# Career-Decision Making: School Counselors in Counselor Education Doctoral Programs

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School counselors enroll in counselor education doctoral programs based on various factors, which impact their future career-decision making. The researchers conducted a phenomenological research study to examine practicing school counselors' experiences with career-decision making to understand this phenomenon. Ten practicing school counselors enrolled in counselor education doctoral programs participated in this research study. Three emerging themes highlighted the essence of these experiences: (a) intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, (b) developmental fit, and (c) lifestyle factors. The results and recommendations from this research study provide counselor educators insight into these experiences. This research study informs counselor educators about these experiences and provide an understanding for the need to support and guide school counselors in counselor education doctoral programs through teaching.

School counselors enroll in counselor education doctoral programs for various reasons. These reasons may include a desire to earn additional pay from their work settings, obtain leadership roles as counseling directors for school districts, provide consultation services, enhance the counseling profession by conducting research and scholarship (Southern, Cade, & Locke, 2012), or become a faculty member at a higher education institution (Milsom & Moran, 2015). It is evident that practicing school counselors enrolled in counselor education doctoral programs have an abundance of career choices and opportuni-ties after graduation (Hinkle, Iarussi, Schermer, & Yensel, 2014). However, limited research is available on the factors that influence the career decisions of practicing school counselors enrolled in counselor education doctoral programs.

Although some school counselors may enter doctoral programs with specific career goals or pathways in mind, others may experience changes from their original plans. Understanding school counselors' experiences with making career decisions while in doctoral programs can inform the training efforts of graduate programs and help cultivate the next generation of counsel-

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or educators with professional experience in school counseling. Therefore, the authors sought to examine the beliefs and experiences that characterize the phenomenon of the future career choices of school counselors as students in counselor education doctoral programs.

**Selected Review of the Literature**

A review of career theory (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Sharf, 2016), current research on doctoral students' experiences (Dollarhide, Gibson & Moss, 2013; Kuo, Woo, & Bang, 2017; Lambie & Vaccaro, 2011; Limberg et al., 2013), and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs' (CACREP) position on faculty recruitment of diverse faculty (CACREP, 2016) are highlighted and discussed to provide an anchor for this research study.

*Career Theory*
Career development theory suggests that an individual's career development is a lifelong process involving psychological, sociological, and lifestyle factors that interact to influence an individual's career (Sharf, 2016). Through these processes, one develops a work identity and makes future career decisions. Super's developmental self-concept theory focuses on the notion that our career development is a product of the development and implementation of our self-concept (Swanson & Fouad, 2014). According to Super (Swanson & Fouad, 2014), individuals choose careers that allow them to express their self-concept. Throughout one's life, self-concept is continually influenced by internal and external factors, including school, family, needs, interests, and values. A greater awareness of the specific factors that shape school counselors' self-concept during their doctoral experiences and, in turn, their career choices is necessary.

Whereas Super focused on the expression of self-concept, the notion that people both shape and select their work environments is central to the person–environment fit theory. According to this theory, people seek out and create environments that allow them to showcase their traits (Sharf, 2016). Thus, the extent to which individuals fit their work environments affects their outcomes and degrees of success. The importance of trait and environment fit can be seen in doctoral students' persistence in counselor education programs. Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) found that a key determinant in attrition or persistence is student–program match. This match consists of student expectations and experiences, academic match, and social–personal match. However, limited research exists on school counselors' experiences as students in counselor education doctoral programs. Career theory is used to shed light on the lived experiences of doctoral students in counselor education programs and the processes that impact their professional identities and future career decisions.

*Doctoral Student Experiences*
Increased attention has been given to the doctoral experiences of counselor education students (Dollarhide et al., 2013; Kuo et al., 2017; Lambie & Vaccaro, 2011; Limberg et al., 2013). For example, professional identity has been found to be an important aspect of doctoral programs (Dollarhide et al., 2013; Limberg et al., 2013). Dollarhide et al. (2013) highlighted three stages of the professional identity transformation process. During the first stage, in the first year of the doctoral program, participants seek support and affirmation from "professors, peers, supervisors, and other counselors" (p. 145). In the second stage, which takes place in the second year of the program, students observe those in the field and consider aspects of what they would do differently (Dollarhide et al., 2013). Self-validation, which occurs in the third stage, encompasses a sense of independence in which doctoral students feel confident in their professional identities. Limberg et al. (2013) also discussed the critical role of professional identity development for counselor education doctoral students since their identities can stem from multiple sources: counselors, students, or previous occupations. Professional iden-

tity development can be a difficult transition, and it is a critical component in doctoral students' experiences. Our knowledge of career theory suggests that identity may also play a role in doctoral students' future career choices.

Studies on the experiences of doctoral students in counselor education programs indicate that mentorship plays an important role in the development of research skills. Lambie and Vaccaro (2011) examined counselor education doctoral students' "research self-efficacy, perceptions of the research training environment, and students' interest in research" (p. 252) and highlighted the importance of counselor educators assisting students in the research and publication domains. In addition, Kuo et al. (2017) recognized that counselor educators are in a position to mentor and build advisory relationships with doctoral students to support activities related to research (e.g., publishing, conducting research, and presenting) to assist in the development of students' self-efficacy in research. These implications identify how counselor education faculty members can support the development of students in the area of research. However, little is known regarding how faculty can support doctoral students as they make career decisions.

*Leadership in Counselor Education*
CACREP (2016) standards establish that one of the primary objectives of a doctoral program in counselor education is "to prepare students to assume positions of leadership in the profession and/or their areas of specialization" (p. 52). CACREP also requires that counselor education programs recruit and retain program faculty members that are representative of the population. However, Holcomb-McCoy and Addison-Bradley's (2005) research on diversity in counselor education programs indicated that only 60% of CACREP-accredited counselor education programs had a racially or ethnically diverse faculty member, and approximately 52% of programs had no specific strategy for recruiting diverse faculty. Obstacles to the development of diverse leadership within counselor education have included poor recruitment and reten-

tion strategies and a lack of leadership opportunities (Holcomb-McCoy & Addison-Bradley, 2005). Despite the need to increase diversity in leadership and prepare students to assume leadership positions, limited research has been conducted on school counselors' desires to pursue degrees in counselor education, and even less is known about the factors that impact school counselors' decisions to enter academia.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the beliefs and career-decision making experiences of practicing school counselors enrolled in counselor education doctoral programs. In addition, the findings from this study provide an impetus for counselor educators to support the development of school counselors as doctoral students in preparation for their future careers. The following research question guided the study: "What are the beliefs and experiences that characterize the phenomenon of the future career choice for school counselors as students in a counselor education doctoral program?" guided the study.

**Method**

The goal of this study was to provide a voice to practicing school counselors enrolled in counselor education doctoral programs to describe their beliefs and career-decision making experiences. Therefore, transcendental phenomenology was selected as the qualitative framework for this study based on its focus to make meaning of participants' experiences by providing rich descriptions of the phenomena (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007; Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology seeks to focus on how participants describe their experiences instead of how the researcher interprets these experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

*Researcher Positionality*
The authors of this manuscript are all current counselor educators with previous school counseling

experience.  The first author is an Indian female, the second author is a White female, and the third author is Latina.  The first and second authors conducted the interviews and analyzed the data.  During this process, the authors employed epoche, thereby identifying and bracketing their assumptions and biases (Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994) to remain focused on the participants' experiences (Hays & Wood, 2011).  The authors consistently bracketed their assumptions, biases, and experiences to remain aware and cognizant of participants' stories and voices (Moustakas, 1994) throughout the research study and manuscript development.  The authors conducted this process by discussing their previous experiences as practicing school counselors, students in counselor education doctoral programs, active members in professional organizations, and practicing school counselors enrolled in counselor education doctoral programs.

*Participants*

Ten participants were identified through purposeful criterion sampling.  The rationale for selecting 10 participants was based on Polkinghorne's (1989) recommendation that phenomenological research may include five to 25 participants.  In addition, this number was reached to adhere to the recommended sample size (Polkinghorne, 1989) and number of participants willing to participate in the research study.  Criteria for participation included working simultaneously as a practicing school counselor and enrollment in a counselor education doctoral program.  All the participants were working as school counselors and enrolled in counselor education doctoral programs.  In addition, the participants involved in the study represented various regions across the United States.  Eight participants identified as female, and two participants identified as males.  Seven participants identified their racial identity as White, and three identified as African-American.  The participants' ages ranged between 25 and 43 years old, and their years of experience as working school counselors ranged between 2 and 16 years, with an average of 6.8 years.  The participants' number of years enrolled in a counselor education

doctoral program ranged between one and six years.

*Procedures and Data Collection*

The research study commenced after receiving internal review board approval.  Qualitative research methods such as phenomenology identify researchers as the research instruments for data collection (Hays & Singh, 2012).  The methods of recruitment included emailing counselor educators from across the United States to ask them to share the research study with their students, reaching out to eligible participants who met the criteria, disseminating recruitment materials through flyers and emails, and contacting other professionals in the field to assist in the recruitment process.  Participants were provided with an informed consent statement prior to data collection.  Because phone interviews are considered permissible in qualitative research (Seidman, 2013), individual interviews were conducted via phone and audio-recorded.  Video conferencing was not utilized to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.  The participants selected pseudonyms to protect their identities and ensure confidentiality.  The interviews lasted between 31 and 53 minutes, with an average interview length of 40 minutes.  Two forms of data sources were utilized for the research study: (1) a demographic questionnaire and (2) a recorded semi-structured interview.

*Demographic questionnaire.*  To examine the entire picture presented by all the participants, a demographic questionnaire was employed.  Information collected included age, race/ethnicity, gender identity, region, years of experience working as a school counselor, grade level in which the participant was employed, length of time spent in doctoral program, and stage of doctoral program.

*Semi-structured interview.*  Interview questions were developed by reviewing the literature (Hinkle et al., 2014; Milsom & Moran, 2015), adhering to the research question (Hays & Singh, 2012), examining career theory (Sharf, 2016), and following the phenomenological framework for crafting open-ended questions (Moustakas, 1994).  The first and second authors conducted the semi-structured interviews and

started the process by providing the following reflection prompt: "Try to remember a time when you were thinking about your career choice after completion of your doctoral program and tell me about what you remember." Other sample questions included (a) What experiences in your doctoral program guided your decisions?", (b) "How would you describe your experiences as a school counselor in a doctoral program in counselor education?", and (c) "Describe how you would characterize the career-decision making process as you experience the combination as a practicing school counselor and academic.

*Data Analysis*

Data analysis involved examining the demographic questionnaires, interview transcripts, and memos (Hays & Singh, 2012). The data was reduced by hand-coding the transcripts and noting keywords after the interviews were transcribed (Hays & Singh, 2012). Horizontalization was employed by identifying a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements (Hays & Singh, 2012). Next, descriptions of what and how the participants experienced the phenomenon were identified. Finally, synthesized descriptions of the textural and structural descriptions represented the essence of the experiences (Creswell et al., 2007). Throughout this process, the authors consulted and discussed the emerging themes and continued the bracketing process to remain focused on the participants' lived experiences.

*Trustworthiness*

The authors adhered to Creswell and Miller's (2000) procedures to enhance validity by asking clarifying questions during the interview process, providing transcripts to participants for member checking, engaging in continuous discussion with one another and immersion within the data, incorporating triangulation, and employing researcher reflexivity to bracket their assumptions and biases. An audit trail was utilized during the research study to include several forms of evidence (i.e., research study timeline, demographic questionnaires, transcriptions, and memos),

which supported and illuminated how these analytical decisions were derived (Hays & Singh, 2012). The authors discussed the audit trail and emerging themes to increase the validity of the research and findings. Furthermore, member checking was executed by sharing the transcripts and themes with the participants to seek their feedback (Hays & Singh, 2012). This provided the opportunity to co-create meaning with the participants while adding to the validity of the findings (Hays & Singh, 2012).

**Findings**

Three themes and seven subthemes emerged that characterized the process of making future career decisions for practicing school counselors in counselor education doctoral programs. The emerging themes are (a) intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, (b) developmental fit, and (c) lifestyle factors.

*Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivators*

Through the lens of career theory, the process of making career decisions can be prompted by internal and external motivators or beliefs. For these 10 participants, intrinsic motivators in the form of personal traits and professional goals provided career inspiration. Extrinsic motivators in the form of academic role models and peer-to-peer interactions provided additional career guidance for these participants. Understanding the participants' beliefs regarding their motivations for entering the profession provides insight into their future career decisions.

*Intrinsic motivators.* Each of the 10 participants expressed that their early career decisions were driven by helping others through volunteering, teaching, or counseling. For example, Marie described knowing she wanted to be a therapist while she was completing her undergraduate degree, Chante realized her connection through mentoring, Asia discovered her passion for helping others through international volunteer work, and Molly and Karen worked as teachers and then school counselors. The rewards of helping others eventually guided these and all the other participants

to school counseling.

    The participants also described their intrinsic abilities beyond teaching and counseling with regard to other aspects of counselor education.  Marie stated the recognition of her innate draw to academics:

> I love to read; I love to write; I love to do research; I love to explore ideas.  *You're gonna pay me to do that?  That's what I get to do?* School counseling is not focused on enriching that side of me that loves the academic life.

Chante, Lynn, and Molly also described their intrinsic motivation to stretch their knowledge through pursuing doctorates.

    Strong intrinsic motivations to bring about change for not only themselves but also the profession influenced career-decision making for two participants.  Chante discussed her desire to address the discrepancies in education she encountered as an adolescent: "I knew I wanted to do something around that.  School counselors have influence over shaping student identity."  Chante went on to explain that as a counselor educator, she would have the ability to gate-keep for the profession and influence systemic change because school counselors are trained as social justice advocates.  For all participants, intrinsic motivators common to career development, such as recognized efficacy and experiences, led to their career decisions.  For some, the desire to push themselves and the profession as a whole influenced their desires to pursue doctoral-level counseling studies.

    *Extrinsic motivators.*  Participants discussed a variety of extrinsic motivators that guided their desires to pursue doctoral studies and possible careers in counselor education.  These motivators include the support and guidance they received from their mentors, such as professors in their programs.  Such examples included encouragement from master's-level professors.  Asia described this mentorship:

> There's a professor who really was like my mentor, and she was teaching in the program I'm in now, and she was amazing, and she really broke down to me what counselor educators do, different opportunities that are available

which you do through your PhD.

Chante further stated that mentors provided motivation sometimes officially and sometimes on an as-needed basis: "Several mentors; some that were assigned, and some who just kinda stepped into that role in different areas such as research."  Alisha explained that attending conferences such as the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) conference, where she interacted with counselor educators, motivated her to enter the profession.  Karen stated that "presenting at conferences, having conversations with faculty members, those really good discussions about coursework and pedagogy" all led to her motivation to enter the profession of counselor education.

    For as well as doctoral studies are supported, they do come with challenges.  Two participants discussed challenges that spoke to intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for their desires to become counselor educators.  Asia shared the experience of needing professors of color; since she did not have them, she felt motivated to become a role model to others.

> I had professors who were women of color, but I never had an experience with a woman of color who was at a PhD level at a research institution.  And having that experience…even maybe idolizing them and seeing what they're able to do in that position and the strength that they were able to bring to other women of color in the program was definitely an encouragement.  And I was able to see myself in that identity.

Both Asia and Chante recognized their motivation to enter counselor education to be there for other doctoral candidates of color.  Throughout their stories, these participants discussed internal and external motivations with current and future implications for their careers.

*Developmental Fit*

    Goodness of fit between the person and environment, between traits and factors, and between values and job requirements characterizes multiple career theories.  In this study, *developmental fit* re-

fers to the timing these participants expressed with regard to three aspects of the developmental process of becoming a counselor educator.  First, many expressed indecision regarding when or if they would become counselor educators.  Second, the participants expressed various beliefs about how their professional identities as school counselors fit their possible goals to become counselor educators.  Finally, several participants revealed that their time pursuing doctoral studies led them to career choices they had not considered.  Each of these aspects of *developmental fit* reveals indecision or delay in terms of the process of making future career decisions for these participants.

*When or if?*  Four participants, each with different considerations for *when or if*, described themselves as undecided about pursuing counselor education after completing their doctoral programs.  Marie stated,

> Am I gonna spend a few more years as a school counselor after I finish my doctoral program?  And gain some experience before applying.  But that's a really hard thing for me, actually.  And I feel quite stuck on that decision right there.

Alisha expressed the same indecision about timing: "Well, this is something I have struggled with because I don't think I'm done being a school counselor." Alisha used the term *fit* to describe her transition from school counseling to counselor educator and stated,

> It'll be important for me to find the right fit. Because I'm professionally happy.  I'm not dying to jump into it.  Yeah, I think I'm happy to take my time and be intentional in that way too, to see that it's the best fit.

Molly and JP described less open ideas about switching from school counseling to counselor education.  Molly explained her ideas about the decision-making process and stated, "I know that I wanna stay connected to school counseling.  For me, staying in schools would be the best thing.  … And so I think that a lot of us aren't really informed [about counselor education]." For Molly, the ability to teach after completing her doctoral studies is appealing, but aspects such as research are not.  Marie discussed her anxiety

about the timing of her higher education career search.  She stated, "Well, if you don't apply right away people are gonna look at that and think you weren't committed to actually doing it.  People will assume that you couldn't get a job."

One participant, JP, expressed certainty that he would not pursue a career in counselor education after completing his program: "I am a school counselor; I don't plan to not be in the near future…"  Despite his investment in a counselor educator program, JP expressed a fit between his desire to work in schools and his current career as a school counselor.

*Professional identity.*  Participants in this study discussed aspects of their strong professional identities as school counselors.  Lynn stated that early in her counselor education program, "I learned I had to take my school counselor hat off.  And that's hard for me because I very much identify as being a school counselor."  Marie described making sure she timed her experiences in school counseling to obtain the maximum benefit for her work in a teaching counseling program:

> I feel as though it is immensely important for counselor educators to have that experience.  As a school counselor, I was taught by a few counselor educators that did not have experience as a school counselor, and I think there's a lot of value in that experience.

She added that she wanted to have stories to draw from in her work as a counselor educator and that she needed time in the profession to gather those.  Similarly, Alisha stated, "So I'm kinda snobby about that.  I feel that it's really important to have a really solid foundation of experience before you start jumping into counselor ed."  For these participants, obtaining a strong professional identity and real-world experience meant spending time in the profession, which might delay or prevent them from entering future careers in counselor education.

*Consideration of career options.*  The development of career options emerged during the interview process.  Jake described the both/and nature of school counselors in doctoral counselor education programs:

> And that's what's made this difficult for me,

is that if there was a school counselor education or a counselor education program within 30 minutes of my home, this decision would be the easiest decision I could make. I would jump to counselor education in a heartbeat. But there's not. And so that interplays with my decision-making process.

Jake decided to focus on school counseling since he can continue working as a school counselor and he has options other than pursuing a career in counselor education if that is not a convenient option. Molly considered other career options, such as consultant or president of a state-level association, after completing her degree. Three other participants expressed possible career interests after graduation, such as counseling supervisor within a school system. Asia stated,

I'm also interested in being a director of counseling at a college or something like that. So I have a lot of ideas always going through my head, but I don't really feel any type of immediacy for any of them right now, because I am happy where I'm at, as far as my job is concerned.

Asia's considerations of multiple options while remaining strongly connected to her identity as a school counselor capture the complexity of development in terms of timing and fit that surfaced in each of the participants' interviews. For each of the participants, aspects of career fit as they completed their doctoral programs could encourage or discourage their decisions to leave school counseling to pursue counselor education.

*Lifestyle Factors*

Theorists recognize a variety of factors that characterize career development, with the aforementioned motivation and fit being only two of many. During the interviews, another factor emerged that recurs in career development theory: lifestyle. The lifestyle factor means the participants' future career decisions involved personal and professional demands and financial concerns. Both of these lifestyle factors are discussed below.

*Personal and professional demands.* Participants discussed the demands of pursuing doctoral studies that influenced their expectations for working in the field. First, many recognized the potential career benefits of their doctoral studies to their school counseling work, but they found the personal and professional demands to be more than they expected. Six participants described how their doctoral studies enhanced their professional identities while practicing as school counselors, including opportunities to connect with others at the state and national levels. Participants described their experiences as transformative both professionally and personally, giving them the best of both worlds and increased effectiveness as school counselors.

However, participants described the sacrifices they faced as they progressed through their programs and considered the next steps in their careers. Chante described the increased level of coursework, reading, and demands of the program and how these affected her life as she attempted to balance doctoral work and school counseling. Jake stated that the demands of the program could be consuming, but he was quick to add that his biggest lifestyle consideration was his family. Karen said that she felt more effective in her job but that she could not fully enjoy the lifestyle of a doctoral candidate since she worked full-time as a school counselor.

Full-time school counselors in doctoral programs are often unable to fully commit to the professional development available in their doctoral studies. This sacrifice creates tension. Two participants, Asia and Alisha, expounded on this sentiment. Asia described limitations in attending events by discussing "mid-week conferences that we just can't leave for." Although Alisha noted that her doctoral program increased her knowledge and skills in multiple ways, including social justice interventions, she stated, "I'm tired of it [the demands of the program]. It's so much personal sacrifice." Each of these participants described their experiences holding the combined roles of school counselor and doctoral student as being fraught with personal and professional sacrifices that

led to their decreased motivation to pursue counselor education as a future career.

Many participants stated that taking a counselor educator role would lead to demands beyond their abilities, desires, or current professional stability. Valerie stated,

> Like in my position at my school, I'm kind of up there with the holy trinity, with the principal. It's principal, assistant principal, and then it's me. ... And I have an excellent relationship with my admin, and I do some other leadership roles in the district.

Valerie recognized that the transition to counselor educator could mean a loss of leadership. Lynn expressed that taking a step backwards from leader to junior faculty could be a concern and that the increased demands and sacrifices expected from those on a tenure track could mean additional lifestyle sacrifices.

*Financial concerns.* Financial concerns also affect the decision to transition from school counseling to counselor education. Participants' financial concerns while in the doctoral program and in their future careers were identified as factors impacting their career decision making. Karen, who expressed a strong commitment to transitioning to counselor education, stated, "I could continue to work in the school system, and just have a higher degree and more knowledge and be better at my job." Valerie mentioned that leaving school counseling and going into counselor education could mean a loss of leadership and the likelihood of a pay cut. She discussed the lifestyle factor associated with a career that requires 10 months each year, whereas she believed she would need to dedicate 12 months of her time each year to have a successful career in counselor education. In the school or P–12 setting, school counselors usually work 10-month contracts. When considering making the transition to counselor education, school counselors often report that to make the same salary in the higher education setting, they would need to work the 10-month academic year and teach for two months in the summer to make the same salary as they did in the school setting. Furthermore, she discussed considering her family

when making career decisions. She stated, "But the biggest thing for me is I want to do what I love, but I don't want it to impact my family or my financial obligations… [or] worry about how I'm gonna pay my bills." Valerie went on to say,

> I think that if we want good educators, we need to find a way to recruit them and to encourage them. And finances are a big issue, especially for people that have experience. And again, all these jobs that I'm looking at, they want you to be licensed, they want you to have experience. Not just teaching, but professional experience in the field. And if you're asking all these things, then you really need to offer something for it. Yeah, that's what I think.

Lifestyle factors such as the tensions that arise when taking a role as a doctoral student and a practicing school counselor as well as possible steps back in terms of status and salary lead to strong hesitations towards future careers for school counseling doctoral students as they consider transitioning into counselor education.

**Discussion**

The need for qualified, experienced school counselor educators is expected to increase (Isaacs & Sabella, 2013). As previously noted, career development is a lifelong process involving psychological, sociological, and lifestyle factors that interact to influence an individual's career (Sharf, 2016). Counselor educators are likely to benefit from the experiences of participants who share their ideas about enrolling in doctoral counselor education programs and the decisions they make regarding their careers after completing their degrees.

Several participants described how psychological and social factors served as both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators for entering counselor education as a career. Psychological factors included personal traits, such as a desire to help others, perceptions about intrinsic abilities, self-fulfillment, and a drive for learning. Such factors are consistent with the person–environment fit theory (Swanson &

Fouad, 2014), which suggests that individuals seek out environments that allow them to showcase their traits. A doctoral program allowed the participants to showcase personal traits in ways that their current positions as school counselors could not. These findings indicate that once in doctoral programs, students may need further support to connect their personal traits to careers in counselor education.

Social factors appear to affect not only doctoral students' professional identities but also their career-decision making. According to these doctoral students, participation in activities related to the professional role of counselor educators influenced their desires to pursue careers in counselor education. This is consistent with findings suggesting that sociological factors, such as cohort models and support from mentors, serve as extrinsic motivators for students in their doctoral studies (Kuo et al., 2017). The absence of racially and ethnically diverse faculty who could serve as mentors was an external motivator for two participants. These individuals used such challenges as motivation for changing the negative sociological factors that could impede future doctoral students. These results are similar to the social factors found in stages one and two of doctoral students' identity transformations (Dollarhide et al., 2013). The participants reported that they sought support and affirmation from professors, peers, mentors, and other counselors (stage 1) and considered aspects of what they would do differently (stage 2).

Professional identity appears to play a critical role in doctoral students' career-decision making. Participants described how their professional identities as school counselors played a role in their decision to pursue doctoral degrees. Super theorized that individuals choose careers that allow them to express their self-concept (Swanson & Fouad, 2014). Similarly, counselor education literature notes the importance of a strong professional identity in doctoral students with regard to their career roles of educating and mentoring counselors in training (CACREP, 2016; Dollarhide et al., 2013). One's self-concept and identity help answer the questions "Who am I?" and "How do I fit

in?" Counselor education programs can help doctoral students answer these questions by exposing them to counselor educators who are former school counselors. Counselor educators can share with doctoral students how their identities transformed from school counselors to school counselor educators, including similarities and differences in the two roles. Lastly, counselor education programs can help doctoral students develop counselor educator identities by involving them in the teaching and curriculum development of master's-level school counseling courses and school counseling-related research.

## Limitations

The limitations identified in this research study include the lack of a diverse sample and regional representation. The majority of the participants identified as White women, which could indicate that most of the experiences described in this manuscript highlighted the phenomena in terms of their experiences. Second, representation of school counselors as doctoral students from across the nation was desired for the sample; however, based on the research criteria and participants' willingness to participate in the research study, an ideal representative sample was not achieved.

## Implications and Future Research

The importance of diversity and representation in counselor education faculty is a key factor valued by doctoral students. As mentioned by participants in this research study, representation of faculty of color was imperative, influencing several students' career-decision making. Furthermore, CACREP's (2016) standards address and inform counselor education programs' need to hire and retain diverse faculty members. Therefore, it is critical that counselor education programs remain cognizant that CACREP requires a diverse faculty and that students have access to diverse faculty as a vital component of their doc-

toral experiences.  It is important to conduct further research on the experiences of practicing school counselors of color in counselor education doctoral programs, especially considering that the counselor education field underscores the value of diversity (Lerma, Zamarripa, Oliver, & Vela, 2015; Zeligman, Prescod, & Green, 2015).

Counselor education doctoral programs and faculty should be cognizant of factors impacting school counselors' decisions to enter higher education as a career.  Understanding these factors is imperative to attract and retain school counselors as counselor educators.  As the participants of this research study indicated, reduction of income was a deterrent; therefore, they would consider continuing to work as school counselors to gain pay raises and perhaps teach some courses on the side or seek faculty positions in the future.  Counselor education programs that want to hire experienced school counselors as counselor educators would benefit from reexamining faculty salaries.  Future studies are needed to examine factors based on income that influence school counselors as they decide to seek faculty positions and what higher education institutions should consider with regard to salaries when seeking applicants with school counseling experience.

## Conclusion

The findings from this research study call for counselor educators to support school counselors enrolled in doctoral programs as they make future career decisions.  This includes offering support in areas such as teaching, mentorship, and advising (Kuo et al., 2017).  By recognizing how professional identity, developmental fit, lifestyle factors, and extrinsic and intrinsic motivators influence future career-decision making, counselor educators can facilitate open conversations pertaining to the needs of practicing school counselors enrolled in their doctoral program

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