The Relationship between Empathy and Theoretical Orientation of Counselors-in-training

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between theoretical orientation and empathy levels of a group of 166 counselors-in-training. Participants' responses to the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) and the Theoretical Evaluation Self-Test (TEST) were collected and analyzed. Only individual items from the TEQ were found to have a relationship with the theoretical orientation inclination responses on the TEST. However, a trend between humanistic theories and counselors-in-training theoretical orientation inclination seems to exist. The study concluded that counselors-in-training might need to develop self-awareness before selecting a theoretical orientation that fit. Incongruences were found between theoretical orientation selected in the demographic questionnaire and the results of the TEST. Implications for counselor educators and future research recommendations are discussed.

Keywords

counselors-in-training, empathy, theoretical orientation, and theoretical orientation selection

Author's Notes

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The process of selecting a theoretical orientation can be overwhelming for counselors-in-training (Fall, Holden, & Marquis, 2010; Hrovat & Luke, 2016; Sumari, Adibah, Mohamad, & Ping, 2009), as more than 400 counseling theories have been developed (Chan, 2008; Freeman, Hayes, Kuch, & Taub, 2011; Melchert, 2013; Reichenberg & Seligman, 2016). This process can be particularly challenging considering the multitude of interactive variables that can influence counselors-in-training to select a particular theoretical orientation (Boswell, Castonguay, & Pincus, 2009; Buckman & Baker, 2010; Fitzpatrick, Kovalak, & Weaver, 2010; Hrovat & Luke, 2016; Tartakovsky & Kovardinsky, 2013). According to various studies one variable that influences theoretical orientation selection is the counselor's personality traits (Belviso & Gaubatz, 2013; Buckman & Baker, 2010; Ciorbea & Nedelcea, 2012; Demir & Gazioglu, 2017; Freeman et al., 2011; Ivtzan, Redman, & Gardner, 2012; Sumari et al., 2009). Counselor's personality traits have been associated with theoretical orientation selection (Heinonen & Orlinsky, 2013; Sumari et al., 2009). Research has demonstrated that counselors tend to select a theoretical orientation that may match their personality and worldviews (Smith, Leeming, & Burr, 2015; Varlami & Bayne, 2007). Also, when a theoretical orientation that matches personality traits is selected, it helps counselors to maintain congruency with worldviews and beliefs (Freeman et al., 2007; Ogunfowora & Drapeau, 2008).

Why the Relationship between Theoretical Orientation and Empathy?

Matching theoretical orientation with personality traits can influence counselors-in-training's views about clients, therapeutic process, and counseling career satisfaction (Petko, Kendrick, & Young, 2016; Ogunfowora & Drapeau, 2008). Interestingly, counseling research supports the idea that when counselors select a theoretical orientation that is congruent with their personality traits, it prevents discontent with the counseling profession and increases retention of

professionals in the counseling field (Belviso & Gaubatz, 2013; Sharf, 2016; Truscott, 2010; Varlami & Bayne, 2007). Various studies have examined the need, the importance, and the benefits of developing a theoretical orientation during training years (Demir & Gazioglu, 2012, 2017; Fall et al., 2010; Hrovat & Luke, 2016; Melchert, 2013; Petko et al., 2016).

While theoretical orientation selection is seen as an essential aspect of counselors-in-training's development (Boswell et al., 2009; Demir & Gazioglu, 2017; Southern & Devlin, 2010), there is a research gap on the topic. Perhaps a need exists for counseling researchers to conduct a more in-depth exploration of how counselors-in-training select a theoretical orientation that matches their personality, starting with specific elements involving personality traits. For instances, the counseling literature lacks research on the relationship between the personality trait empathy (Altmann, 2013) and theoretical orientation selection of counselors-in-training. Since theoretical orientation selection is an essential part of professional development (Petko et al., 2016) increasing research on its relationship with empathy could make it easier for counselors-in-training to select an ideal theoretical orientation (Chan, 2008; Clark, 2004, 2014; Ivtzan et al., 2012). However, no research was found on the relationship between empathy and theoretical orientation selection of counselors-in-training.

First, empathy is the way therapist understand the clients' world, viewing it from the inside but making sure distance is maintained to avoid mixing personal thoughts and feelings and safeguarding client's and therapist's own beliefs (Rogers 1975; Ivey, D'Andrea, Bradford-Ivey, & Simek-Morgan, 2002). Second, empathy has been researched across theoretical approaches as an aspect that influences the development of a compassionate, trustworthy therapeutic relationship, help in the attainment of positive therapeutic outcomes and helps in regulating sensitivity to clients' emotions (Clark, 2010, 2014; Elliott, Bohart, Greenberg, & Watson, 2011;

Moyer & Miller, 2013). The importance of empathy in the many areas of the counseling process, and specific theoretical approaches have been established (Clark, 2010, 2014; Elliot et al., 2011; Ivtzan et al., 2012; Moyer & Miller, 2013; Rogers, 1975). Most recent research studies have examined the meaning, the perception, and the importance of empathy (Carlozzi, Bull, Stein, Ray, & Barnes, 2002; Clark, 2010, 2016; Elliott et al., 2011; Feller & Cottone, 2003). However, how empathy relates to theoretical orientation selection has not grasped the attention of counseling researchers over more than a decade. The only study found on the topic was research performed by Fischer, Paveza, Kickertz, Hubbard, and Grayston (1975) that did not generate a significant relationship between empathy and the therapists' theoretical orientation. After Fischer et al. (1975) study Arthur (2001) commented in his study that if personality traits were not understood, it would be difficult to comprehend how to select and develop a theoretical orientation.

The relationship between the personality trait of empathy and theoretical orientation selection is a topic that counselors-in-training should be aware of because empathy has been recognized among many theoretical approaches (Clark, 2010, 2014). Research on the relationship between empathy and theoretical orientation selection could help counselor educators to assist counselors-in-training to identify with a particular theoretical orientation. In their study, Demir and Gazioglu (2017) suggested that during training some counseling programs put too much attention on basic counseling skills and not on the need of identifying with a particular counseling theory. New research on this topic could help counselors-in-training to become cognizant of how empathy relates to counseling theories, with the idea of understanding how to create congruency between themselves and theoretical orientation selected (Buckman & Barker, 2010; Freeman et al., 2011; Ogunfowora & Drapeau, 2008).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between empathy and theoretical orientation of counselors-in-training, using instruments that measured worldviews, beliefs, and empathy levels. In this study, the researcher tested the following research questions: (a) What is the relationship between empathy and theoretical orientation selection among counselors-in-training?; (b) What variables in the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) are associated with theoretical orientation selection of counselors-in-training?; (c) Can high levels of empathy in the TEQ assessment predict counselors-in-training's theoretical orientation?; (d) What elements derived from the TEQ have high frequencies among counselors-in-training's responses?

Method

A quantitative approach was used to examine empathy and its relationship with these theoretical schools of thought: psychodynamic, biological, family therapy, ecosystems, cognitive, pragmatic, and humanistic. The mentioned theoretical approaches were addressed because they are commonly used in most counseling literature, in counselor training, and in counselor national testing (Halbur & Halbur, 2011; Sharf, 2016). These counseling theories also provide direction, integration of information from counseling sessions and help counselors to validate their rationale for using appropriate counseling techniques and treatments with clients (Fall et al., 2010; Truscott, 2010).

Participants

The study was composed of 166 counselors-in-training (84.3% females; 15.7% males). Counselors-in-training's ages ranged from 20-49 years old, the youngest group was 20-25 (25.3%) years old and the oldest group age 49 (10.2%) years or older. The largest age group

was between the ages of 26-31 (n = 54, 32.7%). Although all ethnic backgrounds were included in the study, the largest group of counselors-in-training (n = 60, 36.1%) was composed of non-Hispanic White, followed by Hispanic or Latino (n = 53, 31.6%). All counselors-in-training were enrolled in the same mental health counseling program at the participating university, located on the east coast of Florida. The counselors-in-training were enrolled in blended (n = 16, 9.6%), online (n = 64, 38.6%), and in-classroom (n = 86, 51.8%) counseling courses. Eighty-four (50.6%) counselors-in-training were on the second or third year, while 75 (45.2%) were on the first year of the counseling program. More than half (n = 100, 60.2%) were working on counseling courses and the remaining (n = 66, 39.8%) counselors-in-training were working on their practicum or internship. The majority of counselors-in-training (n = 106, 63.9%) selected Cognitive Behavioral therapy (CBT) as the theoretical orientation they planned to use with future clients, identified with, or matched their beliefs and worldviews.

Instruments

Demographic questionnaire. The researcher created the demographic questionnaire for the counselors-in-training, with the purpose of obtaining useful information. The questionnaire collected information on the counselors-in-training's age, gender, marital status, race/ethnicity, CACREP accreditation, courses format, years in the counseling program, counseling course hours completed, practicum or internship course status, and theoretical orientation selection or theoretical orientation that the counselors-in-training planned to use with future clients, identified with or matched their beliefs and worldviews.

Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ). The TEQ is a brief self-report tool that measures levels of empathy. The TEQ was developed after analyzing various empathy assessments aimed at measuring empathy as a skill. Spreng, McKinnon, Mar, and Levine (2009)

conducted studies to verify the reliability and validity of the TEQ questionnaire. The researchers concluded that the TEQ was a short, conventional, standardized, and powerful assessment tool with standardized psychometric properties to measure levels of empathy (Kourmousi, Amanaki, Tzavara, & Merakou, 2017). The instrument's validity was established through correlation with similar tools such as a correlation found with the Empathy Questionnaire ($r = 0.80$, $p < 0.001$) (Kourmousi et al., 2017; Totan, Dogan, & Sapmaz, 2012). Reliability for this instrument has been established to be sufficient at $r = .81$, $p < .001$ (Kourmousi et al., 2017; Spreng et al., 2009).

Further, the TEQ consists of 16 items and uses a five-point Likert scale (*Never* = 0; *Rarely* = 1; *Sometimes* = 2; *Often* = 3; and *Always* = 4) to measure levels of empathy in individuals. The TEQ has eight items that are scored positively (1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 13, and 16) and eight items that are scored negatively (2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 15). TEQ totals are obtained by adding all items in the scale. The TEQ total score is a good representation of empathy levels and certain behaviors related to empathy.

Theoretical Evaluation Self-Test (TEST). The TEST is an instrument that assesses undeveloped theoretical orientations (Coleman, 2007). The TEST consists of seven scales: psychodynamic, biological, family, ecosystems, cognitive, pragmatic, and humanistic. The instrument contains 30 items and uses a Likert-type scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*) that allows standardization of seven subscales by dividing the subscale's sum by the number of items in the scale (Coleman, 2004). The instrument's final score evaluates on which theoretical orientation mental health professionals scored higher and on which they scored lower.

The validity of the TEST was considered to be adequate. Coleman (2004) stated that "the factor analysis accounted for a high percentage of the share variance and displayed simple structure, and the factors were theoretically coherent" (p. 122). The TEST captures many

elements involved in practicing in community settings that are interrelated, such as having an understanding of culture, socioeconomic backgrounds, biological, psychosocial interventions, and theoretical constructs to understand what affects clients (Coleman, 2004). Across two studies conducted on the tool, reliability was .65 which was appropriated for the tool as scores lower than .60 will have been considered fair (Coleman, 2004). The validity and the reliability of the TEST were found to be similar to other instruments used in studies conducted on theoretical orientation inclination or identification (Coleman, 2007).

Procedures

Access and permission information. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the researcher's University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The study followed all guidelines for appropriate treatment of research participants, as outlined by the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2014). Permission from the creators of the TEST and the TEQ questionnaires was obtained before formatting and administering the questionnaires. Quantitative data was collected anonymously. There was no contact with the counselors-in-training, but permission to conduct the study, and to use the counseling department listserv were obtained from the participating university IRB Director. Permission to participate in the study was obtained by asking counselors-in-training to sign the informed consent before completing demographic, TEQ and TEST questionnaires.

Sampling methods and data collection. Since collecting a true random sample in the social sciences is not always probable or practical (Creswell, 2009), quantitative data collection was conducted using a probability sampling. Probability sampling allowed all counselors-in-training at the participating university to have an equal opportunity of participating in the study. A faculty member from the counseling department at the participating university facilitated the

use of the counseling department listserv. A SurveyMonkey link was created and was distributed via e-mail to the counselors-in-training. The SurveyMonkey link included the informed consent, the demographic, the TEST, and the TEQ questionnaires. The data collection lasted ten weeks. The SurveyMonkey website recorded all the responses to the questionnaires. The data collected from the SurveyMonkey website was exported into an IBM SPSS version 23.0 for Windows file for further analysis.

Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using the responses obtained from the demographic, the TEST, and the TEQ questionnaires. Demographic information was coded assigning numeric values to each item to facilitate data analysis. The data was visually inspected for outlier and missing data. The quantitative sampling size was composed of 190 counselors-in-training; however, after eliminating questionnaires with missing data, the sample size was reduced to 166 counselors-in-training.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data. A Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between empathy totals and each theoretical orientation (research question a). To identify which variables from the TEQ questionnaire were associated with the TEST results (research question b); a Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis was conducted. The Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis measured the relationship between each item in the TEQ (EMP1 through EMP16) with the theoretical orientation inclination totals in the TEST. A linear regression analysis was performed to test if high levels of empathy in the TEQ could predict the theoretical orientation of the counselors-in-training (research question c). The analysis measured the linear estimation between empathy totals from the TEQ and theoretical orientation from the TEST. To calculate

high frequencies on the TEQ questionnaire responses (research question d) frequency counts and percentages analyses were conducted for each of the items in the TEQ questionnaire. Additionally, a cross-tabulation analysis was performed to check for any possible visual inferences that would help identify if there was any correlation between the study variables.

Validity and Reliability

Quantitative reliability and validity were ensured using the TEST and TEQ questionnaires, which are instruments that have been used in other studies. The psychometric properties of the TEST and the TEQ have been examined and have been found to be adequated (Coleman, 2004; Spreng et al., 2009; Totan et al., 2012). Internal validity was examined, and it was found that alternative conclusions were drawn from the results. The study is presumed to have no external validity as the same study may be conducted with another group of counselors-in-training that have the same characteristics of the participants in this study and yield different results.

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Results

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The Spearman's rank order correlation analysis (performed for research question a) revealed that there was one significant negative correlation. Empathy levels and biological theories, $r_s = -.156$, $p = .044$ have a significant negative correlation because p-values $\leq .05$ indicate a positive or negative significant correlation between variables. The Spearman's rank order correlation results on these variables: Psychodynamic $r_s = .049$; $p = .535$; Family $r_s = -.067$, $p = .393$; Ecosystems $r_s = .069$, $p = .380$; Cognitive $r_s = .073$, $p = .351$; Pragmatic $r_s = .041$, $p = .598$ and Humanistic $r_s = .108$, $p = .164$ did not indicate any correlation with the total empathy level results in the TEQ questionnaire.

Correlations were found between the TEQ items and TEST responses (research question

b). There were 9 positive and 2 negative, significant correlations between the TEQ items and the TEST totals. The highest positive correlations between the TEST totals and the TEQ individual items were in items: (15) I find it silly for people to cry out of happiness, correlated with Cognitive theories (r_s = .240, p = .002), and Ecosystems theories (r_s = .223, p = .004); (5) I enjoy making other people feel better, correlated with Humanistic theories (r_s = .194, p = .012); (3) It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully, correlated with Humanistic theories (r_s = .193, p = .013). Negative correlations were found in the following TEQ items: (2) Other people's misfortunes do not disturb me a great deal, correlated with Cognitive theories (r_s = -.215, p = .005); and (1) When someone else is feeling excited, I tend to get excited too, correlated with Biological theories (r_s = -.157, p = .043).

A regression analysis tried to predict the linear estimation between empathy levels (EMP_LEVELS) and theoretical orientation totals (TO_TOTALS) (research question c). The regression analysis revealed that EMP_LEVELS was not a predictor for TO_TOTALS. In the analysis p-values, $\leq$ .05 would have indicated a significant predictor, but p-values were found to be $\geq$ .05 on all theoretical orientations. Therefore, the regression analysis results revealed that none of the theoretical orientations were found to be significant predictors of empathy levels in counselors-in-training.

According to the frequencies and percentage analyses performed on the TEQ questionnaire items (research question d), it was observed that responses with $\geq$ 50% were: (a) EMP3 (n = 116, 69.9%); (b) EMP4 (n = 85, 51.2%); (c) EMP5 (n = 130, 78.3%); (d) EMP7 (n = 93, 56%); (e) EMP11 (n = 90, 54.2%); (f) EMP12 (n = 115, 69.3%); (g) EMP14 (n = 119, 71.7%); (h) EMP15 (n = 124, 74.7%) and (i) EMP16 (n = 89, 53.6%). Additional findings revealed that the highest TEQ score (64) was associated with one participant with a theoretical

inclination toward multiple theoretical orientations. The lowest TEQ score (29) was associated with a participant with a theoretical inclination toward a humanistic orientation. The cross-tabulation analysis (Figure 1) indicated that according to the TEST results, the highest number of counselors-in-training (n = 61) seem to have an inclination for humanistic theories, followed by ecosystems (n = 45).
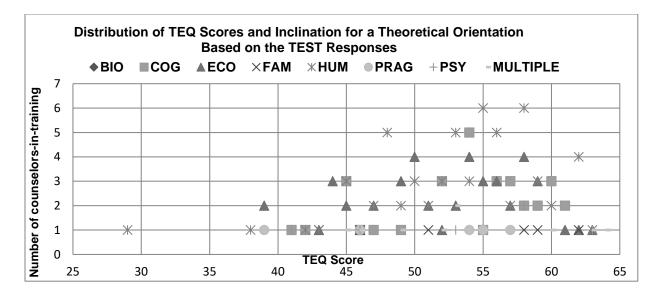

Figure 1. Cross-tabulation Analysis of the TEQ and TEST Scores Distribution

Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between empathy and theoretical orientation selection of 166 counselors-in-training. The study findings tended to demonstrate that the role of empathy across theoretical orientations has not been established. The study results revealed that no positive relationship was found between empathy and theoretical orientation selection among the counselors-in-training in this study. However, the study findings demonstrated that correlations were found between individual items of the TEQ and the TEST questionnaire results. For instances, results revealed discrepancies between the theoretical orientation selected in the demographic questionnaire and the theoretical orientation inclination reflected on the TEST questionnaire results. The overall study findings seemed to suggest that counselors-in-

training in this study lacked knowledge and self-awareness on how to select a theoretical orientation that fits with their worldviews and beliefs.

Empathy and Theoretical Orientation

Study findings tended to demonstrate that the role of empathy across theoretical orientations has not been established. However, Clark (2014) suggested that many counseling theories recognize empathy as an important aspect of counseling. To further examine the relationship between empathy and theoretical orientation, items from the TEQ and the TEST questionnaire were correlated. Empirical findings seemed to indicate that negative correlations existed among empathy variables in the TEQ and theoretical orientation scales in the TEST.

A negative correlation found between the TEST results and an item in the TEQ suggested that counselors-in-training who selected biological theory were less likely to get excited when somebody else felt excited. According to Spreng et al. (2009), this item in the TEQ questionnaire was created to mark the awareness of an emotional state in another person who fuels the same emotion in oneself. The results on this TEQ item could be based on the idea that biological theories deals more with organic and genetic factors (Duran & Barlow, 2003) and not in the conveyance of emotions from one person to another.

Equally significant is the negative correlation found between cognitive theories and the TEQ item, "Other people's misfortunes do not disturb me a great deal." According to the study results, participants in this study that incline toward cognitive theories are more likely to feel disturbed by other peoples' misfortune. This result could be grounded on the idea that how we process information, could lead us to misleading information that is related to affective responses (Beck, 2011). Clark (2014) mentioned that empathy is more than a part of an affective-cognitive involvement; empathy is a mean to challenge clients' dysfunctional perception of their troubles

and work on problematic assumptions and beliefs. Clark (2010) mentioned that therapists should try to remain objective and not be too emotional with the idea of maintaining an empathic attitude.

Further, statistical findings of this study also suggested that responses of various items in the TEQ positively correlated with the theoretical orientation inclination results on the TEST. Examples of these variables are: "It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully"; "I enjoy making other people feel better"; "I do not feel sympathy for people who cause their own serious illnesses"; and "When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards him\her"; positively correlated with humanistic theories. These positive correlations may be the result of humanistic principles influences. Humanistic principles are based on the idea that humans have a tendency to become functional, and empathy is an essential factor during treatment (Halbur & Halbur, 2011).

The results of this study also yielded inferences such as counselors-in-training were able to make the distinction between empathy and sympathy when responding, "I do not feel sympathy for people who cause their own serious illnesses." These results might imply that counselors-in-training are more likely to be empathetic than sympathetic because sympathy is more involved in feelings or concerns for people that are under anguish not just understanding the client's emotions (Bloom, McNeil, Flasch, & Sanders, 2018). Interestingly, Spreng et al. (2009) created this item in the TEQ as a way to identify the frequency of situational indifference toward another individual. Out of the remaining variables that were correlated with humanistic theories, two explored altruism, and one examined sympathetic physiological arousal on participants' responses.

Furthermore, various TEST items seemed to correlate with items on the TEQ. Cognitive

and humanistic theories correlated with the TEQ item, "It upset me to see someone being treated disrespectfully." Perhaps the correlation between the TEST results and the TEQ items could be attributed to the theories' use of empathy, such as empathetic understanding and empathy used as a tool for therapeutic collaboration (Clark, 2010; Rogers, 1957). On the other hand, humanistic approaches such as person-centered theory are based on the idea that empathy facilitates therapeutic change in clients (Clark, 2004, 2010).

Additional Findings

The majority of counselors-in-training reported enjoying making others feel better, in the TEQ individual items analysis. This item on the empathy scale was created to address altruism among responders (Spreng et al., 2009). Swank and Robinson (2013) defined altruism as the engaging action between the client and the counselor driven by unselfish caring, concern and lack of anticipation for an incentive in return.

Although the relationship between empathy and altruism was not intended to be examined in this study, the observation was thought-provoking. Altruism is a desired quality among counselors and counselors-in-training (Limberg et al., 2015; Flynn & Black, 2010; Swank & Robinson, 2013). Also, research has demonstrated that altruism could have a link with empathy. For example, Smith (2006) suggested that people who are empathetic tend to feel good about helping others. Similarly, Swank and Robinson (2013) suggested that a relationship existed between engaging in altruism acts and the counseling profession and it has been associated with positive therapeutic outcomes. Also, humanistic philosophies believe that humans are naturally altruistic, empathic and they like helping others (Smith, 2006).

The TEQ and the TEST scores revealed that counselors-in-training scored themselves as being empathetic and identified themselves with humanistic theories(n = 61). It is necessary to

consider that the analysis only represented the distribution of TEQ scores against the scores of the TEST, and does not mean that a relationship existed. Although no positive relationship was found between theoretical orientation and empathy levels, a trend was observed. This trend suggests that the majority of participants in this study might incline toward humanistic theories. Also, the demographic questionnaire answers suggested that the majority of counselors-in-training preferred CBT (63.9%), as the theory they planned to use with future clients, as the theory they identified with, and as the theory that matched their beliefs and worldviews.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that it was conducted online with an anonymous group of counselor-in-training. Conducting this study online could have made the study more susceptible to inaccurate information, lower participation rate and responses could have been answered in a socially desirable manner that interfered with participants' genuine feelings (Wright, 2006). Another limitation was the counselors-in-training's different stages on the counseling program, as they probably have not taken the counseling theories course or worked on the practicum or internship. Different stages on the counseling program could mean limited knowledge, exposure and utilization of counseling theories (Petko et al., 2016), awareness of self, and knowledge on how to self-report empathy (Pieterse, Lee, Ritmeester, & Collins, 2013).

Further, multicultural differences (gender, age, religion, disabilities, and ethnic background) of the counselors-in-training may have influenced the study responses. Empathy is a construct that may be perceived or defined differently among the diverse group of counselors-in-training participating in the study (Bayne & Hays, 2017). Additionally, the study results could have been affected by the high percentage of females participating in the study, because females' empathy levels have been noted to be higher than in males (Ivtzan et al., 2012).

Perhaps different results could have been obtained if the questionnaires were administrated to an equal number of males and females.

Another limitation was the lack of a pilot study to test specific areas such as analysis, population, and approach to use within the design method used. The study also encountered a scarcity of current literature, related to the research problem. The study suggested that the gender, ethnicity, and theoretical orientation of the professors in the counseling program at the participating university were not taken into account and it may have influenced the study results. Finally, the researcher did not ask participants if all have the same professor for the counseling theories course or how the course was taught, which could have affected the study results.

Implications for Counseling Professionals

The study findings seem to indicate that counselors-in-training might have a deficiency on self-awareness which could influence selecting a proper theoretical orientation. The literature on self-awareness acquisition in counselors-in-training is limited, even though it is an essential part of counselors' training (Pieterse et al., 2013; Pompeo & Levitt, 2014). Counseling courses materials should be designed to develop self-awareness in counselors-in-training (Pieterse et al., 2013). In fact, there is a growing number of evidence demonstrating that when self-awareness of own worldviews and beliefs increases it may contribute to greater empathy levels, and accurate theoretical orientation selection in counselors-in-training, and should be part of counseling training (Bell, Limberg, Jacobson, & Super, 2014; Chan, 2008; Clark, 2010; Demir & Gazioglu, 2012; Pieterse, et al., 2013; Rogers, 1957; Truscott, 2010). Self-awareness can help counselors-in-training to create congruence between the way the world is seen, and a theoretical orientation that matches that lens (Bell et al., 2014). One idea will be the instilling of experiential activities and materials used in counseling theories courses which could help counselors-in-training

increase self-awareness of their worldviews (Bell et al., 2014).

Developing new counseling theories course pedagogies. The results of this study seemed to reflect possible venues for improvement of counseling theories courses. It seems as if self-awareness pedagogies in counseling theories courses should aim at examining more in detail counselors-in-training's core beliefs, strengths, weakness, fears, and passion for counseling. Perhaps increase self-awareness could help counselors-in-training comprehend counseling theory principles to a higher degree (Petko et al., 2016). Increase self-awareness is a positive consequence of counseling training (Liles & Wagner, 2010; Pieterse et al., 2013). According to Oden, Miner-Holden, and Balkin (2009), developing self-awareness is important during counseling training. A suggested pedagogy is the creation of a course segment or workshops that motivate and teach counselors-in-training the importance of developing self-awareness during training.

Course segment or workshop. A course segment or workshop on self-awareness could create a foundation that would allow counselors-in-training to delineate and create a better visualization of their own personal and professional path (Bell et al. 2014). The course could help counselors-in-training to learn how to examine worldviews, beliefs and how to select the theoretical orientation that matches the type of counselor they aspire to become. In the mentioned course the final project could include the presentation of the theoretical orientation selected. In the final project, the counselors-in-training could describe the systematic process used to select the theory, and which individual thoughts or beliefs match the theory. The project could also include how self- awareness courses or workshops, influences biases toward other theories and what needs to be scrutinized before selecting a particular theoretical orientation. For the project counselors-in-training can answer questions such as (a) how worldviews and

beliefs were recognized and how these worldviews and beliefs influenced theoretical orientation selectivity; (b) how the path that leads to the theoretical orientation selected can be described, were there any shortcuts, deviations or obstacles that needed to be overcome, or confront?

With this in mind, the course segment or workshop could help counselors-in-training to find a theoretical orientation that fits. Consequently, experiential activities in the counseling theories course can improve how counselors-in-training use counseling techniques during practicum and internship that are productive, and provide confidence in their counseling competencies. An appropriate theoretical fit is essential as counseling competencies and effectiveness increase as a result of understanding the theoretical rationale behind each theory and feeling comfortable with each technique used (Petko et al., 2016).

Recommendations for Future Research

Empathy and theoretical orientation. According to the study findings, empathy is a construct that could be hard to define and is particularly challenging to self-assess. When the construct is related to theoretical orientation selection, it could be viewed as a standard component among many counseling theories (Clark, 2010, 2014). When empathy is discussed within counseling theories, it could educate, facilitate counseling theory understanding, and help counselors-in-training to identify a theoretical framework that fits. Further research is needed on how empathy relates to theoretical orientation selection among counselors-in-training during counseling training years.

Use of self-assessment tools. A program evaluation can be conducted to examine if the administration of self-exploration and self-awareness questionnaires on theoretical orientation selection and empathy at different stages of the counseling program could facilitate counselors-in-training's theoretical orientation selection. The program evaluation could examine if

counselors-in-training's empathy levels increase because of counseling training. Also, the program evaluation could examine factors that may contribute to counselors-in-training's theoretical orientation selection during training.

Development of theoretical orientation instruments. Research on appropriate scales that aim at measuring theoretical orientation inclination of counselors-in-training during the early stages of the counseling program is needed. A possible suggestion will be to conduct a study to examine if the TEST can be adapted to measure counselors-in-training's inclination toward a theoretical orientation. The TEST has individual variables that aim at measuring the theoretical orientation of social workers and other helping professions, not specifically counselors-in-training. A quality that makes this test appropriate for adapting it to counselors-in-training is that the TEST is an exploration tool that was created to assess theoretical orientation inclinations on individuals who have not yet created a comprehensive counseling framework based on a specific theory (Coleman, 2004). The adaptation of the TEST tool could help counselors-in-training to see how own personal beliefs and worldviews apply to theoretical orientation selection during the early stages of the counseling career when counseling theories knowledge and practice is limited.

Conclusion

The study findings suggested implications for counselor educators and further research. For instance, research is needed on how educators can assist counselors-in-training to select a theoretical orientation that is a good fit and that will be kept after counseling training concludes. Also, it is imperative that counselors-in-training are assisted on how to practice from a theoretical orientation framework that feels like a good match from the early stages of the counseling career.

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