

COUNSELOR EDUCATION: A PERSONAL GROWTH & PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT
EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

A basic qualitative design was implemented to better understand the personal growth and personal development of seven master's level counseling graduates in the mid-western United States. Three foundational questions were used to guide the study: (1) How do master's level counseling students experience personal growth and personal development during the master's level counselor-training program? (2) What parts of the master's level counselor-training program contributed most to students' personal growth and personal development? (3) How do master's level counseling graduates conceptualize how their personal growth and personal development have impacted their professional identity and their present work with clients?

To address these questions, seven interviews were conducted with professional counselors who had graduated from a CACREP-accredited master's level counseling program between the years of 2005 and 2013. Sixteen themes emerged from the interviews that addressed four main areas: 1) how master's level counseling students experience personal growth and personal development, 2) what parts of the training program most impacts personal growth and personal development, 3) how personal growth and development experiences impact professional's identity development and present work with clients, and 4) how the terms personal growth, personal development, and professional development are both unique and overlapping concepts. The sixteen themes were supported by direct quotations from the participants. A synthesis of the findings and current literature was conducted and further discussion regarding the limitations of the study, suggestions for future research and implications for counselor education and supervision programs were addressed.

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because you encouraged me to keep going, you believed in me when maybe I had lost belief in myself, and you sacrificed so I could achieve.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this culminating project of one long and growth-forcing journey to:

My dad and mom, because you loved, part of you is a part of me;

My husband, because we chose each other, I am stronger because you stand with me;

My children, because I was blessed with each of you, you are the best part of me and I will
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Training to be a counselor is more than developing academically and professionally, counselors-in-training must also grow and develop personally. It is believed that personal development is an essential aspect of counselor training (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1995), that counselor training, in fact, does impact counselors' values, skills, and behaviors (Thompson, 1996), and that counseling students change while attending counselor-training programs (e.g., Barbee, et al., 2003; Brendel, et al., 2002; Daniels & Larson 2001; Duys & Hedstrom, 2000; Eriksen & McAuliffe, 2006; Fong & Borders, 1997; Halverson, et al., 2006; Kivlighan, 1989; Larson, et al., 1999; Larson & Daniels, 1998; Melchert, et al., 1996). However, published research studies focusing on personal change, specifically in the areas of personal growth and personal development, are limited and less conclusive. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of master's level counseling students' experiences of personal growth and personal development and what aspects of the counselor-training program contributed most to those same students' personal growth and personal development.

Williams and Irving (1996) described the areas of personal growth and personal development during counselor-training programs as "ill-defined" and "poorly specified" with a surprising scarcity of literature (p. 171). In response, Irving and Williams (1999) clarified the terms and provided a description of the differences between personal growth and personal development. Two points highlight the distinctive nature of these two terms and contribute to clarifying the term definitions that were adapted for the current study.

The first point of clarity that Irving and Williams (1999) elucidated is the relationship between the two terms: "'development' is not a subset of 'growth', rather they are intersecting sets" (p. 517), explaining that attributes are only shared in the intersection of the two terms and

that the terms also encompass unique attributes. The second point of clarity they highlight is the expanding or emergent nature of the terms, stating that, “[d]evelopment is something that can be planned: growth cannot. Growth is what may happen as a result of personal efforts to develop” (Irving and Williams, 1999, p. 518). Irving and Williams (1999) went on to explain, “[d]evelopment can be planned and structured; goals can be defined and progress checked; criteria can be met and end-points achieved” (p. 518). However, growth “is what happens to individuals as a result of their own experience and personal development work. Growth is essentially a retrospective term: we may know when someone has grown, but may not be aware of the process of growing” (Irving and Williams, 1999, p. 518). Finally, after reviewing Irving and Williams’ (1999) appraisal of the terms, the following definitions were developed based upon their work and will be used to inform the current study:

Personal Growth: an aspect of personal change that is unstructured, non-specific, and holistic, a retrospective awareness of change that is not planned, but results from experience and personal development (Irving & Williams, 1999).

Personal Development: an aspect of personal change that is purposeful, structured and specific, a planned measurable change that seeks to develop specific skills and qualities focused on enhancing a trainee’s professional effectiveness (Irving & Williams, 1999).

Even with a clear articulation of the differences between personal growth and personal development provided by Irving and Williams in 1999, it appears that most research completed after 1999 focused on specific aspects of personal growth or personal development, for example: the development of moral reasoning skills (e.g. Eriksen & McAuliffe, 2006; Halverson, et al., 2006), the development of ethnic identity (e.g. Rowell & Benshoff, 2008), and the development of self-efficacy (e.g. Barbee, Scherer & Combs, 2003; Daniels & Larson, 2001), or do not use a

specific definition of either term to frame their research (Lim, 2008; McAuliffe, 2002; Woodside, Oberman, Cole, & Carruth, 2007). Therefore, for this research study the above term clarifications as set out by William and Irving (1999) and the above definitions adapted from their work were used to both inform and plan this study. In addition, these definition and clarifications functioned as the analytical lens for the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is, first, to understand how counseling program graduates experience personal change in the areas of personal growth and personal development while in a Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited master's level counseling program. The second purpose is to understand how their personal growth and personal development have impacted these same professionals' work as counselors. Throughout the study, the following questions guided the research:

1. How do master's level counseling students experience personal growth and personal development during the master's level counselor-training program?
2. What parts of the master's level counselor-training program contributed most to students' personal growth and personal development?
3. How do master's level counseling graduates conceptualize how their personal growth and personal development have impacted their professional identity and their present work with clients?

This study was conducted using a basic interpretive qualitative design. Study participants participated in an interview where they will be asked twelve semi-structured interview questions.

Importance of the Study

The goal of this research was to further the understanding of personal growth and personal development experiences of master's level training program graduates from a retrospective personal qualitative perspective. The literature surrounding counseling student personal growth and personal development calls for continued research that focuses on better understanding counseling student personal growth and personal development as separate concepts of personal change (Irving & Williams, 1999). The research will enhance the current research base and meet the call for more research regarding how counseling students experience personal growth and personal development (Irving & Williams, 1999; Lim, 2008; McAuliffe, 2002; Wheeler, 2000). Through exploring master's level counseling graduates' experiences of personal growth and personal development, counselor educators, counselor supervisors, and counselors themselves will better understand the personal change experiences through the lens of personal growth and personal development. In addition, this study may inform these same stakeholders if and how program experiences impact the personal change experience and if and how that personal change impacts those counseling graduates both personally and as practicing counselors.

Researcher's Perspective

The following section is an autobiography highlighting my personal growth and development as a master's level counseling student. The purpose of this autobiography is to share openly the experiences and perspectives that have and that continue to influence the research contained in this dissertation. I believe that counseling students' personal growth and personal development are important aspects of a counselor education programs, aspects that have the potential to make or break a successful and satisfying counseling career. However, I do

not believe that counseling students' personal growth and personal development can be quantified because each student experiences each aspect of the counselor education program differently. I chose to utilize qualitative research methods so that my story does not become every student's story. Here is the story of my experiences and how those experiences have influenced and created the lens through which I look at this research.

I am a 34-year-old married woman of divorced and remarried parents. As I grew up, I learned to please the people around me with my words and actions. I would attempt to guess how others were feeling so that I could act and respond appropriately. As this skill developed, I began to use it to meet and exceed the expectations of others at work and at school. Even when I was being recognized for my hard work and success, I never seemed to internally connect with my accomplishments. Additionally, I found myself becoming overwhelmed by the expectations of others and found little satisfaction in my work. Before I started graduate school, I had successfully moved through two professional positions: one as a Youth Counselor (non-licensed) and the second as a College Admissions Counselor. This reality and the desire for something more pushed me to follow my personal dream of becoming a counselor and counselor educator.

Although I was reaching for my personal dream, I began graduate school in the same way I had approached most things in my adolescent and adult life; I took inventory of my graduate assistantship supervisor's and professors' expectations, and I worked my hardest to meet them. The first two semesters, I received good grades and performance reviews, but most of the time, I felt as if I was just going through the motions. I also remember realizing that I was not living fully for my personal desires and expectations. As I moved more deeply into the program, I found that I disagreed with some of the thoughts and theories of my professors, and I

learned it was acceptable to express how and why I disagreed. I started to feel less of a need to conform and more pressure to be a self-directed learner and person. My professors could not tell me what I wanted to write and unlike in undergraduate education, the expectations were not black and white. The grayness of the expectations challenged my usual method of success, which was conformity.

The gray was unsettling to me, and often, I found myself erasing papers that were 75% completed because I feared my professors' disapproval. The humorous detail was that my papers and projects were never disapproved of, and most of the time, they were highly praised. As I continued to move toward the completion of my master's degree, I discovered more about my desires, and I was learning to accept myself. Additionally, I was also learning to accept others and their journeys. I found that I was less judgmental and that my skill for reading people assisted me in understanding their genuine feelings. I could use my skill for reading people to adjust my energy to meet other peoples' needs when appropriate without completely changing my existence to meet their expectations. I did not have to give up myself to exist in a harmonious environment, and a harmonious environment did not always have to be the goal. In my experience, the practicum course was where this change was most obvious or identifiable.

If someone were to ask me "What parts of the Counselor Education program contributed most to your personal growth and development?" I would have to say "practicum." I remember three very separate and very distinct phases of practicum. Phase number one consisted of me sitting in front of my client saying what I thought my supervisor wanted to hear. During phase number one, I remember feeling confused because my supervisor was praising me for my "great" form, but challenging me to loosen up and to be more present with my clients.

Phase number two consisted of me sitting in front of my client saying what I thought my supervisor wanted to hear, but trying to look loosened up and present. I also remember leaving sessions feeling internally angry with myself for not being genuine. During this phase, I remember acting defensive with my supervisor and crying because I felt defeated and frustrated. I began resenting the camera thinking that if I did not have to tape, I could be more present and genuine. As I look back at this time, I realize that it was not taping that was the problem; it was actually my desire to meet my supervisor's expectations, and if I did not tape the session, his expectations would no longer be in the room.

Phase number three consisted of me complaining about my supervisor before my session and cognitively deciding I could not meet his expectations. My thoughts changed to, "so today I would do it my way." I walked into the session determined to be genuine and to be present with my client. During the session, I found myself forgetting that the tape was running, and I began to feel energized by the session and the work that was being done. I had finally succeeded in counseling my client, and the relationship between the client and me became stronger. I also found what I was seeking from my supervisor—approval.

I believe this experience stands out, because after my experiences in practicum, I stopped trying to meet other people's expectations before I first tried to meet my own. I adjusted my actions based on the feedback I received from people after I genuinely approached the situation as myself. I learned to filter feedback and criticism to meet my needs and expectations instead of throwing myself aside so that I could try to become the person others thought I should be.

Through these experiences I became interested in counseling student personal growth and personal development. Thus, for a class assignment, I conducted my first study exploring how master's level community counseling students experienced personal growth and

development. I interviewed three master's level community counseling students, inquiring about how they perceived their personal growth and development in different aspects of the counselor-training program. The findings showed that the students did experience personal growth and development while in the master's level community counseling program, that they believed this growth increased their understanding and awareness of self, and that they improved their self-expressional and interpersonal communication skills. Additionally, these students reported feeling increased confidence in both their personal and professional selves. My research reinforced that, while we cannot quantify personal experiences, my experiences share characteristics with those of other students so that qualitative exploration is an appropriate means to understand counselor graduates' personal growth and personal development. In addition, this research also highlighted the weaknesses associated with the ill-defined constructs of personal growth and personal development, which led to the conception of this dissertation topic and its focus on establishing solid definitions of personal growth and personal development to ground this current study.

Today, I am a Ph.D. candidate in a counselor education program. I am a confident researcher, counselor and instructor. I take pride in my ability to hear what others have to teach me without needing to immediately apply each lesson to my current life and situation. I enjoy watching the students I supervise grow, and I am interested in continuing to learn more about how graduate students experience personal growth and personal development as well as how that growth and development impacts their counseling abilities and skills. Lastly, I am interested in learning the things that people attribute to their development so that I can more fully integrate those things into my current and future work with students.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is an abundant amount of literature discussing the multiple ways master's level counseling students' change while enrolled in a master's level counselor-training program. The majority of this literature supports that counseling students do, in fact, develop in targeted, planned, specific, and measurable ways during their education (e.g., Barbee, et al., 2003; Brendel, et al., 2002; Daniels & Larson 2001; Duys & Hedstrom, 2000; Eriksen & McAuliffe, 2006; Fong & Borders, 1997; Halverson, et al., 2006; Kivlighan, 1989; Larson, et al., 1999; Larson & Daniels, 1998; Melchert, et al., 1996). In contrast, literature concentrating specifically on personal growth, personal development or personal change in its entirety is more limited. For the purpose of focusing the current research topic and literature review on studies that directly inform the current study, this review of literature was limited to studies that focused on: (a) conceptualizing personal growth, personal development, and professional development in the counseling and counselor education fields; (b) defining what student personality characteristics are necessary for effective counselor-training and counseling; and (c) understanding how master's level counseling students experience personal change and/or personal growth and personal development while enrolled in a counselor-training program.

The following review will include four aspects of counseling student development. The first section reviews and clarifies the varying definitions of professional development vs. personal development and personal growth vs. personal development. The second section focuses on the essential personality characteristics a counseling student needs to possess before, or cultivate during, the training experience in order to develop into an effective counselor. The third section of this literature review focuses on the specific training experiences that are believed to impact counseling student's personal growth and personal

development. Finally, the fourth section will review the research on counseling students' personal growth and personal development. This section focuses on the experience of becoming a counselor and the change that occurs throughout the entire counselor-training experience. These studies not only provide suggested models for the current research, but also highlight how this study could enhance the current body of literature.

Overview of Terms

Researchers have identified the challenge of researching both personal development vs. professional development (Donati & Watts, 2005; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Wilkins 1997), and personal growth vs. personal development (Donati & Watts, 2005; Hensley, Smith, & Thompson, 2003; Irving & Williams, 1999). These sets of terms are clarified and defined below.

Personal Development vs. Professional Development

In an effort to develop a more clear understanding of the terms personal development and professional development and to build upon the work of Williams and Irving (1999), Donati and Watts (2005) reviewed current literature to articulate how counselor development is conceptualized within the field of counseling. Donati and Watts (2005) found that counselor development is conceptualized as being composed of two distinct strands: personal development and professional development. Additionally, Wilkins (1997) offered a simple definition, suggesting that, professional development is primarily concerned with the acquisition of skills and knowledge, whereas, personal development focuses on all other change that facilitates being a practicing counselor. Nevertheless, while distinguishing the differences between professional development and personal development is possible, others highlighted an overlapping, ever-changing, continuum type of relationship between the two

strands of counselor development (Johns, 2012; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Wilkins 1997). Johns (2012) explains, “The two aspects together weave the essential membrane through which all other learning – theories, skills, legalities, ethics and relationships – must filter.” (p. 22). Therefore, although this study was not specifically looking at professional development it was assumed professional development would be integrated into the stories of the participants and that personal growth and personal development may not be easily separated from participants’ professional development.

Personal Development vs. Personal Growth

In 1996, Williams and Irving described the concepts of personal growth and personal development during counselor-training programs as “ill-defined” and “poorly specified” with a surprising scarcity of literature (p. 171). In 1999, Irving and Williams developed a clearer picture of the similarities and differences between the two terms. The following definitions were adapted from Irving and Williams appraisal of the concepts personal growth and personal development, for the current study: *Personal Growth*: an aspect of personal change that is unstructured, non-specific, and holistic, a retrospective awareness of change that is not planned, but results from experience and personal development (Irving & Williams, 1999). *Personal Development*: an aspect of personal change that is purposeful, structured and specific, a planned measurable change that seeks to develop specific skills and qualities focused on enhancing a trainee’s professional effectiveness (Irving & Williams, 1999). Additionally, Johns (2012) explained personal growth further, “Growth, then, we might define as a product of all this – and as an end in itself – in which any individual’s internal potential connects with the possibilities and opportunities available.” (p. 21). Thus, for this study personal growth will be considered when changes are described as being about the

whole self or person, things that are noticed retrospectively, and things that are byproducts of the totality of the individual's experiences, Whereas, personal development will be considered when changes are tangible, measurable, and possibly targeted outcomes of the training experience.

The current research aimed to look at the personal growth and personal development experiences of master's level counseling students. Hence, it was important to clarify both sets of terms to lay a clear framework for this study. However, it was not known how these terms would relate or differentiate during data collection and analysis. Thus, these definitions were utilized as a guide during the study's design and were considered, when appropriate, during the data analysis and reporting process.

Essential Traits for Competent Practice

Counseling students' personal development, as defined by Irving and Williams (1999), is an aspect of personal change that is planned, purposeful, specific, measurable, and focused on enhancing a trainee's professional effectiveness. Personal development is personal change that can be targeted during a counselor-training program. However, the research below suggests counselor-trainees need to bring both the right set of personality characteristics and a moldable, teachable self to the training experience; that there are specific personality characteristics that are important for a counselor to have when entering a counselor training program (Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Pope & Kline, 1999; Wheeler, 2000); and that some personality characteristics influence the effectiveness of counselors either positively or negatively both during and after training (Cantwell, 1990). Additionally, all of the characteristics cited in the studies below align with either personal growth or personal development as defined by Irving and Williams (1999), and are highlighted as personality

characteristics that impact counseling students professional development (Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Pope & Kline, 1999; Wheeler, 2000) and the effectiveness of professional counselors (Cantwell, 1990).

While developing a best-practices model for monitoring and dismissing students, the faculty at the University of Colorado at Denver identified, through a comprehensive review of the current literature, nine counselor personality characteristics they believed were “essential functions imperative to counselor development” (Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995, p. 120). These characteristics are: openness, flexibility, positive, cooperative, willingness to use and accept feedback, awareness of one’s impact on others, effective conflict resolution, accepting personal responsibility, and expressing feelings effectively and appropriately (Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995, p. 125). Frame and Stevens-Smith (1995) used these characteristics to develop a 5-point Likert-type evaluation instrument, Personal Characteristics Evaluation Form, to evaluate these essential functions. This form was recommended in a model “enhancing monitoring and dismissal process” that included regular monitoring during every class of the counselor-training program. These findings highlight that there are essential characteristics that counselors are perceived to need to provide safe and effective counseling. Additionally, it appears that the presence and/or absence of these characteristics seem to be viewed as a developmental process that can both advance and regress, and that the absence or regression of these characteristics may be responsive to remediation.

However, Pope and Kline (1999) reported that some personality characteristics are perceived by counselor educators to have a limited response to training. Pope and Kline (1999) used the published literature and discussions with counselor educators to compile a list of 22 characteristics that seem to be connected with counselor effectiveness. The

characteristics included: “warmth, friendliness, genuineness, fairness and security, open-mindedness, flexibility, acceptance, patience, sensitivity, sympathy, interest in people, emotional stability, trustworthiness, empathy, tolerance for ambiguity, sociableness, cooperativeness, confidence, capability, resourcefulness, and awareness of limitations” (p. 1340). After identifying these characteristics, Pope and Kline (1999) asked ten counselor educators to first rank the order of importance for the 22 characteristics and second, to rate the trainability of the characteristics using a 1-3 rating scale (“1: can be taught in one semester of a master’s program”; “2: can be taught in two-year master’s program”; and “3: cannot be taught in a two-year master’s program”). They found that acceptance, emotional stability, open-mindedness, empathy, and flexibility are the five most important characteristics. Although they are the five most important, Pope and Kline (1999) also found they are the least responsive to training. Pope and Kline’s (1999) study appears to reinforce the definition of personal growth as described by Irving and Williams (1999), which would confirm that these five characteristics would be difficult to directly train or target during a counselor-training program, but may be a byproduct of personal development experiences.

In addition, Wheeler (2000) also studied how counselor educators construe good and bad counseling students. In this research, experienced counselor educators (subjects) were asked to complete a qualitative construct grid with space for ten students (five trainees perceived as good and five trainees perceived as not so good) and ten personality constructs, which described each student’s personality characteristics (Wheeler, 2000). Each subject was given a grid and asked to think of five counseling students with whom he/she had worked and whom he/she believed had the potential to be good practitioners as well as five counseling students whom he/she believed did not have the potential to be good practitioners. After

completing this step and listing the students on the grid, each subject was then asked to think about ways these students were similar and/or different. The process elicited a bi-polar personality construct for each student combination and, in the end, yielded ten bi-polar personality constructs. Each personality construct was rated for each trainee on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being on the positive end of the continuum and 1 being on the negative end (Wheeler, 2000). Through this process, Wheeler (2000) identified the seven most frequently chosen personality constructs; these constructs were: personable-alloof, open-closed, secure-insecure, self-aware-unaware, intelligent-unintelligent, professionally skilled-not skilled, and committed-not committed. The first three personality constructs (personable-alloof, open-closed, and self-aware-unaware) were the most frequently chosen as personality constructs that differentiate between good counselors and bad counselors (Wheeler, 2000). Wheeler (2000) concluded this “confirmed that the personality of the counselor is seen as the crucial discriminator between a good and bad practitioner“(p. 81).

The above research is important to consider because they suggest that students need to possess and/or exhibit specific personality characteristics in order to become good counselors. Additionally, these researchers (Pope & Kline, 1999; Wheeler, 2000) believe that certain characteristics need to be screened for before admittance into a counseling program, with one study (Pope & Kline, 1999) reporting that the most valuable characteristics are perceived by counselor educators to be almost impossible to train within the two-year time frame of most programs. Additionally, these studies highlighted counselor educators’ perceptions of what makes a student suitable for admission into and enrollment in a counselor education program. However, these studies lacked students’ perceptions and thus only provide one part of the picture. Additionally, the aforementioned studies focused on possessed personality

characteristics rather than personality characteristics that have developed or grown out of participating in a counselor-training program.

In contrast, the current study used a qualitative approach to look at the personal change experiences, specifically personal growth and personal development, of master's level counseling students. Thus, the current study was informed by the results of the above studies and the idea that personality characteristics are a necessary component of counselor training. Furthermore, the current study built upon the above studies by increasing the understanding of the personal growth and personal development master's level counseling students experience during the counselor-training program.

In addition, this study also looked at both personal growth and personal development. Irving and Williams (1999) believed personal development to be personal change that can be targeted during the counselor education process, and personal growth to be an aspect of personal change that is less targeted or trainable and that may happen as a byproduct of the training experiences. The following studies affirmed that personal change does occur during counselor-training programs and that specific training experiences impact personal growth and personal development.

Specific Training Experiences that Impact Counseling Students' Personal Growth and Development

Another area of counseling student development research focused on which aspects of the training program had the most impact on student change (Ieva, Ohrt, Swank, and Young, 2009; Lim, 2008; O'Leary, Crowley, and Keane, 1994). Research focusing on the overall impact of a specific training experience was limited in this area so this section will focus on three studies that were conducted to explore a specific training experience and how that

training experience impacted students' personal growth and personal development. These studies show that specific aspects of counselor-training programs impact personal growth and personal development. Although the focus of the current study is broader and more inclusive in nature, the following studies supported the idea that students: a) experience personal change during a master's level training program, b) are aware of the changes, and c) are aware these changes impact them both personally and professionally. The first study focused on a genogram assignment assigned during a human development course, whereas, the other two studies focused on a personal growth group experience.

In the first study, Lim (2008) focused specifically on graduate students' personal growth and personal development as it relates to, or is impacted by, a genogram assignment. Lim (2008) conducted a mixed-method study investigating graduate students' experiences and perceptions of genogram work. Lim (2008) found that the graduate-student participants perceived the experience of completing and presenting the genogram as positively impacting their personal growth and personal development. Two themes emerge within the area of personal growth and personal development: (1) growth in developing a healthier sense of self and (2) growth in developing a healthier sense of self in relation to family-of-origin dynamics (Lim, 2008). This study supports the idea that graduate students experience personal growth and personal development through participation in personal-exploration activities, specifically a genogram.

In addition, O'Leary et al. (1994) conducted a mixed methods study that focused on the effectiveness of including a group work component in a counselor-training course. Although significant quantitative results were found that supported an increased self-esteem in the participants no other significance in quantitative data was reported. However, five

significant components of growth were identified during qualitative data analysis: self-awareness, congruence, spirituality, attention to positive and negative feelings, and the perception of growth as a dynamic process (O’Leary et al., 1994). These findings further supported that master’s level counseling students do experience personal growth and personal development and that experiences of personal growth and personal development happen in specific, identifiable ways.

Furthermore, Ieva et al. (2009) conducted a qualitative investigation focusing on the experiences of an experiential group and how master student’s personal development make meaning of that experience. One of the emergent themes was “personal self-awareness and development”. This theme focused on the development of insight regarding one’s strengths and areas of growth, on the risk-taking process of sharing with others, and how engaging in the sharing process influences relationships with others (Ieva et al., 2009). Two subcategories “process” and “relationships” emerged and helped to clarify the first theme.

The first subcategory focused on the process of participating in the personal growth group and a development of personal self-awareness of areas of growth and the potential impact those areas may have on clients if gone unchecked. This subcategory not only supported that students change, but that they are aware of the changes they are experiencing and how those changes will positively impact their role as a counselor. Ieva et al., (2009) summarized the findings within this subcategory as follows, “...participants reported the importance of experiencing a personal growth group related to the impact it has on understanding the process and gaining insight about the importance of personal self-awareness and its role in counselor development” (p.359). The second subcategory focused on relationship skills (Ieva et al., 2009). This subcategory also supported the idea that students do

change and that this change has a positive impact both within and outside of the group experience. Students highlighted the transferability of the skills they learned within the personal growth group by sharing how they used the skills outside of the group in their personal relationships (Ieva et al., 2009).

The current study continued the above research by exploring students' perspectives regarding what parts of the master's level counseling program had the most impact on their personal growth and personal development. The qualitative, semi-structured design of the current study allows students to both share their experience of change, specifically in the areas of personal growth and personal development while enrolled in a master's level training program and identify specific aspects of the master's level training program that contributed most to their personal growth and personal development.

Counseling Students' Personal Growth and Personal Development

The following section focuses on the experiences of students' personal change, specifically their personal growth and personal development, while attending a counselor-training program. Researchers looked for the essence of the experience to better understand the experiences of personal change (McAuliffe, 2002; Woodside, Oberman, Cole & Carruth, 2007) and what parts of the program impacted personal change the most (McAuliffe, 2002). These studies are important to the current study as they highlighted the idea that master's level counseling students can and do experience personal growth and personal development, that they are aware and can speak to the experiences of personal change, and that it can be studied in a qualitative way.

McAuliffe (2002) explored undergraduate student experiences as compared to the current researcher's focus of graduate-level counseling students. McAuliffe (2002) questioned

how students change as a result of participation in one undergraduate counselor-training program. In this study, participants (consisting of 15 senior students in an undergraduate counselor-training program) shared (a) how they had changed over the course of the program and (b) what in the program influenced that change (McAuliffe, 2002). After analyzing the data, McAuliffe (2002) identified three categories of change in undergraduate counseling students: 1) *increased reflexivity* (the ability to look at multiple viewpoints), 2) *increased autonomy* (the ability to distinguish and act according to one's personal viewpoint), and 3) *valuing dialogue* (interest in others' perspective, active listening). McAuliffe (2002) also identified four program influences: 1) *social construction of knowledge* (knowledge created in and by humans), 2) *experiential learning* (grounding concepts through real-life experiences), 3) *independent thinking* (inquiring and looking deeper into ideas and concepts independently), and 4) *a supportive environment* (affirming conditions). In the theme *experiential learning*, one participant described the exploration of the self, stating "Our first paper . . . made me examine myself about my blind side and to see the difference between the self I show others and the self that is really true" (p. 210).

Although this study's (McAuliffe, 2002) main focus was on student change rather than student growth and development, the research did support the idea that students do experience personal change and are able to identify that change. The current research will expand on this study by focusing on graduate students. Specifically the current study will focus on master's level counseling students, and how they experience personal change, specifically in the areas of personal growth and personal development.

Woodside et al. (2007) investigated the experience of learning to be a counselor from a pre-practicum student's perspective. Woodside et al. (2007) used a phenomenological

approach to explore eight pre-practicum, master's level students' perceptions about their experience of learning to be a counselor. After analyzing the data, they identified seven themes, which were based on the participants' experience of learning to be a counselor (Woodside et. al., 2007). The most significant aspect of this research for the current study was the identification of the subtheme titled "self." Researchers identify a subtheme titled "self" in the learning theme. In this theme, participants described gaining knowledge about themselves. One participant stated, "I probably learned more about myself than anything else . . . I think in the long run that will help me to be confident as a counselor when I listen to others" (Woodside et al., 2007, p. 23). This subtheme implied the presence of personal growth and an acknowledgement by the student that this growth directly and positively impacted his/her work as a counselor. The current study changed the focus of inquiry from the beginning level student to the graduated, practicing student.

The above-mentioned studies showed that individual personal growth and personal development take place during counselor-training programs (McAuliffe, 2002; Woodside et al., 2007). Additionally, they showed that personal exploration (McAuliffe, 2002; Woodside et al., 2007) and supportive environments and relationships (McAuliffee, 2002) impacted students' perceptions of themselves.

Summary

Students develop in many ways throughout their master's level counselor-training program. Personal growth and personal development are important parts of a counselor's training experience (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1995). Researchers who study personal growth and personal development in master's level counselor trainees are still calling for more studies in this area, specifically research that is based on or provides a clearer understanding of the

concepts of personal growth and personal development (Irving & Williams, 1999; Lim, 2008; McAuliffe, 2002; Wheeler, 2000). The current research answered this call by studying counseling graduates' personal growth and personal development experiences throughout the entire counselor-training program. Additionally, this research furthered its scope and looked at the perceived impact that those personal growth and personal development experiences had on each counselor's professional work with clients.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the methodology used in the current study. It is important to explain how data are collected and interpreted (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975), because the trustworthiness of a research project depends on the quality and rigor of its methods and analysis. Therefore, the methodology used for this study is defined and discussed in this chapter. The first section of this chapter is a review of the study's purpose. The second section is a discussion of qualitative research and the rationale for selecting the basic qualitative design. The third section details the data collection procedures and techniques. Finally, the fourth section covers the data analysis process.

Purpose of the Study

Current literature indicated that counseling students experience personal growth and personal development while participating in a master's counseling program (Lim, 2008; McAuliffe, 2002; Woodside et. al., 2007). Additionally, literature on important counseling traits suggests counseling students' personal growth and personal development are important factors in becoming effective professional counselors (Pope & Kline, 1999; Wheeler, 2000). The purpose of this study is first to understand how counseling program graduates experience personal change in the areas of personal growth and personal development while in a CACREP-accredited master's level counseling program. The second purpose is to understand how their personal growth and development have impacted these same professionals' work as counselors.

The foundational questions are: (1) How did master's level counseling students experience personal growth and development during the master's level counselor-training program? (2) What parts of the master's level counselor-training program contributed most to their personal growth and personal development? (3) How do master's level counseling

graduates conceptualize how their personal growth and personal development have impacted their professional identity, and their present work with clients?

Qualitative Research

The selection of the appropriate research methodology was important to the success of the study. This section details why a qualitative method and, more specifically, the basic qualitative design were the appropriate method and design for this study. As Patton (2002) stated, “qualitative methods permit inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context, and nuance” (p.227). The first indication that qualitative methodology is appropriate is the lack of sufficient research into the personal growth and personal development of master’s level counseling students. Indeed, the literature review demonstrates that the research on the personal change, specifically the personal growth and personal development of master’s level counseling students is still in need of further investigation (Wheeler, 2000). Therefore, the first step toward gaining insights into the personal growth and personal development of master’s level counseling students involves gaining an in-depth understanding of their experiences during their training journeys. Gaining this detailed information is best facilitated by qualitative methods.

Qualitative research relies on methods that allow for holistic understanding of a phenomenon (Patton, 1990). The main goal of qualitative research is to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon from the perspective and experiences of the individuals within that phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). The qualitative data collection process allows participants to share the totality of their story about a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Patton (1990) stated, “qualitative methods are ways of finding out what people do, know, think, and feel” (p. 94).

Thus, qualitative methods are appropriate research tools to study the complex social phenomena of personal the growth and personal development of master’s level counseling students. In addition, how counseling students’ personal growth and development impacts graduates’ professional work as counselors is also an area of inquiry that is appropriate for qualitative research methods for three reasons: 1) this knowledge requires gaining the perspective of individual counseling graduates, 2) it requires understanding and reflecting on their experiences regarding their personal growth and personal development during their counselor training journey, and 3) it also requires understanding how they apply these personal growth and personal development experiences to their professional work with clients (Merriam, 2009). More specifically, the basic qualitative design was selected to direct this research.

Basic Qualitative Design

A basic qualitative design, formerly known as “basic interpretive qualitative design” (Merriam & Associates, 2002), was used to conduct this exploratory research of master’s level counseling students’ personal growth and personal development. This design was selected because it focuses on the main ideas of qualitative research without adding any additional dimensions or purposes (Merriam, 2009). For example a grounded theory study would be focused on understanding in order to develop of form a theory about a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). The basic qualitative design allows for the study’s focus to be to understand, through the process of uncovering and interpreting, the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved. Although understanding how people make sense of, and construct, their lives and experiences is the overall purpose of any qualitative design; the main goal of a basic qualitative study is to simply “uncover and interpret these meanings” (Merriam, 2009, pg. 24).

Additionally, Merriam (2009) simplified the basic focus of this design by stating, "...researchers conducting a basic qualitative study would be interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (pg. 23). Thus, the selection of the basic qualitative design allows the researcher to gain an understanding of three important aspects of how master's level counseling graduates experience change: 1) how graduates interpret their personal growth and personal development while participating in a counselor training program; 2) what meaning they place on their experiences of personal growth and personal development, both in the past and present; and 3) how each participant constructs his/her past and present work with clients as it relates to their personal growth and personal development (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Data Collection Procedures and Techniques

This section discusses the details of the procedures and techniques that were used in this study. First a review of the interview questions was conducted between the design and execution of the study; this step was utilized to test the quality and wording of the interview questions. The second topic defines and explains the interview and the emergent nature of qualitative research. The third topic is participant selection. The fourth, and last, topic is data collection and analysis.

Question Review and Quality Check

In an effort to increase trustworthiness, a review of the interview questions was conducted between the design and execution of the study. Trustworthiness in qualitative researcher is similar to validity and reliability in quantitative research (Merriam, 2009). This step was utilized to test the quality and wording of the interview questions. The researcher interviewed two master's level professionals trained in counseling who had a basic understanding of qualitative research methods. The interview was broken into two phases. The

first phase consisted of asking the interview questions to the participants. The second phase focused on a critique of the interview questions and content by the participants. The intention of these interviews was to test whether or not the study questions were worded in a way that focused the interview content on the study topic and allowed for each participant to share their personal experiences in their entirety. The outcome of the question review was the whittling down of the research questions and a broadening and reordering of the semi-structured interview questions that allowed for a more natural flow of the interview. Additional benefits of the pilot study for the researcher were the opportunity to practice integrating the research questions into the discussion/interview and practice probing for additional information and clarity.

Interview as the Method of Data Collection

Interviewing is a common and effective way to gather qualitative data (Patton, 1990). “The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind... We interview people to find out from them the thing we cannot directly observe” (Patton, 1990, P. 278). Therefore, this study used interviewing as a means to gather and record the experiences of the participants, because asking master’s level counseling graduates about the experiences that impacted personal growth and personal development was the most reliable way to discover the nature of the changes they experienced and how those changes impact their professional work. This collection of multiple individual experiences, as understood and recorded during interviews, provided the data for analysis.

Twelve open-ended, qualitative questions were used to begin and initially direct the interview. The twelve questions are as follows: 1) Would you start by sharing with me your personal experience of the master’s level counselor-training journey (highs/lows)? 2) What were your experiences of personal change? 3) How did you know you were experiencing personal

change during the program? 4) How do you think you changed personally? 5) Please tell me what aspects (classes, clinical experience, supervision) of the counselor-training program contributed most to your personal change. 6) Were there related life experiences that contributed to those changes as well? 7) Did you perceive that personal change was an expectation of the program or of learning to become a counselor? 8) Did you set any personal change goals during your training program? If so, what were they? 9) How did your personal change impact you on a student/professional level during the time you were enrolled in the master's level counselor-training program? 10) Was there any personal change that you only noticed after it had taken place, such as after a class, clinical experience, or after the program was over? 11) In what specific ways, if any, have your personal growth and personal development impacted your professional identity? 12) In what specific ways, if any, have your personal growth and development impacted your present work with clients?

Although the above, semi-structured interview questions were established prior to interviewing, “a qualitative design needs to remain sufficiently open and flexible to permit exploration of whatever the phenomenon under study offers for inquiry. Qualitative designs continue to be emergent even after data collection begins.” (Patton, 1990, p. 196). Thus, an element of flexibility within those questions was maintained in order to allow the research participants to elaborate on and share their experiences in their entirety. Additionally, the researcher used an interpretive style of questioning that allowed the researcher to both summarize and clarify the experiences of the participants (see APPENDIX E). The interpretive style of questioning is simply the purposeful use of content summarization and reflection to confirm the interviewer is correctly hearing and understanding the participant and the essence of their story (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) offered a description of the purpose of interpretive

questions: “Interpretive questions provide a check on what you think you are understanding, as well as offers an opportunity for yet more information, opinions and feelings to be revealed” (pp. 98).

Sampling and Recruitment

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants for this study. Purposeful sampling is simply the use of criterion to select participants who will provide the richest information about the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002). Criteria for participant selection included the following: a) participants graduated from a CACREP-accredited master’s counseling program between 2005 and 2013; b) participants are working in the community-counseling or clinical mental health fields; and c) participants are available and willing to participate in one 60-90 minute audio-recorded, face-to-face or phone interview. Additionally, participants were solicited from North Dakota. This focus was both convenient as it allowed participants the option to complete the interview in person and purposeful as it guaranteed similarity in accreditation and state licensure standards. The aforementioned criteria and focus ensured that the participants had similar training backgrounds and were currently working in the community-counseling or mental-health counseling fields.

Participant recruitment began following IRB approval. As professionals in the fields of counselor education and counseling, the research team had professional contacts and contact information for individuals who met the study criteria. The research team, which included the researcher and the researcher’s doctoral advisor, meet and identified possible participants. All participants that would be considered friends of the researcher were excluded from the study. An email script (see Appendix B) and a phone script (see Appendix A) were used to make initial contact with the identified potential participants. Snowball sampling was also used to solicit

participants who were not known to the research team. When contact was made, potential participants were asked to participate in the study. If initial contact was made by phone the request to participate followed a brief introduction of the study. If initial contact was made via email, the participant was asked to reply back to the e-mail if interested in participating in the study. Phone contact proved to be more effective than e-mail for this study. Potential participants were also asked to refer other participants to the study either through personal contact or by providing contact information for other counseling professionals they knew who might be interested in participating in the study. The above process was used to solicit qualified participants. Solicitation halted when theme saturation was achieved. A visual check of saturation was completed and is reviewed in the data analysis section below.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study consisted of seven audio-recorded (transcribed), semi-structured, qualitative interviews. All interviews were conducted at NDSU Community Counseling Services or in a private, confidential setting of the participants' choice. Participants participated in one interview. Interview notes were taken immediately following the interviews in order to record environmental and emotional nuances, along with any thoughts that may not have been captured through the audio recordings. Interviews were conducted in person or over the telephone. The interview method was determined by what method was most convenient for the participant and their schedule. Four interviews were completed in-person and three were completed over the phone, no difference appeared between the quality and depth of face-to-face verses phone interviews. Interviews varied in length and ranged from 55 to 87 minutes. Interview protocol included a review of the informed consent material (See Appendix C) and verbal informed consent was obtained from each participant before the official interview began.

Data Analysis

“Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150). The initial analysis of the data overlapped with the data collection process, as interviews were completed they would move into the transcription process where data analysis began. This continuous initial analysis was utilized to allow the researcher to become deeply emerged in the individual interview before attempting to identify themes within and across the data. All interviews were audio recorded. Audio recordings were listened to in their entirety by the researcher before transcription began. Initially transcription software was to be used for the initial transcription of the interviews. After two failed attempts to use the software the researcher decided to personally transcribe the interviews. The first three interviews were transcribed using the traditional typed method. After suffering through a grueling and almost impossible twenty plus hours of typing the researcher moved into a less traditional, but very effective dictation process. During the dictation process the researcher used the transcription/dictation software and while listening to the interview through a head-set, dictated the interview out loud into the transcription/dictation software. While dictating the researcher also typed and corrected any errors. Although this process of transcription was still quite time consuming the researcher was able to make quicker progress, but still remained submerged in the data.

The basic analytic procedures outlined by Marshall and Rossman (1999) were utilized to structure the emersion and interpretation process. Marshall and Rossman (1999) propose six phases of the typical analytic procedure: (1) organizing the data; (2) generating categories, themes, and patterns; (3) coding the data; (4) testing the emergent understandings; (5) searching for alternative explanations; and (6) writing the report. The researcher systematically moved

through these six proposed phases during the emersion and interpretation process. Phases 1-3 began during the transcription process and continued until all initial patterns were identified and coded into themes.

During phase 1 of the analysis process interviews were transcribed into organized documents that were easy to read and track. This was achieved by highlighting when the interview questions were asked during the interview, numbering each line to ensure easy reference during analysis, and providing adequate space in the margins for quick and clear note taking during the initial review and open coding process. Additionally, during this phase it was also important that the researcher remained submerged and familiar with the data. This was achieved, by the personal transcription/dictation of each interview and reading through each transcript while completing the open coding process. The open coding process is simply the process of initially reading through each transcript and notating any segment of data the researcher feels might be useful (Merriam, 2009). Notations included the underlining of important segments of the interview and the listing of summary or key words on the right hand side of the transcripts. After opening coding was concluded the researcher compiled all summary and key words onto a notepad. Each interview was assigned a color so the researcher could easily indicate who reported the key words and whether or not the key words were reported by more than one participant. If more than one participant had reported a key word the key word was underlined with the color of the interviewee that repeated the key word. This process allowed the researcher to both visually confirm saturation of data and begin to identify patterns within the data. As the researcher repeated this process and a reduction of new key words were introduced the researcher was able to confidently conclude saturation had been met.

During phase 2 of the analysis process patterns within and across the data were identified. The researcher was looking for codes (key words or phrases) that developed into patterns that were then organized into categories. This stage of the data analysis process took considerable time as it was difficult to identify categories that were distinct from each other while looking for connections among the categories that indicated themes. Ultimately, the themes were organized under the specific research question it addressed (spoke to). Sub-themes (originally categories) that more specifically described a specific theme were maintained under that theme.

During phase 3 of the analysis process each transcript was reviewed again and quotes and phrases were manually coded to indicate the theme or sub-theme it supported. Different colored highlighters were used to identify the theme that a passage or quote supported. Marshall and Rossman (1999) identified two purposes for the coding: 1) to apply the categories to the data and 2) to enable examples of the data to be used in the write-up of the qualitative data analysis.

Phases 4 & 5 were completed through peer debriefing and consultation with two Doctoral level counselors who had conducted qualitative research prior to assisting with data analysis. The peer debriefing process was utilized to clarify theme emersion and discuss the researcher's reactions to and perceptions of the interviews. During the debriefing process the research shared: 1) the guiding questions, 2) the codes and categories that were pulled from the data, 3) the initial themes, and 4) raw transcripts for review. During the discussion the reviewers asked questions about the data and themes that allowed the researcher to examine the essence of the theme. Alternative explanations were also examined. Themes were added, deleted, reworded, and combined as a result of the debriefing process.

Phase 6 was completed after all other steps were successfully navigated. After the themes, themes descriptions, and supporting quotes were drafted, the research team completed a reworking of the themes, which included a discussion of the essence of the themes and whether the interviewer believed the themes both answered the guiding questions and represented the data. Following this final reworking of the themes, the data was narrated and substantiating quotations were added to corroborate the findings. The findings are discussed in the following chapter.

Trustworthiness

Precautions were taken throughout the development and implementation of this study to increase the credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability of this study. For this study the researcher took two precautions prior to beginning the study. The first was completing a question review and quality check process with two master's level counselor-trained professionals who had previous knowledge of qualitative data collection and data analysis. This question review and quality check process increased the likelihood that the research questions would both be understood by the participants and would gather unique and individual stories without leading or directing the information towards the answers the researcher was looking for. The second was the reflection of the researcher's personal experiences of personal growth and personal development while enrolled in a master's level counselor-training program, including any assumptions or biases the researcher might be holding about what the study may uncover. This work allowed the researcher to enter into the interview with an awareness of herself and a desire to fully hear the story and experiences of the study participant she was sitting across from.

The researcher also took precautions during the data collection and data analysis stages of this study. During the data collection stage the researcher used two bias and assumption

checking techniques. The first was a written and voice recorded individual processing of the interview and a discussion debriefing with peers who were able to both listen to the researchers experiences and ask questions that elicited more processing of the interview. The second was the use of narrative probing during the interview that consisted of the interviewer summarizing back the information that she had heard from the participant. This allowed the participant to confirm or correct the interviewers understanding of the information being shared.

Finally, following data analysis the researcher completed two theme checks with doctorate level counseling professionals and qualitative researchers. These theme checks consisted of an open discussion of the themes, interview content, including a review of portions of the transcripts, and the consideration of alternative explanations. Additionally, following the initial write-up of the results section, the research team completed a reworking of the themes, which included a discussion of the essence of the themes and whether the interviewer believed the themes both answered the guiding questions and represented the data. Although it is impossible to fully take the researcher's lens out of a qualitative study, the steps listed above ensured that the researcher was more fully aware of the lens through which she was gathering, understanding and interpreting these data.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The purpose of this study was, first, to understand how counseling program graduates experience personal change, in the areas of personal growth and personal development, while in a CACREP-accredited master's level counseling program. The second purpose was to understand how their personal growth and personal development has impacted these same professionals' work as counselors.

Participants

The seven participants for this study were recruited from a list of professional contacts known to the research team. Effort was made to collect a sample that varied in program attended, graduation year, age, personality, and counseling specialty area. Thus all qualifying professionals were contacted and invited to participate in the study. Additionally, in an effort to expand the reach of the studies solicitation effort, each contact was asked if they had any referrals of professionals who met the study criteria and who they thought may be willing in participating in the study. Below is a description of the participants' demographics, however due to the limited number of professional counselors in North Dakota and the limited number of CACREP-accredited programs in the Midwest, individual profiles are not included.

Participants in this study were all graduates of a CACREP-accredited program and worked either partially or solely as a community or mental health counselor, with two participants identifying as working in both the mental health and addictions fields. Additionally, two participants worked in private practice, one in a college counseling center, and two in nonprofit community counseling centers. Six of the seven participants were acquainted with the researcher, however none of the participants were close friends of either researcher on the team. Participants ranged in age from 29 to 66, with a mean age of 42. All participants identified as

Caucasian, Scandinavian-American or of White European decent. Six of the seven participants identified as female. Four of the seven participants were in the process of participating in post-masters educational programs and one participant reported participating in an online counselor-training program, no outlining difference were emphasized between either participants with or without post-masters education, or the online learner.

Themes

The information presented in this section was garnered from seven interviews and resulted in 16 main themes. The 16 main themes will address the study's three foundational questions. The foundational questions are: (1) How did master's level counseling students experience personal growth and development during the master's level counselor-training program? (2) What parts of the master's level counselor-training program contributed most to their personal growth and personal development? (3) How do master's level counseling graduates conceptualize how their personal growth and personal development have impacted their professional identity, and their present work with clients? Additionally, an additional findings section was included to include themes that focused on the terms of personal growth, personal development, and professional development. Themes will be presented and discussed in correspondence to the section it speaks to. Additionally, each theme will be supported using direct quotations from the participants. These quotations were extracted from the interview transcripts. An outline of the 16 main themes is listed below and is organized in the order they are presented in this chapter.

Foundational Questions #1: How did master's level counseling students experience personal growth and personal development during the master's level counselor-training program?

1. Participants reported a great amount of growth in the area of self.
2. Participants reported having increased awareness of the interconnectedness of humans.
3. Past experiences and current life circumstance influenced participants' personal growth and personal development journey.
4. Participants learned new ways to navigate and build upon their perceived weaknesses.

Foundational Question #2: What parts of the master's level counselor-training program contributed most to their personal growth and personal development?

1. Relationships in the program were a large component of what contributed to counseling graduates' personal growth and development.
2. Clinical experiences contributed greatly to professional development, which in turn promoted personal growth and personal development.
3. Components of the counselor-training program that promoted self-reflection contributed most to personal growth and personal development.
4. Participants overcame periods of insecurity during the counselor-training program.
5. Personal growth and personal development was an expectation of the program.
6. Personal growth and personal development was inevitable if engaged in the counselor-training journey.

Foundational Question #3: How do master's level counseling graduates conceptualize how their personal growth and personal development have impacted their professional identity, and their present work with clients?

1. Learning to receive and process feedback during the counselor-training program normalized use of consultation as a professional.
2. Ethical and effective counseling practices include continual personal growth and personal development.
3. Parallels existed between the personal growth and personal development work and how participants conceptualize the role of a counselor.
4. Counseling graduates reported learning to trust and honor the journey of counseling and change through their own personal growth and development journey.

Additional Findings: Personal Growth, Personal Development and Professional Development.

1. Participants reported a retrospective awareness of personal growth.
2. A connection between personal and professional growth and development was indicated.

Foundational Question #1: How did master's level counseling students experience personal growth and personal development during the master's level counselor-training program?

In order to understand the personal growth and personal development experiences of master's level counseling students it was important to look at how master's level counseling students experienced personal growth and personal development while enrolled in a master's level training program. Counselors were interviewed using twelve open-ended questions that focused on varying aspects of the personal growth and personal development experiences. These questions built off of each other and often naturally overlapped or clarified each other. The first interview question was used to allow the participants to initially think about and share their overall counselor-training experience. The second group of questions continued to focus on

the past and asked participants to look at: a) what were the experiences of personal growth and development, b) what indicated that change was taking place and c) what types of change took place.

When students were asked about the experiences of personal growth and personal development, there was no question that yes-personal change did occur; every participant indicated that they did experience personal growth and personal development. Not only did participants express that personal change did occur, they also expressed an overall positive evaluation of the experience and the personal growth and personal development that had taken place. For example one participant stated, “My experience was really positive in that I felt there was a tremendous amount of personal growth and maturity that happened there.” Additionally, another participant shared how overwhelmed they were by the amount of growth that took place in just a short amount of time: “I remember that first summer just being kind of shaken, moved to the point of being shaken and what, you know, what was happening and then now I look back on it, wow, that was, that was incredible. Like incredible what we did and what we were pushed to do...” In response to the how question, the following four themes speak to how personal change was experienced during the master’s level training program.

Theme 1: Participants reported a great amount of growth in the area of self. A variety of appraisals of the self were reported and appeared to intersect and connect with each other. Participants reported gaining greater understanding of who they are and what impacted their development. They reported learning about their true self and learning to accept and find pride in the person they are. These descriptions of learning about and connecting to their self often intersected and overlapped with different aspects of the self. Additionally, participants often shared that their increased self-knowledge, self-acceptance, self-awareness and self-

concept led to increased self-confidence. For example, when a participant talked about learning more about herself she expressed that her increased self-knowledge impacted her self-confidence. All of the participants expressed a more positive appraisal of self. The following quotations support this main theme.

“I think I was able to identify what I really struggled with in life, whether it be aspects of growing up, or the marriage and divorce...I think I was more confident, in the sense that I knew it was okay to voice my opinion and that it mattered.”

“...I think that was pretty huge, just having an awareness of even personal issues that you go through... [Interviewer summarizes, “So you kind of developed not just a confidence in how to balance everything, but confidence and awareness of yourself, and how you interact with people and how like maybe past experiences impacted the way you are today and different things like that?”]...Yes, absolutely!”

Subtheme 1-2: Increased self-knowledge. Participants reported learning more about themselves, their pasts, how they operate as individuals and their strengths and weaknesses.

“I grew a lot ... I think what happened to me more than anything was it affirmed the way that I tend to work with people. As a professional, it affirmed that my ideas about what would be helpful to people were probably solid, which was very helpful to me.”

“I felt like I learned a lot about myself and my own shortcomings and my own strengths by being in the program.”

Subtheme 1-2: Acceptance of self. Many participants expanded on knowledge of self and expressed self-acceptance or greater acceptance of who they were. These expressions often followed comments about increased knowledge and led to comments indicating greater self-confidence.

“I would say acceptance of who—where I was, personally and academically, more about my childhood growing up, where I came from, that I was divorced and it was okay. It helped accept personal things.”

“This is my journey, I am going to do the unconventional thing because that brought me closer to who I believed myself to be, closer to my authentic self.”

Subtheme 1-3: Greater self-concept. Development in self-concept is achieved when individual’s perceptions of who they should be, the ideal self and who they believe they are, the real self begins to emulate each other or move closer to looking the same. This often happens when people become aware and let go of the expectations that others or society has placed on them, and that they have internalized. This process is demonstrated in the following quotes.

“I think the biggest thing was just...understanding... umm...understanding my triggers, understanding the things that I took on as beliefs, as concrete beliefs in my life that maybe no longer suited me or no longer were purposeful in my life.”

“I think I had a more accurate view of my identity. I think I had had some experience, work experience and life experience before going into the program. And I was a little bit older, I was in the middle and umm...I think before that I had relied on so much of what other people would tell me who I am and so those things were kind of deeply ingrained and then once I got into the program and started doing more self-growth. I think I started to just see myself more accurately with that space, that I didn't have to rely on what other people said as much so I...became more confident.”

“I became the person I believed I was meant to be...As I grew in my skills and continued to be affirmed and successful, I became closer to the image I saw in my head of who I was and the program brought me closer to being that person.”

Subtheme 1-4: Increased self-confidence. Participants reported increased self-confidence as an aspect of the personal growth and personal development that was experienced during the counselor-training journey. They expressed this change almost exclusively as it connected to other aspects of personal growth and development.

“I saw a lot of change in just my self-esteem and my self-confidence umm...in figuring out more about who I was and where I fit in in the world.”

“I think learning more about who I was and just, you know my self-esteem definitely was something that grew quite a bit...coming into the program I had very little self-esteem and thought very little of myself...the program helped me realize was just like my own value and worth.”

“I chose to go a different route because my life has always been about meaning and purpose. In the program I got closer to that and not only did I grow in confidence, but I was proud that I went back and lived my belief in lifelong learning.”

Theme 2: Participants reported having increased awareness of the interconnectedness of humans. Counseling graduates reported increased awareness of self in relation to others as an area of personal growth and personal development. Participants reported having increased awareness of the interconnectedness of humans and how that interconnectedness was represented in how people influenced each other through their interactions. This piece of personal growth and personal development seemed to be very introspective in focus. Additionally, this awareness also led to the establishment of new behaviors, specifically in relation to setting personal boundaries and expecting higher quality relationships. The following quotations support the main theme.

“I feel I understand more about my triggers with family. Things that are deep rooted, kind of cultural beliefs that I have that when someone talks about something that reminds me about, you know, one of my experiences with anyone, a childhood experience or with someone in my family.”

“I think personally you kind of become more aware of things that you might have been doing, or how you communicate with others.”

“Trying to always feel like I was worth the other person's attention or time and that sometimes meant doing things I didn't want to do or things kind of like that. Also, I think that a big part of it for me is that I can't control other people ... you know? I can't fix other people. I can't make them do what I want, and so letting go of control also is a big piece.”

“I learned a lot about umm...developing relationships and doing that in a way that, you know, it feels comfortable for both people and a lot about engagement. And I learned how to say no to things, how to create some space for myself.”

“I think just also really learning about how I function in relationships. In family relationships, in friend relationships, in romantic relationships, like understanding more about healthy relationships and just kind of what I was willing to tolerate and put up with.”

“I would actually say for me, it wasn't so much about learning how to be vulnerable in relationships, but... how to ... I guess if I was learning to be vulnerable, it would be learning to be vulnerable in a healthy way with people who respect me and weren't going to take advantage of it.”

“You can disagree with people and still have relationships with them, like you can set boundaries with them, like I do with my parents and still have relationships and learn to kind of let go of control of trying to make everything light for everyone else.”

Subtheme 2-1: Awareness as Self as a Counselor. Although the main theme focuses on personal relationships, it is important to note that while expressing this growth some participants expressed this increased awareness in relation to their self as a counselor. This distinction is represented in the quotations that follow.

“The moment became really memorable because it became a new more productive coping skill as a counselor and for me to just be able to transfer and ask myself that question any time something comes up, you know, that feels like it's rooted in shame that I can ask myself, ‘why does it have to be about me and more than, more than them?’ And then, you know, understanding the greater boundary between two people that everybody's living their own journey.”

“So I noticed that more that I felt like I could be less self-protective because the boundary... because I knew how to put the boundary there and I knew how to empathize

with what someone was going through which created that change in bringing me closer to people in a more positive way.”

“I think I learned a lot about boundaries. I think I learned a lot about the spirituality of when one person meets another and like how fine that line is and how much impact we have on each other.”

“I think it’s true, umm...I aim for that. I think again learning to listen and observe without pulling your own biases in is important.”

Theme 3: Past experiences and current life circumstance influenced participants’ personal growth and personal development journey. Although the counselor-training program and the aspects of personal change are similar, what people bring to the training program is unique. Participants reported unique perceptions of their journey and how their past experiences and current life stage impacted the lens they looked at and experienced the counselor-training journey through. Similar components of personal growth and personal development were reported, but still each individual’s reason for that journey was unique.

The following quote is taken from a participant who was experiencing the training program at the same time she was going through the process of a divorce.

“Well, I, upon entering, God is it feels like a different world to talk about, and you were there, which is pretty cool too, I was married when I came here in 2007 and we were from [out of state], and I got a divorce, or we separated during that first summer. So, I would say that I had become more self-resilient and independent. And, I found my own voice.”

Later in the interview she expresses how beneficial it was for her to be going through a counselor-training program while experiencing a very difficult life event. This overlap allowed

her to not only understand the humanness of counselors and what it feels like to struggle, but also that she could achieve her goals on her own.

Another participant reported that entering the program signified a career change. He reported experiencing some personal feelings of shame and insecurity throughout the program due to moving from being an experienced and successful professional to being a student. This participant also shared that because of his life stage he did not receive a lot of support from people regarding his career change. His journey looked much different than some of the students who were in more of a career exploration or career establishing stage in life. The following quote speaks to the specific personal growth and personal development he experienced.

“Part of my journey in that whole counseling thing was, working through the shame of feeling like a loser, because I was going back to school at an older age, and so part of my growth was to hang in there, and to do the classes and be surrounded by people like yourself, who were encouraging, accepting and loving, so that was a huge thing for me, working through the shame of changing careers later than midlife.”

Yet, another participant reported very minimal overall personal growth and development, even as it related to increased confidence in career or even counseling skills. She shared that she was well established in her career and had already underwent a large amount of training before entering into a master’s level counselor training program. However, she reported experiencing a great amount of development in understanding herself as she struggled with her own journey of multicultural growth and development as it related to the LGBTQ community. Early on in the interview she shared the challenge of watching all of these conflicting viewpoints come to a head in her personal life and how that intensified the confusion she was feeling during the

program. The quote below expresses her experience after the program as she comes to understand what she believes her professors were challenging her to understand while she was attending the counselor-training program.

“Yes, the evidence for me was when I sat in the family alliance workshop with [trainers from a couples and families program] and I was like ‘oh yes of course, of course we need to do this’. Then I felt like ‘oh this is where everybody else was probably at’ you know 5 years or 8 years ago back at school.”

Theme 4: Participants learned new ways to navigate and build upon their perceived weaknesses. Participants reported that while they were developing knowledge and techniques that would assist them in successfully helping their clients, they learned new ways to navigate and build upon their own perceived weaknesses. The expression of this theme varied from the personal application of a counseling theory or technique, to personally establishing new boundaries and higher expectations for relationships, and even the broad application of learning to appreciate the differences in people, including you as a person.

“The biggest thing that helped me was Albert Ellis', you know the Socratic questioning, and that ABC thing, where something happens and it triggers a belief about yourself...If I felt someone at work was upset with me, I would go through that and I would quickly realize that, chances are this person is not upset with me at all, and secondly, it really helped me just chuck it out right away.”

“My parents at the time were going through a very tough time in their marriage, and so umm...I had always been the mediator between them, and things like that. Learning to establish healthy boundaries and this is not a place for me. I can't be your counselor. I can't take on your guys' issues. This isn't my place, kind of a thing.

“As you are learning about...kind of the process of being people and how there are many different people in the world that you are going to work with, you are also learning that you are ONE of those people; you’re very different maybe too but you can have an appreciation for yourself as you would for other people.”

Foundational Question #2: What parts of the master’s level counselor-training program contributed most to their personal growth and personal development?

After gaining an understanding of how personal growth and development was experienced, the next step was to find out what parts of the training program contributed most to participants personal growth and development. While the first question allowed the participants to provide an overview of their past experience while in the master’s level counselor training program. The second group of questions, still in past orientation, focused on how master’s level counseling students experienced personal growth and development. The third group of questions focused on what aspects of the program had contributed most to those personal growth and personal development experiences. More specifically, the third group of questions looked at: a) what specific components of the program contributed to personal growth and personal development, b) when personal growth and personal development was noticed in relation to these components and how that personal growth and personal development impacted them as a student, c) what personal life experiences were happening during the time of the program that may have impacted the personal growth and personal development experiences and d) if personal growth and personal development was an expectation of the program. Six themes emerged that spoke to what components of the master’s level counseling program contributed most to master’s level counseling students’ personal growth and personal development. The first

theme that emerged highlighted the importance relationships played in the personal growth and development of the participants.

Theme 1: Relationships in the program were a large component of what contributed to counseling graduates' personal growth and development. Every participant cited that some type of relationship with others from the program positively contributed to his or her personal growth and personal development. For many of the participants a variety of relationships were of pinnacle importance to their growth and development, both as a person and as a counselor. The following quotations support this main theme.

“I did grow. I grew through working with my fellow students and the kind of support I got from teachers. The kind of support I got from those folks.”

“If someone else believes in you or encourages you I think there is no doubt that's going to build on your confidence about doing something that you maybe are unsure of or you don't know 100% the answers of it.”

Subtheme 1-1: Peer-cohort relationships. Overall participants reflected on their peer-cohort relationships in a very positive light. They described how these relationships help them succeed during times of intense schedules and classroom expectations. Participants also reported finding support in their peer-cohort relationships when they were feeling insecure or struggling in their personal life. The following quotations speak to the importance of these relationships.

“Also I think the interconnections that I had with some of the students... Just during the time there you have to interact with people; it's structured that way, so I think that was helpful, kind of forced interactions. There may have been people that were easier to be with and some that were less easy, but you are still a part of learning... [and] again encouragement or working together towards a common goal.”

“To just gain some confidence in myself, I would say was a part of that too because it was really, really difficult at times. And so having the encouragement and everything from other people, so I guess I felt that camaraderie from others in the profession.”

“I think that's maybe why I... and we would have anyway, but it really created some lasting relationships and friendships, because they were with me through -- especially with me through the whole thing.”

Subtheme 1-2: Advisor-advisee relationships. Participants singled out the special relationships they had with their advisor as an area of importance in both their personal growth and personal development, and their professional development. Participants reported really feeling like their advisors were not only invested in their academic success, but also genuinely cared for them as people. The following quotations highlight these relationships.

“I think my advisor relationship was one that really kind of modeled unconditional positive regard and acceptance and learning to be a bit more vulnerable where I was at in the program and she was pretty understanding.”

“I think my relationship with my adviser, definitely. It was a really good effect. She was very encouraging and very validating but continued to challenge me in a good way while providing me with a lot of support.”

“...Like a connection that you have with your adviser; it seemed like a good fit with [advisor's name] and she had very valid suggestions and points that were helpful to me.”

“I did develop a pretty close relationship with my advisor at the time. She was pretty helpful with putting things up or helping me along the way, especially if I'm

having a rough time in the program, juggling everything or frustrated or just pissed off or whatever it was, she was there to provide that support, which I think was pretty big.”

Subtheme 1-3: Professor-student relationships. Participants also reported becoming close with some of their general program professors. These relationships were also spoke of as being important to not only participants’ personal growth and personal development, but also their professional development and success.

“Then one of the other professors, we were really close and like he really kind of taught me how to think about things out of the box and not in a, this is a traditional, things can only be done one way... someone I could go and talk to about my concerns. There wasn't any judgment or you need to change. It was just somebody that would just sit down and listen”

“I had professors that were able to reflect back and say, hey this is a really good piece of awareness for you or that part of it.”

“When I was in the program I also pursued some art therapy training and when I went of state to do that, and there were a couple of professors that were very supportive of that and may have had to even write a recommendation, I can’t remember, so that kind of support and willingness to extend their time for that.”

“When we did have that face-to-face contact, they were usually encouragingly, like handing out pins for example, that said ‘you can do it’ or the little things like that, that were just like, you are doing this, you are on your way, keep at it. I think that was really encouraging.”

“Some of the teachers challenged my independence and my own ability to use my internal resources instead of always seeking external resources.”

Theme 2: Clinical experiences contributed greatly to professional development, which in turn promoted personal growth and personal development. Participants reported that clinical experiences, including: counseling skills class, group counseling class, practicum and internship were all areas that impacted personal change. Additionally, participants shared that as they successfully navigated the clinical experiences and grew in their competence as a counselor they also felt advancement in their personal growth and personal development.

Quotations supporting this theme are listed below.

“My internship was really great in that sense that I felt like I really got thrown into the fire and I did okay.”

“[Those were] helpful classes, practicum, supervision and internship. There was always a lot of uncertainty there again, ‘Can I do this?’ which is very similar to the way they start entering the program, ‘Will I be able to do this?’ same kind of question. But with the guides and the knowledge that I can do it when I have somebody to ask questions to, I can figure out my way through it.”

“From practicum to internship even; and looking back there was a sense of confidence or growth that occurred, you build on it. And I remembered some of the clients that I had in the practicum and feeling uncertain, Should I actually say this? You know, ‘this might be challenging,’ or ‘This is some insight I have, do I dare go there?’ And building on that more in the internship and feeling more confident.”

“I do remember because [skills] class was the first one, being uncomfortable and thinking...It was a huge group in the summer and were sitting in a circle and the room is hot and just thinking like really, ‘were just going to sit here and stare at each other’...but I learned silence and that silence is okay and I'm not very good at that, and I do test

myself with that and I am still always trying to tell myself you know less is more or just kind of, quiet, calm, just be there.”

Theme 3: Components of the counselor-training program that promoted or required self-reflection contributed most to personal growth and development. Participants indicated that many of the experiences that impacted their personal growth and development were experiences where they were asked to do some sort of self-reflection. Below are quotations that support this theme.

“It always seemed like we were umm...guided to be introspective about those things. So, constantly looking at what still hurts or what we still have to heal before we can be with someone on their journey of healing.”

“You know I suppose 'cause I distinctly remember again when [my professor] put the... when we had the blackboard and he asked for all the names of how we treat people, what we call people, what the names are...between the white privileged and the Nap Sack and I mean...the program did a nice job of both exposure and, you know, opening us too...I think coming out of this part of the country where there's so limited interaction I think and just not getting out of that white privilege, because nobody's jolted you out of it. That was a jolt. Just the visual experience of seeing all that and then, kind of taking that in as who you are as a person, and not letting it, not letting that bias interfere with that first assumption.”

“One of the courses that we did was how we wanted to look meaningful to personal change was [name of development course]. And in that class we specifically looked at our history, our belief system, how this may affect how we would interact with clients in a professional basis, but you really just know everything about you and maybe

some biases that you've had, that you didn't recognized before or methods of communication or defenses that we may not have recognized before in ourselves.”

“I also liked the theories classes, just being able to look at our own world view and what your theoretical orientation really goes along with who we are as people. I think that was pretty helpful, because you have to get to know yourself to be able to pick one and use it well.”

“And then like the internship class, we also did a lot of back and forth, you know quotes and papers and different things during that time too. I think that overall class was a constant reflection, constantly looking back on, what have you learned, how are you applying this, how are you changing personally as a result of that. I think that was probably pretty big too.”

“I am thinking that in the [name of human development course] class, there was one assignment and it is something I now use as an addictions counselor, but it was like an autobiography timeline. That was something that was pretty impactful, and looking at events in my life that had really impacted who I am as a person. I think that assignment is something that stands out to me.”

Subtheme 3-1: Personal growth and development was also experienced during times of struggle or challenge. Additionally, participants shared times of disagreement that also required them to self-reflect. A few of the participants talked about times when they did not feel supported or times when they felt shamed or put down. The self-reflection process was highlighted, because if self-reflection had not occurred resolution of the internal struggle that was elicited from the disagreement would not have been found. Participants shared that they first underwent some sort of personalization of the message, but after they had had time to

process and self-reflect they were able to redefine or reframe the initial message and gain a better understanding of their self(s) in the process. The participants pointed out that processing through these negative experiences also lead to personal growth and personal develop.

“That triggered a lot of shame for me, the way he treated me, and so part of my growth experience was working through that shame of being an older student, going back to school.”

“ ...It felt at times, the older people [in our cohort] thought we were pretty silly and stupid and just like we were these silly little girls who didn’t really know what we were doing and weren’t taking anything seriously and because we were so young and didn’t know anything. And so...It was really interesting [later in the program] to learn ‘No, I may not have had the life experience that you have had, but that doesn’t make my value or my ability to be a counselor any less effective than yours.’”

“So they wanted me to be who they were, but it wasn’t ok for me to be who I was... [so through that struggle of trying to maintain my identity] I think I got a better name to more of how my views actually do fit into more of a pantheist in the way of my love of chaos theory and I practice that god is in the minutia, the little teeny tiny things of the sourcing. So at least I had a new name for...my beliefs and how I see the world.”

Theme 4: Participants overcame periods of insecurity during the counselor-training program. Participants reported periods of insecurity during the program. These periods of insecurity were connected to new experiences and worry that they would not perform well in the new situation. Entering into the program and transitioning into practicum and internship were times highlighted as producing insecurity in most of the participants. Conversely, subtheme 4-1

speaks to how participants reported increased personal and professional confidence following periods of success. The following quotations support Theme 4.

“When I started the program I think my biggest hesitation, because I was an older than average student at that time. I was in my 40s and it had been a long time since I had been through college. I knew there'd be a lot of writing and a lot of intensive classroom time and wonder personally if it was something that I could still do, given the other life commitments that I had.”

“I was coming in as an older student. I was pretty anxious about how I would be received. Like, what's he doing here? Then being the only male student in the class, in our class, until later we got in two more. I think that first year I was the only male. Again, it was like, ‘Am I weird?,’ because there's no other guys doing this.”

Subtheme 4-1: Success and highlighting positive assets helped build confidence during times of insecurity. Participants reported feeling of insecurity especially surrounding being able to do the academic work and learning to become a counselor. They expressed that when periods of insecurity were resolved they experienced personal growth and personal development. Most participants shared that insecurity was resolved through the successful navigation of counselor-training program, marked by passing marks and positive feedback regarding counseling skills or personal assets. The following quotations support this subtheme.

“So, I think in some ways when we talk about growth and experiences I was able to, prove to myself that I could do that, that I could do that type of program and would be able to obtain a goal of a Masters level. So in that way, I was able to prove to myself...and grow my confidence.”

“...taking classes, doing well on tests, it made me feel like this isn't a stupid thing, and I'm not a loser, which is what I worried about being, kind of.”

“One of my negative beliefs is, I'm not enough, or I'm not smart, and so when I was doing well again, academically, and when I was learning, It gave me some tools to work with, for myself, which is really gratifying.”

“Just knowing I could do it, it was very validating...I think it was the success, because I didn't really -- my client conceptualization wasn't very good until later, or it was very -- yeah, I think it was in it's early stages, I think it had more to do with yeah, I could do this and I could trust myself.”

“I don't know how to say it for sure but some of the encouragement or reassuring statements were helpful too. Like, ‘you need to trust yourself’, I don't know if that was ever said, but in a sense that's kind of what the supervisors were saying, the practicum supervisors or internship supervisors would have helped in that way.”

Theme 5: Personal growth and personal development was an expectation of the program. Participants reported a strong impression that personal growth and personal development was an identified outcome of the program. Six of the seven participants expressed that it was an expectation of the counselor-training program, where as one participant simply felt like it was a suggestion or opportunity if you were willing to engage in the process.

“Right away, in the interview process one of the professors said, ‘I just want you to know that you are not going to come out the way you came in,’ basically. And some people have different religious beliefs than they do when they leave and they may have different beliefs about themselves, their life in general.”

“Yep. I did. I felt that they expected that we would learn and apply enough to ourselves that we would grow, and that some of us would enter into therapy in order to assist that growth.”

“They expect that [change] in so many ways of us, I felt like that was expected of me in so many ways, from the course work, the assignments in the course work all the way to the supervisor role and internship and practicum. Even the doc students I remember just being really challenging.

”We are never going to be perfect, but just having that awareness that you recognize those things in yourself, is essential to being able to be a counselor. Even though I don't think it was ever absolutely stated, ‘Look, you're going to change a lot,’ you know and that's necessary, but it was sort of an undertone I guess you could say.

Theme 6: Personal growth and personal development was inevitable if engaged in the counselor-training journey. Many of the participants expressed that personal growth and personal development was inevitable if a student was participating in the program and engaged in the counselor-training journey.

“I feel like the personal growth and change was also inevitable just because you are dealing with all these different issues, and then you are gaining the experience on communication or conflict management or a variety of different topics.”

“I can't imagine that you go through a program if you were actually participating in it and doing your own work that you would be the same, because there has got to be some insight on some things that occur, otherwise you wouldn't be learning, you wouldn't be there, you wouldn't need to be there.”

“I remember when I was in high school, I wanted to be an attorney and my dad worked at a law office and he said if you're going to be an attorney you have to come and talk to the attorneys because when you become an attorney, you become an attorney. That's not just your job it's just who you are. And so then I sat down with all the attorneys and talked to them and I was, no I don't want to be an attorney. But I mean, he only knew attorneys, you know, he thought that was an attorney thing and in reality that's a... that's a professional thing and I became a counselor in my life, which has some positive benefits and some really negative benefits. That I can't have a normal conversation with my children without empathizing with them or trying to skill build or something like that or trying to emotional regulation I just... I see everything in terms of human growth and potential. I see everything that way.”

“I think it would be near impossible to not have some kind of personal growth, just because of how much really soul searching that you have to do throughout the process, and managing difficult emotions, being from your past, behaviors that you engage in now or personal flaws that you may view. In the experience that I've had, I think it would be near impossible to not have some form of personal growth.”

Foundational Question #3: How do master’s level counseling graduates conceptualize how their personal growth and personal development have impacted their professional identity, and their present work with clients?

After gaining an understanding of what parts of the training program contributed most to participants’ personal growth and development. The final step was to find out if and how the personal growth and development experienced during the master’s level counselor-training program contributed to the participants’ professional identities and current work with clients.

While the previous questions had a past orientation, the fifth and last set of questions focused on the present time. This set of questions looked at: a) how personal growth and personal development impacted each participant's professional identity and b) how personal growth and development impacted each participant's present work with clients. Four themes emerged that spoke to foundational question #3.

Theme 1: Learning to receive and process feedback during the counselor-training program normalized use of consultation as a professional. Participants reported a comfort with seeking consultation from peers, supervisors and other mental health professionals when they were feeling stuck or under--prepared to help their client. Many of the participants connected their comfort with feedback as a direct impact of the counselor-education training program. They stated that going through the feedback process during the training-program made it easier to continue the practice into their professional positions.

“I've learned the value of calling people like my internship supervisor and getting input when I'm dealing with a situation I don't really know, I'm kind of pondering, I call him, and that's really helpful, so I never really feel like I have to figure this out alone, I can get someone to help, from people who have been at this a lot longer than I have.”

“...again encouragement or working together towards a common goal. Those are kind of all things that I encountered once I had a job, so it kind of continued to build on that... I think counselors need to be comfortable with [feedback], because, umm...not only ethically but to staff things so that you know you are going in the right direction, but also for your own personal well-being. And so to be comfortable talking to people about things that you struggle with or things that you are uncertain about; there is no way

you can have all the answers. I work with counselors who have been doing this for 20/30 years and they still have questions; not as many as me.”

“Yeah, which is absolutely necessary in counseling, because you are constantly faced with stuff that you're like, ‘I don't know, I've never dealt with this before...’ You're going to go to your peers, you learn to use your supervisor, you don't have to be alone in all that. I think that was probably important.”

Theme 2: Ethical and effective counseling practices includes continual personal growth and personal development. Participants reported that experiencing change and entering into a process of growth was necessary for ethical and effective counseling. This belief was accompanied by the acknowledgement of the ethical expectation for self-care, appropriate boundaries, and the expectation to do no harm.

“I think in order to help someone heal, you have to heal yourself, or at least work towards that or know what hurts a little.”

“I didn't mention before, was personal change, but just in understanding ethics, and understanding that overall we have to be relatively healthy, well adjusted people.”

“I think that just by being a more confident counselor, it allows me to be more effective and that allows me also to be more confident in my interactions with my colleagues, with those that I work with, with other counselors. And so identifying myself as a counselor or knowing where my strengths lie, is a lot easier now because of that.”

Theme 3: Parallels existed between the personal growth and personal development work and how participants conceptualize the role of a counselor. Participants reported parallels between the personal growth and personal development they experienced and the work

they believe is important as a counselor. This parallel appeared to some degree in all of the interviews. The issues they grappled with in the program are issues they see their clients grappling with.

The quotation below is from one of the participants who experienced a great amount of dissonance during her counselor-training program. Earlier in the interview she described how conflicting views surrounding multicultural awareness motivated her to develop a clearer understanding of her views and the views of others. Later she shared the quotation below where she highlights helping her clients walk through their journey by assisting them in considering the “problem” from different vantage points.

“But, the richness I think of depth in this, of even now the work that I am doing with people it just feels very profound, and their getting results quickly because we can acknowledge . . . we just honor the suffering but then also invite them into something that they haven't considered before which is exactly what the program did for me.”

Furthermore, the quote below is from another participant who shared his journey into and through the program as an older than average student who had left a professional position to follow his dream of achieving a master’s degree and becoming a counselor. He shared earlier in the interview an initial sense of shame that he worked through by excelling in his classes and finding a new sense of peace and energy from living his authentic life. The following quotation demonstrates the parallel perspectives he held about his own personal journey and his role as a counselor.

“It's [counseling] to help, assist people in discovering how to be authentic in their lives, and how to discover and affirm the gifts they have, and how to go after their dreams. You know, not settling for this crappy job, but it pays well. Just trying to help to

grow in their journey... Coming to be really comfortable in your own skin, and really confident in the person you are, and not worrying anymore about what people think or don't think, just be who you are, and that's who you are, and you're fine.”

Finally, a participant who highlighted learning to be more accepting of herself and of others during her counselor-training journey shared the last quotation in support of this theme. This participant focused in on how learning to offer nonjudgmental support to her clients as a counselor also allowed her to apply that acceptance to herself and people in her personal world. This participant also highlighted how her self-confidence grew as she learned to be more present and quiet.

“I think the ideal counselor is probably being someone who is accepting and nonjudgmental while also being able to offer ideas, alternatives and suggestions that could help a client grow...if they choose to do that. I think they have to be ready to take in the information or the technique or the process, and sometimes they are just testing the waters, so I think sometimes you have to be there with them and then other times be willing to give them information, that they might be able to apply or try.”

Theme 4: Counseling graduates reported learning to trust and honor the journey of counseling and change through their own personal growth and development journey.

Participants reported learning to trust the counseling journey and the process through their own experiences with personal growth and development. They also, reported an increased appreciation for the scariness and importance of the personal change that can be achieved through counseling and the counseling process.

“I've learned to trust, just like I've watched others learn to trust their gut, I've learned to trust my gut, my intuition a lot and the process of counseling.”

“I second guessed decisions I was making, and things I would do with, especially in practicum, with clients. I remember saying that in practicum, towards the end [our supervisor] had asked “what was one thing that we really changed”. For me, it was I learned to trust myself and the process more.”

“I love change, you know that, know that I can see how beautiful it is. I just, I want to push people towards change...it came as kind of a journey that embracing it as like you can grow without seeing it happen and then all of a sudden end up in a place that you didn't expect or you didn't plan and then your life is better in ways that you couldn't imagine.”

“I think I probably became more accepting and more umm open to... change.”

“I don't know if this makes sense but I just learned to trust the process of counseling of becoming something. Like my process of becoming a counselor; my process of becoming an addiction counselor; my process of becoming.... Does that make sense? The process of working with clients and helping them trust the counseling process. If you put enough good energy in you're going to get it back and something bigger.”

Subtheme 4-1: Participants recognized the importance of the client-counselor relationship to the therapeutic process. Participants reported a new awareness of the power of relationships, especially within the counseling journey. Additionally, they reported an increased understanding of that the client-counselor relationship was the foundation of the counseling journey. That even if they did not know exactly how to support the person sitting across from them that focusing on the relationship would benefit the individual and their journey.

“I knew that I could sit down and be authentic with the person which is the thing that’s helpful about counseling. It’s just having an authentic open supportive relationship.”

“The relationship is the thing that counts and I think that I got from the program and that I have continued to believe in and that I know that I never—like I don’t have, of course I have a toolbox, skills, most of those were probably learned in my work, rather than in the program, but what I took from the program is just the foundation of it. That like, all you have to do is be with that person. That’s all you have to do, you just have to be authentically you and then don’t do anything that messes them up.”

“Even just being somebody who showed up every week or somebody who was reliable, understood, really underscored that relationship piece. That for me was huge in understanding just the massive, massive importance of relationship and just of being present.”

Additional Findings: Personal Growth, Personal Development and Professional development. Through the data collection and analysis process it became clear that the key definitions laid out at the beginning of this study were important. Themes representing the nature of these definitions and how they apply to personal growth and personal development experiences emerged. Although the focus of this study was not specifically to address the similarities and differences of personal growth and personal development, differentiating these terms was both called for by past researchers (Irving & Williams, 1999) and laid out at the beginning of this study. Additionally, there was not a foundational question specifically looking at these terms or interview questions specifically addressing the differences of these terms; however, some of the semi-structured interview questions elicited information about

the nature and awareness of the personal growth and personal development experiences, which in turn paralleled with some of the differentiating nuances laid out in the definitions provided at the commencement of this paper.

Participants indicated that they experienced both personal growth and personal development. Participant quotes that demonstrated personal growth focused on changes in their whole self or person, changes they noticed retrospectively, and changes they described as byproducts of the totality of their individual experiences or changes they could not identify as happening because of one experience. For example participants shared they had “became the person I believed I was meant to be”, and “started to just see myself more accurately”. Where as, participant quotes that demonstrated personal development focused on changes that were tangible, measureable, and possibly targeted outcomes of the training experience. For example participants shared they had “learned more about my triggers”, “establish healthy boundaries” and “became a better communicator”.

Two themes emerged that spoke to the relationship of these terms. The first theme underlines when counseling students noticed or were aware of their individual experiences of personal growth and personal development. The second highlights the relationship between personal growth, personal development, and professional development.

Theme 1: Participants reported a retrospective awareness of personal growth.

Overall, participants reported only having a retrospective awareness of personal change. The following quotations support the general idea of this theme.

“Yes. I don't know that I would have noticed the change, to begin with, unless it was for being able to reflect back on that. I don't know that I would have noticed anything was different at the time.”

“I don’t know if I noticed it until...or knew what it [my ability to engage with people on a genuine level] was until recently. But I don’t know that I noticed it in...while I was in the program.”

Additionally, some participants went further in describing and clarifying the personal growth and personal development they noticed pretty immediately and the personal growth and personal development they noticed only after they had time to reflect on the change. The following quotation represents one participant’s explanation of how she noticed the change in her cognitive processes right away, but did not notice until after the program that her self-esteem and self-confidence had improved.

“I think that part was my cognitive, but I definitely can look back on it now and see more about how there was more, especially in terms of like self-esteem and self-confidence, like that wouldn't be possible if I didn't have that, but I wouldn't necessarily have said that I had increased self-confidence at the time.”

Another participant shared that she noticed behaviors like communication skills and self-care habits right as they were happening, but only noticed that who she was as a person had changed after the program. This idea is reflected in the following quotation.

“I think taking the time to reflect back on that [experience of personal change] as you progress through the stages of training and into practice, and into being a professional, you start to look back on who you were before you started the program.”

Theme 2: A connection between personal and professional growth and development was indicated. Participates in the program reported that throughout the program there was an overlap in professional development and personal development. The overlap expressed did not seem to be that only professional development influenced personal development, but that as one area development so did the other.

“I think it all works together. It really does like a thread within your being and I think you can build on it. You know. And of course, the more you feel competent in what you are doing as a career, I think you feel that way individually as well. And so I think they kind of go together. And of course through the program I felt, a sense of confidence and so the idea that I could build on that sense of confidence I had to work then with clients.”

“I think the supervision in practicum and in internship was pretty big, especially in terms of instilling self-confidence in my skills and my abilities. I think that translated into my personal experiences in the sense that I was just very much more confident in who I was and being okay with not trying to please everybody around me.”

“When you start growing in any part of your life it impacts all other aspects”

“I think that that’s what we’ve just been talking about. I think it’s hard to separate the two [personal growth and personal development from professional identity and work with clients]. Once you start thinking in a different way, you begin to think that way about everything in your world or at least you try to.”

“Just through the knowledge that I was gaining and then the insight; even techniques, learning that a different question can give you a different outcome or

cause you to go on a different direction with a client. It can also lead to different insights within yourself.”

“Just being able to really truly engage in some of the things that you are taught during the program, and so applying that to my personal use as well as being professional. Communicating with my family for being non-judgmental or being empathetic and not just turning that off when I leave the office, but being able to, I guess, just try to have a broader perspective overall, has been really helpful to me. I think it helped me feel pretty fulfilled.”

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The following section consists of the researcher's thoughts and reflections regarding the findings, the synthesis of those findings with the current literature, the unique research contributions of this study, the limitations of this study, and the implications of this study for the counselor education and supervision field. Before we enter into a rich discussion about the topics listed above, we will review the study's purpose and a summary of the findings below.

The purpose of this study was first to understand how counseling program graduates experience personal change in the areas of personal growth and personal development, while in a CACREP-accredited master's level counseling program. The second purpose was to understand how their personal growth and personal development have impacted these same professionals' work as counselors.

Summary of Results

Seven community counseling or mental health counselors who graduated from a CACREP-accredited master's level counselor-training programs were selected to participate in this study. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews where the researcher asked twelve open-ended questions to guide participants in sharing their personal growth and personal development experiences. Additionally, the interviewer used interpretive style of clarifying and probing questions to garner more detail in order to collect rich data that addressed this study's three foundational questions.

Overall the findings support that master's level counseling students do experience personal growth and personal development while attending a master's level counselor training program and that these personal growth and personal development experiences have both unique and shared characteristics. Participants reported changing in areas of the self,

awareness of human connection and helping skills and knowledge. Participants reported that there are parts of the master's level training program that do contribute to counseling students' personal growth and personal development. Next, Participants reported that programmatic relationships, clinical experiences, self-reflective experiences, overcoming insecurity, the counselor-training program itself and the expectation of personal growth and development as the key parts of the master's level training-program that contributed most to personal growth and personal development. Additionally, Participants reported that their personal growth and personal development experienced impacted their professional identity and their present work with clients in specific and meaningful ways. They reported that their personal growth and personal development impacted professional work with clients by normalizing the use of feedback, highlighting the importance of personal growth and personal development, contributing to the development of their professional identity and instilling a trust in the counseling journey and process of change. The sixteen themes and twelve subthemes were organized into four main sections consisting of the three foundational questions and additional finding. Below is an overview of the four main sections followed by their themes and subthemes.

Foundational question #1 addresses if and how master's level counseling students experienced personal growth and personal development during the master's level counseling program. Four main themes emerged: (1) Participants reported a great amount of growth in the area of self, including four subthemes: (1-1) Increased self-knowledge, (1-2) Acceptance of self, (1-3) Greater self-concept, and (1-4) Increased self-confidence; (2) Participants reported having increased awareness of the interconnectedness of humans, including awareness of self as a counselor; (3) Past experiences and current life circumstances

influenced participants personal growth and personal development, and (4) Participants learned new ways to navigate and build upon their perceived weaknesses.

Foundational question #2 addresses what parts of the master's level counselor-training program contributed most to their personal growth and personal development. Six main themes emerged: (1) Relationships in the program were a large component of what contributed to counseling graduates' personal growth and development, including three subthemes: (1-1) Peer-cohort relationships, (1-2) Advisor-advisee relationships, and (1-3) Professor-student relationships; (2) Clinical experiences contributed greatly to professional development, which in turn promoted personal growth and personal development; (3) Components of the counselor-training program that promoted or required self-reflection contributed most to personal growth and development, including one subtheme: (3-1) Personal growth and development was also experienced during times of struggle or challenge; (4) Participants overcame periods of insecurity during the counselor-training program, including one subtheme: (4-1) Success and highlighting positive assets helped build confidence during times of insecurity; (5) Personal growth and personal development was an expectation of the program; (6) Personal growth and personal development was inevitable if engaged in the counselor-training journey.

Foundational question #3 addresses how master's level counseling graduates believe their personal growth and personal development has impacted their professional identity and their present work with clients. Four main themes emerged: (1) Learning to receive and process feedback during the counselor-training program normalized use of consultation as a professional; (2) Ethical and effective counseling practices includes continual personal growth and personal development; (3) Parallels existed between the personal growth and personal

development work and how participants conceptualize the role of a counselor; (4) Counseling graduates reported learning to trust and honor the journey of counseling and change through their own personal growth and development, including one subtheme: (4-1) Participants recognized the importance of the client-counselor relationship to the therapeutic process.

The additional findings section addresses the foundational terms presented in chapter one and two of this paper. The three terms are: personal growth, person development, and professional development. Two main themes emerged: (1) Participants reported a retrospective awareness of personal growth; (2) A connection between personal and professional growth and development was indicated.

Overall participants reported experiencing a great amount of personal growth and personal development while enrolled in a master's level training program. The personal growth and personal development that was highlighted focused on personal change in the personal appraisals of and relations to self, human connection, and self-improvement or help. Additionally, all of these changes were experienced though each individual's current life stage and the specific struggle/s they encounter throughout the program. These same participants reported that many components of the counselor-training program impacted their personal growth and personal development experiences. More specifically, program components that provided an opportunity for self-reflection or practice of counseling skills and techniques were highlighted. Furthermore, everyone of the participants expressed that their personal growth and personal development impacted their professional identity and present work with clients, particularly this was true in the areas of ethical and effective practice, professional consultation, personal focus of change, and trusting the counseling journey, including the

power of the relationship. The following section will synthesize this study's results with the current research.

Synthesis of Results with Current Research

This section will discuss how the findings in this study compare to the existing literature in the counselor education and supervision field. There are two areas within the counselor education and supervision literature that are further supported by this study, Counseling Student Personal Growth and Personal Development Experiences, and Personal Growth, Personal Development, and Professional Development. Counseling Student Personal Growth and Personal Development Experiences refers to both the types of change master's level counseling students experience while enrolled in a master's level counseling program and the parts of the program that contribute most to this personal growth and personal development. Personal Growth, Personal Development and Professional Development refers to how this study supports the current conceptualization and differentiation of the key terms of personal growth, personal development and professional development. Following the discussion of how these results support the existing literature, there will be an overview of the unique contributions of this research on the field of counselor education and supervision, and possibly other fields within the "helping profession".

Counseling Student Personal Growth and Personal Development Experiences

The results of this research align with existing research about master's level counseling students' personal growth and personal development. The personal change that is experienced by master's level counseling students is complex and multifaceted (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003) with an array of contributing program and personal factors (Paris, et.al., 2006). The findings of this study support both that counseling students do experience change

in unique yet similar ways and that specific components of the master's level counselor-training program impact that said development. Studies about how master's level counseling students experience personal growth and personal development highlight many areas of personal change (Ieva, et al., 2009; Lim, 2008; McAuliff et al., 2002; Paris, et al., 2006; Woodside, et al., 2007). More specifically, this study supports that master's level counseling students experience change in the areas of growth in the area of self, increased awareness of the connectedness of humans, the uniqueness of the personal growth and personal development journey as it relates to each individuals journey, and personal application of the program lessons.

Foundational questions #1, theme 1: *Participants reported a great amount of growth in the area of self*, speaks to the idea that master's level counseling students learn more about who they are as a person (self) while attending a counselor-training program. This increase in self-knowledge appears to lead to a greater acceptance of self, a better understanding of the real self, and increased self-confidence.

These findings align with results reported by Lim (2008) where students experienced "growth in developing a healthier sense of self" as a result of completing a genogram assignment. Furthermore, the connection between the different parts of the self are illustrated, Lim (2008) explained that the studies participants reported specific growth in the areas of self-awareness and self-understanding, and that growth in these areas were reported to lead to "greater self-acceptance and the ability to value self more...the sum affect of such growth was a more realistic self-appraisal," and is supported by this study. These more specific findings are highlighted in subthemes 1-1 to 1-4 (1-1: Increased self-knowledge, 1-2: Acceptance of self, 1-3: Greater self-concept, and 1-4: Increased self-confidence). Additionally, the self-

reflective nature of the genogram project and presentation impacting personal change in master's level counseling students is highlighted and supported by the findings of this study. Specifically, foundational question #2, theme 3: *Components of the counselor-training program that promoted or required self-reflection contributed most to personal growth and development*, supports the findings that a genogram project and presentation had impact on counseling students personal growth and personal development.

Moreover, growth in the area of self, specifically: self-knowledge and self-confidence are seen in other studies that have explored personal growth and personal development in master's level counseling students. Ieva et al., (2009) and Woodside et al., (2007) both reported the development of counseling students self. Woodside et al., (2007) reported the subtheme "self" as a component of the "learning" theme and the focus being on the development of self-understanding and how that self-understanding leads to more confidence in self as a counselor. Additionally, in a study conducted by Ieva et al, (2009) the development of self was reported in relation to a personal growth group experience (another self-reflective experience supporting foundational question #2, theme 3). Participants reported increase knowledge in self as it related to their individual experience of the group process and learning more about themselves by developing a better understanding of one's strengths and areas of growth. These studies are also supported by the current research findings, which focus on how counseling students develop, theme #1: *Participants reported a great amount of growth in the area of self* (foundational question #1).

The other component of self that was identified in the research studies conducted by Lim, (2008) and Ieva et al., (2009) and now this current study is self-awareness or the awareness of the self as it relates to others. For this current study, the specific concept of self-

awareness was combined into the more inclusive theme #2: *Participants reported having increased awareness of the interconnectedness of humans*. This theme supports another common experience of master's level counseling students' personal growth and personal development. Research literature supports the increased awareness of self in relation to others as an area of personal growth and personal development (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Ieva, et. al., 2009; Lennie, 2007; Lim, 2008; O'Leary & Crowley, 1994; Paris, et al., 2006). Participants of studies focusing on personal growth and personal development have reported self-awareness as a category associated with personal growth and personal development (O'Leary & Crowley, 1994). More specifically, this theme speaks to and supports the idea that counseling students' experience an increase in self-awareness, specifically related to how people influence each other through their interactions (Paris, et al., 2006). Furthermore, the idea that this awareness also leads to the establishment of new relationship behaviors, such as setting personal boundaries and expecting higher quality relationships (Furr & Carroll, 2003), was also supported by this current study.

Additionally, the subtheme 2-1: *Awareness of self as a counselor* supports multiple studies that report personal growth and personal development also influences the way a counseling student understands the interconnectedness of the counseling relationship (McAuliffe, 2002; Woodside et al., 2007) and how they impact the client just by being present, listening, and continuing to focus on building and maintaining a therapeutic relationship or alliance (Duan & Hill, 1996; Leibert & Dunne-Bryant, 2015; Sexton & Whiston, 1994).

Furthermore, theme #3 (foundational question #1) supports existing research studies that confirm an individuals' personal experiences, including life stage and current

circumstances impact their personal growth and personal development (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Paris et al., 2006; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Souders, 2009). More specifically, this study's results support the findings that support a positive reciprocal relationship between both the personal and professional aspects of life (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003).

Earlier research has indicated that there are specific parts of the master's level counselor training program that contribute to counseling student personal growth and personal development (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Ieva, et. al., 2009; McAuliffe, 2002; Lennie, 2007; Lim, 2008; O'Leary & Crowley, 1994; Paris, et al., 2006). The results of this study support the findings of existing studies and highlight important parts of the counselor-training program that contribute most to master's level counseling students' personal growth and personal development. Programmatic relationships, clinical experiences, and program components that promote self-reflection are the main areas that this current study supports.

Theme #1 (foundational question #2): *Relationships in the program were a large component of what contributed to counseling graduates' personal growth and development.* This theme supports the multitude of research that highlights the impact of the relationship on counseling students' personal growth and personal development (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Ieva, et. al., 2009; McAuliffe, 2002; O'Leary & Crowley, 1994; Paris, et al., 2006; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Souders, 2009). Although these studies do not present the findings in the exact same way, the descriptions continue to point to the interpersonal connection of the counselor-training experience. These interpersonal connections highlighted feelings of belonging or being included in the cohort and camaraderie in meeting the expectations of a class and the program. Another component of the counselor-training program that impacted personal growth and personal development was clinical experience.

Foundational question #2, theme 2: *Clinical experiences contributed greatly to professional development* speaks to this counselor-training component. Clinical experiences include most experiential components of the counselor-training program, including field experience. Theme 2 supports existing literature that reports that experiential components of the master's level counselor-training program contribute to personal growth and personal development (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Ieva, et. al., 2009; McAuliffe, 2002; O'Leary & Crowley, 1994; Paris, et al., 2006; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Souders, 2009). More specifically, practicum and internship were cited as two of the most important contributors to all aspect of growth and development, personal and professional (Furr & Carroll, 2003; 2009; McAuliffe, 2002; Paris, et al., 2006; Souders, 2009).

Additionally, one area of both practicum and internship that was highlighted by the current study was the experience of insecurity. This feeling of insecurity surrounding new experiences was conceptualized into it's own theme because it appeared the act of overcoming the feeling of insecurity was what contributed to the experience of personal growth and personal development. Additionally, the feelings of insecurity appeared to be catalysts for personal growth, personal development and professional development.

Foundational questions #2, theme 4: *Participants overcame periods of insecurity during the counselor-training program* supports current research that highlights feelings of insecurity during the beginning stages of learning to be a counselor (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003).

Personal Growth, Personal Development, and Professional Development

The authors and researchers who have focused their research attention on students' and counselors' personal growth and personal development not only call for more research in

this area (Irving & Williams, 1999; Lim, 2008; McAuliffe, 2002; Wheeler, 2000), but also identify the challenge of researching this area due to the difficulty of defining and measuring both personal development vs. professional development (Donati & Watts, 2005; Ronnestad & Skovholt 2003; Wilkins 1997) and personal growth vs. personal development (Donati & Watts, 2005; Hensley, Smith, & Thompson, 2003; Irving & Williams, 1999).

Although, clarifying or redefining the terms of personal growth, personal development, and professional development was not the direct purpose of this study and no foundational questions were written to explore this area. The definitions of personal growth and personal development below were used to guide this study's design and will be used as a base for synthesizing these findings with current literature.

Personal Growth: an aspect of personal change that is unstructured, non-specific, and holistic, a retrospective awareness of change that is not planned, but results from experience and personal development (Irving & Williams, 1999).

Personal Development: an aspect of personal change that is purposeful, structured and specific, a planned measurable change that seeks to develop specific skills and qualities focused on enhancing a trainee's professional effectiveness (Irving & Williams, 1999).

The current study supports that there is a difference between when participants notice change in personal growth and personal development. Additional findings, theme 1:

Participants reported a retrospective awareness of personal growth the idea that there is a retrospective awareness of personal growth. Participants who were able to describe this difference supported the definitions set at the beginning of this study for the definitions of personal growth and personal development as described by Irving and Williams (1999). For example some participants reported that they noticed personal development, such as, change

in behaviors (communication, boundaries in relationships, etc.) right away, but did not notice personal growth, such as, change in their self (self-esteem, being a better person, etc.) until they reflected back on the experience(s).

Additionally, although professional development was not specifically defined at the conception this study, the following clarifying description of the differences of personal development and professional development will be used to help further the discussion of how personal growth and personal development and professional development are conceptualized. Wilkins (1997) described the differences as professional development being primarily concerned with the acquisition of skills and knowledge, whereas, personal development focuses on all other change that facilitates being a practicing counselor. Nevertheless, researchers have acknowledged the interconnection between personal development and professional development as having an overlapping, ever-changing, continuum type of relationship between the two strands of counselor development (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Wilkins 1997).

The current study supports the idea of the connection between personal growth, personal development, and professional development. Foundational question #3, theme 3: *Parallels existed between the personal growth and personal development work and how participates conceptualize the role of a counselor* supports this complex relationship by highlighting the connection between participants personal growth and personal development experiences while enrolled in the program and the participants current professional identity and present work with clients.

Finally, additional findings, theme #2: *A connection between personal and professional growth and development was indicated* supports that although one may be able

to distinguish between the type of development that is taking place (this study did not attempt to do this) neither strand of development takes place independently. Participants reported an interconnection between the personal growth and personal development and professional development they experienced. Additionally, students reported that they did not believe the two could be exclusive as the application of learning is naturally both personal and professional.

Contributions of the Research

This study both supports past findings and adds new preliminary information to the continued discussion about counseling students' personal growth and personal development. This study adds new preliminary information to three areas of discussion. The first area of discussion is the differentiation and overlap of the different aspects of personal change counseling students experience while enrolled in a master's level training program, specifically as this change relates to the terms, personal growth, personal development, and professional development. The second area of contribution is the relationship or interconnectedness of a student's personal life circumstances and life stage and his/her experiences of personal growth and personal development while attending a master's level training program. Finally, the findings of this study suggest that students' experiences of personal growth and personal development while attending a master's level counselor-training program impacts the way those same individuals conceptualize the role of a counselor and how they go about supporting their clients.

Researchers have highlighted the importance of considering personal growth and personal development as two different areas of personal change (Irving & Williams, 1999) and differentiated the terms at the conception of the study (Souders, 2009), but have not

attempted to go beyond this acknowledgement and continued to build upon the current definition of terms while reporting their study's results (Souders, 2009). Additionally, other studies have not even attempted to define the terms or look at personal change through the lens of these specific constructs (Lim, 2008; McAuliffe, 2002; Woodside, Oberman, Cole, & Carruth, 2007). As stated in the Synthesis of Results with Current Research section, the findings of this study align with the definition of terms described by (Irving & Williams, 1999) and provide contribution through the consideration of how these terms are represented in the personal growth and personal development experience of master's level counseling students. This study's results support both the idea that personal growth and personal development are experienced differently (Irving & Williams, 1999). Additionally, the findings of this study support that the experiences of personal development and professional development overlap (Wilkins, 1997). Furthermore, introducing from a counselor-training program/counseling professional's perspective that neither personal development nor professional development can be experienced without impacting the other. More research is needed in this area so counselor educators and counselor supervisors can more intentionally assist students in their personal development and thus indirectly with their personal growth.

Moreover, this study highlighted an interesting connection between the personal growth and personal development journey of master's level counseling students and how that personal growth and personal development impacts how counselors conceptualize their professional identity, their work as counselors, and their perceptions about how they can best support their clients. These connections remind me of thoughts I have had in the past regarding where the foundational theorists of psychology imagined and then developed their theories regarding human psychology and development. It seemed that their personal growth

and development experiences contributed to how they viewed human psychology and development.

Finally, the connection and impact students' personal growth and personal development had on their professional identity and current work with clients is a contribution and area of expansion in the research of counseling students' personal growth and personal development. Studies support that past traumatic or adverse experiences of life, such as life-threatening events or the death of a loved one can lead to the reexamination of beliefs and values, and that that reexamination can impact student counselor development (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2001). However, this study went further showing that even non-traumatic life experiences impact how students grow and develop and that growth and development does impact how they view the personal change experiences of their clients.

Study Limitations

The limitations of this study are listed below. Study limitations are more retrospective in nature and thus are discussed to inform the reader and future researcher. The first limitation will address the researcher's acquaint status with most participants; the second limitation will look at the demographics of the participants, including lack of ethnic, gender, counselor-training program, and geographic diversity; the third limitation will discuss the time lapse between participants participation in a counselor-training program and participation in this study; and the final limitation will focus on the researchers inexperience.

This study was conducted in a mid-western state where the number of counselors and CACREP-accredited training programs is limited. Due to geographical location and the limited resources available for conducting this study the limitations discussed below need to be considered when reviewing and applying the findings of this study.

The first limitation in this category is that the researcher was an acquaintance to most of the participants. This relationship status was beneficial as it allowed for an openness and rapport that may have not been achieved upon the first meeting of a participant. Contrarily, this status led to an assumption that the researcher understood what the interviewer was sharing and so often times the researcher had to ask for clarification when statements like “you know” or “well you were there” were made. This assumption happened during interviews that were conducted with participants who did not know the interviewer very well, but at a much less frequent rate. Additionally, the request for clarification was a lot more natural because the researcher genuinely did not have a frame of reference for the content being shared.

The second limitation is that the participants were quite homogenous in their gender, ethnicity, counselor-training program, and geographic diversity. For gender, 6 out of the 7 participants were female. For ethnicity, all participants identified as being a member of the majority culture in this area of the country. For counselor-training program 6 out of the 7 participants had graduated from the same program. For geographical location, all members grew up in the Midwest and, although some had ventured away for a while, were living in the Midwest during the time of the interview. This limitation led to the researcher wondering if or how the finding may have differed if a more diverse sample would have been solicited. This thought is discussed further in the following section.

The third limitation is that some of the participants reported struggling to remember specifics from when they were in the master’s level counselor-training program. This was reported mostly when participants were attempting to recall detailed information, such as the name of professors or specific classes. Thus, the essence of the experiences was not lost,

forgotten or difficult to recall; but the details of the experience were. This limitation is also discussed in the following section.

The fourth and final limitation is the researcher's inexperience. This study is the first qualitative study of this depth and magnitude this researcher has conducted independently or with the guidance of a mentor and committee. Due to the inexperience of this researcher it is to be assumed that common novice weaknesses exist in the planning, implementation, analysis, and reporting of this study. It was the intent and plan of this researcher to complete a quality study that adds to the existing data regarding how counseling students are experiencing personal growth and personal development and to positively impact the counselor education and supervision field with first-hand accounts of what parts of counselor-training programs are contributing to students' personal growth and personal development.

Future Research Suggestions

It is the recommendation of this researcher that research in the area of personal growth and development continue in the following ways.

Personal growth and personal development should continue to be looked at as independent areas of counseling student personal change that may have a possible impact on each other. If more understanding could be gained about the type(s) of personal development that impacts personal growth more intentional impact could be achieved. Research in this area could positively impact the pedagogy and intentional use of experiential learning to target and measure personal development, understanding that gains in personal development in turn will impact personal growth.

Research focusing on the impact of personal growth and personal development across human service fields should be implemented. It is the belief of this researcher that personal

growth and personal development work should be a requirement of all people who work in fields that are directly responsible for the care and development of humans. Current research in this area supports that personal growth and personal development positively impacts the work of counselors (Cantwell, 1990; Leibert & Dunne-Bryant, 2015; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1995; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Thus, the same type of work could have a similar impact on people in other human service fields. For example, this researcher believes research of this type in the area of special education and education in general would assist in the development of educational professionals.

More specific program elements should be researched to add to and expand our understanding of program components that positively impact the personal growth and personal development master's level counseling students. Furthering this research would allow counselor educators to be intentional about the way each component of the counselor-training program promotes personal growth and personal development. This intentionality would allow students to experience a wide range of personal development experiences throughout their educational experience, and personal development experiences could be organized to promote the continuation of early personal development work. For example it is the intention of this researcher to focus on the counseling skills class and examine in more detail how graduate student conceptualize how the skill building experiences promote or impact their personal growth and personal development.

Finally, research focusing specifically on the personality characteristics believed to be essential for counseling practice (Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Pope & Kline, 1999; Wheeler, 2000) need to be studied as they compare or are influenced by the individual personal growth and personal development experiences of master's level counseling students while enrolled and actively participating in a counselor-training program.

Implications for Counselor Training

This study highlights a few best practices that will be discussed in the following section. The results from this study highlight a few very applicable ideas in regards to the training of master's level counseling students. The first is the power of relationships. The second is the need for self-reflective activities. The third is the importance of clinical practice and the successful navigation through those first client experiences.

The results of this study highlight the impact relationships have on the master's level counseling student. Participants highlighted the importance of relationships throughout the entire counselor-training program. The relationships started during the interview process and continued to grow and change up until the time of each participant's interview. The expressions of the emotions that came with the memories of their friends, advisors, professors, and/or supervisors were powerful and telling. They were telling of how true the words they were sharing were. Counselor educators have the ability to influence each of the relationships listed above through the organization of the program as a whole, and the classes and experiences that make up that program. Understanding and keeping in mind the importance of those relationships will contribute to the personal growth and personal development of students and the quality of the counselor-training program.

The results of this study also highlight the importance of self-reflective experiences. These self-reflective experiences are often emphasized in counselor-education programs, however when considering the content layout of a course it is sometimes easy to become overwhelmed by the amount of important information needing to be taught and thus overlook the chances to integrate those self-reflective components into the class experience. The results of this study support that making time for these activities will contribute to the personal growth and personal development experiences of counselor education students.

Finally, a few of the participants in this study highlighted how difficult their practicum experience was because they were expected to independently go out into the community to find, establish, and complete both group and individual counseling hours. These students shared how distracting the expectation of client solicitation was from the actual experience of practicum and the first experiences of sitting in front of “real” clients. The results of this study support the importance of these initial experiential courses. Thus, if counselor education faculty have the means and the ability to complete individual and group client solicitation it appears the absence of the stress associated with that activity would positively contribute to the experiences of personal growth and personal development that can take place during those important program components.

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APPENDIX A. PHONE RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

North Dakota State University

School of Education
Counselor Education
1919 N. University Drive, SGC C121
Fargo, ND 58108-6050

Counselor Education: A Personal Development Experience

Hello _____,

I am a graduate student in the Counselor Education Program at North Dakota State University. Associate Professor Dr. Nelson and I are conducting a research project to explore the personal growth and development experiences of master's level counseling graduates. It is our hope, that with this research, we will learn more about how counseling students are personally impacted or change while participating in a counselor-training program.

I am currently in search of 2005-2013 graduates of CACREP-accredited counseling programs who are working in the community-counseling or clinical mental health field. If you meet these criteria and have approximately 60-75 minutes of available time, I would like to invite you to consider participating in this study. Your participation is entirely your choice, and you may change your mind or quit participating at any time, with no penalty to you. Are you interested in hearing more about the study?

Participation will consist of an interview conducted by me. The interview will be audio-recorded, conducted in-person or by phone, and should take about 60-75 minutes to complete. I will ask you questions about your personal growth and development experiences while enrolled in a master's level counseling program. You will not receive any compensation for participation in this study.

If you would like to participate in this research or have any questions about this project, please contact me at 218-349-1584 or Melissa.Naslund@ndscs.edu, or contact my advisor Dr. Jill Nelson at 701-231-7415 or Jill.R.Nelson@ndsu.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jill Nelson, Ph.D. & Ms. Melissa Naslund, M.Ed.

APPENDIX B. EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

North Dakota State University

School of Education
Counselor Education
1919 N. University Drive, SGC C121
Fargo, ND 58108-6050

Counselor Education: A Personal Development Experience

Hello _____,

I am a graduate student in the Counselor Education Program at North Dakota State University. Associate Professor Dr. Nelson and I are conducting a research project to explore the personal growth and development experiences of master's level counseling graduates. It is our hope, that with this research, we will learn more about how counseling students are personally impacted or change while participating in a counselor-training program.

I am currently in search of 2005-2013 graduates of CACREP-accredited counseling programs who are working in the community-counseling or clinical mental health field. If you meet these criteria and have approximately 60-75 minutes of available time, I would like to invite you to consider participating in this study. Your participation is entirely your choice, and you may change your mind or quit participating at any time, with no penalty to you.

Participation will consist of an interview conducted by me. The interview will be audio-recorded, conducted in-person or by phone, and should take about 60-75 minutes to complete. I will ask you questions about your personal growth and development experiences while enrolled in a master's level counseling program. You will not receive any compensation for participation in this study.

If you would like to participate in this research or have any questions about this project, please contact me at 218-349-1584 or Melissa.Naslund@ndscs.edu, or contact my advisor Dr. Jill Nelson at 701-231-7415 or Jill.R.Nelson@ndsu.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jill Nelson, Ph.D. & Ms. Melissa Naslund, M.Ed.

APPENDIX C. INFORMED CONSENT

North Dakota State University

School of Education
Counselor Education
1919 N. University Drive, SGC C121
Fargo, ND 58108-6050

Counselor Education: A Personal Development Experience

Dear Participant:

My name is Melissa Naslund. I am a graduate student in the Counselor Education Program at North Dakota State University, and I am conducting a research project to explore the personal growth and development experiences of master's level counseling graduates. It is our hope, that with this research, we will learn more about how counseling students are personally impacted or change while participating in a counselor-training program. This letter's purpose is to provide you with information about the study and to obtain consent for participation from you, a study participant.

Because you are a 2005-2013 graduate of a CACREP-accredited counseling program and are working in the community-counseling or clinical mental health field, you are invited to take part in this research project. Your participation is entirely your choice, and you may change your mind or quit participating at any time, with no penalty to you.

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but we have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known risks. Although risks are unlikely, these risks may include: loss of confidentiality, and emotional or psychological distress.

You are not expected to get any benefit from being in this research study. However, benefits to others are likely to include advancement of knowledge, specifically in the area of counselor training and development.

It should take about 60-75 minutes to complete the interview. I will ask you questions about your personal growth and development experiences while enrolled in a master's level counseling program. You will not receive any compensation for participation in this study.

We will make all attempts to keep private all research records that identify you. The audio recording of the interview will be stored in a locked office, all transcripts will have identifying information deleted, and all digital information/data will be stored on password-protected devices (both recorder and computer). The audio recordings will be deleted once they have been transcribed. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study, we will write about the

combined information that we have gathered and pseudonyms will be applied if individual data is referenced. You will not be identified in written materials or presentations containing the study data. We may publish the results of the study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact me at 218-349-1584 or Melissa.Naslund@ndscs.edu, or contact my advisor Dr. Jill Nelson at 701-231-7415 or Jill.R.Nelson@ndsu.edu.

You have rights as a research participant. If you have questions about your rights or complaints about this research, you may talk to the researcher or contact the NDSU Human Research Protection Program at 701.231.8908, toll-free at 1-855-800-6717, by email at ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu, or by mail at: NDSU HRPP Office, NDSU Dept. 4000, P.O. Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050.

Thank you for your taking part in this research.

Sincerely,

Melissa Naslund
Ph.D. Candidate
NDSU Counselor Education

Jill Nelson, Ph.D.
Associate Dean and Associate Professor, Counselor Education

APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS GUIDE

Counselor Education: A Personal Development Experience

Interview Questions

1. Would you start by sharing with me your personal experience of the master's level counselor-training journey? Highs/Lows
2. What were your experiences of personal change?
3. How did you know you were experiencing personal change during the program?
4. How do you think you changed personally?
5. Please tell me what aspects (classes, clinical experience, supervision) of the counselor-training program contributed most to your personal change.
6. Were there related life experiences that contributed to those changes as well?
7. Did you perceive that personal change was an expectation of the program or of learning to become a counselor?
8. Did you set any personal change goals during your training program? If so, what were they?
9. How did your personal change impact you on a student/professional level during the time you were enrolled in the master's level counselor-training program?
10. Was there any personal change that you only noticed after it had taken place, such as after a class, clinical experience, or after the program was over?
11. In what specific ways, if any, have your personal growth and personal development impacted your professional identity?
12. In what specific ways, if any, have your personal growth and development impacted your present work with clients?

Follow-up (topic related) questions will be utilized to ensure the researcher fully understands the experience of each individual participant.

APPENDIX E. TRANSCRIPT EXAMPLE

W. Oh yes, from practicum to internship even; and looking back there was a sense of confidence or growth that occurred, you build on it. And I remembered some of the clients that I had in the practicum and feeling uncertain, Should I actually say this? You know, This might be challenging,” or “This is some insight I have, do I dare go there?” And building on that more in the internship and feeling more confident. Of course now I see a lot of people have probably see close to a thousand sessions a year and there is probably 200 new people a year, something like that. And so I have to act quickly and I think having a base that helps me to have some confidence and build on that was helpful. Of course I had a lot of supervision once I started working too, so I knew I would have someone to ask some questions to because there is a great variety of clients that come. So, yeah...Does that answer your question?

M. It did, yeah. I'm going to dig a little bit more; was it the being with clients and just being successful in that, or would you say that some of the supervision you received in practicum and supervision or in internship, what impacted that?

W. I think both of those, but also, I don't know how to say it for sure but some of the encouragement or reassuring statements were helpful too. Like, you need to trust yourself, I don't know if that was ever said, but in a sense that's kind of what the supervisors were saying, the practicum supervisors or internship supervisors would have helped in that way. Umm...so I think it was all of those things that were helpful, they can't be isolated but they are all kind of working together at the same time. And I think for me it was hard to sometimes trust that it did, if I'd be able to do this and they'll be okay, I'm not going to set them back years. [Laughter]

M. I think that's a really impactful statement, trusting yourself and learning to trust yourself as a counselor and in the process of being a counselor and utilizing your skills and different things like that. Would you say that that is a piece of personal growth that impacted you on just a counselor level or on an individual level too?

W. Oh no, I think it all works together. It really does like a thread within your being and I think you can build on it. You know. And of course, the more you feel competent in what you are doing as a career, I think you feel that way individually as well. And so I think they kind of go together. And of course through the program I felt, a sense of confidence and so the idea that I could build on that sense of confidence I had to work then with clients.

M. That's interesting for you to say; you are saying "Yeah I can develop all these skills and I can develop this confidence but there is no way it's just going to impact me as a counselor, it's definitely going to have some type of personal impact also.

W. Right. As you are learning about...kind of the process of being people and how there are many different people in the world that you are going to work with, you are also learning that you are ONE of those people; you're very different maybe too but you can have an appreciation for yourself as you would for other people.