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Qualitative Examination of Graduate Counselor Education Students Perceptions of Self-Awareness Pertaining to Future Efficacy in the Counseling Environment

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QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF GRADUATE COUNSELOR EDUCATION
STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-AWARENESS PERTAINING TO FUTURE
EFFICACY IN THE COUNSELING ENVIRONMENT

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated in loving memory to my mother, Sandra Dunning Huechtker, whose legacy of generosity, openness, strength, and nurturing is incomparable to any I've ever seen.

My mother taught me that every person is worthy and deserving of respect regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, gender, and/or ability. My mother was an advocate for social justice before I ever knew what that meant.

She taught me what unconditional love feels like and I will be forever grateful. Her abundance of faith, kindness, and patience was rare and had no limits.

My mother is remembered by testimony, not title, which is what she would have preferred, and what has now become my ultimate goal. Her love continues to inspire me, sustain me, and nourish me even as I ache for her presence daily.

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I must acknowledge my daughter Ariel and my son Ian as you have been by my side through trials, formidable challenges, and hard times. Both of you always made me smile and laugh no matter what. We have been fortunate enough to experience together the unconditional love my mother gave me. Ariel, you are talented, beautiful, kind, and wise beyond your years. You have always had an old soul and your strength and perseverance continue to amaze me. Your openness and genuine regard for all of God's creatures is inspiring. Ian, you've had obstacles, challenges, and trials that no one should have but your tenacity and humor have stayed with you throughout. Your quick wit and deep, introspective thoughts are mind boggling. I so admire your determination and strength to carry on. May you always have hope and never lose your will.

I thank Ariel, Ian, and my husband Rick for sharing me with my studies and my love of learning and growing. I also thank you for eating at the counter, being patient with my crazy schedules, my stress related moments, and never complaining that the kitchen table had become my personal office.

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Ultimately, I thank and acknowledge God for his enduring and patient presence in my life. Through God, I have hope and have learned that I am "enough".

ABSTRACT

Research in this study indicates that high levels of self-awareness as well as a clearly defined self-identity are related to increased levels of care and ethical decision making among counselors. An enhanced social-cognitive development of the counselor education graduate student is associated with an increased ability for them (in the future) to process legal and ethical dilemmas such as the right to die legislation and how it could affect them professionally. This study includes implications for counselors and the training and supervision of counselor education graduate students who may be affected by the right to die legislation and the way it affects their interaction with their clients.

Keywords: Self-Awareness, Morality, Ethics, Spirituality, Suicide/ Right to Die

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Title

 A Qualitative Examination of Graduate Counselor Education Students' Perceptions of Self-Awareness Pertaining to Future Efficacy in the Counseling Environment.

Statement of Focus

The present study focuses on the perceptions of self-awareness of counselor education students as related to their future ethical decision-making process in the counseling environment, specifically pertaining to the right-to-die issue. This study was conducted to explore how aware future counselors report to be pertaining to this matter, as a possible venue for ensuring that they do not inadvertently impose their personal value systems on a client.

Overview

The professional association of counseling claims for itself the right to develop codes of conduct for its members. These codes are written by counselors, for counselors and those who claim this professional title, are expected to adhere to their many clauses and directives. These groups include professional counselors and those in training, as well as the faculty who prepare and supervise them. It must be borne in mind that these codes of conduct or ethical codes are undergoing constant scrutiny and review as new social issues confront the profession. In addition to the continual evaluation of ethical

codes, so too is scholarly attention paid to the ways in which counselors make ethical decisions encompassing the domain of social-cognitive development.

A) Ethical Issues Around Suicide As Pertaining To What Has Yet To Be Learned About Right-To-Die

"As social-cognitive growth occurs, individuals are better able to be responsive to the clients they serve" (Lambie, Hagedorn & Ieva, 2010, p. 229). Counselor education programs that are accredited through the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) are required to foster development in this area. "Counselors in training begin the development of their ethical and legal knowledge base and decision-making skills while enrolled in counselor education programs" (Lambie, Hagedom, & Ieva, p. 240). Historically, counselors have been confronted with multiple issues that required them to ascertain how their personal values will impact the delivery of high quality, value-aware counseling services.

These issues include, but are not limited to, the right to die (as discussed in this particular study), sexual orientation, abortion, spirituality, religion, gender issues, race, and ethnicity issues. Moreover, this challenge to the decision-making process has not abated.

At the time this study began, the aforementioned code of ethics (1997) includes End of Life Care for Terminally Ill Clients in section A.9. In , A.9.b. "Counselor Competence, Choice, and Referral", the ACA code of ethics clearly indicates an impact on the counselor both morally and personally related to this issue. "Recognizing the personal, moral and competence issues related to end-of-life decisions, counselors may

choose to work or not to work with terminally ill clients who wish to explore their end-of-life options." This ethical standard relates only to the terminally ill. It also gives the counselor an option of referral. While that option is viable, as the world around us changes along with the legislation pertaining to moral, spiritual, and ethical issues, it may become difficult to avoid working with a client facing these types of issues. As this study progressed, the American Counseling Association published a revised/updated Code of Ethics in January, 2014. This new Code of Ethics, states things differently, which may or may not have to do with impending legislation, new legislation or public interests groups. In section B.2 b, titled; Confidentiality Regarding End-of-Life Decisions, the updated code states:

> Counselors who provide services to terminally ill individuals who are
> considering hastening their own deaths have the option to maintain
> confidentiality, depending on the applicable laws and the specific
> circumstances of the situation and after seeking consultation or supervision
> from appropriate and professional legal parties. (p.7)

Referring out may possibly become less feasible as new legislation will continue to come up throughout time. Looking at the updated code of ethics, it appears that it would behoove most counselors to take an intimate and intense look at where they are in their own development of self-awareness and social cognitive development in order to best serve the clientele of the world we live in. Should legislation such as the right to die become prevalent, counselors and counselors in training may be forced to look at new ways to work with these clients in an effective manner without compromising or imposing their own values onto the client.

The right-to-die issue can be closely linked to the ethical debate around the client's right to suicide. However, while this paragraph has briefly outlined current stances on this issue, no equivalent understanding is as of yet available for dealing with client right-to-die issues, the theme of this study.

B) Ethical Decision-Making Regarding Social Cognitive Content

The issue of suicide was chosen for this study to show the severity and seriousness of why counselors in training may choose to strive for enhanced self-awareness and develop a positive self-identity. Implications are that if they do not possess such attributes, their ability to be value sensitive, (so as not to impose their own values on their clients) will remain critical. Professional morality, ethics, and spirituality among counselor education students are very likely to be challenged and this group may be required to commit to self-reflection and possibly get more training on how they are going to handle these changes in the clinical setting. Counselors in training could benefit from an in depth look at their own self-awareness and thoughts surrounding this issue. Counselors in training may need to work on developing a solid self-identity and to grow in the area of social-cognitive development. Positive growth in this area of self-awareness could be a benefit to them when making ethical decisions based on new legislation as it occurs. According to Lambie, Hagedorn & Ieva (2010),

> Effective counselors possess sound ethical and legal knowledge and have the ability to successfully integrate a code of ethics with diverse clients in various settings, therefore, the acquisition and application of ethical and legal knowledge must occur at the preparation and practice levels (p. 230).

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It has been shown by Lambie et.al., that the counselor education students who displayed higher degrees of social-cognitive functioning and/or self-awareness additionally displayed many desirable counseling skills such as flexibility, increased empathy, and an ability to take on other perspectives (p.240). These students presented stronger impressions of self-care and wellness which are important attributes for counselors when they face a client's serious moral, spiritual and ethical issues that may be incongruent with their own belief systems.

Suicide

The following information, as stated previously is to demonstrate the impact that certain issues in legislation can have on counselor self-awareness and the need for enhanced self-awareness to promote efficacy in the counseling environment. Suicide was intentionally chosen due to its prevalence in society and to act merely as a demonstration of how legislation such as the right to die can impact counselors and their personal values. Additionally, the topic of suicide was chosen because it appears that suicide is an issue that almost every counselor will face with a client at some point in their career. The following information demonstrates the seriousness of types of legislation that could impact the way clinicians in the mental health profession work with clients.

In the United States, assisted suicide is legal in the States of Oregon, Montana and Washington. There are many implications for potential impact on the counseling profession regarding this issue. Literature and recent research (Brassington, 2008) is showing a surge in the push for the right to choose as well as the headway that the interest groups are making on the topic of both suicide and Physician Assisted Suicide

(PAS). To Sociologists, suicide is not just an individual act, but is a function of the individual and the society. (Haralambos, Holborn & Heald ,2004).

The debate of suicide seems to have no bound as both scholars and even men in the street participate keenly. It is controversial in that, while some feel in the wake of unending difficulties or insurmountable pain and conflicts one could subscribe to as a panacea, others are rather inclined to uphold that one should in no account intentionally take his or her life. This school of thought frowns upon suicide and so considers it immoral (Ogar & Ogaboh, 2011).

In Chapter Two of this dissertation, the literature reviews will show that the topic of suicide is currently being debated and that legislation is being enacted in other states. This deliberation may set the stage for changes in the counseling environment and the way counselors work with suicidal clients. While society has historically set the standards for what is moral and immoral, society may be seeing a shift in those beliefs and a fight for an individual's right to choose, regardless of what the "standards" of society say. According to Brassington (2008), autonomy arguments seem to have the most influence on the formation of the laws. One of the issues Brassington raises is: "death is simply too big a deal for people to choose it lightly. If someone seeks death, then there is an overwhelming reason to suppose that de facto, he believes that he has a good reason to do so" (2008. p. 425).

Right-to Die

Research and legislation imply that individuals can and should have the right to die and often see the intervention of others to help as an intrusion and invasion upon that right (Brassington, 2008). Some (Brassington, 2008), believe that after all other routes or methods of treatment have been exhausted, it is the moral obligation of the medical professionals, counselors, and loved ones to not fight the individual's motions to end their life due to what could best be described as unlivable conditions. It is imperative to remember that every individual has a personal tolerance level of pain (physical and mental) and therefore a personal definition of unlivable is key. The sufferer is equally as valuable as one who is not suffering; therefore, their preferred solution to their ailment should not be ignored but held in high regard because they should be valued intrinsically along with their wishes. In other words, those in support of the right to die say that no one, not even medical professionals or loved ones, should have the power to hold the sufferer captive based on the idea that morally, the individuals wishes are the ones that should be respected. These wishes may be incongruent with a counselor's personal values and belief systems and it is not unlikely that a counselor, who is not self-aware, may unintentionally impose their own values on the client. It can be said that it is society's obligation to have compassion for other humans, especially those with great pain and suffering.

Unlike the Death with Dignity Act in Oregon, Brassington (2008) included mental illness such as clinical depression as a "reason" for choosing death. Another "right to die" piece of literature written by an existential philosopher, James Park (2013), (who states he has a deep interest in medical ethics) discusses the idea of separating irrational suicide

from voluntary death. While some might not see the difference between the two perspectives, Park (2013) argued that there are four main differences between what he considers irrational suicide and voluntary death. He shared that Irrational suicide is: harmful, irrational, capricious and regrettable, while Voluntary death is: helpful, rational, well-planned and admirable. When looking at his particular reasoning for "helpful death" one sees that he has four safeguards to separate harm from help: "Psychological consultant reviews the end-of-life plans; statements of support from family members; member of the clergy approves the life-ending decision and an ethics committee reviews the plans for death" (Park, 2013, p. 3). Park argued that autonomy of the individual should not be put above all else which is contrary to what Brassington argued. Park (2013) was adamant that the right-to-die movement should be careful to prevent suicidal people from appropriating the cloak of respectability and reason that the right-to-die movement has attempted to create for itself". A central question here is "who has the right to determine when we may die: us, as individuals with control over our own bodies and destiny, or others, as the state or federal government that claims a public interest in protecting life" (Glick & Hutchinson, 1999, p. 761). The training of future counselor educators may be subject to change in order to meet the needs of those clients who make the decision to exercise their right to choose to die. Just as important could be how counselors will work with individuals in an efficacious manner without imposing their own views of morality, spirituality, and ethics on the client. This has the threat of being a challenge for counselor education students who have been trained to use prevention methods and conduct risk assessments to preserve the client's life regardless of the wishes of the client.

Lacking in the research found thus far, is how the right to die movement and new laws will directly impact counselor education students. Also sorely lacking is how it could affect counselors in training as far as professional morality, ethics, and spirituality, which in turn could possibly affect how they work with suicidal clients as well as the training students receive. Moreover, another hole in the research is that there is no distinction found for the current study as to the differences of perceptions of self-esteem of graduate counselor education students on the school track versus students on the marriage and family track. However, to be pro-active, counselors in training for any area of counseling and counselor education training programs can choose to place further emphasis on the importance of self-awareness and social-cognitive development. Growth in the two aforementioned areas will hopefully enable counselor education students to attain better decision making skills which could assist them with new and/or controversial legislation in an ethical and professional manner. While we do have this knowledge about the ethical, moral, and spiritual issues raised by suicidal clients, at this time, we have no such knowledge pertaining to those clients considering the right-to-die decision, which in turn, lends itself to supporting this study.

Problem Statement

The present study examines the perceptions of the social-cognitive development of counselor education graduate students. The development of their personal identity as well as their perceptions of their own self-awareness may impact their ability to work with both current and future right-to-die legislation in the United States. Their personal and professional morality, ethics and spirituality as related to this subject will be examined. For this study in particular, should individuals gain the legal right to decide

how and when they die, the way we train counselor education students and how current practitioners would work with a suicidal patient and/or their families could be impacted. Counselors and counselor education graduate students may be faced with re-examining their professional morality, ethics, and spirituality.

The Nature of the Study, Hypotheses

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative approach was used with a phenomenological design. The reason for this type of approach was to solicit specific experiences, feelings, and perspectives from the point of view of the counselor education graduate students. This study used interviews, adapted questions pertaining to self-awareness, and philosophical perspectives in order to gain a clearer understanding of counselor education students' perceptions of self-awareness as related to potential efficacy in the counseling environment. The interviews were in-depth and were not structured. Each of the participants was involved in self-awareness discussions, interviewed one on one and participated in at least one discussion group. The perceptions of self-awareness and the feelings of the participants may provide a rationale for a need for new techniques and new types of training and supervision. Although Qualitative research is time consuming, it was necessary to capture the essence of this type of study and to see the counselor education students' world from a new perspective. Knowing how they are developing a social-cognitive awareness, what morality, spirituality, and ethics mean to them as emerging professional counselors, and how it may affect their decision-making processes could be indicative of a necessity for further training. Current practices may need to be reviewed and examined from a new perspective and could become an important topic in the counseling/mental health professions. In addition, an equally

important aspect of the study was to look at how the personal spirituality, morality, and ethics of each individual affects how they approach any new situation that may come to light in the future. The phenomenological approach included narrative aspects that allowed for more in-depth conversations and were used to help the participants become more aware of their own perceptions. The qualitative approach focused on a small set of participants and did not seek to generalize findings to a broad population as would a quantitative approach. The role of the researcher in this particular study was to be an active part of the interview process and to be deeply involved. An additional role of the researcher was to ensure validity and reliability, therefore, the data analysis included; (a) critical self-reflection, (b) member checks, and (c) an audit trail to ensure internal reliability and validity. Participants volunteered and in-depth discussions took place. Measures for ethical protection of the participants were taken and are described in Chapter Three along with a more detailed description of the methodology.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to look at the importance of graduate education students' perceptions of self-awareness and cognitive development pertaining to issues such as the right-to-die. Moreover, the study examined how graduate counselor education students self-awareness could be impacted in the areas of professional morality, spirituality, and ethics pertaining to the right to die legislation. According to the American Counseling Association code of ethics, a counselor has a professional moral obligation to respect and honor the client's wishes; even if they are not what the counselor himself or herself would choose (as long as no harm is done).

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In "A Solution –Focused Approach To Working With Clients Who Are Suicidal"

by Sharry, Darmody & Madden 2002, one of the major ideas of the article can be

summed up in the following quote: "Self-harm and suicide are amongst the most

challenging and frightening problems that therapists and counselors can encounter in the

course of their work"(2002, p. 383). The idea of suicide and confronting a client who

may have suicidal ideations can be challenging and even scary to clinicians. The article

mentioned above also shares that typical, traditional responses to suicidal clients have

tended to consist of risk assessment, management, followed with treatment interventions

including psychotherapy and/or medication (p398). In the literature as mentioned above

and as seen again in "Suicide Prevention: Critical Elements for Managing Suicidal

Clients and Counselor Liability Without the Use of a No-Suicide Contract" by Lee and

Bartlett, 2005, we find that the use of a no-suicide contract, which is a type of

"agreement" between the client and counselor, is often an attempt by the counselor to

manage their own personal anxiety associated with treating a suicidal client (p. 852).

According to the authors, there is no evidence to support the effectiveness of such

contracts, but said contracts do appear to alleviate some anxiety for the counselor.

McGlothlin, Rainey & Kindsvatter, 2005, stated that "It is likely that counselor trainees

will be exposed to suicidal clients and subsequently face personal dilemmas, stress, and

feelings of incompetence, (p. 135)" in their article titled, "Suicidal Clients and

Supervisees: A Model for Considering Supervisor Roles." Moreover, according to

Moerman, in "Working with Suicidal Clients: The Person-Centered Counselors

Experience and Understanding of Risk Assessment" (2012, p. 214): Research indicates

few counselors mention suicide or ask their clients directly, although they are given plenty of opportunity to do so (Reeves, Bowl, Wheeler, & Guthrie, 2004).

As seen in the above articles, there is much written about counselors' feelings and personal struggles when dealing with a suicidal patient, but there are also guidelines and literature specifically to help a counselor with this process. However, while there is a plethora of ideas and activities for the prevention of suicide and working with clients struggling with suicidal ideation, we will see in Chapter Two that there is little research to support counselors in working with a suicidal patient and/or their families when they have chosen to end their life and have the legal right to do so. This has the potential to raise anxiety in counselors to higher levels and it appears there is currently a hole in the literature on how to help them navigate through these types of issues.

New legislation that has the potential to affect the counseling environment is something that counselors and counselor educators may want to be prepared to address in a proactive manner. The hope is that this research will enable counselors to gain a better understanding of the changes that are coming and will help them to be prepared, trained and educated in a manner that is most effective for counseling their clients as well as their families. To reiterate, the main focus of this study, is how a developing counselor's self-awareness and identity affect their moral, ethical, and spiritual decisions in a professional setting and in light of any new legislation that may challenge their perceptions and values as an individual. The right to die legislation is what is being used in-depth to study this issue as suicide is an issue that counselors come face to face with on a regular basis.

Conceptual Framework

In this study, the conceptual framework is written at least partially in narrative form. The bulk of the research used in this study came from, but was not limited to; NAMI (the National Alliance on Mental Illness), the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Policy Studies Journals, Journals of Arts and Science, Journal of Counselor Education and Supervision, Journal of Mental Health, Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health, Journal of Professional Counseling, Practice, Theory, and Research, as well as many other valid and reliable professional journals and sources. The research includes personal in-depth and unstructured interviews, discussions, papers, and human experience. Current laws and legislation were also utilized to provide support and enhancement of the journal articles and other resources. A counselor in training may soon have to face the reality that their spiritual, ethical, and moral opinions could be challenged as they enter the world of professional counseling. Hence, as stated before, the way they work with suicidal patients, as well as other patient issues affected by new legislation, may need to be adjusted. An example of the different ways people think and view issues can be seen by Slater (1990), a British psychiatrist, as he states:

> That individuals do have a right to die and that some people with a mental illness or an incurable physical illness may wish to exercise the right and should be allowed to do so. Reasons being that the chances of such people recovering from such illness is bleak rather with surmounting assurance that they will die hence be allowed to exercise a right to die in order to prevent unavoidable suffering. (p.88)

Operational Definitions

Self-Awareness and or Social-Cognitive Development can also be referred to as ego development. For this study, the two can be interchangeable or even synonymous. In reference to ego, it can be considered the template or schema for how individuals make meaning of their experiences and emotions. The ego develops toward more complex levels of meaning-making of interpersonal relations, impulse control, and often intrapersonal congruence (Cohn & Westenberg, 2004). According to Bauer and McAdams it is also important to note that the degrees of ego development point out some important differences in the ways, and variations of complexity with which individuals may come to understand the self, others, and social situations. Finally, as counselors and/or counselors in training grow and mature in their understanding of self-awareness and social cognitive development, they tend to become more flexible in and are better able to adapt to their environment as well as in their interpersonal interactions (Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007).

Graduate counseling education students are those students who are currently enrolled in an accredited program at a four year University for a Masters Degree, an Educational Specialist Degree or a Doctoral degree teaching them how to be future counselors and/or counselor educators. These students are students at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, South Carolina.

The term "moral" is the root of the Latin word "moralis", and "ethics" is from the Greek word "ethos". Both terms refer to a custom or way of life. Some believe that there is a difference between Role Morality and Professional Morality. "The mentality of role

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morality may allow agents to believe they can abdicate moral responsibility when acting in a role. This is particularly significant in the literature dealing with professional morality where professionals because of their special status, may find themselves at odds with their best moral judgments" (Gibson , 2003, p.18). The American Counseling Association has in place a Professional code of Ethics for counselors, however, a counselor's personal beliefs and code of ethics may be put to the test when new legislation is in place.

Ethics are, as stated above, a custom or way of life, the way a person chooses to live and the standards they hold and subscribe to. The fact that these ethics may be challenged with new issues arising daily in the world we live in must be considered. It may be beneficial for counselors to be at a level of self-awareness and social cognitive development that will enable them to hold on to their personal ethics regardless of new laws or legislation they may or may not agree with. Mental health professionals could require a higher level of self-awareness to hold on to their own personal ethics while operating in an efficacious and professional manner when dealing with issues that may be incongruent to their way of life.

Spirituality does not necessarily mean religious or even affiliated with religion. However, a spiritual person often believes in a higher power that is present in their life and in the world. It often embraces "the concept of searching and moving forward in the direction of meaning, purpose and direction for your life" (OSU Student Wellness Center, 2013). Many who believe in God or any "higher power" believe that it is God's decision alone when a person dies. Some of these objections to giving an individual the right to decide how and when they die are held by a majority of people including counselors and

counselor education students. Spiritually, ethically, and morally, counselors and counselors in training may face an enormous challenge of how to work with individuals who are choosing the right to die and thereby, counselors could benefit by learning how to put aside their own personal morals, spiritual, and ethical values related to life and death, in order to best help the client at hand. Of course the argument of many is that for some, death is much preferred to leading a life of misery, disgrace, suffering, and degradation.   There are of course, those who are against suicide due to it being against the law of self-preservation, an unhealthy approach to solving problems, a violation of God's supremacy, as well as many other theological objections.

Suicide is the voluntary decision to take one's life. "Does man's free moral agency license him to do anything even to include willful taking of his life?" (Ogar & Ogaboh, 2011, p. 94) According to Park (2013) suicide can either be irrational which is a death that was not well-planned or was committed while abusing substances or being temporarily out of touch with reality such as when someone loses a job or a loved one; or suicide can be a voluntary death which is still suicide but is well-planned and takes into consideration terminal mental or physical illness. Either way, suicide whether rational or not is the taking of one's own life. Suicidal considerations or ideations are terms for both fleeting thoughts or the long term planning of taking one's own life.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope and Delimitations

Assumptions

The assumptions in this study are that there will be similar perceptions in the way graduate counseling students view their own degrees of self-awareness or social-cognitive development and what that means for their profession. Another assumption is that after learning about the importance of legislation that can affect the counseling profession and for this study the right-to-die movements and legislation, the students will have a desire to continue to attain knowledge in the areas of awareness of professional morality, spirituality, and ethics. The students will possibly get a glimpse as to how they can be challenged and will face self-reflection, work on a deeper self-awareness, and be willing to seek new training as needed to effectively work with clients whose personal beliefs and decisions pertaining to their right to die or any legislation are incongruent with the counselors own value systems. Another assumption is that there may possibly be a need for more education on the process of becoming self-aware and developing a mature and ethical way to making decisions when faced with unexpected issues or issues incongruent with personal values.

Limitations

The limitations of this study may come with the qualitative nature in which it is to be conducted. The number of participants is small but appropriate for a qualitative study. The information will hopefully be deep and meaningful to understanding the human experience. Working with a small group of counselor education students and their

perceptions of self-awareness may not be indicative of the general population of counselor education students across the country.

The limitations of the study are also the narrow boundaries set forth and the lack of research on working with a suicidal patient who has the right to choose how and when to die. There is a great amount of research on suicide prevention but only a small amount on how to actually work with a client who has the legal right to choose how and when they die. Research has also been found on the importance of high degrees of counselor self-awareness, but more may be needed to teach students how to reach this goal.

Scope

The scope of the study is limited to the graduate counselor education students and the information given and received by the researcher. The researcher looked at the current professional morality, spirituality, and ethics of these students, but most importantly, their perceptions of social-cognitive development as it pertains to efficacy in the counseling environment when faced with new legislation and ethical, moral, and spiritual decision making.

Delimitations

The delimitations of the study are the graduate counselor education students and the number used for the study. Another delimitation is that the study used only graduate counselor education students at the University of South Carolina. The ten students used should not be considered representative of all counselor education students at the University of South Carolina. Other parts of the country or other universities are not

represented. In a sense, the researcher was also a participant in the study as in most qualitative studies.

The Significance of the Study

Knowledge Generation

This study will bring about awareness and knowledge generation on an issue that can impact many professions and areas of life. Knowledge about the importance of elevated degrees of self-awareness and social cognitive development will be valuable. How current legislation can affect or challenge a counselor or counselor in training's professional ethics, morality, and spirituality will be brought to light. Knowledge about the need for further research specifically dealing with the issues in this study will possibly provide a starting point for future studies. Just as important, individual rights and the concepts of professional morality, ethics, spirituality, and how we work with and view those whose value system is different from ours is essential. The importance of the perceptions of self-awareness and social-cognitive development as it pertains to enabling counselors to keep from imposing their own value systems on their clients hopefully will increase efficacy in the counseling environment. While this study is pertaining to the right to die legislation, the researcher specifically uses this particular legislation to show how new laws can affect mental health workers in many important ways ethically, spiritually, and morally. This particular legislation is a way to give credence to the need for more in-depth perceptions of self-awareness and social cognitive development in order to work with clients in today's world.

Professional Application

The significance of the study is broad and can be applied to counseling, social work, mental health and other service related professions. The results of the study may have an impact on the training and supervision of graduate counselor education students as well as current practicing counselors and mental health professionals. This research provides a stepping stone for looking at ways to help those with different belief systems while respecting their rights and wishes. Psycho-educational counseling, grief counseling, and a framework for understanding and possibly accepting something that historically has been deemed immoral, are areas for further research on this topic or any new legislation. New ways of training, teaching, and the practice of counseling could become essential in the near future. Counselors, counselor education students, and counselor educators may want to be prepared to take a hard look at their professional morality, ethics, and spiritual beliefs. They will need to engage in self-reflection and truly practice the unconditional positive regard that Carl Rogers brought into focus many years ago. An ongoing push for counselors to continuously evaluate their perceptions of self-awareness and social-cognitive development will be important for an efficacious environment.

Social Change

The implications for social change in this study have the potential to spark further research on the subject of developing greater levels of self-awareness. The participants provided insight into how counselor education students are doing as far as developing an awareness that will enable them to be effective while maintaining their sense of self and their own personal value system. The right to die legislation as used in this study

provided a way to look at how current and future legislation can challenge counselors and counselors in training. Socially, this concept has the power to affect almost everyone. The morality or immorality of suicide will become a moot point should individuals gain the legal right to choose how and when they die. Having a counselor who is self-aware and can be effective without imposing their own value system on their clients may improve the counseling relationship.

Transition Statement

As previously stated, this study examines the professional morality, ethics and spirituality of counselor education graduate students as it pertains to the right to die legislation. This particular legislation was chosen specifically to demonstrate how serious issues in legislation now or in the future can potentially affect the efficacy of the counseling environment. It was also chosen because this particular legislation is directly related to morality and ethics. It is important to note that morality policies are unlike economic and foreign affair policies. Morality policies are very much prone to widespread disagreement because they bring up fundamental variances in personal experiences and socialization. Morality policies are also very much driven by mass media, public attention, and the persistence and strength of relevant public interest groups. Implications for practicing counselors and the training and supervision of graduate counseling education students are numerous. The outcome of the study may also provide implications for the need for future research in more specific areas. How well counselor education students are trained to develop and openly examine their social cognitive development as well as their own thoughts on self-awareness objectively will be an important focus for future programs. The development of professional morality

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could be an area that needs more research to better meet the needs of developing counselors to understand how to effectively help clients whose value systems may differ greatly with their own. While some of the contrasts in the literature on this topic were discussed earlier in this chapter, an in-depth literature review of counselor self-awareness and social cognitive development as pertaining to this topic will follow in Chapter Two. In Chapter Three, as mentioned above, a phenomenological research approach will be used for this study. The reasoning behind this is that the researcher wants to go beyond statistics and simple data and study the thoughts, perceptions and feelings of the participants in this study. "The research questions for a phenomenological/hermeneutic study are developed in order to understand the everyday lived experiences of individuals to explore what those experiences mean for them" (Heppner & Heppner, 2004, p.171). The phenomenological approach includes narrative aspects that allow for more in-depth conversations and are used to help the participants become more self-aware of their own perceptions.

The Qualitative approach focused on a small set of participants and did not seek to generalize findings to a broad population as does a Quantitative approach. Moreover, Chapter three will provide a more detailed description of the study, the paradigm that will be used, the role of the researcher, as well as the focus of the study. Participants will be looked at and the method of ethical protection of the participants will be explained and described.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The following literature review for this study is not deemed exhaustive but is considered, by the researcher, to represent all aspects that can be found of the study in content and scope. A portion of the literature review is relevant to the study of the self-awareness and social cognitive development of the professional morality, ethics, and spirituality of counselors pertaining to the right to die legislation. However, the majority of the literature review will focus on the importance of development of self-awareness of counselor education students as well as their social cognitive development and its importance as related to any issue that has the potential to affect their personal value system and efficacy in the counseling environment.

Articles were taken from well-regarded academic journals from the fields of counseling, social work, psychology, mental health, philosophy, spirituality in counseling, and political sciences. There are various disciplines in these fields represented as well. There are other articles from both Harvard and Yale Law Reviews pertaining specifically to the issue being studied. Resources were published between 1955 and 2013. The researcher used several search engines including, but not limited to; JSTOR, ERIC, Google Scholar, Ebrary, Academic Complete, Academic OneFile, and EBSCO.

Summaries and comparisons will be in this review where appropriate, and will be used to support and represent the importance of counselor education students' developing a high level of self-awareness and social cognitive development to lend to efficacy in the counseling environment.

The right to die legislation will be reviewed and examined and the implications for counselors and counselor educators will be studied. A look at the legal and historical perspectives of this issue will also be reviewed as suicide is not a new issue. The reasoning for including this information in this chapter is again to give an example of the type of critical issues that will require high degrees of self-awareness and social cognitive development. The topic of suicide is one that almost every counselor will encounter in practice and it is suggested, in order to be more efficacious, that counselors do not place their own value systems on the client.

The literature review will fall into the categories and/or themes of; a) Self-Awareness and Social-Cognitive Development of Counselor Education Students, b) Historical Perspectives and the Right to Die Legislation, c) Conceptual Framework-including Spirituality, Morality and Ethics, and d) Significance for Counseling and Counseling Education.

Self-Awareness and Social Cognitive Development of Counselor Education Students

In the article; "Social-Cognitive Development, Ethical and Legal Knowledge, and Ethical Decision Making of Counselor Education Students" by Lambie, Hagedorn &Ieva 2010, it is stated that, "A primary component of counselors' preparation , therefore, is the purposeful promotion of counseling students' social-cognitive development, which is

associated with greater empathy, flexibility, perspective-taking, self-care, and wellness while at the same time increasing their abilities to process ethical and legal dilemmas with which they will be faced as professionals"(p. 228). Reading articles such as this, it is easy to make the connection between developing counselors' self-awareness and issues such as the right to die. The ego, another name for social cognitive development is the area in which individuals make interpretation or meaning of their own emotions and experiences. It is important to keep developing the ego to more complex levels in order to create better interpersonal relations, impulse control, and intrapersonal congruence (Lambie et al, p. 229). This article also reiterates that effective counselors are able to successfully combine a strong code of ethics with diverse populations. A counselor's professional identity is directly related to their legal and ethical knowledge base which is part of a more complex decision making ability based on enhanced self-awareness. This article conducted a study concerning the implications for social cognitive development based on counselor education students participating in two ethics courses during their programs. The study found that in general, these students' scores on self-awareness scales increased after completing the courses. The study also found that "counselors-in-training who were older and married scored at higher levels of social-cognitive maturity, suggesting that life experiences such as marriage may potentially influence one's social-cognitive functioning" (Lambie et al. p. 241).

The article held valuable and informative information but for this researcher, would have been better to have been completed in two different venues. A discussion and/or study of the effect of the suggested courses for counselor education students in training in one article, and a separate article on the ethical, legal knowledge, and

decision-making processes for counselor education students in training. While the article

tried to connect the two issues to make sense of the combination, it appeared too broad

for one study.

The next article for this section, "Required Counseling for Mental Health

Professional Trainees: Its Perceived Effect on Self-Awareness and Other Potential

Benefits". Oden, Holden and Balkin, 2009, asserted that enhanced degrees of self-

awareness were related to "enhanced therapeutic effectiveness". It also demonstrated that

personal counseling appeared to increase self-awareness for counselors in training. In this

article a study was conducted on the idea of a recommendation of required counseling for

counselors in training. The participants responded in a narrative manner and the

responses included: "an indication of increased understanding of the client perspective

(56%), self-awareness (36%), understanding of the process of counseling (33%), personal

growth (18%), understanding the role of the counselor (11%), and insight about

expectations of the preparation program (4%)" (445-446).

This study did what the aforementioned did not. It was less broad and more

concise. However, it is important to note, that this study was subjective and not objective

and the experiences were not compared to other possible interventions.

In; "Awareness of Self-A Critical Tool", written by Urdang 2010, it is clear she

feels that self-awareness is the essential tool in effective counseling or social work in any

clinical setting. Urdang (2010) states that her reason for writing this article is to

demonstrate how it is imperative, not only for clinical work, but in any social work or

counseling encounter; students need to develop a centered and stable professional self, in

all clinical settings. Furthermore, the essential role of self-reflection in preventing boundary problems, possible burn-out and protecting oneself from client violence is discussed. Urdang (2010) does acknowledge that the idea of self-reflection and self-awareness are not new to the counseling field but feels they need to be revisited. She suggests fostering an academic environment of support in this area along with observational activities and even process recording. She discusses process recording as a narrative in the first person, not a script or direct transcription. Urdang (2010) reiterates that self-awareness is essential for students to develop the "professional self" who in turn become competent, effective, professional clinicians that provide quality counseling for their clients.

While many agree that "Self-reflectiveness is a basic cornerstone for the development of the professional self" and the article was helpful for this current study in regards to the critical component of counselor education students' gaining a deeper understanding of social cognitive development and self-awareness, the focus was very different from this current study. Urdang (2010) focused on worker burnout and boundary crossing while this study will be focusing on self-awareness and social cognitive development as a necessity for counseling efficacy.

"Gatekeeping for Personal and Professional Competence in Graduate Counseling Programs", by Homrich, 2009 discussed the importance of "gatekeeping" of counselor education students. The process should start at the initial interview and continue throughout the program. This article discussed, as did other articles mentioned here, the idea that counselor education students need to experience their own personal counseling sessions in order to grow. The article went into detail about ethical standards,

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professional competence, as well as how to handle "incompetent" trainees. Homrich,
(2009) was also emphatic about the importance of the relationship between counselor and
client as required for therapeutic effectiveness.

The article made several good points about counselor competence and the
"gatekeeping" that supervisors and staff are required to do in order to insure the
production of effective counselors. However, a great deal of discussion was spent on
counselor education students' remediation and recommendations. This article was not
found to be a proponent for this current study of the importance of counselor self-
awareness and social cognitive development. These areas, in this researcher's opinion,
would have a tremendous impact on counselor readiness and competencies. It is unclear
why the author did not discuss these two important attributes. Counselor self-awareness
and social cognitive development contribute greatly to the readiness of new counselors in
the profession. They are at least as important as academic success and focusing on these
two issues (as in this study), could prevent the need for remediation to the extent
discussed in this particular article.

Greason and Cashwell, (2009), wrote an article on "Counselor Preparation;
Mindfulness and Counseling Efficacy; The Mediating Role of Attention and Empathy."
This article focused on the concept of "mindfulness" as a predictor of self-efficacy.
Greason and Cashwell ,(2009) stated that "higher counseling self-efficacy is related to
perseverance in the face of challenging counseling tasks and an increased ability to
receive and incorporate evaluative feedback". The article was helpful in that it promoted
mindfulness and the idea of non-judgmental counseling as well as a counselor being in

the moment and "accepting and allowing rather than trying to change current experience" (p. 14).

This researcher believes that these concepts can be tied into counselor self-awareness and social cognitive development but they do not take the place of them. The study discussed the core areas of mindfulness as a means to better counseling which may be true, but at the same time is not all inclusive. Mindfulness is part of self-awareness but is not purely self-awareness and it is important that the promotion of this concept is only a part of counselor education training.

Historical Perspective

The following information is to present the historical perspectives on suicide as pertaining to the right to die. These articles present the historical viewpoint on the issue of the right to die. As stated previously, the reasoning behind including the history on suicide as part of the "right to die" issue is to demonstrate how critical high levels of counselor self-awareness and social cognitive development are. This issue is an actual life or death issue and while others are not, a deep self-awareness of the counselors about to begin actual counseling careers is imperative for an efficacious environment where the counselor does not impose their own value system on their clients, regardless of the issue.

In the historical section, there was no literature found to help counselors or mental health professionals in dealing with this specific issue. However, by historical, I am going back hundreds of years plus to show this is an age old problem that has been controversial since the beginning of time. Another important aspect of the historical perspective is that since the notion and thoughts of suicide began, it was never just a

"political" or legal issue. It is very much an ethical, moral and spiritual issue as will be seen in the following articles. While no information was found in this section on how to work this into the implications for counselors and counselor educators, it does show that this issue has and likely always will, touch on every counselor's professional morality, ethics, and spirituality, and therefore is important to glean as much information as possible by starting at the beginning.

Suicide is not new. This section begins by going back in time as far as Socrates (470 BC). The first article refers often to "The Phaedo" (Translated in this version by Jowett, 2008) which was a dialogue written by Plato during Socrates' last days. This article was chosen because it shows that the "right to die" has been an ethical, spiritual, and moral issue since life began. The Phaedo discusses how the soul is immortal and "when released from the body can enjoy a better state of being" (Warren, 2001). The Phaedo asks "When does a life become no longer worth living?" (Warren, p.121) Warren also shares that both "Platonism and Christianity hold out the promise of a better existence after death (in heaven, amongst the Forms) and this makes it seem a good idea not to spend any longer than necessary living a life here on earth." Socrates argued for the prohibition of suicide and claimed that his own death would not be suicide because he was to be put to death anyway. This was his reasoning for drinking Hemlock. Socrates believed that there was nothing to fear in death and that the Gods may indicate that they wished for a person to end his/her life. The Phaedo has many interpretations and many contradictions in those interpretations. In contrast to Socrates and his reasons that suicide should be prohibited, the Stoics are renowned advocates of suicide. They did however agree that God would, on occasion, provide a sign that it is time to give up life. Warren,

(2001), does explain that the Stoics do not agree with Plato or Socrates that there is an immortal soul. "Their justification for a rational suicide is not the promise of a better state after death. Rather, in Stoic ethics, the only good is virtue; life is merely an 'indifferent', like wealth, health and so on. Suicide can be the 'appropriate' thing to do just as other actions can also be viewed". In another article; "Philosophy, Cato, and Roman Suicide: I" by Griffin, 1986, it is stated that Stoicism "gave men dignity as well and a feeling of moral superiority which compensated members of the upper orders for the political standing they had inevitably lost, now that a Princeps monopolized the power and the glory." It seems that among the philosophers suicide was often theatrical, as the suicide or voluntary death as some put it, was almost always carried out in the presence of an audience and the victim usually knew that the last words he spoke would be written down and published.

Kant was one of the writers who had a great love and respect for the ancient Latin and Greek authors. Kant's view on suicide was quite the opposite of the Stoics; he found it abominable and appalling and was one of the first who was sensitive to the psychological factors that "may restrict the possibility of a distinctively moral assessment of the act. In Streit, for instance, he referred to 'the wildly made resolution of suicide to put an end to life' which is merely 'the effect of an emotion that has risen to the height of insanity." Gregor (1979) Kant also stated that passion, rage, and insanity in his opinion, were the most frequent causes of suicide. In the article by Seidler (1983), Kant felt suicide was the ultimate human defeat.

"Man can perform great actions even in misfortune--As long as the man is alive; he always has the opportunity to practice good and even heroic virtue. He must view life,

even in the greatest misery, as fate's challenge to his steadfastness" (p.441). In Seidlers (1983) article he also discusses Kant's view of religion relating to suicide. Kant obviously feels that the Creator is the one who decides when humans should live and die. He feels that suicide is a rebellion against God himself. "Another traditional argument that Kant mentions is the claim that suicide involves an injustice against others, including one's parents, spouse, children, friends and fellow citizens (p.445)".

We see looking back in time, that the arguments of man's right to choose to die, and the views of suicide are very strongly worded and there does not seem to be much "middle ground". Lacking in the historical perspectives, was the view of suicide from someone who was actually said to be depressed or had anxiety or some other disorder that can lead to suicide today. In addition, there was not much said about those with a terminal illness or in chronic pain but that issue was alluded to in some articles. Also lacking, as stated before, in the historical background literature, was any reference to or information for mental health counseling and wellness or anyone in the helping profession. When looking at the literature from the historical perspective, there were no actual research studies found in this search. Most of the literature was based on the writings of philosophers and the interpretations of those documents by others. The articles varied in opinions and thoughts on suicide and the ethical and moral philosophies, but no specific research studies could be found. Therefore, it is difficult to pinpoint any type of methodology for these articles, or to discover, other than through the interpretive literature, how these philosophers came to their conclusions about suicide and the moral and ethical aspects of such an act. It is important to remember that the history of the right to die strongly suggests that in addition to the initiative, state courts will be a venue of

choice for this controversial new policy, despite limited success thus far, and legislatures may shift as well. Most courts that have dealt with the right to die have increased patients' rights and autonomy (Glick & Hutchinson, p.761).

For some, to deny one the right to choose how and when they die is considered death control. This "argument sees death as being preferred to leading a life of misery, disgrace and degradation. So, suicide is herein a right" (Ogar, Ogaboh, & Ogaboh, p. 98).

In the words of Slater, "Death is equal partner with birth in the renewal of life, for human societies for human kind, and indeed for the entire world of living things… he who does not accept and respect those who want to reject life does not truly accept and respect life itself; that, causing one's own death should be called suicide only by those who disapprove of it; and should be called death control by those who approve of it" (Satris, p.94).

We see that legally, there are many issues involved in the right to die movement. Some of the main issues being intangibles such as ethics, spirituality, and morals. This of course, is one of the reasons the right to die issue is a morality issue. These issues are generally very controversial and time consuming but we can see from the literature, the proponents of the right to die movement are making headway and it may be that suicide or "voluntary death" will become legal in the near future. As the courts are moving more towards granting autonomy and individual rights, the right to choose how and when one dies, may eventually be a non-issue as far as the legal aspect, but of course, will likely always be a moral, ethical, and spiritual issue for every individual. While again, in this

section, there is no actual research methodology, what is going on in the legislature makes this component of the study important.

This study was not conducted to support or oppose the right to die issue, but was designed to look at how the legal impact of that issue or any issue, could help those in the counseling profession and in counselor education programs. It is imperative that these programs be proactive to ensure that counselors in training are ready to work with individuals who hold different values and perspectives on the issues with which they are dealing. Strong social cognitive development and self-awareness are necessary to be efficacious and productive in the counseling environment.

Conceptual Framework-Including Spirituality, Morality and Ethics

The articles chosen for this portion of the study were selected due to the concepts of morality, ethics, and spirituality as pertaining to suicide or the right to die. This research draws specific attention to the issues that will ultimately affect counselors and those in the helping professions should the right to die become legal and therefore will be an issue not of legality or criminal behavior, but of morals, ethics, and spirituality. Being self-aware means knowing oneself in the areas of morality, ethics, and spirituality. The use of right to die issue is again, to provide an example of a critical issue that could have a potential negative affect on the effectiveness of a counselor if they have not attained a high level of self-awareness or social cognitive development.

The article; "Beyond the Elementary Forms of Moral Life: Reflectivity and Rationality in Durkheim's Moral Theory", 2010, turned out to be more of an exploration of Durkheim's writings and thoughts on the evolution of morality than on morality in and

of itself. The author, Robert Kenny, also looked at the concepts of "moral reasoning." The only thing found in this article related to both morality and suicide was concerning Socrates:

> Having demonstrated the methodological constraint that led him to conclusions that were against his interests, Socrates demonstrated the moral constraint necessary for the occasion by doing what reason demanded (drinking hemlock), having recognized this demand in a reasoning ritual. Socrates indeed died, but in that death, he laid down the most socially determining principal of moral reason: that it reflects back upon the person who invokes it in a manner that gives no regard to that person's preferences. (Kenny, p.231)

This article did not provide the substance and information I had hoped it would regarding morality and suicide but did make for interesting reading and could provide insight for another type of study.

"Contrasting Role Morality and Professional Morality: Implications for Practice", by Gibson, 2003, had some insight to the conflicts one might experience between personal morality and professional morality. He shares that some, while "acting" in a specific role such as at work, feel they can abdicate moral responsibility. Gibson (2003) also looks at "moral choices at work in terms of power and the ability to bring about change" (p.18). Moreover, this article discussed the conflicts some may have when they find themselves at odds, because of their particular status at work, with their own best moral judgments. This could be an issue with counseling and mental health professionals in the future when working with a client who has the right to choose how and when they

die and they exercise that right. "Rights and Autonomy", 1981, by Richards, discussed the ancient philosophers' views on autonomy and rights as well as the views current when he wrote the article. He shared that autonomy is not simply a sense of independence but is much more. Autonomy, when in its highest form is twofold. The first, "the evaluation of one's life that autonomy makes possible enable persons not to be bound to immediate present desires, but to give weight to their desires and projects over time--second, the standards of self-critical evaluation are determined not by the will of others but by arguments and evidence which one has rationally examined and assented to" (Richards, 1981, p.11).

Autonomy therefore is not egotistical and it is not selfish but is a thorough and healthy look at oneself. This might bring up the question in the right to die movement if these people who are pushing for the right to die are truly autonomous. Richards also shares in his article that ethics is not a respect for who people currently are, but rather a respect for the capacity people have and the capacity to "take responsibility as a free and rational agent for one's system of ends" (Richards, 1981, p.16).

Significance for Counseling and Counseling Education

Research led to a respectable amount of information about morals, ethics, and/or spirituality in counseling but it was not related to the topic of suicide. In "Ethical Aspects of Spirituality in Counseling, 2006, it is stated that there are leaders in the counseling field that caution against spirituality in practice, more specifically "a counselor whose religious values and beliefs are so rigid as to preclude the counselor from helping the client" (p.111). If taken to the level that on the issue of the right to die, a counselor may

have a strong spiritual belief that renders him or her unable to objectively help this particular client. In that case, it would be preferable for the counselor to refer the client out to another therapist. However, there may come a time when referring out is not an option for a counselor so it would behoove them to attain a level of social cognitive development so as not to interfere with the professional role of counselor. Ethics of spirituality in counseling lie with the openness of the counselor to discussion "regarding values and beliefs different than one's own" (Steen, Engles, & Thweatt, 2006, p.115).

According to Miller (1999), "spiritual preparedness is important in practice and in counselor preparation." We see the same issue again in "Integrating Spirituality into Counselor Preparation: A Developmental Wellness Approach", (2003). Myers and Williard shared that spirituality should be a part of counselor preparation as a developmental, life-span phenomenon. They felt that counselors in training should be able to recognize spiritual growth as one part of holistic wellness, and students should be encouraged to confront their own religious and/or spiritual views while exploring diverse spiritual beliefs in class projects. A student or counselor in training, who is able to do this, would be considered at a higher level of self-awareness than one who has not reached this point of development. According to the 2005 ACA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, client welfare, respect, worth, dignity, uniqueness and potential are primary responsibilities of counselors.

In "Mental Health Professionals and Assisted Death: Perceived Ethical Obligations and Proposed Guidelines for Practice", by James Werth Jr. 1999, there are actually several good points and suggestions made for counselors pertaining to Assisted

suicide, which may someday be revised accordingly if the right to die movement grows and passes. First, however, let me share that in its "Interest" statement:

> the representatives of the ACA stated that they were signing because 'the counseling profession's largely unique focus on human development, and on individual self-determination and self-actualization' led to the decision that they believed it is imperative for the organization to express its position regarding the ability of terminally ill adults to choose the manner and hasten the timing of their death. (p.2)

For further clarification on their decision to sign onto the brief, ACA's representatives issued a statement which included the following:

> One of the guiding principles of the counseling profession has always been the right of a client's self-determination and many counselors have special training and experience that could help them assess the competence, rationality, and voluntariness of end-of-life decisions. Counselors can also help the patient explore alternatives and prepare family members for the consequences of the patient's final decision, whatever it may be. We recognize this is a controversial issue, however it is one with which your clients or potential clients may be struggling. As with any issue, as professional counselors you must be objective and not project your beliefs onto your clients. If there are times when you are unable to do this, the ethical choice is for you to refer. (Letters to the Editor, 1997, p.4)

There are pertinent statements from other mental health associations as well. From the

American Psychological Association (1997):

> The American Psychological Association does not advocate for or against assisted
> suicide. What psychologists do is support high quality end-of-life care and
> informed end-of-life decisions based on the correct assessment of the patient's
> mental capacity, social support systems, and degree of self-determination. (p. 1)

The document then goes on (p. 3) to be more specific with guidance for professionals:

> Mental health professionals who work in this area must approach their work in a
> neutral manner. Their personal beliefs on the issue should not influence the
> process. The role of the mental health professional is to (a) attempt to ensure that
> the end-of-life decision-making process includes a complete assessment of the
> patient's ability to make a rational judgment, and (b) help protect the patient's
> right to self-determination.

The NASW (National Association for Social Workers) also put forth a statement

(NASW, 1993, p.60):

> Competent individuals should have the opportunity to make their own choices but
> only after being informed of all options and consequences. Choices should be
> made without coercion. Therefore, the appropriate role for social workers is to
> help patients express their thoughts and feelings, to facilitate exploration of
> alternatives, to provide information to make an informed choice, and to deal with
> grief and loss issues….In addition the social worker should help the client
> thoroughly review all available options including, but not limited to, pain

management, counseling, hospice care, nursing home placement, and advance

health care directives….NASW members should be free to participate or not

participate in assisted-suicide matters or other discussions concerning end-of-life

decisions depending on their own beliefs, attitudes and value systems.

As stated above there are many good guidelines in the article by Werth (1999) for

counselors and mental health professionals that can be applied to clients who have chosen

a path that is directly opposite the counselors values. Werth explains that "attempting to

disregard the issue or ignore the client's needs and values about life and death or because

of beliefs about one's professional role is acceptable as long as appropriate referrals are

made, but avoiding the matter by blindly pointing to interpretations of ethics codes or

legal obligations without truly analyzing one's responsibilities, reflects poorly on the

therapist himself or herself and on mental health professionals more generally" (p.181).

As counselors and mental health professionals it is our obligation to help our

client's with whatever issues they bring us. As Werth (1999) states: "We will all face

death someday, in ourselves and in our loved ones; we should utilize our skills,

experience, training, and selves to aid our clients as they consider assisted death to no

less an extent than we would want when we are dying. To do less is more than

unprofessional; it is inhumane" (p. 181).

Summary

The content of this particular chapter supports this study in that it shows a clear

need for a qualitative in-depth approach to be pro-active on the issue of developing a

stronger degree of self-awareness and social cognitive development in graduate counselor

education students. The phenomenological approach will be used to get in-depth views on current graduate counselor education students' thoughts and insights into this critical process. Counselor educators must be proactive in examining their own professional ethics, spirituality and morality and looking at ways to enhance the graduate counselor education students' opportunities for a deeper, stronger sense of self-awareness and social cognitive development.

There is a plethora of articles on multi-cultural awareness, which many ascertain is also being self-aware. However, multi-cultural awareness comes only after one has a positive, strong self-identity and high degrees of self-awareness and social cognitive development. It seems to this researcher, that this concept is akin to the saying that one cannot love others until they love themselves. It would be deemed unlikely then, that one could effectively be a "multi-cultural" counselor without a solid self-awareness and positive self-identity. One does not simply attain these attributes, but will hopefully understand that this is a lifelong process.

Chapter Three will discuss the research design and methodology that will be used in this study. It will also provide a justification for the research and will provide information on the process, data analysis, and protection measures taken to ensure that the study is ethical.

Chapter Four will contain the actual study, which will be a qualitative study with a phenomenological design. Three current counselor education students will be interviewed and will participate in discussions on this study.

Finally, Chapter Five will contain the results as well as implications for counselors and counselor educators. There will also be some discussion on the possible need for future research and in what specific areas to enhance the current study. The hope is that this research will provide opportunities to reiterate the importance of this issue and look at new interventions to increase the development of counselor education students' social cognitive development levels. Furthermore, it will help encourage counselors and counselor educators to become more self-aware and pro-active in reflecting on their professional morality, ethics, and spirituality pertaining to this particular issue as well as any issue that could conflict with their personal value system and beliefs. There will be new considerations for counselors to assess their own values and be ready for change. Stressing the importance of providing opportunities throughout a counselor education students program of study to increase self-awareness is a critical step in producing effective professionals.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study as discussed in detail in Chapter One was to examine how the perceptions of self-awareness and social cognitive development of counselor education graduate students may impact efficacy in their future clinical practice. A look at the right to die issue was used as an example of the critical situations a counselor must work with. Does this decision of the client affect how the counselor will work with him or her in the most effective and professional manner even if the client's decision conflicts greatly with the counselors own values? A counselor has a professional moral obligation to respect and honor the client's wishes, even if they are not what the counselor himself or herself would choose.

Currently, there is research (Greason & Cashwell, 2009) that implies that counselor perceptions of self-awareness and social cognitive development can be assets to effective counseling if they are strong and objective. The hope is that this research will enable counselors to gain a better understanding of the changes that are coming and will help them to be prepared, trained, and educated in a manner that is most effective for counseling the client as well as their families. However, the main focus of this study was not the issue of whether or not clients should or should not have the legal right to die but was designed to hone in on the professional morality, spirituality, and ethics of current practicing counselors and graduate students as well as to look at how we train our

graduate counseling education students. It appears to be imperative to maintain ongoing reflection of self-awareness and social cognitive development for counselors so as not to impose their own value systems on their clients but to be open and receptive to what the client needs and where the client is. Working with graduate counselor education students in this area throughout their program of study seems to enhance and raise a strong sense self-awareness and social cognitive development which in turn create greater efficacy in the future counseling environment. Phenomenological studies that examine the experiential perceptions of individual members of a small and even specifically identified group, offer an opportunity to discover both similarities in perspective and salience.

Design

A phenomenological research approach was used for this study. The reasoning behind this was that the researcher wanted to go beyond statistics and simple data and study the thoughts, perceptions and feelings of the participants in this study. "The research questions for a phenomenological/hermeneutic study are developed in order to understand the everyday lived experiences of individuals to explore what those experiences mean for them" Heppner & Heppner (p.171). The phenomenological approach included narrative aspects that allowed for more in-depth conversations. The researcher and the participants were able to focus on the participants' perceptions of their own self-awareness and identity development. The Qualitative approach focused on a small set of participants and did not seek to generalize findings to a broad population as a Quantitative approach would. This study was limited to eight to ten willing and available participants (counselor education graduate students) who were willing to provide in-depth, personal and meaningful stories to add to the findings of this study. In *"How Many*

Qualitative Interviews is Enough?" Baker and Edwards (2012), writing for the National Center for Research Methods, answer the question of how many interviews is enough, "as with all things qualitative, is, it depends" (p. 3). The authors interviewed several renowned researchers and, as stated above, each qualitative study is different. "At the low end of the 'how many' question, numerous well respected and even classic studies have been produced using the single case study" (p.8). These stories can be powerful and useful to the field of counseling and other mental health professionals. Other methods would not have the potential to be this personal and this potent to lead the study to the answers generated in response to the questions. "The depth associated with qualitative research, coupled with researchers' efforts to triangulate and cross-check their data, gives this methodology strength in the area of validity" (Ambert, Adler, Adler & Detzner, 1995, p. 882).

In addition, this approach was chosen because it makes it more appropriate to concentrate on the self-awareness perceptions of those involved as well as the consciousness and depths of narratives from self-reporting and intimate discussions. The narratives in this study will be used to look at the participants own perceptions as well as observations in depth as is the norm for qualitative research. A first person narrative as well as a participant-centered paradigm is imperative to reach to a depth of self-awareness and personal reporting to support the meaning the researcher hoped to gain from this data. In *Becoming Qualitative Researchers*, by Glesne (2006) it is noted that qualitative research is defined as a way "to understand social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, to contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural-political milieu, and sometimes to transform or change social positions (4)."

Role of the Researcher

The researcher in this study was to develop the interview questions, contact and communicate with each participant and schedule interviews. The researcher was the only interviewer and transcribed the tapes of the interviews. The researcher recorded, analyzed, and interpreted the results and reported the findings and conclusions. The researcher determined the participant criteria and was solely responsible for the ethical integrity of the study.

> Certain types of phenomenological studies incline the researcher to look for, and interpret data in terms of, 'life world existentials,' such as corporeality and temporality-such descriptions require researchers to move farther into or beyond their data as they demand not just reading words and scenes, but rather reading into, between and over the analysis of the 'moments' of a phenomenological study is an excellent demonstration of the successive transformations from a participant's description of an event to researcher's phenomenological description of that event (Sandelowski ,2000, p. 336).

The researcher created the interview questions after having examined McFadden's Stylistic Counseling Self-Assessment for researcher cross-cultural preparation (Harper & McFadden, 2003, pp. 229-232). Although McFadden's questions were intended for counselor self-assessment in working with different cultures, the researcher decided the instrument lent itself to counselors facing new and unexpected issues that differ greatly from their own personal culture and/or value system. Most of the questions are concerning the counselors' self-awareness. The researcher based the

majority of the questions on her own experiences in the Counselor Education Program. The complete list of questions developed by the researcher is listed in this chapter as well as the appendix section.

Within the qualitative design schema, the researcher used phenomenological, in-depth interviewing. Phenomenological interviews were used to understand the lived experiences of people who shared a common phenomenon.

The researcher made every attempt and took every precaution to insure that the information presented did not contain personal opinions but remained focused on the participants and their own perceptions and feelings. Because the researcher allowed the participants to fully tell their own stories, views, and perceptions, she did not present her own biases or interject any thoughts or feelings into their experiences, thoughts, or beliefs.

An additional role of the researcher was to insure validity and reliability. The data analysis included; triangulation, critical self-reflection, member checks, and an audit trail to ensure internal reliability and validity. All of these strategies were reported along with the findings of the study and are described in more detail in the Data section below. The researcher also took measures to insure that she had enough time to be submerged in the study long enough to fully understand and have an in-depth view of the phenomenon.

Qualitative research design should be utilized when you have how and what questions; when variables cannot be easily identified or separated; when the researcher wants to be and chooses to be an active learner; and the "study" is conducted in the participants' natural environment (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2006).

Measures for the Protection of Participants

The participants were given an informed consent form to read. The study was submitted to the IRB and was accepted. The participants were not identified to anyone outside of the study but did come to know each other as discussion groups were part of this study. They each had a numerical code assigned and no identifying information was included in the study. The numeric pseudonyms also applied to any audio recordings. The researcher was the sole interviewer and transcribed and presented all data. The researcher completed the Stylistic Counseling Self-Assessment (Harper and McFadden, 2003, p.229-232) and took all measures necessary to keep subjectivity out of the research as described in the "role of the researcher section". The study and the intent of the study were completely disclosed to all participants. The researcher did not "push or lead" the participants but accepted what each participant was willing to share. The participants volunteered and understood there were no specific requirements to sharing their stories/perceptions only that their stories matter and are important in order to further educate the counseling profession on their thoughts and needs as well as those of future graduate counseling education students in the areas of self-awareness and social cognitive development. The participants were made aware that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without penalty.

Context and Participants

The graduate education students were all students of the University of South Carolina in Columbia, S.C. All participants were volunteers and their confidentiality and anonymity was protected as stated above. Each of the participants was in their last year of

the Counseling Educational Specialist Program at the University. This was designed to look at their perceptions of self-awareness after having gone through most of their program and as they were soon to emerge as practicing counselors.

The interviews and discussion groups were in-depth and were not structured. The study provides insight and information leading to some new ideas for the training and supervision of graduate counseling education students as pertaining to self-awareness and social cognitive development. There were initial and advanced questions; however, the hope was that these questions would lead to deeper and richer discussions. Although Qualitative research is time consuming, it was necessary to capture the essence of this type of study and to see the participants' views from a new perspective. The number of participants as stated previously is sufficient for a qualitative study. The hope was that the small number would enable to researcher to go more in-depth with each participant and extract more authentic and meaningful data.

Data

The participants volunteered after hearing about the study. The researcher spent time getting to know each participant and building rapport before getting to the heart of the study. The interviews were done solely by the researcher and were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Open ended interview questions were utilized. The personal interviews and discussion/focus groups served as the major mechanism for collecting data in this phenomenological study. The researcher remained flexible in arranging interviews and allowed sufficient time for processing. Because the participants' views and experiences are personal, they were coded by a numerical method to protect

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their identity. Informed consent forms were distributed before any of the study began. All ethical considerations were taken into account and the researcher was careful to monitor the ethical integrity of the study on a continuous basis. The protocol for ethical guidelines was aforementioned in this chapter. The study was presented for review to the IRB and was accepted. Time was allotted for any discrepancies to be found and any noted were clarified with each participant. Participants had complete access to the researcher. No software was used and the narratives were transcribed exactly with nothing added by the researcher. The narrative stories of the participants were the only source of data for analysis. Because the goal was to interpret and find meaning in a phenomenological study, the researcher was careful to take special precautions to insure that the interpretation was objective and not subjective.

In order to insure internal validity and reliability, the researcher employed the following methods; triangulation, which can be accomplished in more than one way but for this study the researcher used a combination of document analyses, interviews, and discussion groups. (Merriam & Assoc. 2002). A second strategy the researcher used to ensure validity was "member checks". The researcher took the tentative findings back to the participants' for them to review and asked the participants if the researcher's interpretation was accurate or if changes or adjustments needed to be made. Once the researcher decided upon the direct quotes to use (within 48 hours of each individual interview), she took each quote to the participant to check for accuracy. The researcher was "submerged or engaged in the data collection phase over a long enough period to ensure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon" (Merriam & Assoc., p26). The time allotted was sufficient for this particular study. The participants were at a point in

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their program that enabled them to participate regularly and check in as needed. The researcher used an "audit trail" and diligently kept a detailed listing and account of dates, times, interviews, and accounted for all procedures and methods while conducting the study. Finally, the researcher conducted critical self-reflection regarding biases, assumptions, worldviews, and any relationship to the study that could have possibly affected the investigation. All of the aforementioned information is reported in the findings. The researcher used an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis approach to analyze the data. The progression of this specific type of analysis included the following: 1) Meeting and building rapport with the participants. 2) The individual research interview which included both recording and note taking). 3) Listening to the audio recording. 4) Transcription completed and checked with participants' for accuracy. 5) Clarification of any information the researcher and/or participant was unsure of. 6) Data analysis from pre-coded transcripts. 7) Phenomenological clusters/themes developed. 8) Discussion groups including discussion of emerging themes. 9) Researcher available for any questions/concerns of participants. 10) Ongoing interpretive process. 11) Finalized research themes and analysis.

In Interpretive phenomenology, the researcher is seen as the "data interpreter, empowered by their understanding of participant experience. Meaning is what the researcher understands it to be (Maggs-Rapport, 2000, p. 220)"

Interview Questions:

Most of the interview questions were developed from the researcher's personal experience of having gone through a CACREP accredited Counseling Education program

for both an Ed.S and an M.Ed. The researcher examined McFaddens Stylistic Counseling Assessment (Harper & McFadden, 2003, pp. 229-232) as an additional tool to develop the questions. It should be noted that while these questions were the intended questions, other questions developed as the discussions and conversations with the participants were carried out. It was expected that "deeper" questions would be extrapolated from the in-depth interviews with the participants. The initial questions were created to help build rapport and establish trust. These questions were not meant to be invasive but to develop a relationship between the participant and researcher and to build upon a basic understanding of the participants' goals, and their personal perceptions of the meaning of self-awareness. The participant's experiences within their program were included as this was another building block to understanding their perceptions.

Initial questions:

1) Where are you in your current program (Year in program, coursework completion, practicum/internship)?

2) What are your specific counseling goals upon graduation?

3) Do you have a theory or theories you hope to use consistently in your practice and if so, what is it or are they?

4) What is the reason you chose that particular theory?

5) Can you describe to me what your definition or perceptions are of self-awareness is and/or social cognitive development?

      A. How are these important or not to your future as a counselor?

6) Do you feel that you learned in your program, how to achieve deeper degrees of self-awareness and social cognitive development?

7) If so, which course or courses promoted this growth and how?

Advanced Questions:

1) Where do you feel you are personally as far as self-awareness and how did you come to that conclusion?

2) How do you feel you would work with someone whose personal value system and beliefs are vastly different from your own? Please expand on the answer.

3) As the example used in this study, can you explain your personal thoughts, feelings and beliefs on suicide?

> A. How do you feel you would work with someone who has the legal right-to-die and has chosen to exercise that right?

4) Do your spiritual beliefs affect what you believe about suicide and/or the issue of the right-to die?

5) Do you feel you gained enough self-awareness in your program to help you with these types of issues? If so, please expand. If not, why?

> A. Are you aware of your own biases? If so, how do you keep them from interfering in your clinical work?

6) Is there anything else you'd like to share about your feelings on this issue and/or any other issue that greatly differs from your own personal beliefs' and how it/they should or should not be treated?

7) Is there anything you feel would have better prepared you (during your program of study) for these types of issues and your development of your own self-awareness and social cognitive development?

There was hope that the above questions in addition to those generated by discussion would show not only the importance of the development of a strong and objective self-awareness and social cognitive development for future efficacy in the counseling environment; but also what may be lacking in the graduate counseling program. An in-depth look at the participants' perceptions of their own self-awareness was essential for possible future research studies. The advanced questions were intended as a way to go deeper into the personal experiences of the participants and to create a path for more in-depth questions. In interpretive phenomenology, this was a progression which enabled the researcher to discover any concealed meaning embedded in the participants comments and perceptions. As stated previously, the questions were developed purposefully from the sources as mentioned in the text above as well as from the researcher's personal experience of having gone through and graduated from the same program as the participants. As stated in Chapter Two, there is a plethora of information on developing multi-cultural awareness and the need for that throughout the curriculum. However, there are holes in the current research on how to help students develop and improve their self-awareness and social cognitive development beyond a multi-cultural approach throughout their experience in the graduate counseling education program.

Summary

      A thorough and disciplined schedule was implemented to complete this study. Respect for the schedules of the participants was expressed and insured. Flexibility of the researcher was imperative and rapport building with the participants was critical. The choice of a phenomenological approach was considered by the researcher the best choice for a study of this nature. A high ethical standard was adhered to as well as the protection of the participants. A thorough analysis of the data and interpretation of the narratives will be seen in Chapter Four. Chapter Five will discuss conclusions, findings, and limitations. Finally, Chapter Five will include the implications for the field of counseling and other mental health professionals as well as any recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

As stated in Chapter One, the purpose of this qualitative study was to conduct phenomenological interviews aimed at determining what experiences, if any, during the counselor education graduate program at the University of South Carolina affected the perceptions of self-awareness of the counselor education graduate students in their last semester of study before graduation. This is important as their perceptions of their own self-awareness and social cognitive development have the potential to either negatively or positively impact their ability to be objective and efficacious in their future counseling environment.

The review of literature presented in Chapter Two provided background information demonstrating a clear need for a qualitative approach to be pro-active on the issue of developing a stronger sense of self-awareness and social cognitive development in graduate counselor education students. The phenomenological approach was used to get in-depth views on current graduate counselor education students' thoughts and insights into this critical process. Counselor educators may want to strive to be proactive in examining their own professional ethics, spirituality, and morality. In addition, they could look at ways to enhance the graduate counselor education students' opportunities

for a deeper, stronger sense of self-awareness and social cognitive development.

Therefore, the examination into the lived experiences will provide significant insight into

the specific courses, programs, or other areas of the counselor education graduate

program that encouraged students to delve more deeply into their own self-awareness and

to be able to convey if and where they feel they are either lacking or doing well with self-

reflection.

The conceptual framework for this research study was born from the researcher's

desire to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of graduate counselor education

students' perceptions of their own self-awareness and social cognitive development.

Moreover, the researcher holds a sincere interest in the students' perceptions as related to

legislative issues that could affect them in the counseling environment due to their own

personal values and belief systems. It is hoped that this study might provide a practical

tool through which counselors and counselor educators might help both themselves and

their clients by taking a deeper look at their self-awareness. It is also vital to view the

counselors' role in the larger society as an efficacious and meaningful one that transcends

personal beliefs and value systems.

Data Analysis Approach

As previously stated, this study is a Phenomenological qualitative study.

Phenomenology is steeped in five basic philosophical underpinnings (Creswell,2007).

These are; ontological (reality), epistemological (relationship between the researcher and

the research), axiological (role of values), rhetorical (language) and methodological

(process). The phenomenological interviewing process indicates that the researcher does

have to interject their own realities into what is taken from participants, thus making it is subjective in nature. The researcher forms a relationship with the participants due not only to the one-on-one nature of the interviews but also because of the nature of the topics which may arise throughout the process. Qualitative work, including, but not limited to, phenomenology, generally will have biases present as it is a value-laden type of research. It is important for the researcher to acknowledge the biases that are likely to occur in the beginning of the study, so as not to taint the findings. A narrative approach is undertaken to ensure the participants' stories are being accurately reported and honored while conducting the interviews and reporting the findings. The process of phenomenological interviewing and gathering information uses inductive logic, within the context of the interview to allow for the emergence of both accurate and meaningful themes and patterns.

The research conducted was organized as outlined in Chapter Three, in eleven specific stages. These particular stages were representative of the Interpretive phenomenological approach. 1) The researcher met with each of the participants in a casual setting with no recording devices just to get to know the participants and to explain in more detail about the study. The researcher gave each individual a copy of the informed consent form and answered any questions. This helped to build rapport and create trust. 2) The researcher met alone with each individual participant and took notes and recorded the discussions based on the questions listed in the "interview questions" section of this study. The researcher also "coded" each participant to insure anonymity. 3) The researcher took time to listen to each individual audio recording. 4) The researcher transcribed each pre-coded individuals recording along with the note taking and checked

in with each participant for accuracy. 5) The researcher went back to any participant if there was any issue at all that was unclear to insure that the information recorded and transcribed was accurate. The researcher also checked for accuracy of direct quotes. 6) The researcher began to analyze the data in the transcripts. 7) The researcher began to see clusters within the data and developed the emerging themes from the transcription. 8) The researcher met with groups as detailed and discussed emerging themes. These groups were recorded and transcribed. 9) The researcher was again available for any questions or concerns of the participants'. The researcher also clarified any issues necessary. 10) The researcher continued the interpretation of themes and details from the groups and individual sessions. 11) The researcher finalized the research themes and analysis. In summary, the researcher held a series of individual interviews with ten graduate counselor education students all in their final semester of study before graduating from their program. Seven students were in the program to be School Counselors and three were in the program to be Marriage and Family Counselors. All ten were interviewed individually. Next, the seven School Counselor students participated in a focus group together and the three Marriage and Family students participated in a focus group together. The students were separated by area of concentration to determine if there were any obvious distinctions in perceptions between the two groups.

The data was analyzed through a sequence of rigorous structural coding and thematic analysis procedures as presented in Chapter Three and listed above. An interpretive phenomenological approach was taken as it is said to enable the researcher to be empowered by their understanding of participant experience (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). This was done to develop insight, discover processes and look at possible themes. All

participants provided responses to each question whether directly or in conjunction with a response to one of the previous questions. Each participant completed the interview in its entirety, including a time period to debrief regarding perceptions of the experience of the study.

The researcher used what is known as an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to analyze the data. This approach "has its roots in psychology and recognizes the central role of the analyst in understanding the experiences of the participants" (Drummond & Hendry, 2011, p.20). IPA involves an interpretation process whereby the researcher attempts to interpret how the participants make sense of their experience. One of the reasons for using this particular approach is to address the uniqueness and wholeness of each participant with the goal of providing a complete and in-depth picture (Drummond & Hendry, p.21). Smaller sample sizes are used in the IPA approach in order to allow for a richer depth of analysis. Willig (2001) stated that the IPA has the ability to allow room for more creativity and freedom than other approaches. Using phenomenology as both theory and methodology is not unique. However, phenomenological research begins with the lived experience which means "starting with embodied humans who are intentionally engaged in and with social and physical environments, as opposed to being analytically separable from those environments or from each other" (Papadimitriou, 2012, p410). The approach used in this study appreciates that both the researcher and the participants are immersed in an already meaningful world and therefore, we are inevitably and always culturally imbedded.

Participants

        The participants used in this study were all at the same educational level but not necessarily the same developmental level. All ten participants were in the last semester (Internship) of the counselor education graduate program at the University of South Carolina. There were originally 11 participants but a female participant withdrew before the first interview citing time constraints. Of the remaining ten, two of the participants were male and eight were female. Two of the females were of African American decent. The remaining participants were Caucasian. The participants were drawn from a sampling of University of South Carolina graduate Counselor Education Students. The ten used, should not be considered representative of the entire Counseling Education Program at the University of South Carolina, Columbia. The researcher was hoping for more diversity in both gender and race/culture but because the participants volunteered and were in full time internships with some taking courses, it was difficult to elicit more involvement. Three of the ten participants were on the Marriage and Family counseling track and the remaining seven were on the School Counseling track. It came to the researcher's attention that the marriage and family counseling students were taking some extra coursework in which the school counseling students were not involved. Four of the seven female participants were married and the other three were single. One of the male participants was married and the other male participant was (at the time of the interview) separated. Other than identifying gender and the counseling focus, the participants will remain anonymous and all have been assigned a number along with an F for female or an M for male by their number. For example; participant 1 is a female and will be identified as F1 in the school counseling program.

Summary of Interview Analysis

The research completed in the study consisted of ten individual interviews as well as two focus groups. One focus group consisted of the seven participants in the school counseling program and the other focus group consisted of the three participants in the marriage and family counseling program. There was one main difference between the perceptions of the School Counseling students and the Marriage and Family Counseling students. Due to the number of participants in the study, this disparity was considered noteworthy and will receive attention in Chapter Five.

Themes

Three main themes appeared throughout the data collection and analysis process. These themes described the lived experiences of the participants as they worked their way through the counselor education program: 1) Impact of coursework on self-awareness: 2) Life experiences affecting self-awareness: 3) Spirituality and personal values as related to specific issues in the counseling environment (as addressed in the study). Words and/or phrases that highlight the essence of the themes are italicized in the participants' responses.

Impact of Course Work on Self-Awareness

Every participant in the study pointed out that at least one specific course affected their self-awareness. There were four courses that were prominent throughout the interviews. These included The Multi-cultural course, the Theories course, the Critical issues course and the Group course. Many times throughout the interviews, the counselor education program overall was mentioned as a growth factor as well. Participant F1

commented, "The program helped me grow and mature through helping me *become more aware* of different types of people and cultures. *I feel like I have a deeper sense of self and know myself ten times more now* than when I started!" Participant M1 stated, "the program has *helped me become more self-aware of biases* I had but didn't know were there." F3 shared "for me it wasn't so much the content as the specific professors who took the time to discuss and *process things with me individually*. They made themselves available to me to help me digest things."

As far as the aforementioned courses, the participants were fairly specific. For participant F5, "the theories course helped me begin to *dig deep within myself*. It made me think about if my theory aligned with my personal beliefs and who I am. *I started reflecting on who I was and where I wanted to be.*" F1 mentioned that "in the theories course, there were a lot of heated discussions in this course and debates. *I learned where I stand, learned that I will need to separate my individual identity and my counselor identity.*" F6 stated that "the *group counseling course was a pivotal point for me*. There were a lot of breakthroughs, *including my own* in the group within the class." M1 shared that the "program discussions helped especially in critical issues, multi-cultural and the theories courses. These courses caused me to look at *why I do believe certain things, such as sexual orientation, it made me ask, what does the way I feel mean about myself?*" M2 felt "the group class was designed well and participation was not an option, it was designed for participation. *Everything was resonating with me, it left me very introspective and in a searching state*". Participant F7 said, "The multicultural class *affected my growth* the most. I learned to *really look at myself and understand what white privilege* is. I'm still working on that." According to F4, "the critical issues class helped

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me *become aware of more than just what is in my world and my life*, it was an eye opener."

Life Experiences Affecting Self-Awareness

For many of the participants, the Counselor Education Program brought former and current life experiences to the surface and made them work through issues they had not before as well as making them aware of many of the things that had molded them into who they had become. Some of the participants shared that some of their personal beliefs were tested throughout the program.

Participant F2 stated, "this *program challenged me and at times I even felt my faith was tested. I have also become much more aware of my own words and actions. Things in my own life came more into focus."* F8 shared that "the *grief and loss class was very good for me, then, I actually experienced my own grief and loss during the program and everything became real for me,* all counselors in training should go through this course regardless of their specific area of study." F7 said, "*I feel that life experience has caused most of my self-awareness. I've had a lot of it. Life, along with the program, caused me to look at my biases and the program overall has made me stronger and taken me to higher levels of self-awareness."* F7 also shared that she had her own *"issues I needed to deal with through this program. Some things came up for me that I thought I had dealt with. I had to go deeper and see an outside counselor. I have grown more than I thought I could. It wasn't easy, but now I'm glad it happened."* F3 had a slightly different view point, she shared: "*I have worked for many years and am one of the older students. I believe I already do ongoing self-reflection and analysis. Being in the*

program has helped me to go more in depth, but I started the process long ago." F5 actually had a coworker who had committed suicide, she shared; "*I am young but have worked with suicidal people from age ten all the way to geriatrics.* I worked at an inpatient facility and when working retail *had a co-worker who was 19 commit suicide. It hit me hard. I had no idea he was going through anything."* She also shared, "*I have had to learn to leave the "mess" at home and be a professional in public. I had to deal with a female pedophile as a child, this program brought things back to me that I needed to deal with personally before moving forward. I* feel that all of us in the program should have to go through at least six to twelve sessions of the free counseling offered. It should be required. *All of us need to experience being on the other side whether it is good or bad and then reflect on it. We need to have that perspective."* M2 shared that it has been during this program he has "*experienced the most ups and downs of my life. I feel as if I am questioning everything and in the program I feel like I've just skimmed the basics of every issue. I have to ask myself, do I know enough to work with any one issue?"*

Spirituality and Personal Values as Related to Specific Issues within this Study

Six out of the ten counselor education students interviewed had very strong spiritual issues with the right to die or suicide. All six of them also brought up abortion as a comparison which the researcher found surprising but was able to see the connection. The researcher did not bring up the issue of abortion but did discuss it with the participants who wanted to talk about it. None of the participants are identified even with a number or gender below as they were uneasy with the issue and wanted complete anonymity. The first participant who mentioned abortion shared; "*I believe you should always choose life. Even with abortion. I understand there can be horrible*

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circumstances. If I were to work with someone choosing to die or even choosing abortion, then in a way, I'm condoning it. I don't know that I could work with someone who wanted an abortion. I would seek consultation. I understand there are many exceptions but it goes against all of my values, spiritual and personal." Along the same lines of thinking, another stated; "*I could not help someone make end of life plans, say goodbyes, etc. I could not help them close things out so to speak. A part of me would want to witness to them. Abortion to me is a similar issue. Same topic, life or death. My faith influences this. I believe a child is alive from conception, life begins at conception. I believe that most Christians across the board consider abortion murder in the Christian religion."* A third participant shared: "*If someone has the right to die and feels that God is okay with it then it's between them and God. I spiritually disagree with that and abortion. God has given you the gift of life. Right to die is too hazy for me now. I can see it's very selfish but then again it could end someone's suffering and bring relief...I don't know. I could actually work with someone who had the right to die and chose that over someone who is choosing abortion—because they are choosing death for someone else."* The theme remained the same basically with the six participants' who brought the issue of abortion up in the interview. Another said "I *was taught from a very young age that if you commit suicide you will go to Hell. Now that I'm older, I don't think I would say who is where after death. I don't feel that's my place anymore. I do think that a person can choose life or death for themselves but have no right to choose for someone else to die, like if they wanted an abortion. They don't have the right to choose death for someone else."* One participant stated, "*It's a gift to be alive, it's not a person's right to decide the end, we were created for a purpose; we didn't choose to be here and we shouldn't choose to*

leave." An unexpected result of this portion of the interview was that the six who had serious spiritual issues with the right to die movement, felt even more strongly about the concept of abortion. Overall, each participant in this group corroborated the feeling that abortion was choosing life or death for someone who could not make that decision and were very vocal about their stance against abortion. In the opinions of these participants, there was not really any room for discussion on abortion unless it was a case of incest as noted by a couple of participants. Each of the six did say they could work with someone who had had an abortion; their conflicts were with a client deciding to have one. Each of the six participants said they would have to refer out or receive a great deal of consultation. They also noted they understood that it is their job to help the client and the best way to do this would be to send them to someone who could be unbiased.

Of the other four participants, they each had some personal conflict or issue in working with a client who had chosen the right to die. However, they felt if it was legal and that is what they wanted, they could work with them. They did say they would have to put their own feelings aside and could still reframe things for the client. One stated, *"Our role as counselors is to help the client. I have to show respect and help clients and accomplish their goals. I have to help them however I can and put my own feelings aside."* Another shared, *"It's not me I'm trying to put on them or make them be. That's not my job. I'm going to do my best and not judge."* None of these four participants' brought up the issue of abortion.

Final thoughts from Group Discussions

In the group discussions there were some final thoughts on the right-to-die movement and the issues the one on one interviews brought up. One participant shared that while her opinion was still the same, bringing up the issue "*made me think about what is to come. I actually called my mom after meeting with you to discuss it.*" Another stated; "*Do we really have the choice to live or do we just have the right to death? We can actively choose to die but not to live. We didn't choose to come here. I also got on the phone on the way home from our first meeting. I have really been thinking about it. It wouldn't be my choice but maybe I could work with someone else making that choice…I don't know, but I'm thinking about it.*" Another participant shared that "*I still think suicide is selfish, I have a hard time with it, in my mind and my heart. I have a family member who had talked about it. I don't think everyone who wants to kill themselves is mentally ill. I feel very conflicted on this issue because for me it's close to home. I'd like to think I could put aside my spiritual beliefs but I'm still thinking about it.*" Finally, it came back around to the abortion issue. A participant reiterated what was mentioned earlier, "*I still believe I could more easily work with someone choosing to take their own life than the life of another, as in abortion.*" In the family group, again, no one brought up abortion. Each member of that group felt they could put aside their own value system to work with a client even if they needed to do some consultation.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter appear to suggest that the phenomenological exploration of graduate counselor education students' perceptions of

self-awareness are important to graduate counseling programs and what they have to offer. At the beginning of this study the researcher envisioned hearing of the personal growth each participant experienced throughout the program as well as an ongoing emerging awareness of self. There was anticipation that spiritual beliefs and value systems of various participants would come into play as difficult topics and issues were brought to light. However, this budding researcher did not anticipate the impact the intensity that some of the participants spiritual beliefs would have on their eventual work with certain clients. The positive findings elicited from this study were that each participant felt they experienced a great deal of growth throughout the program, and their perceptions of their own self-awareness became not only more important but vital to be efficacious counselors. It was also discovered that between the individual and group interviews, the participants did give thought to what was discussed and were open to taking a second look at the issue. The participants worked towards aligning their personal values and beliefs with their future practice and the knowing that is may be important to put those values aside if necessary to help others. Spirituality was a critical component in the participants' awareness of self and who they are.

The differences in some of the coursework between the participants on the school counseling track and the participants on the marriage and family track, had this researcher pondering if it might not be advantageous for all students to take those few extra courses rather than just those on the marriage and family track. Chapter five reviews the purpose for this study along with the research questions listed at the origin of inquiry. Limitations of the study will be reported. Implications for counselor education, supervision, and recommendations for future research are offered.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to glean the perceptions of self-awareness of counselor education graduate students pertaining to future efficacy in the counseling environment. The link between counselor self-awareness and clinical service pertaining to the right-to-die issue was discussed as an example of the type of ethical dilemmas that may affect counselors in future practice. The researcher became interested in this topic as a means to ascertain how graduate counselor education students confronted with issues that required them to look at their own biases and personal value systems would affect their ability to work with all clients. As stated in Chapter One, the issue of suicide or the right to die was chosen to show the severity and seriousness of why counselors in training may choose to strive for enhanced self-awareness and develop a positive self-identity. The key issue was not to determine whether or not a person should gain the legal right-to-die but rather how equipped future counselors would be to work with someone whose personal values systems and beliefs are vastly different from their own. The themes generated from the data in Chapter Four enabled the researcher to break down where there may be a need for further research.

There will be six main sections in Chapter Five. 1) The first section of this chapter seeks to summarize the major findings in the study. 2) Next, themes of the study will be elaborated on as related to the literature review in Chapter Two. 3) Credibility of the

study will be reviewed and discussed. 4) Implications of the study and suggestions for future research will be discussed. 5) Limitations of the study will be addressed. 6) The conclusion will close the current study.

Summary

The ability to gain an understanding of lived experiences of current graduate counselor education students is critical to understanding what is working in the program to help produce self-aware, efficacious counselors with a solid identity development. It was discovered through this study that a CACERP accredited counseling program plays a positive significant role in the development, self-awareness, and potential efficacy of future counselors in both the school and clinical settings. Phenomenological in-depth interviews were used to understand the lived experiences of these students sharing a common phenomenon. The phenomenological interviews conducted as a part of this study adhered to the research procedures outlined in Chapter Three.

In analyzing the themes which emerged from the data throughout this study, it became apparent that certain courses and/or professors are major components or reasons as to why, perhaps, the students experienced positive growth and self-reflection throughout their program. In Chapter Two, the literature cited by Lambie, Hagedorn & Ieva, (2010), reminded us that purposeful promotion of enhanced self-awareness/social cognitive development is a primary component of counselors' preparation, which is associated with greater empathy, and perspective taking. As stated in Chapter Four, the research was organized into a series of individual interviews with ten graduate counselor education students all in their final semester of study at the University of South Carolina, Columbia. Seven of the students interviewed were in the program to be School

Counselors and three were in the program to be Marriage and Family Counselors. All ten were interviewed individually. The seven School Counselor students then participated in a focus group, and separately, the three Marriage and Family counseling students participated in their own focus group. The students were separated by area of concentration to determine if there were any obvious differences in perceptions between the two groups. The participants used in this study were all at the same educational level, but not necessarily at the same developmental level. Two of the participants were male, and eight were female. Two of the females were of African American decent, the remainder of the participants were Caucasian. The researcher used an approach known as interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to analyze the data, previously described in detail in Chapter four.

The findings in the study showed that all of the participants perceived that they had grown and had acquired an enhanced sense of self-awareness throughout the course of the study. Some cited specific courses that were the catalyst for this journey, while others discussed professors. The overall consensus was that all participants had achieved a higher state of self-awareness and social cognitive development having gone through the counseling education program. All participants felt they had gained something. As Lambie, Hagendorn & Ieva, (2010), article pointed out in Chapter Two, this is consistent with the purposeful development of counseling students' social-cognitive development. They shared that this type of program was useful in "increasing their abilities to process ethical and legal dilemmas with which they will be faced as professionals" (p.228). The findings elicited three consistent themes. In addition, there was one particular noteworthy difference between the students on the school counseling track and the students on the

marriage and family track. Inadvertently, while discussing the right to die, abortion became a topic that stimulated strong personal and spiritual emotions among six of the ten participants. These participants felt that abortion was as much a matter of life and death as the right to die, the only difference being that those who choose abortion are choosing death for someone other than themselves. All six of these participants were on the school counseling track. Abortion was brought up by the participants and not the researcher. The subject was initially brought up in six of the ten individual interviews and then again in the school counseling group. The topic of abortion was not even alluded to within the marriage and family group or individual interviews. One of the students on the school counselor track never brought up the topic. While the researcher was able to see the connection, she was surprised as this was an unanticipated product of the interviews.

Themes

As seen in Chapter four, there were three main themes that were consistent throughout the interviews. 1) The Impact of coursework on self-awareness, 2) Life experiences affecting self-awareness, and 3) Spirituality and personal values as related to specific issues in the counseling environment (as addressed in the study).

Theme 1: The Impact of Coursework on Self-Awareness

For the first theme, every participant in the study was able to discuss and point out at minimum; one course that they perceived affected and enhanced their own self-awareness. The courses that were consistently pointed out were the Multi-cultural course, the Theories course, the Critical Issues course and the Group course. While other courses

were mentioned, these four courses were all brought up by more than one participant as being instrumental in beginning their journey of self-awareness and discovery.

Theme 2: Life Experiences Affecting Self-Awareness

In the second theme with life experiences, it is important to note that many times the life experiences that related to a growing sense of self reflection, analysis and awareness, were brought to light by the one or more of the courses in the program. These courses or discussions within the courses oftentimes caused the participants to feel a need to work through personal issues they believed they had already processed. Many of the participants shared that they went to counseling on their own outside of the program and became very introspective and reflective due to the nature of the program. All of the participants describing this process felt that it was not only helpful, but that it should be required for all counselor education students to go through personal counseling as part of their program. This finding corresponded directly with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two by Homrich, (2009). The article pointedly discussed the need for counselor education students to experience their own personal counseling sessions in order to grow.

Theme 3: Spirituality and Personal Values as Related to Specific Issues in the Counseling Environment (as addressed in the study)

The spirituality and personal values theme appeared to elicit strong emotions about certain topics. As stated before, six out of ten of the participants likened the right-to-die movement with abortion. Most of whom felt that working with someone choosing abortion would be more difficult to work with than someone with the legal right choosing to die. While all participants stated they could work with someone who had already had

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an abortion, many stated they could not work with someone who was choosing to have one. These particular participants felt that abortion was indeed akin to murder and working with someone making that choice was condoning the behavior or choice. This finding points back to Seidlers (1983) article in Chapter Two where he discussed Kant's view of religion relating to suicide. Kant felt strongly that the Creator is the one who should decide when humans live and die. This was found to be the same view of the six participants who specifically cited spirituality as being the main reason for their conflict in working with someone who has chosen to die or to seek an abortion. Because nowhere in the questions or interviews did the researcher bring up the topic of abortion, it came as a surprise when it was initially brought up by participants in the first few interviews. The researcher could see the connection but did not anticipate the topic. One participant stated during the focus group for future school counselors; "*We know we are supposed to be able to say we can work with anyone and with any issue, but sometimes when it's too contradictory to our personal and spiritual beliefs, it's best to refer out. It's better for the client. I for one believe that will make me a better counselor, knowing when I can't work with an issue. It's not the person, it's the issue. That to me is true self-awareness, knowing who I am and what I am capable of and who I am capable of helping.*" In the literature review in Chapter Two, Kevin Gibson (2003) had insight into the conflicts one might experience between personal morality and professional morality. In addition, the article discussed the conflicts some counselors may have when they find themselves at odds, due to their particular status at work, with their own moral judgments. Gibson also shared that this could be an issue with counseling and mental health professionals in the future. A problem future counselors could encounter is the fact that they may not always

be able to refer out. As pointed out in Chapter Two, Glick and Hutchinson (1999) share that most courts that have dealt with the right to die issue have increased patients' rights and autonomy. The phenomenological approach in this study and the use of first person narratives yielded a real world illustration of the perceptions of the graduate students. The deep emotions and connections to their own spirituality were embedded in the narrative stories of the study participants, and for some, were difficult to separate when looking at personal and professional. The literature review in Chapter Two of the article, "Ethical Aspects of Spirituality in Counseling" (Steen, Engels & Thweatt, 2006), stated; "a counselor whose religious values and beliefs are so rigid as to preclude the counselor from helping the client…(p.111)" if taken to the issue of the right to die, (or even abortion as it emerged in the findings in this study), a counselor may have a strong spiritual belief that renders him or her unable to objectively help a particular client. In this case, it may be preferable for the counselor to refer the client to another therapist. As seen in Chapter Two, some see denying one the right to choose how and when they die is considered death control. This "argument sees death as being preferred to leading a life of misery, disgrace and degradation. So, suicide is herein a right." (Ogar,Ogaboh, & Ogaboh, p. 98) Another point made in the literature review, after conducting this study, appears to be a need that the researcher has found would be beneficial for counseling programs to take a good look at. Going back to Chapter Two, we see; According to Miller (1999), "spiritual preparedness is important in practice and in counselor preparation." We see the same issue again in "Integrating Spirituality into Counselor Preparation: A Developmental Wellness Approach", (2003). Myers and Williard shared that spirituality should be a part of counselor preparation as a developmental, life-span

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phenomenon. The authors felt that counselors in training should be able to recognize spiritual growth as one part of holistic wellness, and students should be encouraged to confront their own religious and/or spiritual views while exploring diverse spiritual beliefs in class projects. A student or counselor in training, who is able to do this, according to the authors, would be considered at a higher level of self-awareness than one who has not reached this point of development. As yet another reason for insuring that spirituality is part of any counseling program and respecting the differences of the way others believe, feel, and think, we can look at the words of Slater from the review in Chapter Two:

> Death is equal partner with birth in the renewal of life, for human societies for human kind, and indeed for the entire world of living things… he who does not accept and respect those who want to reject life does not truly accept and respect life itself; that, causing one's own death should be called suicide only by those who disapprove of it; and should be called death control by those who approve of it (Satris, p.94).

Based on the interviews and the perceptions of the participants, the researcher noted that not once did a participant mention not being able to work with any specific culture, gender, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation. All participants felt confident in their ability to work with and learn about any population. It was only the issue of abortion that continued to surface as an area of contention.

Credibility of the Study

The credibility of the study was judged by the data collected and the resulting analysis. The adequacy of the research process using the interpretive phenomenological analysis with the phenomenological narrative interviewing resulted in the culmination of three consistent themes: 1) Impact of coursework on self-awareness, 2) Life experiences affecting self-awareness, and 3) Spirituality and personal values as related to specific issues in the counseling environment (as addressed in the study). The three themes presented in Chapter Four serve to help the researcher, as well as the research community at large, begin to understand graduate counseling education students' perceptions of their own self-awareness and social cognitive development by the end of their program of study. Each interview was examined through a comparative lens with the other interviews to compile and ensure consistency. In most cases, the participants seemed to experience similar things, while the internalization of how to deal with those experiences was personal and individual**.** The resulting themes which include the impact of coursework, life experiences, personal spirituality/ belief systems and how to separate those from clients were the common threads permeating the ten interviews.

The findings presented in Chapter Four, generated from rigorous structural coding and thematic analysis detailed in Chapter Three, address the lived experiences and perceptions of current graduate counselor education students. Themes were generated from the data collected and were systematically derived from the interviews conducted. The links were presented as themes with the understanding that these experiences may affect the future efficacy of the burgeoning counselors in the clinical setting. The themes described a dynamic process of finding links or common threads which exist among the

ten individual interviews and the two focus groups. The themes which emerged as a result of the data collection and analysis processes have contributed to the understanding of the perceptions of graduate counselor education students of their own self-awareness pertaining to future efficacy in the counseling environment. Components of the research process that were described in Chapters Three and Four presented the findings in their purest forms of interwoven themes which paint a picture enabling counselors and counselor educators to see how the students' perceptions can either positively or negatively affect the counseling environment. Looking at the themes through the lens of the counselor education students can give insight of what may be needed in future counselor education programs as well as what is currently working. Given the guidelines followed concerning interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) and phenomenological narrative interviews throughout the research study, a judgment was made by the researcher that the exploration was adequate in adding to the understanding of the perceptions of a sampling of current counseling education graduate students at the University of South Carolina.

Implications

Significance of the Study for Knowledge Generation:

It would be of utmost importance that the training/coursework and professional development opportunities be representative of what is expressed as issues of concern as seen in this study. It is important that students ask for what they feel will help them to be successful in their chosen profession. As noted in Chapter One, the hope was that this study would bring about knowledge generation concerning the importance of elevated degrees of self-awareness and social cognitive development. This study has elicited the

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importance of the perceptions of self-awareness and social cognitive development as it pertains to enabling counselors to keep from imposing their own value systems on their clients. The majority of the school counselors who participated in this research study appeared to this researcher to need further coursework and pedagogical training in spirituality in the counseling environment. Individual needs may vary but the overarching theme of the majority of the counselors having a conflict with working with clients with major issues of this day and age, show that the need is present. The revisiting of the premise of the pedagogical experiences having an effect on self-awareness especially in the areas of spirituality and social cognitive development would be paramount for expounding on this study. It is suggested that supervision in the areas of concern in this study be enhanced and addressed with future counselor education students.

Significance of the Study Regarding Professional Applications

As hoped in Chapter One, this research has provided a stepping stone for looking at ways to help those with different belief systems while respecting their rights and wishes. The need has been implicated that future counselors be trained to take a hard look at how to truly engage in self-reflection and still practice the unconditional positive regard that Carl Rogers brought into focus many years ago. This insight has suggestions for training, seminars/professional development opportunities, and even supervision/mentoring opportunities available for all graduate counselor education students. Training seminars and professional development sessions can be offered within the confines of the university, as well as through the professional school counseling organizations to address issues of spirituality within the workplace. Spirituality within the clinical environment can address differences between any counseling student, faculty,

supervisors, staff, future clientele, and the impact on future efficacy in the workplace. Novice and seasoned graduate students perceptions can be useful in the planning as well as the implementation of these training seminars. It would appear to be vital that the training and professional development opportunities are representative of what is expressed as issues of concern in this particular study. An innovative approach to addressing the need for training and professional development for spirituality in the counseling office could be seminars conceptualized by the population they are meant to serve (graduate counseling students). An example would be for a graduate counseling student to identify specific issues they feel need to be addressed in order for them to feel empowered to counsel clients whose spiritual beliefs and values are vastly different from their own, such as abortion. The professional counseling organizations can be helpful in providing training or professional development in a multitude of ways. They could perhaps even offer online CEUs by publishing research literature addressing issues brought to light in this study in their professional journals. Mentoring and supervision from current counselors and professors who have dealt with the specific issues mentioned would be a positive approach as well. The mentoring aspect of any program intended to provide support is a way to meet a crucial need in any education program. The importance of receiving supervision in the arena of additional training in education is imperative.

Results of this study have produced, in the researchers mind, substantial evidence that the perceptions of self-awareness and social cognitive development of counselor education graduate students may have an impact on future efficacy in the counseling environment as related to specific issues. These results have been elicited from real-world

experiences and introduce counselor educators, supervisors, and counselors in training to additional knowledge and insights related to self-identification as one dimension of individual identity. This is especially relevant for CACREP accredited programs for counselor education students. Section II of the (2009) CACREP standards, related to professional identity issues, requires that all students demonstrate both understanding and knowledge of multicultural and pluralistic trends related to cultural and social diversity from a national and international perspective.

Further exploration and conceptualization through additional quantitative and qualitative methodology would be advantageous. Quantitative measures and data would be viable to study. The future research could be focused on extrapolating information from other CACREP programs in various geographical areas. It might be advantageous to compare perceptions of graduate students early in their programs to those at the end of their programs. Moreover, it may be beneficial to look at diversifying the study as far as the religious and spiritual backgrounds and choices of the students. It would be helpful to gain access to further information by examining relationships and situational information, collecting information from multiple principal participants (faculty and staff in addition to students) as well as to look at graduate education programs that offer coursework in spirituality in the clinical environment as compared to those that do not. As for supervisors in any CACREP counselor education program, should spiritual or other specific value related issues arise in the client experience, it would be incumbent on supervisors to be prepared to address relevant ideological differences between themselves and the student, or between the student and the client, that might inadvertently influence

the approach to treatment or inappropriately preempt the client's values, beliefs and even worldview.

Research studies may also be inclined to replicate this study on both Masters/Education Specialists level students compared to Doctoral students. Research using other contexts (i.e. current 1st year counselors in school practice, family practice and various locations) can be viewed as another potential study. Identifying both the similarities and differences among and between the contexts would be paramount to gaining a true understanding the affect additional coursework and training could have on efficacy in all areas of the counseling environment. Collecting data from multiple participants with more diversity in gender, race, religion, socio-economic status, and age would allow a view from multiple perspectives. These findings may have implications for school counselors, family counselors, and graduate education programs, as well as professional counseling organizations. These suggestions are important as we look at the words of Werth (1999) for counselors and mental health professionals that can be applied to clients who have chosen a path that is directly opposite the counselors' values. Werth explains: "attempting to disregard the issue or ignore the client's needs and values about life and death or because of beliefs about one's professional role is acceptable as long as appropriate referrals are made, but avoiding the matter by blindly pointing to interpretations of ethics codes or legal obligations without truly analyzing one's responsibilities, reflects poorly on the therapist himself or herself and on mental health professionals more generally" (p.181). It is vital that our future counselors have been trained thoroughly and are ready for any client, issue, or topic that may come to them regardless of their personal values and belief systems.

Limitations

　　The current research study did have some limitations as it was conducted. The first limitation was the use of convenience sampling and the ability to secure only current graduate counselor education students in their last semester of the program from the University of South Carolina. This limitation implies that the geographical area may make a difference in future studies as far as the results. Another limitation was the limited number of participants in the Study, which of course resulted from convenience sampling. This sampling included ten counselor education graduate students and should not be considered representative of the complete population of students enrolled in the graduate counselor education program at the University of South Carolina, Columbia. In addition, there was a lack of diversity in relation to both ethnicity and gender. Moreover, while the singular role of the researcher in data collection, analysis, and interpretation afforded the study personal familiarity with participants and data, process continuity, and maximum ethical security, a group approach to analysis and interpretation could in the future add a dimension of transparency that may enhance the validity of the conclusions. Finally, the religions of the study participants were all similar in denomination and/or spiritual beliefs. Therefore, conclusions drawn from this study should not be extrapolated to explain the perceptions of self-awareness of graduate counselor education students in all geographic areas or more varied groups both in diversity and religion.

Conclusion

　　This phenomenological study was undertaken to seek understanding of the perceptions of graduate counselor education students' self-awareness. The researcher spent time building rapport and getting to know the participants but made every attempt

to be acutely aware of not revealing any personal opinions prior to the conclusion of individual interviews and focus groups.

Throughout this study the researcher has developed a deeper appreciation for Qualitative Research. Qualitative Research emphasizes a focus on the richness of detail necessary to reach beyond Quantitative data, surveys and controlled experiments. The use of phenomenological interviews allows participants to tell their stories and create a mosaic of information. It is my express hope that the information shared by the ten participants will serve as inspiration to novice and seasoned researchers and professors to look at offering additional coursework as well as personal counseling experiences to graduate counselor education students. It is also my hope that universities and professional counseling organizations will use the information gathered to inform and review their practices in providing support, professional development, and training to develop strong self-awareness and social cognitive development as well as a solid sense of racial identity. Some researchers implicate that social identity development through group membership, (such as a counselor education program) and self-identification can be a significant aspect on a continuum of personal identity development (Howard, 2000). Another important view for us to remember is from "Rights and Autonomy" (Richards, D. 1981), as seen in Chapter Two, which states that autonomy is not simply a sense of independence but is, in reality so much more. Richards shared that autonomy, when in its highest form is twofold. The first, "the evaluation of one's life that autonomy makes possible to enable persons not to be bound to immediate present desires, but to give weight to their desires and projects over time--second, the standards of self-critical

evaluation are determined not by the will of others but by arguments and evidence which one has rationally examined and assented to" (Richards, p.11).

Furthermore it is central that we take to heart as elicited from Chapter Two from Werth (1999); as counselors and mental health professionals it is our obligation to help our client's with whatever issues they bring us. Werth (1999) further states: "We will all face death someday, in ourselves and in our loved ones; we should utilize our skills, experience, training, and selves to aid our clients as they consider assisted death to no less an extent than we would want when we are dying. To do less is more than unprofessional; it is inhumane" (p. 181). This is not only about death but about our professional obligations to help.

The findings of the qualitative study to gain an understanding of the perceptions of graduate counselor education students' self-awareness provides a framework from which to view the possible needs and further training within the counseling education program. The individual, phenomenological interviews with ten graduate counseling education students as well as the two focus groups revealed a sense of something being missing throughout their experiences. The thematic analysis conducted as a part of the data analysis revealed issues regarding a need of further training in spirituality in the counseling environment and conceivably a need for further study on developing a solid and positive self-identity as a possible venue to holistically train the students. Another result from the study was the discovery that there is an abundance of literature on suicide prevention but there were no studies found or even guidelines or implications for those who may someday work with clients who have the legal right to die, and choose to exercise that right. In an effort to be proactive, it may behoove counseling education

programs and even supervisors, to remain abreast of the issues in legislation that could eventually be brought to the counseling environment.

An encouraging outcome of the study was the interplay of themes within the context of the interviews of all ten participants indicating a cohesive vision of positive growth experienced throughout the program. Hopefully, the stories and tapestries woven together in this study will expand the mind of at least one person and possibly initiate dialogue and further research associated with these findings.

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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONS

Initial Questions

1) Where are you in your current program (Year in program, coursework completion, practicum/internship)?

2) What are your specific counseling goals upon graduation?

3) Do you have a theory or theories you hope to use consistently in your practice and if so, what is it or are they?

4) What is the reason you chose that particular theory?

5) Can you describe to me what your definition or perceptions are of self-awareness is and/or social cognitive development?

   A. How are these important or not to your future as a counselor?

6) Do you feel that you learned in your program, how to achieve deeper degrees of self-awareness and social cognitive development?

7) If so, which course or courses promoted this growth and how?

Advanced Questions:

1) Where do you feel you are personally as far as self-awareness and how did you come to that conclusion?

2) How do you feel you would work with someone whose personal value system and beliefs are vastly different from your own? Please expand on the answer.

3) As the example used in this study, can you explain your personal thoughts, feelings and beliefs on suicide?

    A. How do you feel you would work with someone who has the legal right-to-die and has chosen to exercise that right?

4) Do your spiritual beliefs affect what you believe about suicide and/or the issue of the right-to die?

5) Do you feel you gained enough self-awareness in your program to help you with these types of issues? If so, please expand. If not, why?

    A. Are you aware of your own biases? If so, how do you keep them from interfering in your clinical work?

6) Is there anything else you'd like to share about your feelings on this issue and/or any other issue that greatly differs from your own personal beliefs and how it/they should or should not be treated?

7) Is there anything you feel would have better prepared you (during your program of study) for these types of issues and your development of your own self-awareness and social cognitive development?

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM
(Invitation to participate in research study)

A Qualitative Examination of Graduate Counselor Education Students Perceptions of
Self-Awareness Pertaining To Future Efficacy in the Counseling Environment.

Principle Investigator for This Study: Tara Huechtker Darby, Ph.D. Candidate, Counselor
Education, University of South Carolina

Current Graduate Counselor Education students at the University of South
Carolina, Columbia who are in their last semester of study, are invited to participate in
this dissertation research study. This study is being conducted through the Counselor
Education Program within the Department of Education at the University of South
Carolina. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my
Ph.D. degree in Counselor Education and is approved by the USC Internal Review Board.
You are asked to participate in a private interview as well as to participate in at
least one discussion/focus group. You will be asked questions designed to ascertain your
understanding and perceptions of your own self-awareness/social-cognitive development
as related to future efficacy in the counseling environment. You will also be asked about
your self-awareness as it pertains to spiritual, ethical and moral issues pertaining to new
legislation that may affect the counseling environment.
Your private interview will be confidential and will be audio tape recorded. The
interviews will be transcribed only by the researcher, Tara H. Darby. Your name will not
appear on the audio tape or the transcription. Only the researcher will have access to your
contact information, audio tape and transcript. No copies of data material will be made.
Once the transcription is complete, the audio tape and your contact information will be
destroyed. When the research requirements have been completed, the transcriptions will
be destroyed as well. The same process will apply to the discussion/focus groups.
However, you may know or recognize some of the other participants.
At the completion of both the interview and discussion group, you will have time
allotted to discuss your thoughts about the interview or discussion with the researcher in
private if you so wish. Because your contact information will not be retained, if you
would like to know about the findings related to this study when it is completed, the
researcher will provide you with contact information and an approximate time frame so
that you may inquire at the appropriate time.
There are no anticipated risks to the participants in this study. Participation in this
study is voluntary. You are free not to participate or to withdraw at any time, for
whatever reason, without negative consequences or any penalty for doing so.

You will have an opportunity to ask questions about this research study as stated above. You may contact Tara H. Darby at 803-448-0861 or email tarahdarby@gmail.com . For more information about this research study, you may contact Dr. Joshua Gold, University of South Carolina, 803-777-1936; JOSGOLD@mailbox.sc.edu .

If you have any questions, problems, or concerns, desire further information or wish to offer input, you may contact Lisa Johnson, IRB Manager, Office of Research Compliance, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208, Phone - (803) 777-6670, Fax - (803) 576-5589, lisaj@mailbox.sc.edu This includes any questions about your rights as a research subject in this study.