexibility in research design, and focus on rich and descriptive data lending discovery of meaning differentiate qualitative research from quantitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Snape & Spencer, 2003). Qualitative methods are popular with social sciences, as researchers seeking to explore human experience may prefer using descriptive methods allowing for multiple perspectives and ways of knowing (Morse, 1994; Moustakas, 1994; Snape & Spencer, 2003). One such methodology within qualitative research is phenomenology.

Phenomenology

Social sciences often use phenomenology research to examine human experiences (Cohen & Omery, 1994). The concept of phenomenology encompasses a variety of research methods, techniques, and considerations (Finaly, 2012). Print materials such as art and written stories, or interviews with individuals of groups represent data in phenomenology (Ray, 1994). Phenomenology seeks the essence of experience (Finlay, 2012). The essence, derived from Plato, is a philosophical concept embodying the representation of real and pure experience (DeGrood, 1976; Mohanty, 1997).

According to the philosophy of phenomenology, the essence of an experience can become transferable, allowing for the researcher to gain further meaning from the shared experience through the essence, and can then use transferring of the essence of experience to inform best practices and influence changes in policy (Finlay, 2012; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). There are two basic types of phenomenological research: transcendental or descriptive phenomenology and hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology (Finlay, 2012).

Transcendental Phenomenology

Phenomenology as a concept is a philosophy and methodology originally developed by Husserl, which centered on the importance of examining the experiences of humans to develop meaning (Dowling, 2007; Finlay, 2012; Lyotard, 1986). Husserl's philosophy of phenomenology examined descriptive accountings of experience to derive essences (Dahlberg, 2006). Contemporaries including van Manen (1990), Merleau-Ponty (1996), and Giorgi (1970) carried on the work of Husserl. Husserl's descriptive, or transcendental, approach to phenomenology views the individual as an independent unit within the world (McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008). The foundation of descriptive phenomenology is the goal of the researcher seeking to discover

meaning within a phenomenon by delving into the richness of the experience as described by the participant (Dowling, 2007).

Descriptive phenomenology as a research method focused on epistemology, the nature of how knowledge and how knowledge is developed (Benner, 1994; McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008; Ray, 1994). In order to seek understanding of experience and meaning derived from experience, a researcher may explore the experience of a particular occurrence for an individual in order to gain valuable description and insight suggesting the meaning associated to the occurrence (Finlay, 2012). To explore these experiences, conducting phenomenological research includes consideration of the connection between the researcher and the topic of research (Dowling, 2007).

The key focus of descriptive phenomenology is the objectivity of the researcher (McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008). The researcher, as an objective body within the research, seeks the essence of the experience purely preserved to represent the phenomenon (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004). The descriptive approach assumes the data will be self-evident in that pure description of participant experience will lead to knowledge, thus descriptive phenomenology does not consider preconception or historical context, but purely pursues the essence of experience (McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008; Ray, 1994). Within examination of the description, the complexity of the experience yields meaning with the highest minimization of researcher influence (Finlay, 2012). Examination of descriptive accountings of experience derive essences (Dahlberg, 2006; Finlay, 2012). Thus, focus is on organizing and recounting the description of the participant to derive meaning.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Heidegger was a student of Husserl who criticized the claim that knowledge only becomes evident when the researcher brackets all prior understanding or presumptions (Ray, 1994). Heidegger (1996) shifted from an epistemological focus of inquiry to an ontological approach. Ontology considers the nature and connectedness of existence (Cohen & Omery, 1994; McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008). Ontologically, humans share the broad experience of being, however each person's being is inherently different in the details of their individual experience (Heidegger, 1996). Heidegger focused on ways of discovering meaning through experience, considering the interpretive nature of humans (Ray, 1994).

Heidegger (1996) described phenomenology as a concept of method combining the philosophical principles of phenomenon and logos. Phenomenon is the principle of manifestation of inherent states of being, which come to show themselves organically through the experience of being. Logos is the principle of talking about things, which creates greater understanding to reveal truth. Combining these principles, the result was interpretive, or hermeneutic, phenomenology. Together, phenomenology according to Heidegger (1996) is a means of discovering the lived experience of being, which becomes self-showing through the discussion of being to reveal the common truth of ontology. Contemporary scholars of hermeneutic phenomenology include Gadamer (1989), Habermas (2007), and Ricouer (1998).

Creating a more interpretive lens of phenomenology, Heidegger combined his ontological focus of with the Greek philosophy of hermeneutics (Benner, 1994). Hermeneutics focus on consciousness and experience examining the relationships between experience and the dynamics within the re-telling of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Hermeneutics suggest even the retelling of an experience is in itself a means of interpreting events which have already occurred

(Benner, 1994). These philosophical principles were adapted in pursuit of psychological understandings of how individuals interact with the world (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). Thus, the understanding of the ongoing being of humans warrants dedication of scientific study to explore interpretation of the lived experiences of within context (Heidegger, 1996).

In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher must demonstrate foundational knowledge of the origins and philosophical foundation for phenomenon (Ray, 1994). However, the basis for hermeneutic phenomenology asserts the tenet that having knowledge of a concept does not necessarily provide insight as to the human experience associated with the knowledge (Benner, 1994; Finlay, 2012; McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008). Thus interpretive phenomenology seeks experiences and process of a derived result, not the result in and of itself (Moustakas, 1994). So to allow for the interpretation of experience in context, this approach considers the researcher to participate in the generation of the data (McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008).

In hermeneutic phenomenology, the lens of the researcher shifts from the objective stance of transcendental phenomenology, to a subjective stance (Benner, 1994; McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008). This approach incorporates context to represent the experience in consideration of other factors such as culture, personal values, and connections with other to support the subjective stance of the researcher (Benner, 1994; Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004; Finlay, 2012; Heidegger, 1996; Moustakas, 1994). Bridling is the process of the researcher examining prejudice to make room for focus and inclusion of the participant views (Dowling, 2007). Bridling differs from bracketing used in transcendental phenomenology. Bracketing involves examination of researcher bias in order to create objectivity (Dahlberg, 2006; Vagle et al., 2009). Bridling also examines the positionality of the researcher, however the purpose is to practice subjectivity in

the ongoing awareness of the impact of the researcher lens on the analysis process (Dahlberg &

Dahlberg, 2004; Dowling, 2007; Vagle, 2009). Negotiation of the influence of the researcher and

bridling through reflexivity finds careful balance in the description of the participant and the

filter of the researcher interpretation of events (Dahlberg, 2006; Morse, 1994). For the current

study, bridling allows for the researcher to consider her expertise in CED, but allow for sharing

of experiences from participants in the online focus groups.

Focus Groups

Methodologically, focus groups are a research method inviting dialogue with participants

in a group format through interactions of group members on topics chosen by the researcher

(Basch, 1987; Bogardus, 1926; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Litosseliti, 2003; Morgan, 1997; Puchta

& Potter, 2004). Focus groups as an interview method for qualitative research are helpful for

exploring complex topics and obtaining different perspectives on the same topic or experience

(Litosseliti, 2003; Merton & Kendall, 1946). As a research method, focus groups can produce

data qualitatively different than that accessible from participant observation or individual

interviews; focus groups instead direct information comparing and contrasting participant

experiences and perspectives about a focused topic (Kitzinger, 1994; Morgan, 1997).

Specifically, focus groups offer dynamic data in comparison to individual interviews (Basch,

1987; Frey & Fontana, 1991).

Focus groups are especially useful methods when needing to explore attitudes, beliefs,

and experiences (Litosseliti, 2003). The structure of the focus group depends on the area of

inquiry and intent of the group. While focus groups allow for several formats within many

disciplines, within the social sciences focus groups typically include a semi-structured group

session (Morgan, 1997). The members of the focus group can influence the data generating for

the study (Frey & Fontana, 1991; Goldman, 1962; Merton & Kendall, 1946; Morgan, 1997). Screening of potential group members requires criteria determining if participants have shared experience to discuss in the group (Kitzinger, 1994).

Researchers can use the structure of the group to examine a specific experience or event (Frey & Fontana, 1991). Such group sessions entail a group leader moderating discussion in an informal setting, serving the purpose of collecting varying perspectives on a chosen topic (Morse, 1994). The skills necessary to moderate a focus group are similar to skills necessary for facilitating group therapy (Goldman, 1962). The group moderator builds rapport with the group, and then adapts to the group discourse to support sharing of dialogue to gain dynamic focus group data (Bogardus, 1926; Goldman, 1962).

Ledermen (1990) described the methodological assumptions associated with use of focus groups. First, the researcher assumes participants have enough self-awareness to report on their own perspectives and experiences, aligning with the constructivist perspective (Ledermen, 1990; Neimeyer, 1993). Second, the researcher assumes the participants require the help of a moderator to guide the group discussion on the experiences of focus (Ledermen, 1990). Third, the dynamics of a group offer usefulness in discovery of new meaning derived from an experience. Finally, the core assumption of focus groups is that a group interview is more useful in generating data about a given focus than use of individual interviews. Limitations of the focus group method include dynamics of the groups, composition of the group, influence of the moderator of the group, and group consensus (Frey & Fontana, 1991; Kitzinger, 1994). Regarding the researcher acting as moderator of the group, Goldman (1962) described five requirements of the research process to create trustworthiness: objectivity, reliability, validity, intensive analysis, and applicability to the field.

Ultimately, focus groups as a method offer advantages of stimulated discussion, multiple perspectives, and rich descriptive dialogue exploring the topics of focus (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook, & Irvine, 2008). One application of focus groups is in educational assessment. Focus groups are qualitative methods useful in assessing education and instructional effectiveness (Lederman, 1990). In an education context, educators can use focus groups to connect with the students they serve to define and support best practices (Krueger & Casey, 2000). As experiential reflection often can occur more in a group format than individual interviews, focus groups provide an experiential perspective to shared experience among group members (Palmer, Larkin, de Visser, & Fadden, 2010). Combining the methodological tenets of hermeneutic phenomenology, which entails exploration of experience allowing for the interpretive lens of the research to derive meaning from the recounting of experience, with the focus group research method, which entails eliciting rich and descriptive dialogue about a given topic of focus through multiple perspectives, creates a unique opportunity to examine phenomena through a shared exploratory experience.

Phenomenological Focus Groups

Focus groups are a newer approach to collecting phenomenological data (Palmer et al., 2010). Considering the tenets of descriptive phenomenology, primarily the examination of the description of experience yielding meaning with the highest minimization of researcher influence (Benner, 1994; Finlay, 2012), focus groups introduce too much interpretation from peers in a group and the moderator for appropriate use in phenomenological research (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2008). Hermeneutic phenomenology as a research methodology recognizes a group approach (Palmer et al., 2010). Collaboration and dialogue in the sharing of experiences are inherent

pieces of hermeneutic phenomenology (Heidegger, 1996), and thus dialogue among multiple

participants in a group format is appropriate within a hermeneutic phenomenology framework.

According to Bradbury-Jones et al. (2008) hermeneutic phenomenology as a

methodology, unlike descriptive phenomenology, allows for consideration of the data with the

researcher's own interpretive lens, which allows the researcher to be an active part of the data

generation. According to Bradbury-Jones et al. (2008), considering the co-construction of all

data in qualitative research, a focus group would be congruent with the tenets of hermeneutic

phenomenology. Thus, pairing the underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenology with the

purpose of the focus group method, focus groups are appropriate in hermeneutic phenomenology

research to explore the lived experience of individuals with facilitated contemplation from a

moderator (Jones, 2015). In order to manage researcher bias, bridling in the form of researcher

interviews, co-coders, and use of a clear analysis plan can help practice reflexivity (Jones, 2015;

Morgan, 1997; Vagle, 2009).

Summary of Literature

CE seeks to foster counselor development for counselors-in-training using counseling

pedagogy (CACREP, 2009, 2016; Grafanaki, 2010; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). CACREP

accreditation standards provide SLOs, called KPIs, to guide programs in fostering counselor

development and to provide parameters for gatekeeping (Bobby, 2013; CACREP, 2016). One

specific area of counselor development receiving great attention in the literature and professional

organizations is the development of professional identity for counselors (Urofsky, 2011). In

order to advocate for the profession among other healthcare professionals and to promote

reciprocity of counseling licensure, professional identity became a focus for the 2016 CACREP

accreditation standards for all counseling specialties (Bray, 2014). A lack of understanding of the

fundamental elements of professional identity leave counselor educators uncertain as to the most appropriate means of supporting and evaluating professional identity development (Emerson, 2010).

One specific area of counselor development focused on professional identity is the Group Counseling and Group Work area, which requires the unique element of direct experiences as participants in a small group setting (CACREP, 2016). Researchers noted that the experiential small group was very meaningful in counselor development (Anderson & Price, 2001; Anderson et al., 2014; Ieva et al., 2009); however, further research is necessary to examine the counselor development process occurring through the small group experience. Considering the scholarly examination of lived experience in hermeneutic phenomenology (Heidegger, 1996) and the experiential processing tool used in focus groups (Morgan, 1997), hermeneutic phenomenological focus groups align with a research goal of examining the developmental process occurring within the experiential groups in CED.

ELT declares learning best measured through process as opposed to objective outcome (Kolb et al., 2001; Kolb, 2015). Literature recognizing transformational elements and significant learning in counselor development designate an experience-based approach as best for measurement of professional identity development (Fink, 2013; Gibson et al., 2010). The small group experience SLO in the Group Counseling and Group Work area provides an opportunity to examine professional identity development in accordance with experience-based SLOs. Thus, the literature assembled establishes a theoretical framework for ELT as an appropriate approach for examining the construct of professional identity development.

Considering the literature presented in chapter two, the current study seeks to discover the professional identity development occurring within the direct small group experience

described in the Group Counseling and Group Work area using hermeneutic phenomenology

through focus group research methods grounded in ELT within the IDM framework. In

conclusion, the existing literature provides a gap in understanding of the experiential

development process occurring in a group context specifically in the area of professional identity

development for counseling students. The literature explored in this chapter provides a

theoretical foundation and establishes need for further research regarding the professional

identity developmental process explored through the current research. Having established the

foundation for the current study in the literature, focus turns to the explanation of methodology.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The small group experience is influential for students in the early phases of counselor development (Anderson et al., 2014; Anderson & Price, 2001; Ieva et al., 2009). Practicum and internship represent more advanced counselor training in both skills and professional identity development (CACREP, 2016). Prior to practicum and internship, students navigate the early stages of counselor development experiencing self-doubt and uncertainty while beginning to develop understanding of the counseling profession and themselves as counselors (Woodside et al., 2007). Experiential learning opportunities, such as the small group, create transformational tasks for developing counselors, which are fundamental in counselor training (Gibson et al., 2010). To provide context for the current research, this chapter provides description of the methodology of the current research including method, theoretical framework, participants, and analysis.

Qualitative Research

Exploring a developmental process in education warrants an underlying assumption that learners are contributors to the educational experience; additionally, learners are able to derive meaning from educational experiences (Neimeyer, 1993). To examine experiential learning in CED, specifically the small group experience- complexity of issue, ability to answer research questions, and available resources including time, money, and people should guide the choice of method (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The current research journey exploring the developmental experiences of counselors-in-training requires examination of the learner experience also providing a parallel avenue for discussing experiences in a group context through group exploration.

Consideration of multiple perspectives, flexibility in research design, and focus on rich and descriptive data lending discovery of meaning differentiate qualitative research from quantitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Snape & Spencer, 2003). Qualitative methods are popular with social sciences, as researchers exploring human experience may prefer using descriptive methods allowing for multiple perspectives and ways of knowing (Morse, 1994; Moustakas, 1994; Snape & Spencer, 2003). Specifically, within the counseling field, qualitative research seeks to discover the meaning associated with life events related to the counseling field (Nelson & Poulin, 1997); thus, an inquiry using qualitative methods is appropriate for exploration of the development of counselors-in-training.

Phenomenology

Social sciences often use phenomenology research to examine human experiences (Cohen & Omery, 1994). The concept of phenomenology encompasses a variety of research methods, techniques, and considerations with data derived from written text or interviews (Finaly, 2012; Ray, 1994). As described in chapter two, the philosophy of phenomenology seeks the essence of an experience which is transferable, allowing for the researcher to derive meaning through the essence of experience to inform best practices and influence changes in policy (Finlay, 2012; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). A philosophical concept embodying the representation of real and pure experience defines the essence of experience (DeGrood, 1976; Mohanty, 1997). In pursuit of the essence, there are two basic types of phenomenological research: transcendental or descriptive phenomenology and hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology (Finlay, 2012).

Transcendental phenomenology. Descriptive phenomenology, guided by the work of Husserl, focused on deriving essences from the lived experiences of participants with minimal interpretation on the part of the researcher (Dahlberg, 2006; Finlay, 2012). The foundation of

descriptive phenomenology is discovery of meaning within a phenomenon through richness of the experience as described by the participant (Dowling, 2007). The epistemological focus of descriptive phenomenology requires objectivity with minimization of influence on the part of the researcher (Benner, 1994; Finlay, 2012; McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008; Ray, 1994). A descriptive approach to phenomenology assumes the data will be self-evident as pure description of participant experience leads to knowledge; not considering preconception or historical context, but purely pursuing the essence of experience (McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008; Ray, 1994).

The purpose of this study was to explore professional identity development of counselors-in-training enrolled in entry-level graduate programs within the experiential small groups required for the Group Counseling and Group Work area. Such an endeavor requires inclusion of the interpretive lens of the researcher to examine the participant experience in the small group considering the context of counselor development. Thus, transcendental phenomenology is not an appropriate methodological guide for the current research.

Hermeneutic phenomenology. Heidegger (1996) shifted from an epistemological focus of inquiry to an ontological approach, meaning consideration of considers the nature and connectedness of existence (Cohen & Omery, 1994; McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008). Heidegger focused on ways of discovering meaning through experience, considering the interpretive nature of humans (Ray, 1994). Scholars following the work of Heidegger argued a condition of the connection humans shared with the world is the inherent interpretative nature of living (Finlay, 2012; Gadamer, 1989; Habermas, 2007; Ricouer, 1998). Thus, it is impossible for the researcher to eliminate prior assumptions; instead, researchers must practice subjectivity and use prior understandings to derive meaning (Morse, 1994).

Creating a more interpretive lens of phenomenology, Heidegger combined his ontological focus of with the Greek philosophy of hermeneutics (Benner, 1994). Hermeneutics focus on consciousness and experience examining relationships between experience and dynamics during the re-telling of an experience (Moustakas, 1994). Interpretive, or hermeneutic, phenomenology posits interpretation as part of human nature (Dowling, 2007). Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to explore the lived experience of humans, while allowing for the interpretive lens of the researcher (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). In hermeneutic phenomenology, the lens of the researcher shifts from the objective stance of transcendental phenomenology, to a subjective stance (Benner, 1994; McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008).

The underlying assumption of hermeneutic phenomenology is that having knowledge of a concept does not necessarily provide insight as to the human experience associated with the knowledge (Lyotard, 1986). Thus, phenomenology is appropriate to seek understanding of the experiences and process of a derived outcome, not the outcome in and of itself (Benner, 1994). The researcher considers foundational knowledge and philosophy of the phenomenon of focus, deriving new meaning from the participant experience through the lens of the foundational knowledge (Ray, 1994; Moustakas, 1994).

Negotiation of the influence of the researcher and bridling through reflexivity finds careful balance in the description of the participant and the filter of the researcher interpretation of events (Dahlberg, 2006; Morse, 1994). Bridling is the process of the researcher examining prejudice to make room for focus and inclusion of the participant views through examination of the positionality of the researcher (Dowling, 2007). The purpose of bridling is to practice subjectivity in the ongoing awareness of the impact of the researcher lens on the analysis process (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004; Dowling, 2007; Vagle, 2009). For the current study, bridling

allows for the researcher to consider her expertise in CED, but allow for sharing of experiences from participants in the online focus groups.

Research in education warrants innovation in research design and hermeneutic phenomenology offers opportunity to explore experiences of students during developmental aspects of higher education (Tight, 2016). As professional identity is a crucial aspect of counselor training (CACREP, 2016). To address the current gap in the literature regarding professional identity development and the small group experience, an exploration of the small group experience considering foundational knowledge regarding counseling development warrants use of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Focus Groups

Methodologically, focus groups are a research method inviting dialogue with participants in a group format through interactions of group members on topics chosen by the researcher (Basch, 1987; Bogardus, 1926; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Litosseliti, 2003; Morgan, 1997; Puchta & Potter, 2004). According to Morgan (1997), as a research method, focus groups can produce data qualitatively different than that accessible from participant observation, individual interviews, or other methods. Focus groups elicit dynamic data, which compares and contrasts participant experiences and perspectives about a focused topic (Basch, 1987; Frey & Fontana, 1991; Merton & Kendall, 1946). Focus groups are especially useful methods when needing to explore attitudes, beliefs, and experiences (Litosseliti, 2003).

The members of the focus group influence the dialogue in a focus group (Frey & Fontana, 1991; Goldman, 1962; Merton & Kendall, 1946; Morgan, 1997). Screening of potential group members requires creating criteria determining if participants have shared experience to discuss in the group (Kitzinger, 1994). Researchers seeking subjective qualitative research

around a topic can use the structure of the group to examine a specific experience or event (Frey & Fontana, 1991). Such group sessions entail a group leader moderating discussion in an informal setting, serving the purpose of collecting varying perspectives on a chosen topic (Morse, 1994). The skills necessary to moderate a focus group are similar to skills necessary for facilitating group therapy (Goldman, 1962).

One application of focus groups is in educational assessment. Focus groups are a qualitative method of data collection useful in exploring educational experiences for students to gain understanding of developmental processes (Lederman, 1990). In an education context, focus groups can help professionals connect with the students they serve, and thereby defining and supporting best practices (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Combining the methodological tenets of hermeneutic phenomenology (Cohen & Omery, 1994; McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008), which entails exploration of experience allowing for the interpretive lens of the research to derive meaning from the recounting of experience, with the focus group research method (Litosseliti, 2003; Merton & Kendall, 1946), which entails eliciting rich and descriptive dialogue about a given topic of focus through multiple perspectives, creates a unique opportunity to examine phenomena through a shared exploratory experience.

Hermeneutic phenomenological focus groups. Pairing the underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenology with the purpose of the focus group method, focus groups are appropriate in hermeneutic interpretive phenomenology research to explore the lived experience of individuals with facilitated contemplation from a moderator (Jones, 2015). This approach examines constructed understanding and insight on topic (Benner, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, Finlay, 2012; Flick, 2009). The chosen experiential component of counselor training occurs in a group format. Congruently, exploration of the developmental process occurring in

experiential groups would warrant the use of a group format in qualitative inquiry. Thus, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach using the focus group method represents the most appropriate methodology for the aforementioned inquiry.

Theoretical Framework

Integrated Developmental Model

The Integrated Developmental Model (IDM) provides a theoretical framework to counselor development and professional identity development (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg et al., 1998). The IDM is a theoretical framework integrated into clinical supervision occurring during practicum and supervision during counselor training. However, counselors often receive informal supervision through other influential experiences during counseling graduate programs (Farber & Hazanov, 2014). Counselors progress through three levels of development, growing in autonomy, empathy, and self-awareness (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). One aspect of the IDM is professional identity development, typically manifesting more fully in Level 3 counselors but begins to develop early in counselor training (Eichenfield & Stoltenberg, 1998; Gibson et al., 2010). Early development of counselor identity and uncertainty consistent with a Level 1 trainee under the IDM (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010) may be found in pre-practicum students prior to the beginning of formal clinical supervision in practicum and internship (Woodside et al., 2007).

Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) describes learning as a process as opposed to other theories equating learning with a static outcome (Kolb, 2015). Kolb et al. (2001) described learning as a dynamic process incorporating the individual perspectives and experiences of learners. The ELT conceptualization of the learning process, including a holistic approach to

learning, measures learning through examination of the process and thus relevant to the recent SLOs identified in the 2016 CACREP Standards. In order to examine professional identity development and learning through the experience of the small groups required in the Group Counseling and Group Work area, ELT provides an appropriate and constructivist framework through which to conceptualize the learning experience. ELT declares measurement of learning includes consideration of process as opposed to objective outcome (Kolb et al., 2001; Kolb, 2015).

Integrated Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework supporting the current research is ELT (Kolb et al., 2001; Kolb, 2015), as means of exploring the identity development process outlines in the IDM (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg et al., 1998). Considering the scholarly examination of lived experience in hermeneutic phenomenology (Heidegger, 1996), and the experiential processing tool used in focus groups (Litosseliti, 2003), hermeneutic phenomenological focus groups supported by ELT align with a research goal of examining the developmental process occurring within the experiential groups in CED.

The IDM outlines the developmental process of student, resulting in competent counseling professionals demonstrating self-awareness, autonomy, and expression of professional identity (Stoltenberg, 2005; Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Supervision including individual and group experiences facilitates this process (Seegars & McDonald, 1963; Werstlein & Borders, 1997). Beyond formal supervision, participation in experiential learning is fundamental in the counselor development process (Farber & Hazanov, 2014). ELT outlines the process of learning through experience (Kolb et al., 2014; Kolb, 2015).

In counseling coursework, ELT (Kolb, 2015) provides opportunity for counselor development through experiential learning opportunities, which serve as a catalyst for the counselor development process outlined in the IDM (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). This integrated theoretical framework serves as the foundation for the current study, specifically examining the experiences of students in the group counseling course (See Figure 3.1).

Rationale

CED seeks to foster counselor development for counselors-in-training using counseling pedagogy (CACREP, 2009; 2016; Grafanaki, 2010; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992).
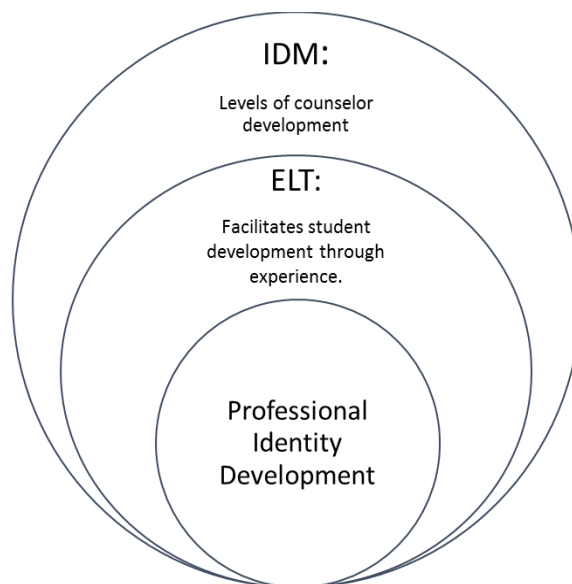
Figure 3.1. The theoretical framework for the current study supports examination of professional identity development as ELT (Kolb et al., 2001; Kolb, 2015) facilitates the development process outlined in the IDM (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg et al., 1998).

One specific area of counselor development receiving great attention in the literature and professional organizations is the development of professional identity for counselors (Urofsky, 2011). A lack of objective measurement of professional identity leaves counselor educators uncertain about how best to measure the SLOs within the CACREP core areas meant to foster professional identity development (Emerson, 2010).

One specific area of counselor development focused on professional identity is the Group Counseling and Group Work area, which requires the unique element of direct experiences as participants in a small group setting (CACREP, 2016). Researchers noted that the experiential small group was very meaningful in counselor development (Anderson et al., 2014; Anderson & Price, 2001; Ieva et al., 2009); however, further research is necessary to examine the counselor development process occurring through the small group experience. Literature recognizing transformational elements and significant learning in counselor development designate an experience-based approach as best for measurement of professional identity development (Fink, 2013; Gibson et al., 2010).

Considering the scholarly examination of lived experience in hermeneutic phenomenology (Heidegger, 1996), and the experiential processing tool used in focus groups (Litosseliti, 2003), hermeneutic interpretive phenomenological focus groups using an ELT framework align with a research purpose of examining the developmental process occurring within the experiential groups in CED.

<div align="center">**Procedure**</div>

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand through hermeneutic phenomenological online focus groups professional identity development of counselors-in-training enrolled in

entry-level graduate programs within the experiential small groups required for the Group

Counseling and Group Work area. Use of technology tools in research offer opportunity for

students from various universities to connect and share their experiences. The experiences of

students in the small groups provided insight as to the professional identity development of

students enrolled in entry-level counseling programs.

Research Question

In general, phenomenological research studies employ broad research questions focused

on exploration of experience (McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008; Ray, 1994). The current literature

offers little knowledge about the professional identity development process occurring within the

experiential small groups for entry-level counseling students (Ieva et al., 2009). In order to

explore professional identity development within the experiential small groups for the group

counseling course, this study employed the following research question:

(1) What are the lived experiences of entry-level counseling students as they participate

in the experiential small groups?

<div align="center">

Participants

</div>

The focus group method outlines invitation and screening of participants who have a

shared experience, common knowledge of an experience, or other criteria (Krueger & Casey,

2000). Students enrolled in entry-level counseling graduate programs experience identity

development through the training experience (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Woodside et al.,

2007). The current study used primarily electronic resources to recruit participants. Prior to

sampling participants for the current study, the researcher attempted to conduct a pilot group in

order to hone discussion prompts in the protocol and test the Zoom Meeting software in the focus

group format. Sampling for the pilot group included inviting students from the master's program

at the researcher's university to participate in a focus group about their small group experience. Despite several email invitations from both the researcher, and faculty at the university, no students volunteered for the pilot group.

After consulting with experts regarding the protocol, the researcher began recruiting participants for the study. The researcher sent a weekly electronic advertisement through the Counselor Education and Supervision Network Listserv (CESNET-L), Counselor Education Students Nationwide (COUNSGRADS-L), and Diversity/Multicultural/Cross-Cultural Counseling (DIVERSEGRAD-L) listservs for five consecutive weeks. Additionally, recruitment emails were sent to 50 program coordinators/faculty from CACREP accredited master's programs asking electronic advertisements emails be shared with students in the program. These programs were identified through the CACREP website program directory, and then by determining the typical sequence of courses in the plan of study and program faculty contacts from each program website. Programs offering the group counseling course in the spring semester were primarily contacted. Additionally, electronic advertisement was posted on the social media pages (e.g. Facebook, Linked In) for 50 state and national counseling organizations.

Screening of participants occurred through an online format using a screening questionnaire form including questions assessing inclusion criteria (See Figure 3.2). Screening criteria were based on self-report. Screening also included a declaration of no prior relationship with the researcher, as she is conducting the focus groups. Student indicating and response of "yes" for each inclusion criteria and declaring no prior relationship with the researcher were included in the study. Inclusion criteria maintained the following stipulations:

(1) The participant must be a student enrolled in CACREP accredited master's program,

(2) The student must have participated in an experiential small group within the group counseling course within the most recent academic semester,

(3) The student must have earned a passing grade demonstrating proficiency in the Group Counseling and Group Work area,

(4) The student must have participated in the course within a location-based program as opposed to an online-based program, and

(5) The direct experience requirement for the course must have been facilitated within the context of the course, as opposed to separate experiences occurring in the community.

20 individuals completed the online screening questionnaire in response to electronic advertisement for the current study (see Appendix A). Of those who completed the questionnaire, two individuals did not meet inclusion criteria. Two participants did meet inclusion criteria; however, the individuals did not provide an email address or name in the screening questionnaire and thus contacting them for inclusion was not possible. 16 participants met inclusion criteria and provided contact information; thus, the researcher contacted them for inclusion in the study. Four participants did not respond to email requests to complete the informed consent and poll to schedule the focus groups. The researcher emailed these participants six times over a four-week period.

12 participants completed the online informed consent. Two participants were non-responsive to requests to schedule focus groups. Participants completed online informed consent and a demographics questionnaire including: program specialty, region of university attended, gender, ethnicity, and age.

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┌────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│           20 Participants Completed Online Screening Questionnaire        │
├──────────────────────────────────┬───────────────────────────────────────┤
│  2 Participants did not meet      │  2 Participants met criteria but did   │
│  criteria.                        │  not provide contact information.      │
└──────────────────────────────────┴───────────────────────────────────────┘
                                    ▼
┌────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│              16 Participants Contacted To Schedule Focus Groups           │
├──────────────────────────────────┬───────────────────────────────────────┤
│  4 Participants did not complete  │  12 Participants completed online      │
│  informed consent.                │  informed consent.                     │
└──────────────────────────────────┴───────────────────────────────────────┘
                                    ▼
┌────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                 12 Participants Completed Informed Consent                │
├──────────────────────────────────┬───────────────────────────────────────┤
│  2 Participants were not          │  One participant was scheduled for     │
│  responsive to scheduling polls.  │  Group 3 but could not participate.    │
└──────────────────────────────────┴───────────────────────────────────────┘
                                    ▼
┌────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                                                                           │
│                 9 Participants Completed the Focus Groups                 │
│                                                                           │
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Figure 3.2. Visual illustration of participants sampling and screening resulting in a total of nine participants for the current study.

One participant had scheduled participation in the last focus group, and was unable to attend the online group sessions due to a schedule conflict, which arose within thirty minutes of the group. Thus nine participants completed the online informed consent and demographics form, and then were able to participate in an online focus group.

Participant Demographics

An equal number of participants were students in either Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) or School Counseling (SC) specialty programs (See Table 3.1). Of the

participants who complete focus groups, four participants self-identified as attending CMHC programs, four participants attended SC programs, and one participant attended a Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling (MCFC) program. Six students attended programs located in the Southeast, two attended programs located in the Northeast, and one attended a program located in the Midwest. Of the four participants who attended CMHC programs, three were located in the Southeast and one was located in the Midwest. Of the participants who attended SC programs, two were located in the Southeast and two were located in the Northeast. The participant who attended a MCFC program was located in the Southeast.

Eight participants identified as female and one participant identified as male. Seven participants identified as White, and two selected the Other category. The two participants who selected the other category identified as "Hispanic" and "Multiracial." In addition to race, participants also had the option to select ethnicity with choices being "Hispanic or Latino/a" or "Not Hispanic." Eight participants identified as "Not Hispanic" and only one participant identified as "Hispanic or Latino/a." All of the participants who identified as White also identified as female and "Not Hispanic". The participants reported their age in the demographics form. The range of age for the participants was from 22 to 48 years old.

Table 3.1

Participant demographic information displayed by category.

Program Specialty	Region of University	Gender	Race	Ethnicity
4 CMHC 4 SC 1 MCFC	1 Midwest 2 Northeast 6 Southeast	8 Female 1 Male	7 White 2 Other	1 Hispanic or Latino/a 8 Not Hispanic

The average age of participants was 25 years old.

After completing online informed consent and demographics forms, participants completed an online survey via Doodle Poll to indicate availability for the focus group. The researcher assigned participants into groups based on availability. Group members represented different program experiences and specialties, which offered diversity for the focus groups (See Table 4.2).

Group one. The researcher scheduled four members for Group One, however one group member had a schedule conflict due to time zone differences resulting in the group member missing the online group. The researcher rescheduled this group member for a later group. Group One thus included three participants. Two participants were students in CMHC specialty programs, and one participant was a student in a SC specialty program. Two attended programs in the Southeast, whereas one participant attended in a program located in the Northeast. All three participants identified as white, non-Hispanic females. The range of age for participants in Group One was between 26 and 34 years old. One participant in Group One was unable to use the video component of the software, and thus participated via audio only.

Group two. The researcher scheduled four members for Group Two, one of whom was the member rescheduled from Group One. This group member had a schedule conflict immediately before the group began and so Group Two had three members. All three participants were students in CMHC programs. Two students attended programs located in the Southeast, and these two participants disclosed they were students in the same program. These students also participated in the group class together. The other student attended a university in the Midwest. All three students identified as female, white, and non-Hispanic.

Table 3.2

Participant demographic information displayed according to assigned focus group.

Category	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Program Specialty	2 CMHC 1 SC	3 CMHC	2 SC 1 MCFC
Region of University	1 Northeast 2 Southeast	1 Midwest 2 Southeast	1 Northeast 2 Southeast
Gender	3 Female	3 Female	2 Female 1 Male
Race	3 White	3 White	1 White 2 Other
Ethnicity	3 Not Hispanic	3 Not Hispanic	1 Hispanic or Latino/a; 2 Not Hispanic
Age (range)	26-34	22-48	25-27

The range in age among group members was 22 to 48 years old. All three participants were able to connect using audio and video.

Group three. The researcher scheduled four members for Group Three. One group member was unable to complete the focus group due to a change in schedule shortly before the scheduled group time. Thus Group Three included three group members. Two participants attended SC programs, and one participant attended a MCFC program. Two participants attended universities located in the Southeast, whereas one participant attended a university in the Northeast. Two participants identified as female and one identified as male. One participant identified as White and Not Hispanic. Two participants selected the race category of Other which allowed participant input of a self-defined category. One participant selected Other, indicating she identified as Hispanic and then selected Hispanic or Latino/a in the ethnicity category. One participant selected Other, indicating he identified as Multiracial and Not Hispanic. The range of

age for Group Three was 25 to 27 years old. All participants used audio and video to connect during the focus group.

Data Collection

This study received approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Tennessee (UTK IRB-16-03018-XP). Prior to data collection, the researcher participated in a bridling interview, during which she responded to the prompts given to participants in the focus groups. A doctoral candidate in a CED program conducted the bridling interview with the researcher. This entailed the researcher responding to the discussion prompts about her own small group experience. The bracketing interviewer used advanced counseling skills and knowledge of CED to challenge the researcher on perceived biases to encourage reflexivity. This interview was recorded and shared with two co-coders, who supported the analysis process throughout by providing triangulation for this study. The two co-coders of the current study were doctoral students in CED who had advanced counseling skills and knowledge of CED. Throughout the coding process, both co-coders and the researcher had ongoing discussions of potential researcher biases highlighted by the bracketing interview.

Screening Participants

Participants completed an online screening questionnaire form to determine eligibility for the study. Qualtrics software facilitated administration of the screening questionnaire. The link to the screening questionnaire was included in the recruitment email (see Appendix A). Once online form was completed, the researcher used the screening questionnaire to select in or select out participants for the focus group (Yalom, & Leszcz, 2005). This form listed the inclusion criteria, which the participant self-reported if she did or did not meet each criteria (See Appendix B). Additionally, the participant reviewed identifying information for the researcher including:

name, status, and university. The participant had the option to elect a statement declaring a prior relationship with the researcher, or no prior relationship with the researcher. Finally, this form required input of the participant's first name and email address, stating collection of such identifying information was for the purpose of contacting the participant for enrollment in the focus group.

Participants selected out received an email notifying them of not meeting study criteria. Participants meeting criteria were eligible to participate in online focus groups about their small group experience. The researchers contacted group members meeting criteria via email to request completion of the online informed consent and demographics form. The informed consent explained a description of the research study, risks and benefits of participation, costs and payments for the study, confidentiality, withdrawal of participation, information about the research, and a statement of consent (see Appendix C).

Following completion of the informed consent, Qualtrics automatically directed the participant to the demographics form (see Appendix D). The demographics form collected information including: program specialty, region of university attended, gender, race, ethnicity, and age. The program specialty options on the demographics questionnaire corresponded with the specialty programs listed within the CACREP (2009) accreditation guidelines. Each category offered options as well as an "other" category to input a category not represented in the choices offered. Participants had an option to respond or not respond to all demographics categories. Demographics information allowed the researcher insight as to the participants in each group, and potential awareness of how demographics may have influenced the dynamics of the focus group. Secured servers kept all forms and data to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Following completion of all online forms, the researcher sent options for available times to participate in the online focus group via Doodle Poll. The poll was set to only allow the researcher to see participant responses to protect confidentiality. The researcher sent email notification for scheduling focus groups with options of various dates and times in order to provide the highest likelihood to allow all participants to elect a convenient time for participation. The availability of the students and the slated time of the focus group determined number and composition of students within each focus group.

Conducting Focus Groups

Hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology requires an in-depth exploration of the participant experience, which typically occurs in some form of semi-structured interview (Dahlberg, 2006; McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008). The focus group method elicits group member interaction and open discussion of the research focus (Kenyon, 2004). Krueger and Casey (2000) describe optimal use of the focus group method outlining use of single-category design as traditional for studies using the focus group method. The authors also suggest using three to four groups to reach theoretical saturation, meaning the data is no longer generating new ideas (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Focus groups seeking to gain insight about experiences warrant smaller groups, with suggested inclusion of four to six participants (Kenyon, 2004; Krueger & Casey, 2000).

As this current study sought to explore a developmental process, with a purpose of discovering professional identity development of counselors-in-training enrolled in entry-level graduate programs within the experiential small groups required for the Group Counseling and Group Work area, smaller focus groups limited to no more than six participants were most appropriate (Litosseliti, 2003). Prior to sampling participants for the current study, the researcher

attempted to conduct a pilot group in order to hone discussion prompts in the protocol (See

Appendix E) and test the Zoom Meeting software in the focus group format. Sampling for the

pilot group included inviting students from the master's program at the researcher's university to

participate in a focus group about their small group experience. Despite several email invitations

from both the researcher, and faculty at the university, no students volunteered for the pilot

group. In order to gain feedback about the focus group protocol, the researcher sought

consultation with two researchers beyond the dissertation committee. The first consultant held a

doctorate in Educational Psychology from a research-intensive university. This consultant had

conducted many phenomenology research projects, and conducted his dissertation about

phenomenology and education. The second consultant held a doctorate in CED, and was a full

professor at another university. This consultant was the Institutional Review Board chair for her

university. Both consultant provided support for the methodology and protocol for the current

research project. Beyond this consultation, the researcher also sought feedback from an

interdisciplinary phenomenology group held at her university. This group provided feedback

about discussion prompts used for the current research. Having feedback from prominent voices

in the field regarding methodology and protocol, the researcher began the data collection for this

study.

   Participant schedules and time zones impacted the number of participants included per

group. The researcher organized groups of four participants, however some groups had three

members due to participant schedule conflicts, especially considering participants were often

located in different time zones. Theoretical saturation suggested a minimum of three to four

focus groups, but the number of groups was ultimately based on sampling response (Krueger &

Casey, 2000). As the current study had only nine participants complete the focus groups, the study did not achieve theoretical saturation.

Phenomenological focus groups employ the semi-structured interview format, using fewer questions and less structure as would be typical in a traditional focus group (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009). The focus group protocol for the current study outlined the structure of the focus group (see Appendix E). Questions in the interview focused on recounting an experience including the participant emotions and perspective regarding the experience. Typically focus groups may include questions on concepts, theory, and historical knowledge to help connect meaning to experience (McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008; Ray, 1994; Smith & Osborn, 2003). The current study used semi-structured interviews organized by a uniform interview guide in a focus group format (Flick, 2009; Morgan, 1997; Puchta & Potter, 2004). Participants at times deviated from prompts, which is typical under phenomenological studies using semi-structured interviewing (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

The current study conducted three online focus groups. Online focus groups allowed for a sample of graduate students from a variety of universities without limitations based on location and resources (Litosseliti, 2003). The researcher used Zoom Meeting software, licensed through the University of Tennessee, to conduct the online focus groups. Participants received instructions to use the Zoom Meeting software and suggestions to improve the quality of the video conference experience including use of a wired internet connection and headphones (see Appendix F). Zoom Meeting software supports video messaging with groups of people to allow for collaboration from a distance. The software included capability to audio record each group session. To protect the identity of the participants, the focus groups were recorded with audio only despite the participants being able to view each other via video conferencing during the

group experience. The transcriptions of the audio recordings served as data for the current study. In addition to the audio recording capabilities of the Zoom Meeting software, the researcher used two additional external digital audio recording devices. Password-protected folders within secure servers protected the audio files. The focus groups lasted approximately one to one and a half hours. The groups entailed reviewing of the informed consent, then discussion of the small group experience and professional identity structured through the interview guide (see Appendix E).

The purpose of using focus groups is to promote self-disclosure, thus focus groups should be conducted with a skilled moderator creating an open environment so group members can share about a common focus (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Litosseliti, 2003). The researcher for the current study also served as group moderator. The researcher has advanced training in group facilitation warranting filling the role of group moderator. In addition to criteria listed on the focus group screening questionnaire (See Appendix B), the participants were required to declare no prior relationship with the primary researcher. Given such screening criteria, it is appropriate for the researcher to conduct the focus groups given her training and expertise in moderating groups. Additionally, the researcher acting as moderator and analyzer of data provides richness to analysis given the researcher's familiarity with the context of the focus group (Litosseliti, 2003).

Once the suggested three to four focus groups were completed to achieve theoretical saturation (Litosseliti, 2003), analysis using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) occurred.

Analysis

In order to manage researcher bias, bridling in the form of researcher interviews, use of co-coders, and a clear analysis plan used by all coders supported researcher reflexivity (Jones,

2015; Morgan, 1997; Vagle, 2009). The two co-coders used for the current study were doctoral students in CED who had advanced counseling skills and knowledge of CED. After the focus groups concluded, verbatim transcription of the audio recordings took place followed by audio confirmation of transcription accuracy (Crist & Tanner, 2003). Hermeneutic examination of the participant context within the given topic of educational development methodologically framed the analysis (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

This analysis process used Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Larkin et al., 2006; Palmer et al., 2010; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA is a cyclical coding process balancing the interpretive lens of the researcher and the recounting of experience from the participant (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). The overall goal of the IPA process was to capture the essence of the participant experience, paying focus to participant language to demonstrate clear connection between transcripts and themes. Researchers have used IPA to examine student learning experiences prior to the current study (Cooper, Fleischer, & Cotton, 2012). IPA facilitates examination of the lived experiences, deriving the meaning of the experiences as described by participants (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2004). Engagement with and interpretation of participant experiences can help the researcher gain understanding, which can inform further knowledge about the area of study (Dahlberg, 2006).

IPA draws from the hermeneutic goal of drawing meaning from experience, and thus is an appropriate method of analysis in hermeneutic phenomenology (Shinebourne, 2011). IPA includes a double hermeneutic, considering first the interpretive lens of the participant as she recounts her lived experience, then of the researcher in the interpretation of the participant experience (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Combining symbolic interactionism and phenomenology, IPA examines the meaning-making process, which occurs through a participant telling of? a

lived experience (Quinn & Clare, 2008). IPA is a cyclical coding process seeking balance between the interpretive lens of the researcher and the recounting of experience from the participant (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999).

The IPA protocol warrants an interview format employing semi-structured protocol with small sample sizes to allow for intimate knowledge of transcripts (Quinn & Clare, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2003). In applying IPA to focus group contexts, the researcher sought experiential accounts of a particular phenomenon using focus groups and thus each group becomes a "unit" offering dynamic accounts of a shared experience, as opposed to diluting the data parsing out the experiences of each participant individually (Palmer et al., 2010). Thus, the IPA process in the current research considered each focus group as a "unit." The overall goal of IPA as an analysis method is to use themes illustrated by exemplar quotes from participants to draw meaning from recounting of participant experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

The overall goal of IPA as an analysis method is to use themes to illustrate the meaning participants draw from experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA may be adapted to the need of the research study in order to best attend to the research question (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 1996). The series of steps comprising the general IPA protocol (Quinn & Clare, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith et al., 1999) were adapted for use in analysis of the current study (See Appendix G).

The process of IPA occurred in a series of steps (Quinn & Clare, 2008; Smith et al., 1999): (1) Reading of transcripts to immerse in the data; (2) Making notes in the margins of the transcripts emphasizing key points in the participant dialogue; (3) Creating a summary list of notes made in initial coding; (4) Grouping of margin note codes into general thematic areas; (5) Re-coding transcripts according to general themes; (6) Following coding, creating a full list of

theme summaries including frequency and location in transcripts; (7) Grouping of theme summaries to broader themes; (8) Condensing coding into broad general themes, noting location of themes in each transcript; (9) Creation of a final list of themes; (10) Dissemination of themes through report of findings using participant quotes to illustrate themes.

The researcher and two advanced CED doctoral students serving as co-coders analyzed the data using the IPA structure described by Smith et al. (1999) noted significant or interesting dialogue within the transcripts in the left margin, and then noted possible emerging theme titles in the right margin. The researcher did not code any interviews until after completion of all focus groups. The coders independently highlighted phrases and associated the phrases with potential themes and subthemes. The coders then met to compare coding and agreed on consensus as to the appropriate code for each portion of text. Then the codes collapsed into themes and subthemes, which the coders agreed upon to provide triangulation of findings. Emerging themes representing within at least two or the three focus groups were including in findings (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

In order to achieve an organized and detailed coding process, technology supports can offer organization of emerging themes and the location of themes in interview transcripts (Quinn & Clare, 2008). The current study used Microsoft Excel software to complete the coding and organizing of themed data, as well as identify excerpts from transcripts to describe themes in findings. Using Microsoft Excel software, the researcher constructed a table with a master list of all codes and corresponding dialogue from the transcripts (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith et al., 1999). In presenting findings according to IPA, it is appropriate to organize themes in a matrix according to evidence in the transcripts including location and frequency of each theme in the participant interviews (Smith et al., 1999). According to the protocol outlined in IPA (Smith &

Osborn, 2003; Smith et al., 1999), a table was constructed with a master list of all codes and corresponding dialogue from the transcripts. These were sorted to identify more common codes, and to collapse similar codes into emerging themes and subthemes (See Appendix G). Explanations of themes should include excerpts from transcripts illustrating the themes (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Close connection between themes and transcripts can help guide analysis to preserve the participant experience and support the reflexivity of the researcher in the coding process (Smith et al., 1999).

Limitations

As with any research, the current study recognizes limitations in consideration of method, population, and findings. Morgan (1997) outlines limitations to use of the focus group method. Morgan states focus groups are limited to verbal and self-reported data. Additionally, focus groups offer limited time for each participant to express their perspective, as well as create data representing less depth and more breadth of information. Considering these limitations of method, the researcher may express less certainty about the accuracy of accounted information from participants considering the influence of group dynamics (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Group member screening criteria based on self-report, as well as the declaration of no prior relationship with the researcher qualified participants for inclusion in the study. While the researcher exercised screening out of participants when a prior relationship became evident, there are limited means of ensuring the validity of the other screening criteria provided by self-report.

Within hermeneutic phenomenology, due to potential bias of the group members, moderator influence on the group, and false consensus, the researcher cannot claim to able to be able to generalize findings (Litosseliti, 2003). It is impossible to eliminate bias due to the subjectivity of the researcher in qualitative research (Flick, 2009; Vagle, 2009). Practicing

reflexivity through bridling can provide insight as to the potential influence of researcher bias, and trustworthiness of data resulted from efforts to minimize influence of researcher bias (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004; Koch, 1996; Vagle et al., 2009; Vagle, 2009). The current study employed bridling ((Dahlberg, 2006; Morse, 1994) in the form of a researcher interview, and use of co-coders in the analysis of data. Despite these considerations in methods, researcher subjectivity remains a limitation of the current study. Especially considering the researcher served as moderator for the group. Methodologically supported steps offered trustworthiness to the current study, however with any qualitative research the influence of the research represents a possible limitation of the study.

Although 20 participants completed the screening questionnaire, only nine participants completed the focus groups. Thus, the current study did not meet theoretical saturation. A final limitation of the method employed for the current study is that experiences of the participants in the experiential small groups are unique. While exploration of the student experience was valuable to inform further research and best practices, assumption of the experiences of other students in other programs being identical to those of the participants in the current study was unfounded. Finally, diversity of the participant sample creates a limitation for the current study. Participants predominantly identified as white females. More diversity in the participant sample could provide experiences from a broader population of counseling students.

Trustworthiness

In using the focus group method, the researcher and/or facilitator should not have previous relationships with participants in order to minimize implicit information not verbalized due to familiarity (Flick, 2009). Disclosure of researcher identity and a statement declaring no prior relationships used for screening participant evidenced no prior relationship between

participants and researcher. All research procedures adhered the 2014 ACA Code of Ethics and University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board protocol to insure ethical practice on conducting research.

Analysis according to the IPA protocol allows for reflexivity of the researcher to lend trustworthiness in themes derived from transcripts. Additional reflexivity through bridling allowed for disclosure and awareness of researcher subjectivity (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004; Koch, 1996; Vagle et al., 2009; Vagle, 2009). The current study employed bridling in the form an interview of the researcher, in which she answered the prompts given to participants, offered insight and awareness of biases and positionality which supported the bridling process. The current study also used co-coders to create triangulation of findings. Triangulation and contextual supports for themes minimized subjectivity and added trustworthiness to findings (Larkin et al., 2006; Moustakas, 1994; Saldana, 2016; van Manen, 1990). Reporting of themes relied heavily on excerpts from participant dialogue, thus providing contextual evidence to support themes and offer opportunities for reflexivity in coding (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Subjectivity and Reflexivity Statement

I am a doctoral candidate in Counselor Education at the University of Tennessee with aspirations to obtain a faculty position teaching and guiding graduate-level counseling courses. As an educator, I value experiential learning opportunities. I use experiential activities often in my teaching. I have completed an entry-level degree in clinical mental health counseling, and hold a national counselor certification (NCC) credential. I have taught the group counseling course, and facilitated small groups within the group counseling course. In my group counseling course, I participated in a small group experience and found the experience to be influential in

my personal growth. I identify primarily as a counselor, although I am in training to teach in higher education.

Reflexivity as Group Moderator

My identity as a counselor could also introduce bias towards evidence of personal growth or feeling a need to find meaning in every piece of data. Having knowledge of my counselor identity, I must be reflexive as a researcher. In conducting interviews, it is important to practice self-awareness. Use of an interview guide will allow for reflexivity, however in examining transcripts during analysis it is important to consider my contributions to the group in addition to the dialogue of the participants. Although some counseling skills are transferable in conducting qualitative interviews, I must avoid conducting counseling with participants.

It is also important as a researcher to allow meaning to emerge from data. As a counselor, I may feel pressured or find natural inclination to make further meaning of participant experiences, extrapolating the experiences shared to be generalizable throughout the participant's life. I may be inclined to deviate from the analysis method or interview format most appropriate under my chosen theoretical method. With these considerations, there are inherent advantages and disadvantages in identifying as a counselor and educator.

Having provided an outline of the study methodology including method, participants, data collection, and analysis, focus turns to exploration of findings.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand through hermeneutic phenomenological online focus groups the professional identity development of counselors-in-training enrolled in entry-level graduate programs within the experiential small groups required for the Group Counseling and Group Work area. In order to explore professional identity development within the experiential small groups for the group counseling course, this study asked the following research question: What are the lived experiences of entry-level students as they participate in the experiential small groups?

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith et al., 1999) yielded thematic findings which included professional identity development and dual relationships. Professional identity was evident through discussion of application of unique aspects of counseling, which aligns with the professional identity development goals outlined in the 2016 CACREP standards. One specific avenue of identity development in the small groups was through parallel process. All groups referenced dual relationships within their small groups, which impacted engagement in the group experience. Dual relationships created ethical conflicts for students, including concern for breach of confidentiality, which represented barriers to disclosure for students.

Professional Identity Development

Participants discussed aspects of professional identity development aligning with the constructs described by Gibson et al. (2010) including: definition of counseling, responsibility for professional growth, and transformation to systemic identity. Participants described gaining a more personal definition of effective counseling from reflection following the group experience.

In discussion of developing empathy for clients in Group Two, one participant described her experience as "trying to figure out how to be a counselor and not just a student because I feel like I am pretty good at being a student, but then having to actually apply the skills that we learn is harder." Additionally, participants recalled discovering through interactions within the small group gaining greater awareness of how aspects of their personality could impact counseling relationships as counseling professionals. Discussion in Group One included the following view of the group dynamics in the small group as mirroring work as a developing counselor.

> The biggest thing for me is that it is not always going to work out the way that you want it to. That is the biggest thing for me, as naïve and lame as that sounds, I mean it would be obvious that it's not going to, but you have to keep your expectations reasonable.

Further, Group Two included realization of struggle with the disclosure of small group members might be similar to the disclosure of future clients.

> So… in group people shared some heavy stuff and me included, and I just think that I learned, you know it is going to be difficult dealing with, you know dealing with clients and especially in group, like emotions and learning how to not get bogged down by them. So, just really I know for me that that is going to have to be something I work on, not taking it home with me. I think being in group really, I mean I already suspected that I would be like that, but being in group gave me that actual experience.

Participants demonstrated responsibility for professional? growth in acknowledging lessons learned from the small group experience, and considering steps to grow as practitioners. In both Group One and Group Two, participants shared the choice to pursue a group outside of school once the group course had ended. These counselors-in-training realized personal growth areas which required further support than that received in the context of the small group

experience. In taking further responsibility for professional growth, all three groups expressed frustration in a lack of opportunity to serve as group leader, as the students felt responsible for developing skills as group facilitators.

Considering a systemic context of counselor identity, participants also described considerations for what the group counseling role might look like in different settings. Participants enrolled in school counseling programs especially described consideration of the systemic influences of a school system in conducting groups.

> I can imagine a group in a setting such as a clinic, say a boys' home, a girls' home, or even a prison… I can't imagine, you know the drama and the emotion? How would I, I would, I would get so emotionally caught up, I think, yeah. I think I learned that. I think I learned that, and I think I would personally… be unable to disclose, be unable to just feel too much of the weight I guess.

Participants explicitly identified areas of professional identity development gained from the small group experience, and described aspects of their own professional identity development of gained from reflection on the group experience.

Participants drew lessons learned about how to lead groups, and how not to lead groups based on their own experience. For example, one participant who had a negative group experience drew lessons from reflection after the semester ended, stating "I need a long time to warm up to people, and so I totally get now if I had a group, I would want to do like ice breakers and things that help people feel safer." These instances of parallel process during the small group experience, and in reflection following the small group experience, represented an avenue for professional identity development in all of the focus groups.

Parallel Process

   All participants referenced some experience of parallel process during their small group. All participants reported at the time of the small group having not started practicum, or taking practicum concurrently. Each group referenced having role play activities in other counseling courses prior to the small group experiences, but reported the small group within the group course felt more "real" than any previous role play counseling exercise. Participants described the group experience as meaningful, especially when students had not taken practicum or internship prior to the group course. The participants in Group Two recalled the small group was longer and more involved than other experiences.

     That was probably more profound, I think, in my mind to see that the group dynamic, you

     know what happens in the one-on-one, but I never seen it happen in a group, and I

     certainly never experienced it, so in that way as a counselor, yes I think it, absolutely, it

     opens your eye to a whole different realm…I learned a lot.

   The group process which played out through the small group experience was opportunity to gain understanding of the perspective of the client while applying concepts from counseling courses. In this, their own experiences as a group member drew parallels to the experience of future clients. The small group included feeling like a member of the group, which felt to participants like understanding the client point of view. All of the focus groups described developing empathy for clients, and developing understanding of their own counselor identity after the experience in the small group.

   Also, participants shared learning from observing the group leader and experiencing group membership under different leadership styles. Participants in all three groups discussed comparing their own counseling style with that of their group leader. In this, participants gained

better understanding of the impact of their facilitative style on clients, and the importance of building rapport. Gaining empathy for clients, and considering future clinical work is exemplified by conversation in Group Three.

> I just remember feeling very judged and when I spoke in group, I was very aware that there were all of these eyes on me, that I couldn't necessarily see all the people in the room watching and listening to me and so that was definitely something that, it was memorable to me and something I wouldn't want to have happen in future groups.

Participants often described the meaning associated with the group experience realized in retrospect. During the immediacy of the group experience, the meaning within the context of the counseling program was not always clear. However, participants could identify meaning derived from the group experience when reflecting after the conclusion of the semester. Participants especially found meaning in the small group experience after beginning field experiences in practicum and internship through clinical supervision, as illustrated by discussion in Group Three.

> I guess it kind of helped me form my identity as a group counselor in the future, because now I have had to do groups since that experience and it really helped me be mindful and aware and what works and finding that sweet spot between complete chaos and lack of structure…so it really helped me find that happy medium as a therapist doing groups.

Thus, the parallel process of experience of processes employed during counseling and reflection of application in the field provided an avenue to professional identity development.

Dual Relationships

Overall, participants discussed dual relationships creating reluctance to disclose deeper information for fear of repercussions within the program, or within a cohort. Considering within

the small groups, the group members were all students from the same counseling program, dual relationships inherently existed. All groups acknowledged the dual relationships among the members of the group, and most had the course professor facilitate the small group which created an additional dual relationship. These dual relationships transcended beyond just the group course experiences for students in programs using a cohort model, meaning the students were in many other classes or student organizations together.

Group Three discussed the impact of small group interaction within a cohort, "Unfortunately, as much as we may have wanted to avoid people we couldn't, but there were definitely visible coalitions, like where people would sit in class, it kind of changed." Roles within the program also created dual relationships. For example, having graduate assistant positions within the department meant labeling other group members as co-workers as well as classmates. All groups referenced dual relationships, exemplified by an example shared in Group One:

> So there were a couple of my classmates that I have known and had relationships with and some of those, a couple of those people, we actually have outside the class relationships with where we actually are friends and hangout and go and have dinners and stuff. A couple of them I am solely school friends with, and then one of the individuals I actually work with as a graduate assistant, Right? So I have got friendships, I am a resource for some of these people, I am a co-worker with some of these people, and I am supposed to act like just myself in here and I don't bring all of that into this setting with me, so it was hard and really frustrating for me because, yes I want to get this group experience but I feel like I have got so many boundaries and barriers because of who is in this group, that I can't do that I guess.

Participants described rifts created between cohort members because of interactions during the small group experience which lasted into subsequent semesters. Other participants described a change in dynamic between students after individuals disclosed deeper information during group. For example, in Group Two, discussion of disclosing personal information included a group member disclosing abuse in the past and how that impacted the dynamic in the cohort after the group class.

> I think it's interesting when that class ended it almost carried with us the rest of the week, so you know it was kind of…of course we had the same thing this is confidential to the group, we don't go out of this group and talk to everybody else, but you know how you are so, I don't know when someone has something so profound to share, it just really affects you really every time you see them.

Whether students breached confidentiality by discussing small group in other programmatic contexts, or confidentiality was maintained the small group experience impacted relationships beyond the course. This was especially true when the course instructor served as group facilitator.

Course Instructor as Group Facilitator

The majority of students experiences included the course instructor facilitating the small group experience. Discussion of the dual relationship within this experience created a barrier to disclosure and power differential within the group. Participants experienced lack of trust and uncertainty as their professor was fulfilling roles of both "counselor" and "evaluator" within the group.

> I had had [the professor] in two classes the previous year and was surprised to see him in this one. He was actually also my advisor and you just… I don't know if there was in

another class an incident, it may have closed me off to him. It may have made a

difference who the instructor was. I won't say I was uncomfortable with him but did I

feel constantly critiqued and judged? Absolutely!

Participants described having the professor of the course also lead the small groups as being

difficult due to lack of trust and concern for repercussions after disclosing in group. This concern

for repercussions both within the program and within a cohort represented barriers to disclosure

during the small group experience.

Barriers to Disclosure

Groups described vulnerability through disclosure as representing full engagement in the

group experience. In all three focus groups, participants described actively choosing not to

disclose personal information in the group. Many small group members avoided openness during

the small group experience, partially because of dual relationships within the group, but also out

of fear of remediation. Groups described disclosure or vulnerability in the group as taking a risk,

calling this "going there." Participants often labeled levels of sharing within the group as

"surface" or "deep," describing the choice to share deep personal details as "going there." In

Group One this was described: "I would ask questions, it's just when it came to me, like if it was

too deep I was just not going to go there."

When groups discussed "going there" and becoming vulnerable through disclosure,

groups described a more powerful group experience with a more meaningful connection to

others in the group than those who chose not to "go there." Groups who chose to "go there" also

seemed to have progressed further in the stages of group (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977) during the

course of the group experience. However, overall all groups discussed existence of barriers to

engagement as a group member, which may have impacted professional identity development.

I was under the impression that in being in this inter personal process in group was to be

able to test out your personality sort of and learn things about yourself that you need to

work on or not know and I felt like I couldn't, yeah, I couldn't be my actual self in there,

I had to be like this other person, my professional self.

Groups attributed this lack of engagement to ethical considerations including concern for

confidentiality considering dual relationships within the group. These dual relationships were

problematic for students due to a lack of confidentiality and trust that other group members

would not share disclosed information in other contexts, representing a barrier to engagement in

the small group experience. While confidentiality is never guaranteed in groups (ACA, 2014),

breaches in confidentiality were impactful to the students due to dual relationships within their

programs.

Several groups shared examples of classmates discussing content of the small group in

other classes. For example, in Group One discussion included the following: "but that is totally

full circle why I just didn't feel safe in there is because later I had class with a lot of the other

people that evening and they were all talking about it in the hallway." Most groups described

instances of feeling unsafe disclosing in group for concern of other group members breaching

confidentiality. Even when small group members did not openly share the topics discussed in

group, participants grew concerned about the impact of small group outside of the group class.

Additionally, participants in all three groups described reluctance that disclosure of personal

information in small group would be considered for evaluation within the program, and concern

disclosure could then be cause for remediation.

'Well our professor even told us, like even in the informed consent it was like anything

you say in group, it is definitely confidential but anything can be used against you for the

program itself, you know we evaluate you each semester. I personally, that make me

nervous you know someone is always watching me"

This concern, and the power differential between the instructor and the students, created a barrier

for disclosure as students felt safer sharing only "surface level" information which would be

appropriate to share in any class setting.

Conclusion

Overall students described aspects of professional identity development, often occurring

through parallel process, during the small group experience. Many participants found reflection

after the conclusion of the group offered them opportunity to connect to the meaning of the

group experience. These included constructs of professional identity developed by Gibson et al.

(2010) including: definition of counseling, responsibility for professional growth, and

transformation to systemic identity. Dual relationships represented ethical conflicts for the

students, in that group members were often other students from their program or cohort. Further,

in most cases the course instructor served as group facilitator representing a dual relationship

including a power differential. These dual relationships created barriers to disclosure, as students

often felt unsafe sharing personal information within the group out of concern information would

impact dynamics within the program, or their evaluation as counselors-in-training. Considering

these thematic findings, discussion of findings within the context of the existing literature, and

implications for practice are further discussed.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore professional identity development of counselors-in-training enrolled in entry-level graduate programs within the experiential small groups required for the Group Counseling and Group Work area. In order to explore professional identity development within the experiential small groups for the group counseling course, this study asked the following research question: What are the lived experiences of entry-level students as they participate in the experiential small groups?

To explore the aforementioned research question, hermeneutic phenomenology (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004; Heidegger, 1996; McCance & Mcilfatrick, 2008) examined the experiences of entry-level students using the focus group method via online groups (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Larkin et al., 2006; Palmer et al., 2010; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) provided a method of analysis to derive participant meaning taken from the small group experience. Themes including professional identity developing including a subtheme of parallel process, as well as the theme of dual relationships which included the subtheme of barriers to disclosure.

Discussion

The CACREP 2016 standards offer programs flexibility in the method of delivery for Key Performance Indicators (KPI) outlined for each core area course. This flexibility supports programs in training counselors, but also introduces wide variety in the experiences of counseling students between programs. Consideration of counseling student experiences in different programs can offer insight to establish best practices when delivering KPIs under CACREP (2016) standards.

This dissertation specifically examined the experiential small group KPI maintained from the 2009 to 2016 CACREP standards. The integrated theoretical framework for the current study included Experiential Learning Theory (ELT, Kolb, 2015) within the Integrated Developmental Model (IDM, Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010) of supervision as context for professional identity development within the small group experience (See Figure 5.1).
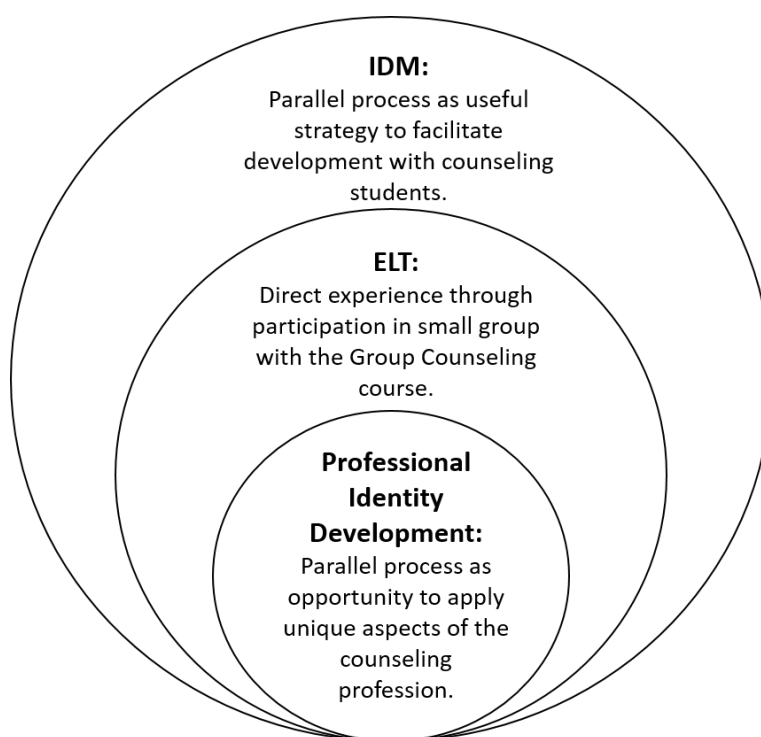
Figure 5.1. The findings of the study within the context of the theoretical framework for the current study including professional identity development as ELT (Kolb et al., 2001; Kolb, 2015) facilitates the development process outlined in the IDM (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg et al., 1998).

According to the IDM, counselors in early developmental stages can benefit from parallel process as an opportunity to gain understanding of the client point of view, which helps shift focus from the counselor's own experiences in counseling to focus on the client (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). ELT provides a process for students to use direct experiences as opportunity to develop meaning from course material (Kolb, 2015). Under the 2016 CACREP standards, counseling programs should promote professional identity development by providing opportunities for students to learn and apply unique aspects of the counseling profession, including the unique ethical code for counseling (ACA, 2014; Emerson, 2010).

Findings

Participants in the focus groups identified great variety in the context of the small group experience, however found commonalities in the group process and experience as a group member. Reflection after the small group and lessons learned within the small group represented the overall impact of the group experience for counseling student development. Findings included description of professional identity development through parallel process, and dual relationships as an ethical consideration which became a barrier to disclosure within the group.

Professional Identity

Counselor identity is fostered through group experiences including the small groups and group supervision (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010; Stoltenberg, 1981; Woodside et al., 2007). Gibson et al. (2010) described transformational tasks as influential in professional identity development for counselors-in-training. Membership within a counseling group can be a transformational process (Torosyan, 2008). The small group experience as described by participants represents a transformational task. Participants discussed aspects of professional identity development aligning with the constructs described by Gibson et al. (2010) including:

definition of counseling, responsibility for professional growth, and transformation to systemic identity. As counselors-in-training develop, the journey of professional development facilitates integration of the professional and personal self to achieve a personal definition of counseling (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Participants discussed development of a personal definition of counseling in the context of groups. Especially in observing the group leader, participants considered their own personality style and values in how they might approach leading a group in practice. Emerson (2010) described understanding and application of the ACA Code of Ethics to be a unique aspect of counselor identity. Participants applied the ethical code within the small group experience, discussing ethical considerations for group member selection and citing the need for better screening criteria for their own small groups to address dual relationships.

In addition, the reflection after the conclusion of the group, participants expressed seeking supervision and group membership in a community counseling group. These actions suggested taking responsibility for personal growth as counselors-in-training. Participants also expressed frustration in lack of group leadership opportunities, noting such experience would be vital for success in clinical settings. Participants considered the systemic role of group experiences in their future clinical settings, discussing types of clients and client settings at play in groups they may lead in clinical practice. Some participants identified client populations or settings which may be most challenging for them, or discussed how groups may be applied in desired areas of practice.

Parallel process fosters opportunity to build self-awareness, independence, and the capacity to experience empathy for clients for beginning counseling students (Eichenfield & Stoltenberg, 1996). Participants discussed gaining insight, often only after reflecting on the small group experience in retrospect after the completion of the course. Participants described focus on

immediacy and being too overwhelmed in the moment for the parallel process of the small group experience to be evident. Supervision provided following practice in group facilitation, or reflection prompts focused on connecting course content to the small group experience provided venues for discussion of implications and realization of meaning gained from the experience. Internalization of counseling knowledge prepares students for complex client issues, ethical decision-making, and development of clinical judgment which characterize later stages of counselor development (Trotter-Mathison et al., 2010). Group members learned from observing a group leader, most often identifying behavior the participants did not want to repeat as group facilitators. Participants in practicum or internship at the time of the focus groups felt observing the group leader and considering their own counseling style in comparison to the group leader was helpful in groups they lead later in the program. This growth of awareness of the counseling profession results in professional identity development including changes in traits, attitudes, and behaviors (Whiteley, 1969).

Reflection following the completion of the course, or reflection journals written after each group session, offered students space to consider the complexity of their group experience and implications for counseling work in the field. This aligns with the developmental process outlined in the Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1964; Kolb et al., 2014). In these reflections, critical thinking suggestive of clinical judgment regarding the ethical dilemmas of dual relationships and confidentiality in group settings was apparent.

Dual Relationships

Group leaders are charged with protecting members from harm within the group experience (Shechtman, 2007). Counselor educators serving as group leaders may experience challenges in this task due to dual relationships. The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) described the

power differential between counselor educator and student. While both accreditation and ethical standards require personal growth experiences for counseling students, these personal growth experiences should include consideration of ethical principles and student ownership over personal information shared in class (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016). The ACA 2014 Code of Ethics recommends minimizing dual relationships among students and instructors within programs. The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) also charges counselor educators with conducting training ethically to act as a role model for counselors-in-training. The circumstances of the small groups within the group courses represent a possible ethical conflict as multiple dual relationships exist with the course, especially when the instructor is the group facilitator.

As participants discussed dual relationships as barriers to disclosure, these ethical principles become a conflict. Anderson and Price (2001) conducted a study examining the small group experience, in which students reported the experience as meaningful, but representing ethical conflicts due to dual relationships. The dual relationships described by participants presented similar ethical conflicts. The unique small group experience represents possible dual relationships for both students and professors. Dual relationships in the small group experience prevented cohesion (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) and created uncertainty for group members.

Group leaders are charged with the ethical responsibility of maintaining confidentiality, however due to the nature of groups confidentiality cannot be guaranteed among group members (ACA, 2014; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Participants described instances of confidentiality breached by members of a group in other program settings. Even without breaches of confidentiality, personal information disclosed within the group impacted the relationships of the students in other contexts. In some cases, creating rifts between cohort members with implications beyond the group course. Participants identified concern for confidentiality due to

dual relationships as the greatest barrier to a more authentic and engaging group experience. Resistance due to dual relationships in the group left participants disconnected with a lack in engagement in the group process.

Group process and dynamics (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) identify disclosure and vulnerability to be vital part of a successful and meaningful group. Students in counseling programs have ownership over their own level of disclosure within class experiences (ACA, 2014). Participants described these dual relationships as a barrier to disclosure within the group. Participants identified the vulnerability of sharing personal information as difficult, especially with other group members being students within their cohort. Moments of disclosure and vulnerability through disclosure, labeled as "going there," participants described as meaningful during the group. However, concern for dual relationships hindered these experiences. The dual relationships within a student small group, beyond representing an ethical conflict, thus may limit the quality of the group experience and stall the group process. Groups progress through stages, which helps to create connection between members and facilitate personal growth (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Considering the hesitancy to disclose information, which builds cohesion among group members (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005), participants felt the group process did not progress as it might in a typical counseling group.

Counselor educators carry the responsibility of gatekeeping (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016). While serving as small group facilitators or supervisors for small group facilitators, the professional identity development occurring specifically in experiential small groups may reveal professional and ethical issues relevant to the counseling profession (Goodrich & Luke, 2012). Participants who had familiar professors as group leaders overall expressed feeling guarded and cautious to disclose personal information in the group. Several participants also expressed

concern information disclosed in group may have impacted their ongoing evaluations as students in the program. This concern for remediation or changes in a student's standing within a counseling program represent a barrier to disclosure for students due to the dual relationships and power differential when the course instructors is also group facilitator.

Limitations

As with any research, the current study recognized limitations in considerations of method, population, and findings. The goal of qualitative research is not to generalize findings, but to gain valuable descriptive understanding of the topic of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Snape & Spencer, 2003). In any qualitative study, the subjectivity of the researcher represents possible bias and thus a limitation to the study. Reflectivity through bracketing and triangulation of findings provides trustworthiness. However, within hermeneutic phenomenology using the focus group method, due to potential bias of the group members, moderator influence on the group, and false consensus, the findings of this dissertation study cannot be generalized (Litosseliti, 2003).

In advertising the current study, the researcher did not offer any kind of participant incentive. Thus the potential pool of participants may have been more limited. Limitations in the number of participants exist due to difficulty in scheduling group members for focus group inclusion. Several participants who completed the screening form were unresponsive when contacted to schedule inclusion in an online focus group. In all three focus groups, the researcher scheduled four participants per group and one participant was unable to attend the online session due to a time conflict. Thus, findings are limited in that each focus group included only three participants. The discussion in these focus groups was rich and provided valuable descriptive knowledge of the small group experience, however focus groups with more members may have

provided qualitatively different findings. Additionally, the current study did not achieve theoretical saturation due to the limited number of participants.

The technology aspect of the study, while providing opportunity for inclusion of participants from different geographical locations, represented some limitations as well. One participant was unable to connect using video, and thus only participated with audio. She was able to see other participants but the focus group members, including the moderator, were unable to see her. The focus group experience for this participant was likely different from others who connected using both audio and video components. Additionally, there was difficulty with internet connection or microphones which created difficulty in understanding the audio of participants. The researcher addressed these issues during the group, however the researcher had to disrupt the group experience to address the audio issue.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this dissertation study suggest the small group experience to be a unique aspect of counselor training among the KPIs within the 2016 CACREP standards. Programs have great flexibility in developing the structure and format of the small group experience, which creates greatly different experiences for students between programs. This experiential small group may carry implications regarding professional identity development and ethical considerations including dual relationships. These implications support use of experiential learning in counseling programs to foster professional identity development. Students as participants in small groups develop aspects of professional identity both through the perspective of a group member, and by observing the group leader. While the small group offers valuable self-awareness, insight, and empathy for the client perspective, there are ethical considerations

which may suggest an outside group experience to be an appropriate alternative option to the in-class experiential small group.

Counselor Education

Implications for CED graduate programs and counselor educators include considerations of best practices for experiential small groups. All participants in the current study had different structure for their group experience representing differences in context. The variety in group context supported the CACREP 2016 standards in allowing programs flexibility in implementing KPIs to accommodate programs of various size and structure. Participants had common experiences as group members despite these differences, suggesting while the context of the group helps shape the group experience, group members gain insight and self-awareness regardless of context. The context of the group does become important in consideration of ethical practice in CED.

Professional identity development. The findings of the current study suggest the small group is unique in that the group member experience is more authentic than role play exercises used for skills development. This creates opportunity for parallel process, useful to foster counselor development with counselors-in-training (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). This parallel process represented a transformational task to foster professional identity development (Gibson et al., 2010). While participants noted the artificial environment of the group, they expressed genuineness in the interactions among group members as opposed to role plays when participants often pretended to be someone else. Through this genuine experience, participants described the small group experience as offering perspective as to the experiences of clients. Participants expressed awareness of the potential ethical conflicts within the group, suggesting the small group experience is a useful experiential avenue for applying counseling concepts such as ethics.

The immediacy of the group experience prevented deeper reflection and so at times the meaning of the group experience was often only evident after reflection following the group. As counselor educators include experiential learning opportunities in courses, inclusion of all aspect of the Experiential Learning Cycle allows for meaning making despite differing student learning styles (Kolb, 2015). Thus, including a reflective assignment or aspect of the group course focused on the small group experience could help facilitate professional identity development.

Participants described aspects of professional identity development during the small group experience, or derived from reflection following the group experience. These findings suggest experiential learning opportunities, such as the small group experience, offer students space to develop aspects of an individual professional identity as a counselor. Group members also developed systemic considerations specific to the practice of group counseling including topics of group member diversity, clinical settings for groups, and the counselor role in the community. Participants gained perspective in observing the group leader and reflecting on the experience as a group member. However, having opportunity to serve as a group facilitator during the small group experience yielded greater efficacy as a practitioner in clinical settings. The opportunity for parallel process within the group experience could offer a valuable tool for application of systemic considerations of the counseling role. This parallel process occurs both in the role of group leader and group member. Thus it is important for the developmental process for students to have an opportunity to act as a group leader during the group course. Participants reported experiencing the group process during the focus group experience. The parallel process in the focus group could suggest online video conferencing as a possible option for conducting small groups within the group course for universities in rural settings or online programs.

Ethical considerations. Ethical standards (ACA, 2014a) advise programs to avoid dual relationships among students and counselor educators within counseling programs. Participants identified dual relationships as being highly influential in the small group experience. These dual relationships are inherent with the small group experience potentially both among group members and with the group leader. These dual relationships carry implications for the small group experience and for CED programs. Counseling programs adhering to a cohort model seek to create a strong bond among students. While the cohort has the potential to grow a stronger bond because of the small group experience, the potential for harm is also a risk. It is the responsibility of the group leader to protect group members from harm (Shechtman, 2007). Should the small group be successful in progressing through the stages of group, the small group experience would strengthen a cohort. However, should conflict be unresolved within the small group experience, interactions within the group carry over into other experiences within the program. Breaches in confidentiality as group members discuss interactions in group outside of the group are an inherent risk of a group experience (ACA, 2014; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). When the members of the group are counseling students, this breach of confidentiality can carry consequences within the greater systemic levels of the counseling program. Counselor educators must weigh the potential risk of harm for counseling students as members in a small group, and consider ways to minimize such risk. In smaller programs, this may be difficult and offering the alternative of joining an outside group in the community may be necessary.

Similarly, professors serving as small group facilitators create issues of power differentials and dual relationships for students. The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) addresses the need for counselor educators to practice awareness of power differentials, and honor student decisions in boundaries to disclosure during growth experiences. Considering the ongoing

evaluation of students during counseling programs, and the possibility of gatekeeping issues becoming evident during the small group (Goodrich & Luke, 2012), students experience fear in disclosing deep personal goals for the small group experience. Participants described fear of disclosing information which might result in remediation following the small group.

Group members may also feel unsafe expressing discomfort or harm experienced with the professor due to the power differential. Students in acting as group facilitators may feel pressure to imitate the group leadership style of the professor due to both the power differential within the group and the dependence upon instructors early in the counselor development process (Stoltenberg & McNeill, 2010). Considering these factors, counselor educators may opt to allow a different group leader- a student within the course, a practitioner from the field, or another outside facilitator to conduct the small group. Avoiding use of a professor as a group facilitator may eliminate some barriers among group members to disclose, which could create a more authentic group experience for students in the course. The current researcher, who serves as counselor educator, would strongly consider the option to allow for a community group experience in order to minimize address these ethical considerations.

Policy. Accreditation standards supported by professional organizations require counselors-in-training to experience membership in a group through direct experience (ASGW, 2000; CACREP, 2016). The findings of the current study support a direct group experience as a unique opportunity for parallel process. This parallel process facilitates professional identity development for counselors. Standards require participation in a group approved by each program, but does not require the group to be facilitated within the program (CACREP, 2016). As such, it would be appropriate to discuss group options with students and discuss ethical implications of dual relationships with students as part of informed consent. Further, programs in

considering the format for the group experience should discuss ethical implications and dual relationships among students and group facilitators.

Considerations for Future Research

The current research utilized Zoom Meeting software to connect with students from CACREP accredited programs across the country. The online focus group format used in the current dissertation study eliminated the geographical barriers for students from different programs and regions to collaborate and connect. Participants overwhelmingly reported enjoying the experience of connecting with students from other counseling programs. Online focus groups may offer accessibility to a vast population of counseling students, whereas location or cost may otherwise prevent interviewing or collaboration. This is especially useful in trying to reach counseling students in rural settings. Researchers considering seeking feedback or examining the experiences of counseling students may choose the online focus group method for these reasons. Specifically, the Zoom Meeting software was effective and reliable in supporting the online focus groups, especially in using the recording capabilities of the software.

Specific to the current research, increasing the sample with more participants could provide a broader view of program practices. Participants in the current research were predominantly located in the southeast. Seeking a more diverse sample of students from various geographical regions could offer a more dynamic view of counseling student experiences. Further research studies examining perspectives of a course experience may consider conducting focus groups before and after the group course to provide valuable insight as to the developmental process of counseling students during a specific course. Future research may also include a measure of proficiency in the other KPIs of the group course to see how the small group experience impacted development of group counseling skills or efficacy in group

counseling. Considerations of identity development for counseling students under the CACREP standards may be examined in comparison to guidelines for identity development from other accrediting bodies. Researchers may also consider including analysis of reflective journals written about the group experience to examine meaning gained after the group experience.

Conclusion

Professional identity development became a focus of research and education following the 20/20 Initiative (Kaplan et al., 2014). The 2016 CACREP standards, the predominant accrediting guidelines for CED, align with this theme of professional identity. Experiential learning offers counseling students opportunity to apply course content facilitating counselor development. The trend of professional identity and experiential learning meet in the small group experience KPI outlined in the Group Counseling and Group Work Area of the CACREP (2016) standards. Limited literature exploring the experiences of students as members in experiential small groups offered rationale for the current dissertation study. The experiential small group within the group counseling course is a unique aspect of counselor training representing a genuine experience for students. The small group experience provides parallel process and offers counseling students insight as to the perspective of a client. This perspective helps counselors-in-training develop professional identity.

The context of and players within the small group shape the group experience. Overall the small group experience is meaningful in the developmental process of counselors-in-training, however ethical considerations of dual relationships and power exist. Findings of the current research offer feedback for programs to support development of best practices in CED specific to the experiential small group. Whereas students may gain value in experiencing group membership with fellow counseling students, the potential for harm and impact on cohort-based

counseling programs may require programs to provide an option for an outside group experience. Students also need opportunity to gain experience as a group leader, and so incorporating student facilitation of the small group is crucial for counselor development and efficacy in group counseling. Considering these suggestions for best practices, themes discovered through the current research support the unique contributions of the experiential small group in counselor development, but also highlight important ethical considerations for programs in implementation of the small group.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Email

<u>Did you complete the Group Counseling course in the previous academic semester?</u>

You are invited to participate in a focus group about your small group experience within the Group Counseling course in your program. Participation in this focus group will entail sharing about your experience in your small group with other graduate students from other programs. These focus groups will occur online, so participation will require an internet connection. Participation in the focus group will last approximately one to one and a half hours.

There is no cost to participating in this study, nor will compensation be offered. Sharing your small group experiences can help inform counselor educators about professional identity development and the small group experience for master's students enrolled in counseling programs. The first step to participating in this dissertation study is to complete the online informed consent, group member screening, and demographics forms. The forms can be accessed using the link below:

https://utk.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3sjUXuFX44VvDdr

Appendix B

Focus Group Participant Screening Questionnaire

Focus Group Screening Questionnaire
Exploring the Professional Identity Development Process of Counselors-In-Training in Experiential Small Groups
A dissertation study by Amanda DeDiego
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Choosing to participate in this study will entail sharing your experiences from your experiential small group in your course meeting the CACREP criteria of the Group Counseling and Group Work Area. Sharing of these experiences will occur within online focus groups with other entry-level counseling students.

The research protocol of this dissertation study requires all members of the online focus group meet certain inclusion criteria. Please review below the inclusion criteria required to participate in this study. Please indicate if each of the criteria are applicable for you. Selecting the box [YES or NO] indicates you meet the corresponding criterion.

- I am a master's student enrolled in a CACREP accredited program
  - YES, I meet this criteria
  - NO, I do not meet this criteria
- I have participated in an experiential small group within the group counseling course during the most recent academic semester.
  - YES, I meet this criteria
  - NO, I do not meet this criteria
- I have earned a passing grade in the group counseling course, meaning I have completed all of the requirements of this course according to my program.
  - YES, I meet this criteria
  - NO, I do not meet this criteria
- My course occurred within a location-based program in a face-to-face format, meaning I did not participate in an online-based course.
  - YES, I meet this criteria
  - NO, I do not meet this criteria
- My direct experience requirement for my group class was facilitated within the context of my course and not in a separate experience within the community.
  - YES, I meet this criteria
  - NO, I do not meet this criteria

The researcher of this dissertation will also be serving as group moderator. Research protocol requires there be no prior relationship between the group moderator and the group participants. In order to be included in the group, you must have no prior relationship with the moderator of the focus group.

Please indicate your prior relationship with the researchers identified below:

<div align="center">
Amanda C. DeDiego
Doctoral Candidate
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
</div>

- YES, I have a prior relationship with this individual
- NO, I have no prior relationship with this individual.

Focus groups will be conducted online. To participate in the online focus group, please provide contact information for the researcher to enroll you in a focus group and provide scheduling options for the focus group. The following information will ONLY be used for the purpose of facilitating focus groups.

First Name:

Email Address:

Appendix C

Participant Informed Consent

Default Question Block

Participant Informed Consent

Exploring the Professional Identity Development Process of Counselors-In-Training in Experiential

Small Groups
A dissertation study by Amanda DeDiego
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Description of the Research Study

The professional identity of counselors has been a popular and important focus within the counseling profession. Given the established importance of professional identity development, it is important to explore the professional identity development experiences of counselors-in-training.

Thus the purpose of this study is to explore the professional identity development process of counselors-in-training enrolled in entry-level graduate programs through exploration of the student experiences within small groups required for the Group Counseling and Group Work course. To do this, I invite you to participate in a phenomenological focus group with other counseling students to share your experiences with your small group. Experiences shared in the context of these groups can help counselor educators to gain understanding of professional identity within experiential elements of counseling courses, like the small groups.

Prior to participation in the focus groups, screening criteria for inclusion in the study was collected. Additionally, demographics information will be collected. It is possible that your meeting inclusion criteria may not result in participation in the focus groups due to scheduling, or available space in the focus groups.

Focus groups comprise of four to six participants, who are counseling students enrolled in CACREP accredited entry-level counseling graduate programs. The researcher will act as moderator of this group, offering discussion guides and facilitating discussion between members. Your perspective and experiences are important and the role of the researcher as a moderator is to provide a comfortable environment so you and other group members can share stories of your experience. The moderator is tasked with protecting the well-being of group members, so if evidence of harm of any group members becomes evident, the moderator is responsible for addressing the group to ensure safety of group members.

Risks

When participating in any group, confidentiality of topics shared during the group experience cannot be guaranteed. While the researcher will maintain confidentiality and secured keeping of documents, audio recording, and transcriptions, it is not possible to guarantee other group members will maintain confidentiality. While the moderator will stress importance of being respectful and not sharing topics discussed in the group with others, it is important to be mindful of this risk while participating in any group.

During the focus group, you may experience discomfort when discussing your experiences. Although I anticipate minimal risk, participants may experience discomfort or an emotional response to sharing their experiences or hearing the experiences of others within the focus groups. This risk is inherent with sharing any experience in a group context, and the moderator guiding the group discussion will minimized risk as much as possible. Additionally, guidelines for the group will allow you to choose not to share experiences if you feel uncomfortable. And, as with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to additional risks not yet identified.

Benefits

There are many possible benefits of be included as a participant in this study. By sharing your experiences in a focus group, findings based on analysis will inform understanding of student development and professional identity development for counselor educators. You may gain exposure to programmatic experiences of other counseling students in other programs shared in the group. You may also feel empowered to share their own experiences.

Findings may shape new understanding of counseling pedagogy and so you may help to inform practices of counseling programs beyond your own program. Clearer understanding of counselor development can help counselor educators advocate on behalf of the profession and further develop best practices for all counseling programs, improving services for counseling clients in various communities.

Costs and Payments

There is no cost to you as a participant. There is no monetary compensation offered for participation in this study.

Confidentiality

All information obtained about you in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by federal or state law. The results of this study will be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researcher will protect your identity in all results. Transcriptions will be de-identified, removing your name and any information which may suggest your identity. Pseudonyms will be used in sharing quotes to protect your identity.

Withdrawal Privilege

You may decline to participate with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. The researcher

reserves the right to withdrawal your participation in this study, at any time, if she observes potential problems or pitfalls associated with your continued participation. You are not required to answer any questions or share any information if you are not comfortable.

The researcher may withdraw you as a participant in this study if you are found not to meet inclusion criteria, due to scheduling, or lack of available space in the focus groups. If you do not follow study procedures outlined in this informed consent statement, for example if harm to other group members becomes evident you may be withdrawn as a participant in this study.

Researcher
If you have any questions at any time about the study or you experience any problems, please contact:

Primary Researcher: Amanda DeDiego, MS, NCC, 3rd year Doctoral Candidate, University of Tennessee, College of Education, Department of Counselor Education
Email: adediego@vols.utk.edu
Phone: 678-371-9265

Contact Information
If at any time you have any questions about your rights you should contact the University of Tennessee Human Subjects Review Committee located at 1534 White Ave. Knoxville, TN 37996-1529 by phone at 865-974-7697 or by email at utkirb@utk.edu.

By signing this form, you are saying you have read this form and that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researcher will answer any questions you may have had about the research at any point during this study.

By typing your full name below you are consenting the researcher to include your information and experiences as data for researcher purposes. By signing this form, you are stating you understand your rights described in this from and are agreeing to provide informed consent to use your interview data for research purposes. A copy of this form will be emailed to you after submitting your electronic signature.

Full Name

Appendix D

Participant Demographic Form

Demographic Information
Exploring the Professional Identity Development Process of Counselors-In-Training in
Experiential Small Groups
A dissertation study by Amanda DeDiego
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

The participants in the groups will be described using the following demographic information. No identifying information (e.g. name, school attended) will be shared. Only the researcher will have access to identifying information. You may choose not to provide any of the following information.

(1) Please indicate your program specialty:
      a. Clinical Mental Health Counseling
      b. School Counseling
      c. Addiction Counseling
      d. Career Counseling
      e. Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling
      f. Student Affair and College Counseling
      g. Other: _____

(2) Please indicate the region of the university you attend:
      a. Northeast
      b. Southeast
      c. Midwest
      d. Northwest
      e. Southwest
      f. Other: _____

(3) Please indicate your gender:
      a. Female
      b. Male
      c. Transgender
      d. Other: _____

(4) Please indicate your race:
      a. American Indian
      b. Alaskan Native
      c. Asian
      d. African American
      e. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
      f. White
      g. Arab

       h. Other: _____

(5) Please indicate your ethnicity:
       a. Hispanic or Latino/a
       b. Not Hispanic

(6) Please indicate your age:
       a. _____

Appendix E

Focus Group Protocol

<u>Focus Group Protocol</u>

1. Review informed consent
   a. Confirm permission to audio record and start recording devices

2. Group member introductions
   a. Do not have to share university attended
   b. May choose to only share first name

3. Discussion prompts
   a. Please share about the format of your small group.
   b. Tell us about your experience in your small group.
   c. Please share a time that stands out to you in your small group experience.
   d. Describe your identity as a counselor before and after the small group experience.
   e. Please share what it was like to share your group experience in this focus group.

4. Summarize discussion

5. Offer opportunity to share information not covered.

6. Thank you and close group.

Appendix F

Participant Focus Group Instructions

Group Number:
Group Time:
Instructions:
Thank you again for your participation in my dissertation study.

This study entails participation in a focus group, which will last approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. This focus group will occur via Zoom Meeting. Zoom Meeting is an online-based meeting software. You will only need a computer with web cam capabilities and a reliable Internet connection to participate. Upon clicking the link for the group, you will be prompted to either download an app if using a mobile device or software if using a computer. You may consider connecting via an Internet cord, as this can often be more reliable than a wifi connection. You may also consider using headphones to minimize audio feedback.

During this focus group you will have an opportunity to discuss your small group experience with entry-level students from other CACREP accredited programs. You are not required to share the name of your program or any other identifying information beyond sharing your first name. The Zoom Meeting software may prompt you to enter your name upon entering the online meeting, please only provide your first name. The focus group will be audio recorded for the purpose of the research.

In order to join this meeting, you should receive an email with a link to join the online meeting. You may use the link found in your email, or the link listed below which will become active about 10 minutes prior to the beginning of the focus group. Should you have any connectivity issues or difficulty accessing the virtual meeting, please contact the researcher via email or phone.

Zoom Meeting URL:

If you have a scheduling issue or any other questions regarding your participation in this dissertation research, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher.

Amanda C. DeDiego, MS, NCC
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Doctoral Candidate, Counselor Education
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Appendix G

Analysis Coding Guide

<u>Coding Guide: Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis</u>

(Based on Smith & Osborn, 2003)

(1) Reading of transcripts to immerse in the data;

(2) Making notes in the margins of the transcripts emphasizing key points in the participant dialogue;
    a. Not all dialogue must be included, differs from use of meaning units
    b. First- Left-hand margin annotate interesting or significant thoughts about the participant dialogue, such as:
        i. Summarizing or paraphrasing
        ii. Associations or connections
        iii. Preliminary interpretation
        iv. Use of language by participants
    c. Second- Right-hand margin used to note emerging theme titles
        i. Capture the essence or quality of the interview transcript
        ii. Concise phrases that create theoretical connections
        iii. Should still be clearly connected to the transcript

(3) Repeat steps 1 & 2 for each transcript;

(4) Creating a summary list of notes made in initial coding;

(5) Grouping of margin note codes into general thematic areas;
    a. Emerging themes listed out chronologically based on order appearing in transcripts
    b. Look for connections between themes
    c. Re-order themes based on connections to each other
    d. Cluster together like themes, isolate differing themes and sub-themes

(6) Following coding, creating a full list of theme summaries including frequency and location in transcripts;

(7) Grouping of theme summaries to broader themes;

(8) Condensing coding into broad general themes, noting location of themes in each transcript;
    a. Create a final list of themes (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999, p.224)
    b. Disseminate themes through report of findings using participant quotes to illustrate themes (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p.77, p.78)

Vita

Amanda C. DeDiego was born in Tampa, Florida, and prior to attending the University of Tennessee was local to Atlanta. She earned the degree of Bachelor of Science in psychology with a minor in music with focus of vocal performance from North Georgia College and State University (NGCSU), since re-branded as the University of North Georgia (UNG). After completion of her B.S., Amanda pursued a Master of Science in Community Counseling at the University of North Georgia. She was part of the last graduating class at NGCSU before the re-branding as UNG. After completion of her M.S., Amanda relocated, with her fiancée and cat, to Knoxville, Tennessee to attend the University of Tennessee, with enrollment in the Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral program. During her time at UT, Amanda supported students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities as a Graduate Assistant for the FUTURE program.

At the time of completion of her doctorate, Amanda had completed over thirty-five professional presentations locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. She had three peer-reviewed articles published or in press at the time of completion. She was involved in leadership as a Chi Sigma Iota Leadership Fellow and Associate Student Editor of the *CSI Exemplar,* as well as the Technology Committee Chair for the Association for Creativity in Counseling. During her program, she developed research interests in counselor development, vicarious trauma in first responders, and creative techniques for counseling and counselor education.