

**Using Contemplative Pedagogy to Encourage Professional Counselor Identity**

**Development: A Multiple Case Study**

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Tony Wayne Burch

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## **Dedication**

For Laura and for Rosalyn

## **Abstract**

The goal of this study was to examine how contemplative practices might inform the development of professional counselor identity in student counselors. Critical to both topics is the development of self-awareness. Contemplative practices are a well-documented and common means to improve wellness and promote self-awareness across history and cultures. Those who engage in contemplative practices place intentional focus on mindful attention, awareness, and presence, contemplative practices and experience a wealth of positive outcomes. Professional counselor identity is a central component of ethical and effective counseling practice according to the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Current research shows that the development of a strong professional counselor identity improves outcomes for clients and promotes well-being and self-efficacy in counselors. Contemplative pedagogy may provide an educational framework to help students connect personally with materials and therefore grow in self-awareness.

Using an instrumental multiple case study design, this study examined how contemplative promotion of self-awareness informs the development of professional counselor identity. Four participants engaged in contemplative practices, listened to podcasts, journaled, and completed a final interview to discuss professional identity. Individual case analysis revealed themes across professional growth, values, roles, and interventions, and cross-case analysis further revealed professional self-discovery, deepened connection to values, and viewing contemplation as a guide to practice and growth. This study supports the current research which indicates that contemplative practices may promote self-awareness and that professional counselor identity helps connect student counselors to the profession while guiding

their growth. It expands upon the existing body of research by revealing how contemplative pedagogy can be a means to inform professional counselor identity development. The findings can be used by counselors to personally connect with theories, ethics, and interventions. Counselor educators might use the results to explore contemplative instruction. Future researchers can expand upon this work by examining contemplative pedagogy in other realms of counseling and across the careers of counselors.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

The governing bodies of the counseling profession outline several facets of counselor development that are critical. One of the most prominent of these is professional counselor identity (ACA, 2014; CACREP; 2024). Professional counselor identity guides the work a counselor does both in theoretical approach and practical interventions (Calley & Hawley, 2008; Degges-White & Stoltz, 2014). Additionally, a well-developed professional identity is an ethical requirement (ACA, 2014). These expectations stem from both foundational values of counseling and research which indicates a strong professional identity leads to improved outcomes for counselors (Degges-White & Stoltz, 2014. Prosek & Hurt, 2014, Reiner et al., 2013).

Finding means of developing a more comprehensive understanding of self in the profession is a significant component of developing one's professional identity. Reflection is encouraged throughout and beyond the scope of counselor training, and continuous critical consideration of professional counselor identity is expected and encouraged by supervisors and colleagues (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Owens & Neale-McFall, 2014, Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003). The courses and continued education developing counselors undergo can often be connected to this essential aspect of practice, and thus it behooves the discipline as a whole to investigate additional effective means of helping student counselors and practicing counselors better understand themselves in relation to the work they do.

Preparation of student counselors in CACREP accredited programs in part facilitates the development of self-awareness (CACREP, 2024). Programs tend to require 60 credit hours in total, and this rigorous workload is specialized to the practical settings in which counselors will work (e.g., clinical mental health and school counseling settings). Required coursework such as those devoted to counseling theories, professional ethics and orientation, and skill development offer opportunities for student counselors to reflect upon their individual perceptions,

expectations, and goals of their work (CACREP, 2024). Practicum and internship experiences provide real world opportunities to practice authentic counseling and develop relationships that will further become a core aspect of professional identity and overall self-awareness.

Student counselors display both excitement and anxiety surrounding all aspects of professional development and can struggle at times to understand how they fit in the world of counseling (Gibson et al., 2010; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003). Guided experiences toward self-awareness and professional identity helps to focus their attention on their professional selves and develop confidence. Models of teaching and supervision outline facets of development that student counselors can attend to have a stronger understanding of their identities (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Owens & Neale-McFall, 2014, Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003). Mentors and leaders guide and provide examples of leadership through the early uncertain stages. As student counselors make themselves vulnerable through intense self-reflection, it becomes imperative to provide a safe and encouraging method of honoring that vulnerability with a path to professional confidence.

Self-awareness develops through a number of influences, and researchers have outlined several which are particularly impactful in the realm of counseling. An understanding of one's unique professional purpose and values (Shuler & Keller-Dupree, 2015) and socially constructed identity (Owens & Neale-McFall, 2014) exhibits the internally-focused aspects of self-awareness. In contrast, there are external factors such as meeting expectations of professional counselors (Wagner & Hill, 2015) and building relationships with mentors (Gibson et al., 2013; Gibson et al., 2023). Additionally, growth through experience and exposure to counseling concepts (Auxier et al., 2003) coupled with the natural progression of development over time (Dollarhide et al., 2013) supplements the composition of self-awareness for student counselors.

Contemplative practices have a rich and extensive history, exist throughout cultures, and display a myriad of benefits in both personal well-being and professional growth. They create a mind-body connection that improves situational awareness, empathy, and self-care in unique and promising manners (Bonifas & Napoli, 2014; Christopher et al., 2007; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Gockel et al., 2013; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Newsome et al., 2006; Shapiro et al., 2007; Watkinson et al., 2021). For counselors, these traits are all foundational for ethical and effective practice (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2024). It is little wonder that counseling programs have included contemplative concepts in coursework and that clinicians have regularly turned to mindfulness, yoga, and other contemplative practices as interventions (Brown et al., 2013).

Contemplative pedagogy has emerged as an auspicious framework for incorporating contemplative practices and perspectives into the teaching of a variety of fields, especially in higher education (Grace 2011; Grossenbacher & Parkin, 2006; Gunnlaugson et al., 2014; Repetti, 2010; Simmer-Brown, 2009). It is worth noting that while the proper term for approaches to teaching adults is *andragogy*, the current literature on the subject consistently refers to this approach as contemplative *pedagogy*. Therefore, throughout this dissertation, the term *pedagogy* will be used. Through reflective and personal connections to class material and unique techniques in teaching, programs that utilize contemplative pedagogy have seen students grow and learn into talented and well-prepared professionals (Christopher et al., 2011; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Christopher et al., 2006; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Gockel et al., 2013; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Newsome et al., 2006; Newsome et al., 2012; Shapiro et al., 2007). Counseling has been one of the most common disciplines to turn to a contemplative paradigm, and student counselors see the benefits (Gardner, 2020; Hilert & Tirado, 2019, Lenes et al. 2020, Watkinson et al. 2021). This study will aim to examine how the advantages of a contemplative

approach can increase self-awareness to encourage the development of professional identity in student counselors.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The framework of this study is built around the concept of self-awareness as a critical component of professional identity. The American Counseling Association (ACA) requires student counselors to engage in a process of self-growth (ACA, 2014). Models of professional identity development note self-awareness as a critical component of professional identity development (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Owens & Neale-McFall, 2014, Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003), and research confirms that notion (Auxier et al., 2003, Dollarhide et al., 2013). As counselors continue along the path of their careers, they reflect upon their abilities, their responsibilities within the profession, and their personal connections to their work among others, and this practice of self-awareness becomes essential to their professional identity. Contemplative practices and a contemplative perspective imparted through contemplative pedagogy demonstrate a strong positive impact on counselor self-awareness (Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Christopher et al., 2006; Lynn, 2010; Repetti, 2010). As such, this study will be bound in the marriage of the importance of counselor self-awareness to the development of professional counselor identity and contemplative pedagogy's unique ability to guide nascent counselors to improved self-awareness.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Professional counselor identity development is identified by the governing bodies as crucial to the overall development, ethical education, and effective practice of student counselors (ACA, 2014, CACREP, 2024). A key component of professional counselor identity is the practice of self-reflection leading to improved self-awareness (Dollarhide et al., 2023).

Contemplative practices have long been used and shown to be an effective method of both the practice of self-reflection and the development of self-awareness (Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Christopher et al., 2006; Lynn, 2010; Repetti, 2010). Additionally, contemplative practices are commonly used as interventions and to conceptually frame concepts in the professional practice of counseling (Brown et al., 2013). Contemplative pedagogy is a framework which aims to use contemplative practices, and a contemplative perspective to impart both an intellectual and experiential understanding of concepts, and quite often is specifically used in counselor education.

Less is known about the effect of a contemplative pedagogy to the development of self-awareness in relation to professional counselor identity development. As the paradigms of contemplative pedagogy seek to foster those personal attributes which demonstrate significance to the development of professional counselor identity, namely those that improve self-awareness, it stands to reason that these practices would improve professional self-awareness of counselors. It follows then that this improved self-awareness could have a positive impact on professional counselor identity development. The link between these constructs has not yet been explored, and that is the overall aim of this study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine how a contemplative, self-awareness driven approach to education coupled with contemplative practices can inform the development of professional counselor identity development, to which the development of self-awareness is critical. By utilizing a contemplative pedagogical approach and encouraging student counselors' contemplative reflection, I hoped to gain an understanding of how this approach to pedagogy could be used to develop an understanding of such a crucial aspect of counselor education.

Participants listened to and journaled about three podcasts that examined topics relevant to student counselors' development, completed weekly meditations, and participated in a post-intervention interview.

### **Research Question**

My guiding research question was "How do contemplative practice and taking a contemplative perspective on concepts inform the development of professional counselor identity in student counselors?"

### **Definitions of Terms**

**Student counselors.** Student counselors are pre-licensed students who are currently enrolled in a counseling education program. For the purposes of this study, that definition was further limited to include only students attending a CACREP-accredited program.

**Professional counselor identity.** Professional counselor identity is a set of values, activities, sense of professional responsibility, and theoretical perspective related to professional counseling work that is unique to each clinician while sharing a range of foundational commonalities with the profession (ACA, 2014; Myers & Sweeney, 2001; Remley & Herlihy, 2025; Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990). Although each counselor will personally utilize interventions and prioritize certain aspects of their work, they do so under the umbrella of shared ethics and research-informed practices expected in the profession (ACA, 2014). A counselor's own professional counselor identity is essentially their conceptualization of the intersection of personal approach and professional requirements.

**Self-awareness.** Self-awareness refers broadly to the knowledge of one's own intellectual and emotional features, and it also refers to the process of gaining this knowledge. In the context of this study, self-awareness applied to a sense of one's place along the continuum of

professional development (Auxier et al., 2003, Dollarhide et al., 2013, Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003).

**Contemplative practice.** Contemplative practices are activities undertaken with the goal of improving one's ability to develop self and situational awareness, connection to the surrounding world and people, attentiveness, and ability to focus and concentrate (Haynes, 2005; Zajonc, 2006, 2013). Although nearly any practice can be approached with a contemplative perspective, common examples of contemplative practices include yoga, mediation, prayer, and mindfulness (Grace, 2011, Haynes, 2005; Zajonc, 2006).

**Contemplative pedagogy.** Contemplative pedagogy, broadly defined, is the use of contemplative practice and a contemplative perspective as a foundation in the framework of an approach to education (Zajonc, 2006). The current conceptualization of contemplative pedagogy is in a relatively emergent stage, its historical and philosophical roots are nearly as old as human history (Repetti, 2010). Common aspects of the current approach to contemplative pedagogy include the combination of intellectual and emotional learning, encouragement of students to make personal connections with materials, and a process-oriented style of teaching (Grace, 2011, Haynes, 2005; Zajonc, 2006).

### **Delimitations**

The participant population of student counselors was delimited to those who had taken a professional ethics course and a counseling skills course. By taking a professional ethics course, student counselors were introduced to the concept of self-reflection as a necessary component of working with clients as well as the ethical requirement of understanding their own professional identity. A skills course gives student counselors an opportunity to bring conceptual self-reflection and values into practice of working with clients. This requirement is therefore placed

with the hope that the sample will include only students who have had an introduction to the concept of professional counselor identity and have begun personal and professional work toward intentionally developing their own unique understandings of that identity. More specifically, the participants were delimited to those attending CACREP-accredited universities in the Spring semester of 2024.

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter 2 will begin by describing and discussing the importance of professional counselor identity development. In this section, definitions and concepts related to professional counselor identity will be outlined and themes across academic literature related to the subject will be relayed. Following that, I will expound upon the history and development of contemplative practice as a pedagogical method and the themes and concepts significant to contemplative pedagogy. Once that is established, I will discuss methods of using contemplative pedagogy and the impact such an approach has on both student counselors and practicing clinicians. Chapter 3 describes core concepts of qualitative research, then further narrows to discuss case study, which will be the chosen methodology for this study. More specifically, this study will be an instrumental case study, and that too will be described. The last portion of this work will discuss my chosen population, the specifics of the intervention, and overall methodology. Chapter 4 begins with a description of the participants in the study and reiterating the study goals. It then describes the analysis of each individual participant's case and finishes with a cross-case analysis of all cases in the quintain. Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the study in context of the current relevant research literature, outlines the limitations of the study, then goes on to describe the potential implications of the study for practitioners, counselor

educators, and future researchers. The last chapter then provides a summary conclusion of the study.

**Chapter Two**  
**Review of the Literature**

This chapter will synthesize and examine academic literature relevant to two major constructs: professional counselor identity and contemplative pedagogy. The focus of professional counselor identity centers on the development of such an identity and salient aspects of that and related processes. Additionally, the value of forming one's identity is discussed. This section concludes with a review of themes present throughout the literature. I then discuss the relatively nascent educational approach known as contemplative pedagogy. I explore philosophical, experiential, and institutional roots of the paradigm before investigating the practical application of a contemplative approach to education. The chapter concludes with a critique of contemplative pedagogy.

### **Professional Counselor Identity**

Defining counselor identity has been a task of focus for the counseling profession and academics. Contributors to the field place a defined professional identity in a position of importance and note the value it brings to the profession and practitioners alike. For the profession to move forward on stable footing, members of the profession must come together to define a universal professional identity (Calley & Hawley, 2008). Indeed, CACREP (2024), ACA (2015), and ACES (2011) have all placed a distinct professional identity as a central component to a fully developed counselor. In this section, I clarify the definition of professional counselor identity and discuss barriers that have made such a definition difficult.

Many commonalities exist throughout the counseling profession even as constructing a shared identity remains a challenge. Broadly, counselors identify with healing or helping roles, and they often shape their work around this basis (Calley & Hawley, 2008; Degges-White & Stoltz, 2014). Historical contributions of various professions to the counseling profession often trend back to a common beginning and nodal events (Calley & Hawley, 2008). The field shares a

standard of ethics which, among other things, attempts to promote common values (ACA, 2014; Hendricks, 2008). Certainly, many tasks completed and services provided by professional counselors (e.g., psychoeducation, consultation, advising, coaching, advocacy) are common across disciplines. Thus researchers, educators, supervisors, and even other practitioners often encourage collaboration between interdisciplinary practitioners (Calley & Hawley, 2008; Mellin et al., 2011). Advocacy stands out as a central aspect of a shared counselor identity and a primary responsibility of those in the field (Brat et al., 2016).

Scholars and professionals identify philosophical foundations that are common throughout the field. A strengths-based focus on wellness provides direction for counselors, rather than a more pathological approach which attends to clients' shortcomings or pathologies (ACA, 2014; Myers & Sweeney, 2001; Remley & Herlihy, 2025; Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990). Additionally, counselors take a developmental perspective, which recognizes and addresses personal change throughout the lifespan (ACA, 2014; Remley & Herlihy, 2025; Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990). A third philosophical foundation is a focus on preventative care (ACA, 2014; Remley & Herlihy, 2025). Finally, counselors share a common goal of empowering clients to engage with, and improve, their own mental health (ACA, 2014; Remley & Herlihy, 2025).

These points of agreement help create a colloquial understanding of professional identity for counselors. Within this understanding, however, academics describe differing aspects as foundational to a professional counselor identity. Some scholars point out the desire to distinguish the counseling profession uniquely from similar professions (Mellin et al., 2011; Ritchie, 1990). Other professionals believe that a focus on practice over theory is central to a counseling identity (Wittmer, 1988), and still others note cohesion of philosophical underpinnings mentioned above (Remley & Herlihy, 2025; Woo et al., 2014).

Even particular aspects of the common philosophy are measured for their importance to this concept. Van Hesteren and Ivey (1990) declared the developmental focus of counseling to be the critical feature, and others pointed to the wellness perspective as most significant (Remley & Herlihy, 2025). Some researchers pointed to the unique preparation counselors receive as a most integral part of identity. For example, in a survey of counselor educators from CACREP-accredited programs, Calley and Hawley (2008) explored which experiences were most relevant to the development of a professional counselor identity. Respondents indicated that their unique training exposed them to the professional world, allowed them to participate and effect change through student organizations, and facilitated participation in important department meetings. These writers noted that a firsthand experience brings forth a professional understanding of the history, ethics, perspective, and practice of counseling, and that all these together form the basis of a professional counselor identity.

Professional counselor identity can be conceptualized in a myriad of ways and holds unique importance for each counselor and for the profession. Defining this concept can be difficult; however, working toward a better understanding helps unify and guide individual clinicians and the future of the profession. In the next section, I explore research concerning the value of understanding professional counselor identity for both counselors and counseling.

### **Importance of Professional Counselor Identity**

Professional counselor identity has the potential to shape the lives of individual counselors and the profession. For many clinicians, having a strong professional identity improves both day-to-day experiences (Prosek & Hurt, 2014) and the overall professional enterprise (Degges-White & Stoltz, 2014; Healey & Hays, 2012). From the perspective of the profession altogether, a coherent understanding of identity helps achieve goals set out by

governing bodies and organizations (ACA, 2014; ACES, 2011; CACREP, 2024), stands as a guidepost for setting future goals (Weatherford et al., 2016), and helps protect the practice of counseling (Reiner et al., 2013). This section includes discussion regarding how the concept of professional counselor identity benefits both counselors and the counseling profession.

### ***Individual Counselors***

One of the clearest measures of the usefulness of a coherent identity to individual counselors is that of life-satisfaction. Degges-White and Stoltz (2014) demonstrated how counselors with a strong connection to their professional identity can gain personal/professional insight and improve life-satisfaction. These researchers conducted a mixed-methods study of 256 counseling practitioners and educators. The study was framed using an archetype theory of personality (Faber & Mayer, 2009). With some reservations, Degges-White and Stoltz noted that counselors are often identified among Caregiver archetypes. They found statistically significant correlations between counselors' connection to that identity and higher levels of reported life satisfaction.

In another study, master's students from CACREP accredited programs ( $n = 161$ ) who had more experience and a stronger sense of professional identity were more comfortable engaging in the day-to-day activities of counseling, as well as the more overarching values and processes involved in the counseling profession compared to those with less experience and lower levels of professional identity (Prosek & Hurt, 2014). Specifically, clinicians-in-training who possessed a strong professional identity showed greater levels of comfort engaging in self-directed work, seeking consultation from others, and obtaining a sense of efficacy as counselors compared to peers. The authors reported these results were significant in a medium to large effect range.

## ***The Counseling Profession***

Probably the most essential and imperative facet of a common professional identity is a shared standard of ethics. This promotes a shared identity, ensures a standard of accountability, and provides protection to clients (ACA, 2014). In reciprocal fashion, a unified sense of identity helps inform formulation of these standards (Hendricks, 2008). Practitioners use the *Code of Ethics* (ACA, 2014) to drive decision-making, an integral component to any theoretical framework, and a guide in daily professional conduct (ACA, 2014). Many state boards grant and adjudicate professional licensure using these standards. Certain aspects of professional identity are even ensured by the standards, such as a primary focus on client welfare (ACA, 2014). These standards limit and guide the practice and even the very concept of legitimate counseling. In this way, ethical standards are ultimately and inextricably connected to the identity of the profession and its members.

A unified identity bolsters legitimacy of the profession. Reiner et al. (2013) explored this notion and discussed an assortment of ways in which professional identity helps provide validity. For example, clients and providers alike seek consistency in mental health practices. Utilizing a common understanding of client work, a shared set of practices, and consistent professional language helps ease daily practice and administrative considerations. The authors discovered this through a mixed- methods survey of counselor educators in which participants agreed a more coherent identity would be beneficial in achieving many of the goals of the profession such as licensure portability and establishing a clear vision for the future.

Finally, the future of the profession will be guided largely by unified aspects of identity taken on by those in the field and the profession at large. Advocacy has been an ever-present driving force behind the establishment and expansion of the profession, and as counseling

continues to grow and develop many opportunities and potential pitfalls become apparent. As collaboration across fields and regions becomes easier due to the improved and increased collaborative efforts of the Counseling Compact and expanded access to mental health services, the profession will continue to be defined by unforeseen challenges (Moorhead et al., 2023). Advocacy in the future of counseling will likely be defined by meeting the needs of these challenges and continuing to improve the scope of care provided to clients.

Perhaps the most prominent frontier of the counseling profession is the exploration of neuroscience applications, and research suggests there is still much to be done in this realm (Beeson et al., 2019; Insel, 2014). The Research Domain Criteria (RDoC) Initiative was developed by the National Institute of Mental Health to organize ongoing neuroscience research toward a collaborative system with counseling and other related fields, with the goal of improving mental health support by informing counseling practices with neuroscientific principles (Insel, 2014). Beeson et al. (2019) conducted a large study ( $n = 358$ ) assessing professional counselors' awareness and use of the RDoC framework. Using a cross-sectional exploratory design, the researchers surveyed counselors across the spectrum of their careers ranging from master's students to counselor educators. The researchers reported that only a small minority of participants (24.3%) had any awareness of the RDoC framework, only a few of which ( $n = 9$ ) were currently using it. Counselors also revealed that they did not feel prepared to use the framework to guide their practice, with even those that had already been using it reporting a largely neutral level of preparedness (Beeson et al., 2019).

Of particular importance is how the counseling profession utilizes technology in the future (Myers et al., 2002; Weatherford et al., 2016). Researchers have expressed concern with how technology, particularly social and communicative technologies, intersects with ethics and

values of counseling, the practicality and expectation of its use, and what aspects will inevitably integrate with the profession over time (Weatherford et al., 2016). As these issues continue to emerge, professional identity can be a boon in guiding an understanding of direction. Indeed, some have argued that identity is essential to ensure the endurance of professional counseling (Myers et al., 2002). A myriad of questions and considerations face the field of professional counseling, all of which will both shape and be shaped by the identity of the profession.

While these researchers explored the significance of counselor identity, others focused on processes, components, and developmental themes attached to the concept. This section sought to establish the stature of professional counselor identity; the next section will shift attention to how identity develops among professional counselors.

### **Development of Counselor Identity**

Just as there are many perspectives regarding the nature and definition of professional counselor identity, there are perspectives on the process of developing a unique counselor identity. At times these are simply ideas about what components are critical in the development of counselor identity (Auxier et al., 2003; Dollarhide et al., 2013, 2023; Shuler & Keller-Dupree, 2015). Some scholars have developed full-fledged models to clarify understanding of this process (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Owens & Neale-McFall, 2014; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003; Stoltenberg, 1981). These models conceptualize the formation of counselor identity as a distinctly developmental process. The following section will examine those models and ideas which attempt to reveal the process of forming a professional counselor identity.

### ***Process of Development***

The development of professional counselor identity has been an area of interest for practitioners, educators, and supervisors for many years. At times, ideas concerning the process

of development are organized into developmental models to better understand and predict the process (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Owens & Neale-McFall, 2014; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003; Stoltenberg, 1981). Outside of a formal model for counselor identity development, some researchers pointed out crucial features of this process (Auxier et al., 2003; Dollarhide et al., 2015; Shuler & Keller-Dupree, 2015; Wagner & Hill, 2015). This section will review the research regarding these processes.

One of the earliest examples of counselor development models was the counselor complexity model (Stoltenberg, 1981). This model identified four distinct levels through which professional counselors and other helping professionals transitioned from practitioners dependent upon supervisors and teachers to autonomous master counselors. Development occurred as counselors became proficient in therapeutic skills, left imitation for a self-directed approach, came to understand themselves in the profession, and finally integrated their knowledge, skills, and awareness into a mastered identity (Stoltenberg, 1981).

Some scholars sought to quantify various components or themes that compose counselors' professional identity. Skovholt and Ronnestad (2003) developed a model which determined 14 distinct themes present in the counselor development process. In this model, counselors come to establish an individualized professional self with the outlined themes becoming either integral aspects of that identity or distinct value-laden directions they might choose to take. As counselors develop, they move from a generalized understanding of salient aspects of what it means to be a counselor, to an individual understanding of what these aspects mean for them uniquely. In this manner, counselors develop a unique identity within the overall identity of being a professional counselor. These themes include many of the concepts which would be presented later by other researchers and included considerations such as the importance

of professional roles and a movement from self-focused counseling goals to client-focused goals (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003).

Other researchers maintained that counselors must constantly question and redefine their beliefs, values, abilities, and themselves within the profession to develop (Auxier et al., 2003). In a grounded theory exploration of the Recycling Identity Formation Process, eight master's students completing the final year of CACREP-accredited counseling programs were asked to participate in two rounds of individual interviews and a focus group regarding aspects of counselor identity development. The researchers used data to develop a model of professional identity in which counselors revisit their identity and redefine who they are in the profession continuously. The researchers posited that counselors cycle through processes related to conceptual and experiential learning and self-evaluation, and professional identity is manifested as the result of these cycles (Auxier et al., 2003).

Bernard and Goodyear (2014) conceptualized the counselor development process from the perspective of supervision. In this work, the authors focused on the importance of supervisor-supervisee relationships in establishing a counselor's professional identity. By interacting with more experienced practitioners, student counselors begin to understand their own roles and identities. As supervisees come to either embrace or shy away from the values and approaches of their supervisors, their unique identities are established.

Dollarhide et al. (2013) wrote that counselor identity development is a process of moving through levels of validation. Using grounded theory methodology, the researchers interviewed doctoral counselor education students ( $n = 23$ ) from multiple specialty areas and institutions both accredited and not accredited by CACREP who were at important points in their professional development. They found that professional identity begins by requiring external

validation; through professional experience, this validation becomes more intrinsically motivated (Dollarhide et al., 2013). In this way, counselor education doctoral students continually redefine their concept of professional success.

Shuler and Keller-Dupree (2015) defined the identity development process as one of experiential learning wherein experience helps counselors become more comfortable with emotional expression and develops their understanding of client issues. Researchers used a mixed-methods approach, as they invited counseling graduate students ( $n = 17$ ) of varying specialty areas to participate in a seminar regarding their professional development. The authors did not note whether the programs were accredited by CACREP. The participants completed the Professional Performance Review Policy Standards (PPRPS; McAdams et al. 2007), a self-report assessment of counseling skill development, as a pre and post-test analysis of the seminar. Researchers discovered themes revealing an improved sense of purpose and understanding about themselves in the profession, the values of counseling, and the internal process and transformation related to becoming professional counselors (Shuler & Keller-Dupree, 2015).

In a grounded theory study with master's level counseling students ( $n = 8$ ), Wagner and Hill (2015) conducted two rounds of semi-structured interviews to assess the process of identity development. Following data analysis and validation, the researchers identified a cycle of developmental stages. Students appeared to undergo stages defined by anticipation of expectations, growth through learning, and coping with challenges. Although this process was not strictly defined, professional identity seemed to evolve as a means of meeting and overcoming professional expectations. Students also noted the influence of mentors and their usefulness to the process (Wagner & Hill, 2015). Mentors often represented a benchmark toward autonomy and how trainees assessed their ability to meet the challenges.

The last model reviewed here is more recently developed. In this model, Owens and Neale-McFall (2014) applied the Context-Phase-Stage-Style (CPSS) model (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 1999), which is typically used in client interventions, to the development of counselors. The CPSS model (Owens & Neale-McFall, 2014) states that identity is socially constructed. Within the model, components of the constructed identity can be outlined in four distinct areas. The first is that of social context; counselors bring with them environments in which they were raised and in which they currently reside. Environment is not limited to physical space, but encompasses identity aspects such as race, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, and personal history that naturally influence counselors' approach to the profession. In the CPSS model, the "Phase" portion of the model refers to an individual's phase of life. This can be related to chronological age, but also has ties to other aspects of personal development such as nodal life events (Owens & Neale-McFall, 2014). The next element is that of the developmental stage, in which counselors examine how far along the professional curve they have progressed, and how they are approaching counseling in a philosophical and meaning-making sense. This can include considerations of the supervision process, aspects of career development, skill acquisition, understanding of theory, and other important related details. Finally, counselors examine the style with which they approach work with clients. This is the most personal and least tangible component of the model. Counselors might include their own personal values, rituals, decision-making, and in-the-moment approach to counseling in considering their styles (Owens & Neale-McFall, 2014). This is where counselors' personalities are most prominently displayed.

Although notions of professional identity processes are disparate at times, they all point to the need for a process of change and redefining critical aspects of one's identity to move forward in the developmental process. Many of the structured models of counselor identity

development make these processes central to development. The next section will explore research regarding aspects of professional identity that are formed through these processes.

### ***Developmental Components***

In their qualitative analysis of professional identity development, Gibson et al. (2015) focused on the experiences of tenured and tenure-track counselor educators. This foundational study utilized a grounded theory approach and included 18 participants from varying programs and at various academic ranks. The researchers conducted intensive interviews in which they examined experiences developing identity. Using an open coded thematic analysis of the interviews, Gibson et al. (2015) uncovered several key experiences that were transformational to the development of participants' identity. Noteworthy among those was the influence of colleagues, peers, mentors, and other professionals which surrounded these educators. Mentors had a lasting impact due to the support and direct influence provided during training. In discussing the professional transition from training to educating, the interviewers recognized themes of early pressure to obtain tenure and adjust to new and challenging responsibilities. Meeting these challenges and fulfilling these responsibilities was seen as validating among participants. Specific to educators was the development of a research focus, which further developed their professional focuses. Gibson et al. (2015) also discovered minor themes regarding professional milestones and newfound autonomy.

In a unique study featuring current and former presidents of professional counseling associations ( $n = 10$ ), Woo et al. (2016) attempted to discover how leaders of professional development viewed their own professional identity development process. Woo et al. used two in-depth questionnaires to examine this phenomenon. Multiple researchers coded and analyzed that data, which revealed that leaders believed interactions with other professionals was integral

to their development of a strong professional identity. Mentorship was again particularly important, but these participants also discussed the value of professional engagement and leadership within organizations (Woo et al., 2016). Once again, the researchers found that duties, often those that were not expected, had a significant impact on the development of their identities.

Other researchers focus on the importance of professional engagement as well. Luke and Goodrich (2010) explored this in a grounded theory study of the experiences of counselors early in their careers ( $n = 15$ ) who held leadership positions within their Chi Sigma Iota chapters. The researchers conducted telephone interviews and then collected, coded, and analyzed the data. Counselors, while new to the profession, noted the critical effect of working with others within a professional organization and holding positions of leadership on their professional development. In fact, Luke and Goodrich (2010) concluded that participation in CSI provided an “authentic learning experience” (p. 63) which significantly influenced views of their professional responsibilities and focuses. Some participants had previously held professional leadership positions, and they noted the guiding impact such leadership roles had on their identities. Some spoke of an awareness of the systemic components of leadership, which shaped their approach to organizational leadership and connected this as an integral aspect of professional identity. Participation in these organizations provided participants with opportunities to develop professional relationships and to seek out mentors, which were once again stated as crucial to professional identity (Luke & Goodrich, 2010). Finally, participants indicated that CSI helped them to connect professional identity to professional practice and to integrate these concepts into an effective approach to counseling.

Researchers have also taken a closer look at the nature of relationships that were critical in the development of professional identity. Murdock and Stipanovic (2013) analyzed letters and emails sent between master's and doctoral level student counselors ( $n = 28$ ). In this study, the doctoral students had previous counseling experience and served as mentors to the master's students. The authors also conducted focus groups with master's students and individual interviews with doctoral students, and performed an open coded, thematic analysis of the data. The doctoral students reflected upon how these relationships facilitated their transition to faculty and supervisor roles, including navigating the added responsibility of these new roles. They spent significant time reflecting on previous mentor experiences, and they noted these as guiding forces and reference points for their own mentoring approaches (Murdock & Stipanovic, 2013). Uniquely, personal relationships were influential in this study as well. Both master's and doctoral students reflected upon previous personal relationships and drew from those experiences to develop their identities. The master's students within this study discussed how mentor relationships drove them to develop a better sense of theoretical orientation, an individual approach to networking, and a sense of personal growth in addition to professional growth.

An emerging aspect of professional counselor identity is the presence of identities that are both elective and non-elective. The non-elective identities are those which counselors do not choose for themselves (age, race, years of experience, etc.). Elective identities are those with which counselors choose to identify themselves after personal and professional reflection and generally parallel counselors' senses of themselves within their profession. Gibson et al. (2023) reviewed articles ( $n = 34$ ) researching counselor professional identity, and focused on the elective identities of leader, researcher, counselor educator, and social justice practitioner. Using a qualitative content analysis methodology, the researchers examined these studies and analyzed

them for themes relevant to the development of professional counselor identity related to these unique identities. They divided the various developmental influences into three categories: predisposing factors which occur prior to training, process codes which occur during training, and outcome codes which occur once training is completed. Their results indicated that the most common predisposing factors of their elective identity were counselors' own personality traits, life experiences, and personal relationships (Gibson et al., 2023). Twelve separate factors occurred during student counselor training which were found to be significant including those related to practical experience, gaining knowledge, developing relationships, building confidence, and understanding the process of becoming a counselor. Finally, the researchers revealed seven statistically significant influences on elective identity formation which occurred in the time following counselor training. These included, recognition of responsibility, the ability to vocally advocate for oneself and others, successful experiences increasing confidence, and external validation (Gibson et al., 2023).

Mellin et al. (2011) conducted a larger study with new counselors who had completed the National Counselor Examination in the last 10 years ( $n = 238$ ) wherein they sought to determine how participants conceptualized professional identity. They used a constant comparative method to analyze data obtained from an extensive questionnaire. The data were further validated through multiple forms of triangulation and participant review. This ranks as one of the more thorough examinations of the concept. The researchers discovered a variety of important elements of professional identity. As with many other studies, this work revealed the importance of tasks, duties and services provided that are unique to the counseling profession. However, participants also spoke of distinguishing the profession of counseling from other related mental health professions (Mellin et al., 2011). Of particular importance in making this distinction was

the training, developmental and wellness focused philosophy, and specific credentials required to work within the counseling profession.

Nelson and Jackson (2003) conducted a study of graduate counseling interns who identified as Hispanic ( $n = 8$ ). They conducted semi-structured interviews and analyzed transcripts using a constant comparative method. This analysis yielded themes both similar and dissimilar to findings in studies featuring samples composed of primarily non-Hispanic students. Common to non-Hispanic students, these participants noted a strong connection between identity and knowledge of the field (e.g., responsibilities, theoretical approaches, professional organizations). These students also connected professional growth to personal growth, and they pointed to key experiences as integral in both aspects. The researchers also determined that some themes were “mediated by cultural issues specific to Hispanic students” (Nelson & Jackson, 2003, p. 6). Among these themes was a unique conceptualization of how personal and professional relationships affected and influenced professional identity. Although these relationships were still important to Hispanic students, as appears to be nearly universal in the process of identity development, students in this study connected those relationships to aspects of their heritage as well. These students also placed significant importance on the sense of accomplishment obtained by becoming members of this profession as connected to their identities. Finally, students in this study reflected upon their previous perceptions of the profession, including how their perceptions evolved as their professional identities developed.

The body of work exploring the major questions of professional identity development is beginning to uncover concepts, processes, models, and components of this topic. This information is utilized across the profession to inform, train, and serve clinicians in the field. The following section will summarize the most salient themes present throughout the literature.

## **Themes of Development**

A review of the conceptual and research literature regarding professional identity development among counseling students, practitioners, and faculty revealed three central themes. These themes included: personal and professional relationships (with special attention to mentors), tasks and duties of daily work, and engagement with professional organizations.

### ***Relationships***

One of the most salient themes throughout the literature was the importance of relationships to the growth and development of professional counselor identity (Dollarhide et al., 2023; Gibson et al., 2023). student counselors lean on experience, knowledge, and insight of supervisors, family, friends, significant others, and their cohorts for support and direction (Gibson et al., 2015; Luke & Goodrich, 2010; Murdock & Stipanovic, 2013; Nelson & Jackson, 2003; Wagner & Hill, 2015; Woo et al., 2016).

Mentor relationships were particularly influential within the professional identity development process (Dollarhide et al., 2023; Gibson et al., 2015; Luke & Goodrich, 2010; Murdock & Stipanovic, 2013; Wagner & Hill, 2015; Woo et al., 2016). Nascent clinicians found themselves in their most valuable fellowship with those around them. The literature revealed that the mentor-mentee relationship was of exceptional importance to the development of professional counselor identity. Clinicians counted their experiences with mentors as transformational (Dollarhide et al., 2023; Gibson et al., 2015). student counselors work together with mentors when conceptualizing their identities, helping them create and personalize a tangible understanding of the concept (Woo et al., 2016). Throughout the process of professional development, counselors often leaned upon these relationships. When meeting challenges in the field, they frequently turned to prior connections for inspiration and guidance by both reflecting

upon professional wisdom and seeking supervision from trusted advisors (Murdock & Stipanovic, 2013; Wagner & Hill, 2015). As counselors take on more responsibility, mentors provide a template for leadership (Luke & Goodrich, 2010). Likewise, mentors count this relationship as integral to defining their own identities (Murdock & Stipanovic, 2013).

### ***Tasks and Duties***

The responsibilities performed by any profession are a natural means of defining that profession. So too is the case with counselors, and they do so in a variety of ways. Across studies, counselors referenced their professional duties when describing their professional identities (Brott & Myers, 1999; Dekruyf et al., 2013; Woo et al., 2016). Additionally, some new counselors viewed taking on these responsibilities as crossing a professional threshold (Dollarhide et al., 2023; Murdock & Stipanovic, 2013). Counseling exists within a sea of related helping professions, and its practitioners often distinguish themselves by the tasks they perform in service to their clients (Brott & Myers, 1999; Dekruyf et al., 2013; Mellin et al., 2011).

Counselors also noted that the responsibilities of the profession were integral to how they defined their character as professionals. All along the path of development, counselors referenced these duties when discussing professional identity. For example, counselor educators who were fresh in leadership roles in the profession found new pressure to complete responsibility as they worked toward tenure. Adjusting to these new duties became an identifying task and living up to these challenges was validating (Gibson et al., 2015). Counselors in the field found that their identities transformed depending on the tasks they completed (Dollarhide et al., 2023; Wagner & Hill, 2015). Finally, student counselors counted their professional commitments as experiential forms of learning as they built the foundations of their professional counselor identities (Dollarhide et al., 2023; Nelson & Jackson, 2003).

### ***Professional Engagement***

Involvement in professional organizations and professional interaction with other clinicians was also prevalent within the literature. student counselors discussed how CSI helped them grow as professionals and allowed them to better understand systemic aspects of their professional identities (Luke & Goodrich, 2010). Counselors further along in their careers also noted how CSI and other groups helped influence how they understood themselves (Gibson, 2016; Luke & Goodrich, 2010; Woo et al., 2016). For example, early leadership experiences later guided decision making for counselors (Dollarhide et al., 2023; Luke & Goodrich, 2010). Additionally, differences in roles was an ever-present consideration when interacting professionally, and thus impacted veteran counselors' professional identity (Woo et al., 2016).

The established literature concerning professional counselor identity reflects frequently on how such identity develops. The research is often done in a manner which reflects upon previous work in which the question "how did we get here?" is answered. Researchers have not explored what can be done to guide student counselors from a pedagogical standpoint to such a thorough degree. In the next section, I will explore a pedagogical approach that utilizes self-reflection and contemplation as a means of education and discuss how it may be an effective approach to developing those aspects critical to professional counselor identity.

### **Contemplative Pedagogy**

The roots of contemplative pedagogy connect with many varied philosophical, educational, and existential paradigms. The framework explores many of the deepest questions of learning as a fundamental line of inquiry (Haynes, 2005; Repetti, 2010; Zajonc, 2006, 2013). Namely, scholars consider the ethical, epistemological, and ontological aspects of education from the contemplative perspective (Zajonc, 2006, 2013). Educators who commit to this

pedagogical focus commit to in-depth analysis of themselves, their students, the material, and relationships between all these components of a course.

Contemplative philosophy can be thought of as having two major components: contemplative practices and a contemplative mindset. Contemplative practices are aimed at attaining the mindset, as the mindset is meant to motivate the practices. The approach is cyclical and serves as a form of positive feedback loop. The contemplative mindset and values that encourage such a mindset, are found throughout history and the world. Many religious, spiritual, and philosophical traditions have contemplative components (Repetti, 2010). Meditation, one of the most ubiquitous contemplative practices, is found across cultures and time (Repetti, 2010).

Contemplative pedagogy attempts to conjoin these contemplative spiritual practices with scientific and educational inquiry (Zajonc, 2006). In fact, some researchers have termed the unique forms of exploration found through contemplative pedagogy as a form of spiritual inquiry (Haynes, 2005). Although this approach to pedagogy is something of a new horizon, it has reflections in ancient educational traditions such as Stoicism (Repetti, 2010).

Perhaps the most direct method of understanding contemplative pedagogy is understanding contemplative practice. This term is often used broadly to describe activities aimed at improving attention, concentration, awareness, and connectedness (Haynes, 2005; Zajonc, 2006, 2013). Varied practices are often included under this broad umbrella, and it can be difficult to pin down which of them can be counted among contemplative practices (Haynes 2005). Yoga, various forms of meditation, the handling of spiritual objects, prayer, and qi gong have all been identified in research as examples of contemplative practice (Grace, 2011, Haynes, 2005; Zajonc, 2006).

The historical and philosophical roots of contemplative pedagogy are far-reaching and deep. Reflections and impressions of this educational approach can be seen throughout history and the world. While a paradigm with something of a ubiquitous presence can seem to lack focus, contemplative pedagogy has a firm foundation in a few areas that sharpen that focus. In the following section, I review the major aspects that form the foundation and structure of contemplative pedagogy.

### **Foundational Aspects**

Although it can be difficult to distinguish what exactly contemplative practices are, and therefore what may manifest in a contemplative practice, some common aspects are found in the literature. First, contemplative courses use a holistic approach which attempts to combine emotional and intellectual growth. Similarly, students are expected to make unique personal connections to the material and process of learning. Finally, the role instructors play is unique in contemplative pedagogy courses, as they teach both the material and the process of learning. This section will examine these aspects.

### ***Holistic Or Integrated Approach***

A hallmark of a contemplative approach to pedagogy is a commitment to holistic education. Zajonc (2006) described this focus best, stating “It has been specifically designed to move human cognition from a delusory view of reality to a true one: that is, to one in which the profound interconnectedness of reality is directly perceived” (p. 2). Not only do contemplative pedagogy experts encourage the exploration of connections between material, learners, instructors, and context, they require it as a foundational aspect of learning.

This holism occurs on both practical and conceptual levels. Students use a contemplative line of inquiry to explore their understanding of material and to create personal connections to

the material (Haynes, 2005). Students and instructors are encouraged to attend to the process of learning and use that information as a means of connecting to the class and others in the class (Byrnes, 2012; Grossenbacher & Parkin, 2006). Additionally, all individuals involved in a contemplative course share a unique experience and participate in common activities, thus promoting a second sense of holism (Coburn et al., 2011).

Zajonc (2006) argued that the distinction between the spiritual and non-spiritual is ethnocentric and can be overcome to some degree. He further stated that educators can combine the secular and spiritual in the classroom to integrate the emotional and intellectual aspects of learning. Much of this integration occurs by creating synchronicity between the mental and physical (Coburn et al., 2011). This is thought to work on multiple levels, from simply managing stress reactions which interfere with learning (Coburn et al., 2011) to creating a sense of personal harmony to promote mental acuity (Byrnes, 2012).

Contemplative pedagogy encourages integration of emotional and intellectual connections to material. Students are encouraged to consider the material in context of their own experiences. Contemplative pedagogy promotes contemplation over memorization as well as exploration of personal ideas without judgment (Zinger, 2011). More creative approaches, deeper and more critical consideration of what is being taught, and personal awareness of the learning process synthesize into a personal and personalized pedagogy (Brady, 2007). This approach affects the worldview of students and may allow for more openness to complex ideas (Grossenbacher & Parkin, 2006).

The contemplative method attempts to promote student learning in more traditionally academic areas as well. By creating a personal connection, contemplative pedagogy promotes “synergy with...material” and an improved ability to maintain focus on academics (Coburn et

al., 2011 p. 167). The use of contemplative inquiry broadens connections by encouraging students to explore more deeply (Haynes, 2005). Students can then benefit from integrating what they have learned from several classes. Lastly, holistic learning occurs at each stage of the process (e.g., studying, processing material, and evaluation of learning) and students' improved awareness of their process through contemplative practice helps to further the process of integration (Grossenbacher & Parkin, 2006).

In all, contemplative pedagogy seeks to create an integrated, holistic, educational experience. Students are asked to connect on deeper levels than they may be used to and in areas in which they may be unfamiliar. This challenge continues through creating self-reflective workspaces that deepen connections and creates a more realized holistic education. The following section will review how personal experience is also foundational to a contemplative pedagogical approach.

An additional aspect common to contemplative pedagogical approaches is the focus on personal experience. Students are expected to learn as much about themselves as they do about the course material, and this personal growth is considered part and parcel of the learning experience (Coburn et al., 2011). For example, students often are tasked with managing intrapersonal contradictions that arise when they confront new or challenging material (Zajonc, 2013). This can be beneficial from a multicultural perspective as it allows students to use their unique cultural views as a direct lens to engaging material and encourages them to consider other views as well (Coburn et al., 2011). This focus on personal experience affects the atmosphere of the course and this can have both positive and negative consequences (Haynes, 2005).

It is worth noting that the deeply personal nature of contemplative pedagogy courses can be challenging to navigate. This framework requires an intentionally subjective approach at

times and can create discomfort for those who may not agree with the material, the instructor, or other students (Coburn et al., 2011). Additionally, the depths of personal exploration expected and the subjects that are most personally connected to students and instructors may incite controversy (Coburn et al., 2011). For example, students who do not consider themselves to be particularly spiritual may struggle with religious overtones of contemplative practice. Fortunately, research indicates that mindfulness and other contemplative practices can be helpful in cultivating an educational environment of respect (Haynes, 2005). As these methods of learning can be new to many students, and contemplative practices are often intense and challenging, the instructor becomes an educator of course content but also contemplation. The next section will discuss this role.

### ***The Unique Position of The Instructor***

The contemplative model is awash in relationships. Relationships between the personal and academic, the mental and physical, and the secular and spiritual are all foundational in contemplative pedagogy. Relationships between people are no different, and the relationship between instructors and students is addressed directly. In the contemplative approach, instructors are successful when they utilize compassion and authenticity as means of building a learning environment (Byrnes, 2012). To achieve this, instructors must allow themselves to be open to new ideas and perspectives and to provide meaningful evaluations of student progress beyond grading (Blinne, 2014). This can include recognizing that learning occurs beyond an academic level and making note of personal growth aside from academic achievement. A sense of mutual respect and genuineness should pervade the contemplative classroom wherein instructors create a space where the necessary work of contemplative pedagogy can occur (Brown, 2011; Zinger, 2011).

Naturally, certain personal characteristics are more conducive to creating the appropriate educational atmosphere for a contemplative pedagogy classroom. Much of the literature surrounding contemplative pedagogy has explored this topic as well. For instance, perceptiveness to student attitudes and experiences is helpful in creating necessary relationships (Gozawa, 2014; Kahane, 2011; O'Donnell, 2015). Students in this model benefit from a compassionate and open approach from instructors, which in turn models the approach students should take to the material and the course (Brown, 2011; Byrnes, 2012). Instructors who are inclined toward activism, creativity, and an open perspective are most effective in a contemplative setting (Blinne, 2014). Finally, instructors who take on this task should feel some connection to contemplative practice and the material discussed (Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Kahane, 2011). Authenticity is critical to creating the holistic, personal experience of a contemplative pedagogy course.

Contemplative pedagogy seeks to inform students through depth of experience in addition to breadth of knowledge. By incorporating personal connections, contemplative practices, and a holistic/integrated approach to learning, courses approach the goal of a uniquely experiential educational process. These philosophical notions become tangible in the classroom through developing the contemplative mindset with contemplative practices. In the next section, I describe the variety of courses and methods which instructors use to craft and deliver this pedagogical framework.

### **Contemplative Pedagogy in Practice**

The philosophy of contemplative pedagogy has been applied in an array of courses. In the earliest stages of contemplative pedagogy, it was applied almost exclusively to the field of religious studies. As the pedagogy grew, it expanded into other fields which rely upon self-

awareness and experiential learning, such as the helping professions. The nature of contemplative pedagogy lends itself more to reflective studies than subjects that are less reflective. Techniques and practices vary a great deal as the model is so encompassing. In this section, I discuss the scope of assignments, subjects, course structure, and evaluation covering a large range with some notable repeating features.

### ***Programs Which Use Contemplative Pedagogy***

Courses that tend to require personal reflection from students are well-suited for contemplative pedagogy. The simple study of human nature and the breadth of academic territory that notion covers fit naturally within the notions set forward by contemplative pedagogy. Religious studies, counseling, psychology, and social work are the most common. One of the earliest adopters of a contemplative approach to education was Naropa University. As such, this institution has become exceptionally influential within the field. I begin this section by discussing the role of Naropa and continue with an exploration of disciplines which have at times adopted contemplative pedagogy within their educational frameworks.

**Naropa University.** Researchers note, often with high regard, the unique influence of Naropa University in contemplative education (Grace 2011; Grossenbacher & Parkin, 2006; Gunnlaugson et al., 2014; Repetti, 2010; Simmer-Brown, 2009). The university boasts a long-standing tradition of a contemplative approach to education (Grossenbacher & Parkin, 2006; Simmer-Brown, 2009). This tradition was developed from Tibetan contemplative practice and developed as an approach to education in Naropa's earliest years. Although Naropa offers the traditional educational benefits of multiple accredited programs, it truly stands out by focusing the process of learning through a philosophy and culture of cultivating awareness through normalization of contemplative practice. Contemplative practice and fostering awareness are

core to the curricula and pedagogical philosophy of every program and the university (Simmer-Brown 2009).

Cultivating awareness is a core goal of the programs at Naropa, and contemplative practice becomes naturally intertwined with course activities. Lectures focus on developing presentness through extensive meditative and contemplative practice. Students are expected to direct some of their intellectual energy toward developing skills in studying and meditation (Simmer-Brown, 2009). An education at Naropa is meant to transform students' approaches to learning and to understanding themselves. Deep personal examination is required and applied to academic learning. This has been referred to as a reflective approach to learning, which places the self at the center of academic inquiry (Simmer-Brown, 2009).

Meditative focus is often key to how students are trained to study, contemplate, and meditate in addition to just developing knowledge specific to their programs of study. How to learn is as important as what is learned. Students reported that meditative focus affected awareness, worldview, and communication skills, all of which are vitally important to counselors (Grossenbacher & Parkin, 2006). The development of contemplative pedagogy at Naropa allowed for the approach to grow beyond its nascent focus on religious studies, and into further professional and academic fields. The following section will review some of the most common areas to which contemplative pedagogy has been applied.

**Religious Studies.** Religious studies courses were some of the first to adopt a contemplative approach (Grace, 2011). In fact, Naropa University originally focused their contemplative approach to education on exclusively religious studies programs (Grace, 2011; Simmer-Brown, 2009). Grace (2011) further noted that contemplative pedagogy is particularly well-suited as means of personal exploration, and this type of reflection is often confronted

within religious studies courses. This allows academic exploration of a subject that can be difficult to engage with through more traditionally scientific means (Simmer-Brown, 2009). A contemplative approach can help students better understand the mindset of the faithful and provides a personalized inlet to the material studied which may not be so easily objectified. Though contemplative pedagogy seems principally compatible with religious studies courses, the framework should not be limited simply to this discipline (Coburn et al, 2011; Gunnlaugson et al., 2014).

**Psychology.** Contemplative pedagogy has also been utilized in psychology classrooms. The focus on uncommonly used methods and a personal connection to material provides for innovative lines of inquiry (Grossenbacher & Parkin, 2006). Grossenbacher and Parkin (2006) noted that concepts connected to contemplative pedagogy incorporate more broadly into complex ideas in the field of psychology. For example, other researchers have made connections between contemplative practice and positive psychology, noting that each focused on personal strengths and development of a unique and personal perspective on the world (Gunnlaugson et al., 2014). Finally, on a practical level, students who take contemplative pedagogy courses seem to approach material with a more open perspective, and greater personal awareness, allowing them to more keenly grasp the concepts addressed throughout the course (Grossenbacher & Parkin, 2006).

**Human Services.** Although contemplative practices are often discussed in courses across the myriad of human service disciplines, few emphasize them (Gunnlaugson et al., 2014). Clinical skills practice connects particularly well with contemplative pedagogy, as notions of self-reflection, empathic understanding, and human awareness interweave throughout both (Gunnlaugson et al., 2014). Social work seems to contain the most thoroughly researched

examples of contemplative pedagogy in human services. The use of contemplative practices to improve social work training and professional outcomes is well-established. These researchers have examined how contemplative practice in the classroom helps develop self-care (Goh, 2012; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011), reduce work-related stress (Bonifas & Napoli, 2014), professional confidence and clinical skills (Gockel et al., 2013; Newsome et al., 2012).

Many of the same connections can be made between contemplative pedagogy and counselor education, and especially in recent years there have been efforts to incorporate techniques and concepts into preparation. Some work has been done to conceptualize the use of contemplative practice in counselor education (Banks et al., 2016; Holt & Cottone 2014; Lahikainen & Soysa, 2014), and others have shown effective use in promoting counselor skills, mindsets, and professional perspective (Gardner, 2020; Hilert & Tirado, 2019, Lenes et al. 2020, Watkinson et al. 2021). Research into the connection between contemplative pedagogy and counselor education continues to develop as contemplative practices become well-established as beneficial to the field at large, yet no course has been examined empirically.

However, several courses in training clinicians from various professional fields have utilized similar strategies outlined within contemplative pedagogy, and researchers have examined these courses empirically (Aggs & Bambling, 2010; Bonifas & Napoli, 2014; Chrisman et al., 2009; Christopher et al., 2011; Christopher et al., 2006; Gardner, 2020; Gockel et al., 2013; Goh, 2012; Hilert & Tirado, 2019; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Newsome, et al., 2012; Schure et al., 2008; Shapiro et al., 2007; Walter & Shenaar-Golan, 2022). These courses primarily include mindfulness-based courses, many of which are intended to help clinicians-in-training manage the stress of clinical work. Although these have not been specifically designed to follow the contemplative framework, a multitude of similarities exist. These include the use of

contemplative practice in and out of the classroom, a focus on personal reflection to explore material and hold the contemplative mindset in high regard. This next section will review courses that have both a contemplative focus, and those that have used contemplative practices to improve clinical skills or personal well-being.

## **Implementation**

Contemplative courses can vary as much as the instructors, activities, and philosophies that make up contemplative practice. Some courses elect to focus on helping students make personal improvements, while others help with professional skill development (Chrisman et al., 2009; Christopher et al., 2011; Christopher et al., 2006; Gardner, 2020; Hilert & Tirado, 2019; Newsome, et al., 2006; Schure et al., 2008). The contemplative activities used in courses cover a wide range and rarely repeat exactly. Instructors utilize various forms of meditation, yoga, journaling, guided imagery, and other techniques to explore contemplative concepts and achieve the contemplative mindset. The expectations of both students and instructors can be stringent or positively ephemeral. The next section covers ways in which contemplative pedagogy courses are structured, assignments and activities that have been used in contemplative pedagogy courses, and various outcomes researchers observed from such courses, as well as courses which utilize elements of contemplative pedagogy without an explicitly contemplative focus.

## ***Focus/General Structure***

Basic focus and structure of contemplative courses were among the most basic differences. For example, many courses focused on helping students make personal improvements. At least one simply set goals to improve students' quality of life (Bonifas & Napoli, 2014), but many focused more specifically on self-care (Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Gockel et al., 2013; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Schure, Christopher,

& Christopher, 2008; Shapiro et al., 2007). A few other scholars set sights on developing skills for those in the helping professions (Christopher et al., 2006; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Newsome et al., 2006). Students from a variety of professions were represented, but most research focused on courses in social work (Bonifas & Napoli, 2014; Gockel et al., 2013; Goh, 2012; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Newsome et al. 2012) and counseling (Aggs & Bambling, 2010; Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Chrisman et al., 2008; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Christopher et al, 2011; Christopher et al., 2006; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Grepmair et al., 2007; Newsome et al., 2006; Newsome et al., 2012; Schure et al., 2008; Shapiro et al., 2007; Walter & Shenaar-Golan, 2022).

How class time was divided varied, but often included an initial period of contemplative practice aimed at creating a sense of unity in the class, improving focus, and connecting to a contemplative mindset. Lectures, discussion, student presentations, and reviews of readings often followed. Additionally, the total length of each course varied within a somewhat small range, lasting generally between eight and 15 weeks (Aggs & Bambling, 2010; Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Chrisman et al., 2008; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Christopher et al, 2011; Christopher, et al., 2006; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Grepmair et al., 2007; Hilert & Tirado, 2019; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Newsome et al., 2006; Newsome et al., 2012; Schure et al., 2008; Shapiro et al., 2007). While there was a measure of variation within course structure and length, the techniques utilized were common throughout. The following section will review those techniques.

### ***In-Class Techniques***

Contemplative courses utilized a variety of activities and techniques to approach material. While mediation was nearly ubiquitous and a primary focus much of the time, students also

engaged in other contemplative practices. Additionally, more traditional assignments such as journals and presentations were commonly used. This section will explore these techniques.

**Meditation.** Meditation is a nearly ubiquitous practice across philosophical and spiritual perspectives, and many forms of mediation practice exist. As such, it is an exceptionally common practice within contemplative pedagogy. Authors have noted that the popularity of meditation serves as an easy point of reference for students new to contemplative concepts (Barbezat & Bush, 2014). In fact, Naropa's landmark contemplative program was founded by a master of meditation and represents a core focus of the University's approach to contemplative pedagogy (Simmer-Brown & Grace, 2011).

One reason contemplative pedagogy and meditation are often used together is that it allows instructors to choose from many techniques to offer variety and an opportunity to connect with students' preferences. Among the available meditation options are sitting, walking, guided meditation, and loving kindness (Bishop et al., 2004, Gardner 2020, Hilert & Tirado, 2019).

Several benefits of using meditation in the classroom were noted throughout the literature. While the research on these potential benefits was limited to conceptual work which expressed what educators had noted from experience and extrapolated from other literature, it provides insight into what students may gain from such practices. For example, the groups appeared to have a stronger sense of unity (Grace, 2011) and stress reduction (Coburn et al, 2011; Repetti, 2010; Lynn, 2010; Simmer-Brown & Grace, 2011). Academic benefits such as improved focus (Lynn, 2010; Repetti, 2010; Simmer-Brown & Grace, 2011), the encouragement of creative approaches to material (Lynn, 2010; Repetti, 2010; Zajonc, 2013), and a deeper understanding or awareness of course concepts (Coburn et al, 2011; Repetti, 2010; Lynn, 2010;

Zajonc, 2013). Lastly, personal developments critical to clinical work such as improved empathy for self and others and greater self-awareness (Lynn, 2010; Repetti, 2010) have been discussed.

**Other Practices.** In addition to meditation, contemplative pedagogy courses have run the gamut of contemplative practices utilized in classes. Informal breathing and stretching techniques are common (Bonifas & Napoli, 2014; Shapiro et al., 2007), for example, as well as formal approaches such as yoga and qigong (Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Chrisman et al., 2008; Christopher, Christopher, Dunnagan, and Schure, 2006; Shapiro et al., 2007).

Chrisman et al. (2008) used a contemplative pedagogy course to encourage self-care, physical health improvements, and stated goals of contemplative pedagogy (Chrisman et al., 2008). This course utilized the “Mind/Body Medicine & the Art of Self-Care” curriculum and included first and second year master’s-level students from various counseling specialties and institutions. The course lasted for 15 weeks as a for-credit elective. The course aimed to acquaint students with contemplative practices relevant to counseling and to introduce various self-care strategies. Chrisman et al. (2008) focused on qigong as the primary focus of contemplative practice, and students were asked to journal about their experiences. The researchers performed thematic analysis on these journal entries, and found students reported benefits including improved balance, increased group connectedness, reduced stress, and enhanced motivation. Researchers noted that the data was self-reported, and thus limited, but further explained that this type of qualitative data was helpful in eliciting non-limited responses about the experience.

**Non-Contemplative Activities.** Traditional classroom activities have a place in a contemplative pedagogy course as well. Some instructors have used workbooks to help students better understand contemplative practices (Bonifas & Napoli, 2014). Traditional lectures do not often hold the same level of prestige or importance as they might in a non-contemplative

pedagogy course, but these methods are present in nearly all contemplative pedagogy courses (Aggs & Bambling, 2010; Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Chrisman et al., 2008; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Christopher et al. 2006; Christopher et al., 2011; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Grepmaier et al., 2007; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Newsome et al., 2006; Newsome et al., 2012; Schure et al., 2008; Shapiro et al., 2007).

Discussion often takes precedence over lecture in contemplative courses, as students are encouraged to explore and challenge their beliefs and understanding of material (Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Gockel et al., 2013; Schure et al., 2008; Shapiro et al., 2007). The topics of both lectures and discussion cover a range of concepts that are inspired by and supplement the general course topics. Theories of contemplative practice, applicable techniques, and current research into contemplative ideas all find a place in contemplative pedagogy courses (Dorian & Killebrew, 2014).

**Assignments.** The ultimate goals of contemplative courses can be somewhat intangible; however, instructors often find it useful to assign out-of-class work to students. In the review of literature, all but one course (Shapiro et al., 2007) required specific assignments. Most commonly, students were required to keep personal journals, chronicling their progress through the contemplative journey (Bonifas & Napoli, 2014; Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Chrisman et al., 2008; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Christopher et al., 2006; Christopher et al., 2011; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Newsome et al., 2006; Schure et al., 2008). These journals helped students keep track of their changing beliefs and understanding of material, as well as serving as a method of self-exploration. Students also used these journals to keep track of the contemplative practices in which they were often required to participate (Bonifas & Napoli, 2014; Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Chrisman et al.,

2008; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Christopher et al., 2006; Christopher et al., 2011; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Newsome et al., 2006; Schure et al., 2008). Instructors pointed to the challenging and sometimes uncomfortable aspects of contemplative practice, especially in a group setting, and noted that additional practice beyond what can be done in classrooms is beneficial in overcoming such challenges.

It is evident that contemplative pedagogy courses incorporate many of the facets and qualities of non-contemplative pedagogy courses, and the approach to course assignments is not different. As in most classes, students are almost always required to keep up with a slate of readings to supplement and guide the concepts of the class (Aggs & Bambling, 2010; Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Chrisman et al., 2008; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Christopher et al., 2006; Christopher et al., 2011; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Grepmaier et al., 2007; Newsome et al., 2006; Newsome et al., 2012; Schure et al., 2008; Shapiro et al., 2007). These readings can cover topics such as current research and ancient philosophies, disciplines that utilized contemplative practices/concepts, and application of contemplative ideas to the profession upon which the course is focused. Instructors have asked their students to complete various forms of homework related to these readings including reading logs (Bonifas & Napoli, 2014), and presentations based on readings (Bonifas & Napoli, 2014, Shure et al., 2008). The readings and related assignments serve to connect contemplative pedagogy notions to familiar topics, and to grow the knowledge of students about both contemplative practice and the material of the course.

### ***Outcomes***

For human services students, contemplative courses have had a myriad of positive effects. Students grew both professionally and personally from their time in contemplative

pedagogy courses. Some effects (e.g., an openness to utilize and understand contemplative notions in the context of professional work) were minor, and some effects (e.g., range of positive impacts on students' personal lives) were major. Although there remains much research to be completed to fully grasp the influence of contemplative courses, the current results are promising. Here I review researchers' findings regarding the professional and personal impact of contemplative pedagogy courses.

**Professional Impact.** In the professional sphere, students who participated in contemplative pedagogy courses reported a variety of changes. Many of these changes related to the way students approached working with clients. Christopher and Maris (2010) performed an integrated review of five studies directed over several years which focused on mindfulness training through "Mind/Body Medicine and the Art of Self-Care." These 15-week elective courses met twice per week totaling three credit-hours and required students to engage in a variety of contemplative practices in and out of class. Researchers performed multiple qualitative analyses, including narrative reviews, follow-up interviews over several years, and focus groups, to determine the impact of such courses. Results indicated the course's potential to positively affect counselors' skill development and personal well-being. For example, psychotherapy students who took an MBSR course found themselves more patient and open minded with clients (Christopher & Maris, 2010). The authors indicated that the findings were substantial throughout each study, with minor limitations regarding the relative uniformity of the samples. The study indicated that further research should focus on broadening the sample set and incorporating quantitative data.

In similar fashion, students grasped the importance of connecting with clients more tangibly and were aware of that connection to both the client and the present moment.

Christopher et al. (2006) reviewed a course, also based on the “Mind/Body Medicine and the Art of Self-Care” program, which was conducted over an entire semester and outlined six distinct objectives: educate students on methods of self-care, examine a variety of contemplative practices, demonstrate the usefulness of contemplative practice in health care (called mind/body medicine), familiarize students with the research surrounding mind/body medicine, help students understand the ethical considerations of mind/body medicine, and help students understand cultural implications of mind/body medicine. Students again engaged in meditation, yoga, and other mindful practices both in and out of class, completed readings on the subjects, facilitated discussions, and kept journals. Focus group data was collected from 11 students in school, mental health, and marriage and family counseling programs. Results indicated that students found the course helpful in developing an understanding of the connection of physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of counseling and improved their awareness both in-the-moment and in conceptualizing client issues.

Newsome et al. (2006) revealed that contemplative pedagogy courses had a range of impact on students in this area. The “Mind/Body Medicine and the Art of Self-Care” curriculum was once again utilized for this study, and participants were 33 first and second-year master’s-level graduate students in mental health, marriage and family, and school counseling. In this case, however, the course was conducted over 4 years. Researchers used a mixed methods approach which combined the Aleamoni Course/Instructor Evaluation Questionnaire and a focus group in the fourth year of the course near the conclusion of the final semester. Students in that group reported finding the class to be of high quality and a valuable growth experience both personally and professionally. Students indicated an increased comfort in silence, more attentiveness to the therapeutic process, and more understanding of various dimensions of

counseling. Furthermore, researchers found students planned to integrate mindfulness into clinical practice (Newsome et al., 2006). Researchers found the quantitative and qualitative to be consistent and significant throughout the study. The authors recommended that future work continue to focus on integrating contemplative practice into counselor education for the benefit of both students and clients. This change in approach created an atmosphere in which students felt more comfortable approaching the spiritual aspects of counseling with their clients.

Students from contemplative pedagogy courses also often found other ways to incorporate mindfulness and other contemplative practice into work with clients (Aggs & Bambling, 2010; Lahikainen & Soysa, 2014). By and large, students were able to recognize the relevance of mindfulness skills in clinical work and reported being more confident using such skills as a result of their courses. Aggs and Bambling (2010) conducted a workshop consisting of multiple modules which encouraged counseling students to explore concepts of mindfulness and the use of such concepts and skills in clinical work. Through a variety of mixed methods measures, the researchers determined that students felt more comfortable including mindfulness in their work and believed their work improved as a result. Additionally, Lahikainen and Soysa (2014) conducted a mixed methods study with undergraduate students that supported these results. Using a variety of assessments regarding mindfulness and student interviews, researchers determined that students who took part in a mindfulness module were likely to incorporate the notions and techniques learned into their later clinical practice.

Students commonly reported that they were more comfortable using silence intentionally as a clinical skill to reduce stress surrounding silent moments in clinical work (Christopher, et al., 2011; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Newsome et al., 2006). The researchers followed-up with practitioners who had completed the “Mind/Body Medicine and the Art of Self-Care” course two

to six years prior to the study, and results indicated broad benefits including enhanced physical, emotional, and mental health, improved relationships, and awareness (Christopher et al., 2011). They then selected 16 participants from a larger set to participate in a focus group and semi-structured phone interviews. In addition to personal and self-care benefits, participants discussed the use of mindfulness techniques and silence in clinical work (Christopher et al., 2011).

These burgeoning clinicians found more ways to incorporate contemplative skills into their own professional framework, and they reported that this improved their ability to work with clients and gave them a better personal understanding of their professional identities (Christopher et al., 2011). The introduction of new techniques and concepts was seen as both empowering for the students and for their clients, as was noted in the work of Newsome et al. (2012). These researchers worked with a mix of graduate and undergraduate students from a variety of helping professions to conduct a course aimed at teaching mindfulness skills to integrate into clinical practice. Newsome et al. taught two separate courses and explored the range of contemplative practices explored. A mixed methodology was once again used, which incorporated stress and mindfulness scales, a self-compassion scale, pre- and post-test measures, and follow-up groups with students four weeks after the courses. Students indicated that they experienced less work-related and personal stress and found the new concepts and strategies improved their work and confidence (Newsome et al., 2012).

Students were able to utilize new connections and areas of exploration to adapt to unfamiliar clinical situations and to manage unexpected client issues. Gockel et al. (2013) conducted a counseling skills course for graduate social work students which consisted of contemplative practice and discussion over 10 weeks. This study utilized a nonrandom cohort control design, as students were unaware of the target of the study. Researchers employed a

mixed method incorporating questionnaires, quantitative inventories, and a focus group. Students indicated that mindfulness was useful to the development of skills and helped reduce anxiety of engaging in unforeseen clinical experiences. In addition to developing the use of contemplative skills, students found their general counseling skills improved as well. Researchers found that contemplative pedagogy courses facilitated the learning of new skills through a more open mindset. This led to in-class gains as general as acceptance of new ideas and as specific as more committed roleplays (Gockel et al., 2013).

Empathy, perhaps the most critical skill for clinical work, also improved through contemplative courses (Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Christopher et al., 2006; Newsome, Christopher et al., 2006; Schuster, 1979). Some researchers suggested that as contemplative practice improves self-awareness, it also improves awareness of others, and so nascent clinicians can more effectively understand the perspectives of their clients (Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Christopher et al., 2006). This occurs in some practical fashions such as attention to detail, ability to mitigate distraction, and improved control over reactivity (Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Christopher et al., 2006; Cushman & Gilford, 2000). However, contemplative practices also improve counselor empathy in more nuanced ways. The contemplative mindset mirrors facets of the philosophies of counseling. Primarily, non-judgmental acceptance and authenticity are each foundational pillars of both (Rogers, 1957; Zajonc, 2013). In this way, the development of empathy within these courses is both deliberate and incidental. Counselors learn the skills through practices which both encourage and require them.

Students in contemplative pedagogy courses also saw gains in other skills such as attending, attunement, building rapport, multicultural competence, and making meaningful reflections. Students reported working more comfortably with ambiguity, a sense of fluidity in

counseling (Christopher & Maris, 2010), and generally better ability to make connections within client issues (Christopher et al., 2006; Schuster, 1979), all of which indicated a deeper and more thorough understanding of the therapeutic process and more confidence in using therapeutic skills (Christopher et al., 2006). In a training titled Color-Conscious Multicultural Mindfulness (CCMM), pre-licensed counselors addressed issues of racial inequity, intercultural relationships, and other systemic issues related to race in counseling and in general (Lenes et al., 2020). The researchers utilized an experimental quantitative design to examine participants' attitudes and understanding of these issues after participating in a mindfulness focused training. The results indicated significant impact (increased multicultural competence, decreased color-blind racial attitudes, and increased mindfulness among those who experienced the training when compared to the control groups. The results suggest that contemplative mindfulness practices were effective in affecting these multicultural competencies (Lenes et al., 2020).

Research has also focused on the professional benefits of mindfulness among student counselors. Johnson et al. (2019) examined the effects of mindfulness practice on the working alliance of student counselors ( $n = 182$ ) and their clients. Participants who engaged in such practices four times per week reported improvements in goal and task-oriented aspects of their work. Results indicated that while little difference existed between those who did not practice mindfulness and those who did so up to three times per week, a statistically significant increase occurred with those who practiced four or more times per week. Namely, frequent practicing participants showed stronger working alliances with their clients regarding the goals and tasks of counseling (Johnson et al., 2019).

Last among the professional gains, students in contemplative pedagogy courses found their relationships with clients improved. As students showed a more open approach to clients,

they were able to establish a more inviting atmosphere for clinical work (Christopher & Maris, 2010). Through this openness, the clinicians-in-training saw more clinical avenues to examine and were more patient with the clinical process, further improving the relationship (Christopher et al., 2011; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Grepmaier et al., 2007). In a training provided to German psychotherapists-in-training, which focused on Zen meditation, researchers used a true experimental, quantitative design to explore client reactions and outcomes (Grepmaier et al., 2007). Results indicated that promoting contemplative practice in training can improve therapy outcomes and create a stronger relationship between client and clinician.

Moreover, the improvement in clinical skills gave students confidence to take their work further; they reported that they felt more connected to their clients, and this improved connection improved the therapeutic relationship (Christopher & Maris, 2010). Lastly, the students from contemplative pedagogy courses felt that they were able to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of client issues. These improved conceptualizations helped them to gain a better understanding of the clients themselves, which in turn improved their relationships (Christopher et al., 2011; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Grepmaier et al., 2007).

**Personal Impact.** In addition to the professional benefits of contemplative pedagogy courses, students also reported a myriad of personal gains. These included improved ability to engage in self-care alongside increased self-awareness and their belief in their abilities to engage in effective clinical work. As the professional and the personal are often inextricable within the human services fields, these findings represent a promising approach to preparing new clinicians while helping them better understand themselves in their professions.

Self-care represents activities in which clinicians engage to manage the challenging aspects of the profession which can be damaging if left unattended (Chrisman et al.,

Christopher, & Lichtenstein, 2009; Christopher et al., 2006; Christopher et al., 2011; Newsome et al., 2006; Schure et al., 2008). Mindfulness and other contemplative practices have been closely associated with self-care throughout scholarly research (Bonifas & Napoli, 2014; Christopher et al., 2007; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Gockel et al., 2013; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Newsome et al., 2006; Shapiro et al., 2007; Watkinson et al., 2021). Students who engaged in contemplative pedagogy courses found many of the same benefits associated with self-care. For example, many students reported that contemplative pedagogy courses helped them find ways to manage the stress and anxiety of everyday life. In one such case, research examined a curriculum titled “Quality of Life: Development of Mindfulness” (QLDM; Bonifas & Napoli, 2014.) This course focused on master’s level counseling students, and the principal goal was introducing mindfulness skills as a means of stress-reduction. Bonifas and Napoli (2014) conducted a quantitative study, and results showed quality of life increased to a small but significant degree. Many other courses pursued similar goals (Christopher et al., 2007; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Gockel et al., 2013; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Newsome et al., 2006; Shapiro et al., 2007; Watkinson et al., 2021).

Improved self-care was often paired with a variety of emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and even physical improvements (Christopher et al., 2006; Christopher et al., 2011; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Newsome et al., 2012; Newsome et al., 2006; Shapiro et al., 2007; Watkinson et al., 2021). One of these studies which reported this range of improvements focused specifically on female therapists-in-training (Dorian & Killebrew, 2014). This course was conducted over a 10-week period, focused on mindfulness as a self-care strategy. It included reading material; in-class practice; and discussion of theory, research, and application of mindfulness techniques with goals toward developing mindfulness skills and

competence in mindfulness interventions. Dorian and Killebrew performed thematic analysis of weekly journals and a final paper and discovered themes of improved personal acceptance, compassion for self and others, and improved attention/awareness (2008).

Researchers also discovered that students who took contemplative courses put more effort toward activities associated with self-care (Gokhan et al., 2010; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011). McGarrigle and Walsh (2011) focused on mindfulness as a means of promoting self-care among social workers. The researchers used a mixed method design to assess stress, mindful attention, and the reactions of the practitioners who took the course. Students' overall stress was reduced, mindful awareness improved, and students found the course helpful to their overall well-being. All these actions and perspective changes appeared to combine to create a better overall quality of life (Bonifas & Napoli, 2014; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014), which included improved interpersonal relationships (Christopher et al., 2011; Newsome et al., 2012) and sense of self-acceptance (Gokhan et al., 2010).

Beyond improving engagement in and effects of self-care, contemplative pedagogy courses appear to boost clinicians' personal outlook as well. This appears in the forms of improved self-efficacy and a deeper self-awareness. Multiple studies revealed that students' belief in their abilities as clinicians increased through attendance of a contemplative pedagogy course (Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Gockel et al., 2013; Gokhan et al., 2010). This was sometimes associated with reduced anxiety around clinical practice (Christopher & Maris, 2010) or a more positive view of one's skill set (Gockel et al., 2013; Newsome et al., 2012). Additionally, students reported understanding themselves and their connection to counseling better (Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Gockel et al., 2013; Newsome et al., 2012; Shapiro et al., 2007). Along with that, they came to grasp the spiritual aspects of

themselves and the usefulness of such features in counseling practice (Newsome et al., 2012). Students found a renewed and reinvigorated compassion for themselves and were more likely to grant themselves forgiveness for mistakes in the process of learning (Christopher & Maris, 2010; Newsome et al., 2012; Shapiro et al., 2007). Overall, these blossoming clinicians found that they were more accepting of themselves, which allowed the learning process to continue in a more effective manner (Campbell & Christopher, 2012; Christopher & Maris, 2010).

Additionally, researchers found contemplative approaches to supervision had a positive impact on student counselor's anxiety around practicing (Watkinson et al. 2021). These authors engaged in a practitioner inquiry study of practicum counseling students, specifically examining the participants' anxiety around applying theory to practice. They utilized mindfulness and practices of contemplative pedagogy such as attending to room arrangement, contemplative focused course structure and assignments, and use of sandtray as a conceptualization tool and means to alleviate that tension (Watkinson et al., 2021). Participants showed openness to their own developmental process, identified contemplative reflection as a tool for self-care, and attended to and reflected upon their practice and development more coherently.

In all, personal and professional growth appear to be enhanced through contemplative learning and contemplative practice. The range of these effects is still being studied, and current research has revealed that these courses have a significant impact upon the professional and personal development of students who take them. Through intentional self-discovery and the process of deeper exploration, students come to understand themselves, their profession, and their clients to a more profound degree. This leads to improved skill development, a more well-rounded appreciation of clients and their issues, and better understanding of themselves in their profession. While the research exploring the implementation of contemplative practice within the

education of helping professionals is promising, it is important to take note of where this research excels and where it still has room to improve. As such, the next section will review the strengths and limitations of this research.

### **Strengths**

Many of the strengths of a contemplative framework are not easily quantified. This pedagogical approach is useful with varied learning styles, as it allows for novel and individualized approaches (Grace, 2011; Zajonc, 2014). Students are also able to create personal connections with course material through in-depth exploration (Brady, 2007), and this can lead to a complex understanding of ideas (Haynes, 2005). Furthermore, the encouragement of an open approach to material and exhaustive discourse creates an atmosphere of shared learning that can go beyond traditional academic settings (Grossenbacher & Parkin, 2006). Lastly, the nonjudgmental nature of the learning environment can help students feel more at peace with learning, personal reflection, and intellectual exploration (Zinger, 2011).

More tangible benefits of contemplative pedagogy courses have been noted as well. Contemplative pedagogy encourages students and instructors to use creative or nontraditional approaches to course challenges. Using this method of instruction, students take a more critical stance and re-envision the material and their perspectives (Zajonc, 2013). In doing so, some problems find new and surprising solutions where perhaps none were found before. Students have reported a stronger connection to their own creative “muse” as well, and find the work more fulfilling (Brady, 2007). For instructors, contemplative pedagogy presents an opportunity to diversify course content, activities, and evaluation (Blinne, 2014). All involved in a contemplative course find more creative attention and a further developed interest in material (O'Donnell, 2015).

Secondly, a contemplative classroom is perhaps the most concrete. Students consistently show improved academic qualities using contemplative practice. In the most basic sense, students simply learn to manage stress in their environment, which has a net positive effect on many academic aspects (Coburn et al, 2011; Zinger, 2011). Many students were able to use the practice of centering themselves as a means of focusing on material (Brady, 2007; Zajonc, 2013). This can have the effect of calming a student before critical tasks, and some have reported making better use of even small amounts of time. Attention is a major focus of contemplative practice and has the effect of increased overall mastery of concepts. Improved attention creates enhanced mastery (Zajonc, 2013). The holistic nature of this framework leads to a broader incorporation of interrelated ideas, and thus expands the web of knowledge a student constantly creates (Grossenbacher & Parkin, 2006).

Finally, students who engaged in courses using contemplative practice found many professional and personal benefits. These ranged from improved clinical ability to enhanced self-care and self-efficacy (Christopher et al., 2011; Christopher & Maris, 2010; Christopher et al., 2006; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Gockel et al., 2013; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Newsome et al., 2006; Newsome et al., 2012; Shapiro et al., 2007). Students found that a contemplative mindset helped them further understand their profession and themselves within that profession. These benefits appeared to be linked to the encouragement of personal exploration and the palliative nature of contemplative practices and the contemplative mindset. Research indicated many benefits to a contemplative education; however, the research is not without its faults.

### **Limitations**

As is the case with any framework, contemplative pedagogy is limited in its benefits, scope, and utility. Instructors take on unique responsibilities, and so the pool of potential

educators is limited. Likewise, some students may find intense personal exploration challenging or even an impediment to educational growth. The research itself has been limited by a lack of empirical studies, somewhat untested measures, and less rigorous methodologies. These limitations create gaps which need to be further explored as contemplative pedagogy grows.

Contemplative pedagogy requires a great deal from instructors. The approach calls for a somewhat specific set of attitudes, perspectives, and values (Coburn et al., 2011). This may mean more in-depth and personal exploration for instructors and perhaps strains on time and personal mental health (Simmer-Brown, 2009). The challenges of introspection, creativity, authenticity, and openness are not conducive to a “one size fits all” pedagogy. Therefore, not all instructors will be willing or able to pursue contemplative pedagogy.

Many students will undoubtedly find themselves challenged in a contemplative pedagogy classroom. Grace (2011) noted that this approach is not necessarily beneficial for all students. She found that students not inclined toward self-reflection can find it difficult to manage the tasks of such a course. As stated, contemplative practice has a spiritual tradition and many have chosen to focus on the spiritual components of contemplative pedagogy (Coburn et al., 2011; Simmer-Brown, 2009). Students can find this discomfoting if instructors are not careful.

It is noteworthy that the academic work on the foundational and pedagogical aspects of contemplative pedagogy is largely descriptive. No empirical studies have yet been performed to validate this specific approach to pedagogy. Thus, without the use of comparison or control groups it is difficult to discern if outcomes are most related to the instructional approach, or other student development over time. The empirical research that has been done in related areas, as outlined in this work, has focused on courses which utilize contemplative methods but do not specifically tailor themselves to contemplative pedagogy.

Related research has limitations of its own. In some cases, measures require further validation (Aggs & Bambling, 2010). Most of these courses examined used small sample sizes, and thus feature limits on generalizability of results (Aggs & Bambling, 2010; Bonifas & Napoli, 2014; Chrisman et al., 2008; Christopher et al., 2011; Gokhan et al., 2010; Lahikainen & Soysa, 2014; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Shapiro et al., 2007). These studies rarely used control groups, and may be considered less rigorous, and does not account for the natural development of student knowledge and ability (Bonifas & Napoli, 2014; Aggs & Bambling, 2010; Gockel et al., 2013; Grepmaier et al., 2007; Newsome et al., 2012). An additional limitation to the validity of these studies is the frequent use of self-reported measures of course effects (Aggs & Bambling, 2010; Bonifas & Napoli, 2014; Chrisman et al., 2008; Christopher et al., 2011; Gokhan et al., 2010; Newsome et al., 2012; Schure et al., 2008), which may affect the outcomes of the research through participant bias.

Finally, many of participants self-selected into electives and had previous experience with mindfulness (Aggs & Bambling, 2010; Bonifas & Napoli, 2014; Chrisman et al., 2008; Christopher et al., 2011; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Shapiro et al., 2007). The participants could have well-developed self-care and attending skills prior to even beginning these courses. These factors naturally limit the scope of the results the researchers reported.

There are multiple barriers to entry for contemplative pedagogy courses. Instructors can find it difficult to engage in or maintain the practices that create a truly contemplative environment. Furthermore, creating such an environment presents additional challenges. Students, too, can struggle with the demands of such a personally reflective course framework that often requires outside practice to be most effective. Beyond these internal difficulties, the

research on the contemplative pedagogy framework has been mostly descriptive; empirical data is found primarily in courses that were not designed from a contemplative pedagogy framework.

### **Conclusion**

Professional counselor identity and contemplative pedagogy are complex topics which seek to guide counselors toward a more complete personal awareness. The former of these constructs is developed largely through interpersonal work and growing clinical skills. A thorough examination of how professional identity develops for counselors reveals that the professional self is constructed through building unique personal connections, professional character, and mastering one's craft. The relationships upon which one builds their lives before entering the profession are the most critical elements of what makes that clinician unique. It is, in essence, what they bring to the table. Professional relationships guide what happens during training and as a counselor's career matures (Gibson et al., 2015; Luke & Goodrich, 2010; Murdock & Stipanovic, 2013; Wagner & Hill, 2015; Woo et al., 2016). The choices a counselor makes represented by their well-informed approach to their work reveal who they are in practice. This is the most essential question of identity for many counselors (Brott & Myers, 1999; Dekruyf et al., 2013; Woo et al., 2016). Professional identity is then honed through engagement with the profession itself. Counselors understand themselves on a systemic level by discovering where they fit within the field (Gibson, 2016; Luke & Goodrich, 2010).

In similar fashion, a contemplative approach to pedagogy encourages students to build unique personal connections with material, a sense of one's own personal character, and mastery of contemplative practices (Christopher et al., 2007; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Gockel et al., 2013; Newsome et al., 2006; Shapiro et al., 2007). The common ground, and the most salient component for developing counselors, is the development of self-awareness. A key component to

developing a professional identity is coming to understand oneself within the profession. This requires significant reflection on the part of the clinician. Contemplative pedagogy is founded upon, and promotes, such reflection. The proposed study will attempt to combine these constructs in a manner that challenges students to immerse themselves in the exploration of a topic exceptionally valuable and most complex: themselves.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

This study used an instrumental multiple-case study design to explore the relationship between contemplative pedagogy and counselor identity development. My guiding research question was “How do contemplative practice and taking a contemplative perspective on concepts inform the development of professional counselor identity in student counselors?”

In this chapter, I describe the methodology used in the current study. I begin with an overview of qualitative research and case study research in general, as well as the specifics of instrumental case study and multiple case study. Next, I describe case study research within research regarding professional counselor identity development. Following that is a description of the participants, recruitment strategies, and data collection phases of my study. I then describe the interventions which occurred, including listening to contemplative podcasts, participating in contemplative practices, journaling about these experiences, and participating in a post-intervention interview. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the methods of validating the data collected throughout the study including multiple methods of triangulation and member checking.

### **Qualitative Research Overview**

Although many approaches to research exist, studies most often fall within the dichotomy of qualitative and quantitative research. While each has their merits and limitations, it is helpful to explore one in the context of the other to contrast their fundamental attributes, philosophies, and practices.

Qualitative researchers seek to draw out the experience of participants, through their own perspective (Flick, 2022). This is known as an emic approach, as opposed to an etic approach which expresses data from an outsider's perspective. An integral characteristic of qualitative

research is the purposeful reflection of phenomena in a naturalistic context (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Researchers sometimes go so far as to immerse themselves in the phenomena being studied and take on the role of participant. Although qualitative studies are often bound to a particular time frame, many times data are collected without such distinct limits and is ongoing until phenomena are adequately explored (Flick, 2022). As such, data are frequently investigated and reinvestigated with novel themes emerging to clarify the phenomena.

Outcomes of qualitative research take on a distinct tone as well. The report thereof tends to take toward a narrative of common themes rather than a defined measurement of change (Creswell, 2016). While quantitative research seeks to provide numerically measured and often generalizable data, the qualitative approach presents research data as themes discovered, ideas collected, and experiences shared (Flick, 2022). Quantitative research typically utilizes an established instrument such as a formal assessment, scale, or the like. A qualitative line of inquiry will utilize interviews, journals, or researchers' embedded experience after spending time in the environment of those being researched (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

**Qualitative approaches.** Within the bounds of qualitative research exists a variety of approaches to studies. The populations, philosophies, and research questions guide researchers in selecting a qualitative approach. For example, phenomenological studies attempt to discern the core meaning and qualities of the unique experience of the participants (Flick, 2022). These experiences, or phenomena, generally focus on participants which have a particularly uncommon experience such as refugees or children of divorce. Ethnographic research is another qualitative approach, which sees the researcher embedded within the group being studied. These studies tend to focus on the social and cultural aspects of the participants, and the data is presented in the voice of those participants (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). When researchers wish to understand

the story or history of an experience or nodal event, many times a narrative approach is used. Narrative studies connect themes by examining the lived perspective of participants who experienced these events (Flick, 2022). While the previously mentioned approaches do not seek to establish some later intervention, grounded theory research does exactly that. Researchers using a grounded theory approach utilize the data collected in support of some action to be taken by practitioners (Flick, 2022). This could be the implementation of an educational program, counseling practice, or other such tangible processes. The last of the most common qualitative approaches is the case study approach. Researchers using case studies observe a structure bounded by a specific person or groups of people (Stake, 1995; Yazan, 2015). Participants in their unique circumstances are of primary interest, and research serves to deepen the understanding of experiences within those specified parameters. As this study utilized a case study approach, more information on this type of qualitative research follows.

### **Case Study**

This study utilized a case study methodological approach. The advantages of case study align well with the stated aims of this research, namely in that it allows for an in-depth analysis of a bounded system (Stake, 1995; Yazan, 2015). This approach is particularly appropriate for the exploratory nature of this study, allowing for a thorough examination of the concepts in an educational context. Furthermore, the philosophical orientation of case study methodology aligns well with the philosophy of contemplative pedagogy, each aiming to understand concepts within the context of an individual (case or student). Each presents the facts of the occurrence and the personal lens of what occurred, granting a more holistic and deeper understanding of the ideas themselves (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The goal of this research is to potentially shape

counselor education courses in a contemplative framework, and a case study allows the researcher to examine the foundations of this approach to identity development.

Researchers have proposed and executed a variety of case study approaches across the spectrum of scientific work. While adhering to a unified philosophy, researchers have chosen to focus on differing aspects of cases and methods of investigation. Among the most well-established and often utilized case study approaches are those described by Merriam (1998), Stake (1995), and Yin (2002). For Yin, the process of investigation is critical to the definition of a case study. He detailed the methodology for approaching case study research, taking a more rigid approach to the process of inquiry. Yin's approach is the most empirically driven of the three and attempts to research questions often related to the nature of the case itself (Yin, 2002). In Yin's view, case study is essentially a scientific research methodology necessary when attempting to understand the object of research to a degree which requires exploration in natural context (Yazan, 2015). Merriam holds a much more fluid understanding of case study. This approach defines case study simply as a bounded phenomenon. In fact, the act of binding phenomena is both necessary and sufficient for the creation of a case. When researchers elect to focus on a specific duration of time and set of participants they, in essence, have begun a case study (Merriam, 1998). Merriam's view allows for the broadest possibilities, and as such she instead focuses on the level of description and specificity with which researchers examine the case. To properly study a case, Merriam stated researchers must create richly defined delimitations (Merriam, 1998; Yazan, 2015). Lastly, Stake takes a much more limited view of what can be researched through case study methodology (1995). Like Merriam, Stake considered boundedness as critical to creating a case but noted that the case is the object of integrated systems. These systems constantly influence and alter each other, making it extremely difficult to

bind processes. Stake reported researching a case to be more of interest to explore the programs and systems within which the case exists. Case study is then often exploratory or comparative in nature, using the information gleaned from research to influence the administration of the overarching systems (Stake, 1995). Stake referred to this as an *instrumental case study* design. The current study utilized an instrumental design based on Stake's structure, and so this approach will be further detailed as follows.

**Instrumental case study.** Stake noted the necessity of stating the intended focus of case study research. This defines the unit or case to be analyzed. Stake's (1995) approach, as with most case study methodologies, allows for the use of largely conceptual definitions for what counts as a case. Stake stated:

The case could be a child. It could be a classroom of children or a particular mobilization of professionals to study a childhood condition. The case is one among others. In any given study, we will concentrate on the one. (Stake, 1995, p. 2).

The current study was bound to student counselors, all of whom were taking courses in a master's program in the Spring 2024.

Within the realm of case study research, Stake and other researchers indicated several acceptable methods of collecting data. A significant portion of data is collected, broadly, through fieldwork. Typically, case study researchers consider data within the context of a constructivist philosophical framework (Stake, 2005). The constructivist approach sees participants as constructors of their own individually valid realities, and this paradigm therefore affects the roles and responsibilities of researchers (Merriam, 1998). Data collection is best done outside of a laboratory setting to allow for a more authentic representation of participant experiences (Stake, 1995).

Appropriate sources of data help researchers best explore the depth of these constructed experiences, rather than searching for generalizability (Stake, 2010). Participant interviews, observations, researcher field notes, and qualitative review of existing data are used to aggregate themes and build theories. Interviews are among the most common means of data collection, and they can be further delineated into structured, unstructured, and semi-structured types (Flick, 2022). Within these interview types, researchers create sets of questions intended to gather data from interviewees in such a way that potentially reveals shared themes among the constructed realities of the participants (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Structured interviews adhere strictly to these researcher-developed questionnaires called interview guides, whereas unstructured interviews may have no interview guide whatsoever and questions are developed in vivo throughout the interview. Semi-structured interviews allow for both types of questions as researchers react to the flow of the interview and personalities of participants.

Prior to beginning proper data collection, it is necessary to identify data sources, methods of analysis, and how the data will be presented (Stake, 1995). For example, interview guides and procedures must be developed and methods of transcribing those interviews are to be identified. Stake discussed three distinct possible sources of data in case study research: participant observations, interviews, and document review. Final interviews were utilized as a means of gathering data both in the initial and final phases of this study. Additionally, participant journals were collected as a major source of data. Stake discussed three distinct possible sources of data in case study research: participant observations, interviews, and document review (1995). As they contain strictly qualitative data, the journals collected from participants were considered document review in this case.

**Multiple case study.** In a multiple case study, researchers compare the analysis of individual, related cases and draw themes from the analysis of the group of cases which is called the *Quintain* (Adams et al, 2022; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2006). In reviewing multiple cases individually then analyzing collectively, researchers create a diverse and robust report of themes that occur across cases while getting a sense of what is unique to each case within the quintain. This method of analysis can lead to more generalizability and validity in the overall analysis and the individual analyses as well (Merriam, 1998).

Data collection in a multiple case study begins by defining the parameters of the quintain. In this study, the quintain was student counselors who had completed a skills course and a professional ethics course from a CACREP accredited university. The data itself included the journal and interview responses from participants as they completed the activities of the intervention. This followed Stake's instrumental methodology of using only qualitative data sources (Stake, 1995; 2006).

Data analysis occurs on both the individual and cross-case levels. While the individual analysis provided a sense of what each participant's experience entails, the cross-case analysis outlined the themes of the quintain itself and was contextualized within the research question. Once the individual analysis presented a broad representation of individual themes, I organized those themes into similar clusters which provided the basis of the cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006).

Once analysis was complete, the findings were reported in the case report. This consolidated the information of the analysis into a meaningful statement which places the findings in context of the research at large. It references any theoretical frameworks, relevant literature, and the research questions which are all framed within the purpose of the study.

Implications for further research, practice, and training are also explored as well as the limitations of the study itself (Merriam, 1998).

**Binding a case study.** A case study must illustrate a focus to effectively answer the research questions proposed. The approach a case study researcher takes to defining the bounds of the case largely defines the research itself (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Stake (1995) recommended a case be bound to a specified timeframe and the context of the research. In an instrumental design, the case is examined to better understand systems and concepts, so these overarching themes are also defined and help to bind the extent of the research through research questions and hypotheses and serve as a conceptual bound for the case (Stake, 1995).

For this study, the case was bound to student counselors seeking a master's degree. Participants were students from both mental health and school counseling specialties, and the research occurred over the Spring term of 2024. Conceptually, the study focused on the personal and professional growth of these students as they engage with contemplative practice and pedagogy related to their professional identity development.

**Data validation.** Once results were developed from the data collected, findings were subject to confirmation. A multitude of processes existed which aimed to validate qualitative research, many of which are common throughout case study research (Flick, 2022). I created a subjectivity statement, outlining personal and professional biases, which adds a level of rigor to the work (Creswell, 2016). I also allowed research participants to review the findings, and to provide feedback on the conclusions, and to confirm that the findings accurately reflect their experiences (Stake, 1995). Similarly, I granted other researchers or professionals in the field being examined an opportunity to review the findings (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). This provided an insight into the veracity of the results being reported. Triangulation is the last of

these most common forms of data validation. This process refers to researchers comparing results from multiple data sources, or multiple researchers (Stake, 1995; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Flick, 2022). For example, a researcher might conduct interviews and field observations, then review the results from each to confirm that they support one another. In other cases, multiple researchers might collect data from the same sources using the same methods and compare their findings in a similar fashion. Following best practices, I ensured data validation in this study by member-checking, utilizing a co-coder, and triangulating data from the multiple data sources of each participant.

**Limitations and advantages of case study research.** The primary advantages of case study research relate to the richness of information discovered. Binding cases allows the researcher to take a more focused approach to the data (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Likewise, the personal nature of the data further deepens the researcher's understanding. Case study researchers utilize the specificity of the case to examine the complexity of the issues being researched (Flick, 2022). The case can be viewed within the context of relevant historical, personal, and interpersonal factors.

Case study research is not without its limitations. Like most other forms of qualitative inquiry, case study does not often produce generalizable results. As researchers pursue a deeper understanding of the subjects, they sacrifice some ability to relate those results to those outside the bounds of the study (Flick, 2022). Additionally, the depth of information can overwhelm researchers and consumers of research alike. It can become difficult to parse out what is relevant and what is noise when there exists a great deal of information from which to draw (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). One of the primary questions asked of case study researchers is, "what exactly is meant by a case?" There can be great difficulty in nailing down this concept to the point that it

may appear to be an almost meaningless distinction. Thus, another limitation of case study research is the added responsibility of diligently defining a specific case to study. Finally, case studies are frequently bound to significantly small samples, many times just one participant (Creswell, 2016). An exceedingly small sample lends critique to the validity of research results.

Multiple case-study methodology naturally has its own unique limitations. As is the case with most case studies and qualitative research in general, the integrity of the researcher and the process of research are paramount (Creswell, 2016). The researcher strives to provide impartial analysis across cases, however there always exists concerns over bias that must be addressed and mitigated (Merriam, 1998). The sheer volume of data that is included in multiple-case studies can overwhelm and confuse the process of analysis, as well as possibly leaving out critical themes and information that could be missed in the research. Lastly, the amount of time and effort required to review multiple cases in the quintain and create a cross-case analysis can deter efforts and create fatigue which may lead to errors (Stake, 2006).

**Case study research in counselor identity.** Case study has been utilized as a means of examining aspects of counselor identity throughout research literature for many years. In one such case study, Henrikson et al. (2019) conducted a review of pre-licensure requirements and professional goals and tasks of student counselors across the country. By reviewing various published standards in multiple states and contacting professionals, they found inconsistencies and challenges to portability and reciprocity. These included multiple types of licensure, training qualifications for obtaining licensure, and expectations of licensed professionals.

Researchers often use case studies related to the discipline of counseling. Some case study researchers have chosen to focus on aspects of training within counselor professional development. Koltz and Champe (2010) interviewed mental health counseling interns in their

last semester of graduate school. Researchers conducted interviews to ascertain participants' perceptions of life as professionals. The nascent counselors identified with professional responsibilities, reflected upon the process of becoming professional, noted valuable mentor relationships, and expressed varying attitudes concerning professionalism. Some case study researchers have chosen to focus on aspects of counselor professional development. Jett and Delgado-Romero (2009) examined the relationship between service learning, a common form of counselor training, and overall development. In their research, they noted that even in the pre-practicum stage student counselors were becoming familiar with professional roles, duties, and developing early connections to counseling theories.

These studies reflect the findings of the literature regarding professional counselor identity development in a number of ways. They highlight the challenge of constructing a shared professional identity (Calley & Hawley, 2008; Degges-White & Stoltz, 2014). Moreover, the common research contrasts this difficulty with a shared set of values (ACA, 2014; Remley & Herlihy, 2025; Van Hesteren & Ivey, 1990), and that contrast is present within case study research on the topic. Lastly, case studies centered on counselor identity development call attention to the shared tasks of the profession, which is once again a common theme in the general literature on the subject as well (ACA, 2014; Remley & Herlihy, 2025). In summary, case study research has shown to be an effective and integral method of inquiry which highlights the aspects, goals, and academic understanding of professional counselor identity development.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

It is important for qualitative researchers to be aware of the potential influence of personal bias throughout research. Without the presence of statistical analysis, the researcher is primarily responsible for interpreting data. This can reduce the validity of findings, and so it is

the responsibility of the researchers to self-reflect, identify potential bias, and take steps to mitigate such bias (Flick, 2022).

My own personal demographics and experiences potentially color the direction and analysis of my research. I am a white male cisgender, heterosexual school counselor who has worked with elementary, middle, high school, and college students in academic settings. I have primarily lived in the southeastern United States, and I was raised in mostly low-income communities. My background impacts how I view power, privilege, authority, and the value of education as a means of creating one's own success. Namely, I believe that systemic advantages exist within the realms of power and privilege which bolster those assets for people in the majority culture (i.e., white, male, Christians with wealth in the United States), and that public education is the most effective means of overcoming these advantages for those in the minority culture.

My experience as a counselor creates a myriad of potential biases. Since this research is focused on professional identity development, the course of my own development colored my expectations for the participants. Professional relationships have been exceptionally influential during my own development, and it is possible that I could place additional importance on this aspect of the research. My preference for specific theories and interventions may lead me to focus more on like-minded participants. Lastly, I chose contemplative pedagogy as a focus because of my own interest and experience with contemplative practices. I regularly participate in mindfulness activities, meditation, yoga, and journaling as part of my own personal and professional growth, and I have found them to provide great value in my life. Using these techniques and a contemplative mindset when reflecting on my own growth has been crucial to every stage of my own professional development. In particular, I have found it to be an

exceptional means of attaining the critical self-awareness so often indicated as a significant part of counselor professional identity. Therefore, a potential exists for bias toward results supporting my own experience.

## **Current Case Study**

### **Participants**

Participants were four master's-level student counselors at CACREP-accredited universities in the United States. Of the four participants, all identified as women. They ranged in age from 24 to 57 years. All were students in clinical mental health counseling programs in Florida and Kentucky. While all four participants identified as White; two of the four identified as Hispanic. This, along with the range of ages provided some demographic diversity to the sample of participants. They all completed the study in April and May 2024.

The first participant chose the pseudonym AL. AL wrote that her experience with contemplative practices included guiding group meditations at times. Through her responses, she revealed her professional identity is connected to her role as a student and a client advocate. She saw value in the intentionality provided by contemplative practices. Carmen, the chosen pseudonym of the second participant, discussed a strong familiarity with contemplative practices including regular practice of mindfulness. She primarily identified with the student/learner role as a developing counselor, and she valued multicultural considerations and authenticity. The third participant, who selected the pseudonym D, considered herself regularly practicing contemplation through yoga, prayer, meditation, and mindfulness, doing at least one of those activities daily. Her journals indicated that her counselor values are themselves key to her professional identity, and she discussed the importance of respectful boundaries and lifelong learning. The fourth participant's pseudonym was Soo. Soo practiced yoga daily. She wrote that

she was uncertain of her professional counselor identity at this stage, but she expressed a strong focus on clients and their needs throughout the study.

## **Recruitment**

Prior to beginning recruitment, the proposal for this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Following IRB approval, I recruited participants from students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. Initially, I began with two local universities but due to low recruitment rates, I revised my IRB and expanded to a national recruitment process. A request was sent to department heads asking for them to disseminate a recruitment email blast (Appendix A) to all master's students. The second step of this process was obtaining informed consent (Appendix B) from all participants, which allowed them to understand the minor risks and overall process involved in the study. The consent forms were secured on Google Drive through the secure UTK system to ensure confidentiality. Participants completed a demographic survey (Appendix C) following receipt of their informed consent.

Participation was voluntary. Due to the commitment of time, effort, and energy necessary for the success of this study, incentives were offered in the form of a \$10 gift card for completing the pre-intervention journal, additional \$10 gift cards for each completed journal entry, and a \$20 gift card for completing the post-intervention interview. This uncommonly high amount was offered as participants were expected to complete an orientation, a pre-intervention journal, listen to three separate podcasts, participate in short contemplative practices, journal about their experiences, and complete a final interview about their experience in the intervention. The commitment of several hours of time made it necessary to offer an equitable incentive.

## **Intervention/Data Collection**

The data collected for this study is of two varieties: transcribed responses from the final interview, and journals written by the participants. An outline of the procedures for data collection and analysis is appended to this document (Appendix D). Below, these data will be described in further detail outlining their use and value to this research.

**Orientation and Pre-Intervention Journal.** Following recruitment and informed consent, the third step of the study consisted of a brief orientation to the study (Appendix E). In this orientation, participants were re-introduced to the goals and procedures of the study, were given guidance on how to submit responses, and were given an opportunity to ask any questions about the study. This was to ensure a measure of fidelity in the procedures within the study, and responses were not collected as data.

Following orientation, participants were directed to complete a pre-intervention journal (Appendix F). Journal items included assessing participants' experience with contemplative pedagogy and practice, their understanding of the subjects, perspectives, and comfort performing contemplative practices. Additionally, the journal included questions regarding participants' conceptualization of professional counselor identity, including the essential components thereof.

**Breathing Meditation.** Participants were asked to view and participate in breathing meditation videos throughout the process. Breathing meditation was selected as a means of giving participants direct experience with contemplative practice to deepen and supplement the contemplative concepts expressed in the podcasts. Breathing meditation was chosen as an appropriate contemplative practice since it requires no additional materials and very little explanation or training. Videos were selected based on their ease of access and how well thoroughly they expressed the essential components of breathing meditation. Participants in this

fourth step viewed these videos and followed along with the meditation prior to completing journals and listening to podcasts. Participants were asked to do so twice more weekly at times of their choosing.

**Podcasts and Journaling.** The primary focus of the study was on three podcasts that discussed various concepts in counseling, presented through a contemplative perspective. Many of these were released by Mindfulness U, a program through Naropa University, which presents interviews with various educators, practitioners, and others with experience in contemplative pedagogy. These ranged from roughly 25 minutes long to just over 60 minutes long. Participants listened to these following five minutes of guided breathing meditation and pre-journaling.

Throughout the study, participants were asked to journal about their experiences and understanding of the concepts and practice of contemplative pedagogy. They were provided with journal prompts (Appendix G) to guide their writing, which asked that they reflect upon their perspectives of the counseling concepts discussed in the podcasts and how they relate to their own professional identity. The prompts were as follows:

#### **Pre-Listening Prompt**

1. Discuss the importance of (*conceptual theme of the podcast*) in the context of counseling. Include your experiences, if any, engaging with this concept within the bounds of counseling.
2. Discuss how (*conceptual theme of the podcast*) fits within your professional counseling identity.
3. What challenges could you predict to enacting/engaging with (*conceptual theme of the podcast*)? What are some possible benefits of integrating this (*conceptual theme of the podcast*) into your counseling work?
4. What is your level of comfort with (*conceptual theme of the podcast*)? Do you feel confident engaging clients regarding this concept? How might a contemplative approach to (*conceptual theme of the podcast*) affect your level of confidence?

### Post-Listening Prompt

1. Describe your understanding of (*conceptual theme of the podcast*) now that you have heard it discussed and exemplified through a contemplative lens. What have you come to better understand? What questions do you still have?
2. What possible challenges and benefits do you now see to integrating a contemplative understanding of (*conceptual theme of the podcast*) into your work and identity?
3. Discuss how experiencing a contemplative approach to (*conceptual theme of the podcast*) changes how you conceptualize your professional counselor identity, if at all.

There was no constraint upon the length of these journals, however, participants were encouraged to go into as much depth as possible. Complete responses to all of the questions in each of the pre-listening and post-listening prompts ranged in length from a single sentence to roughly half of a page of writing. Participants then completed journals after they listened to the podcasts, and primarily upon those same concepts and perspectives in light of the experience.

*Podcast 1.* The first of these podcasts was entitled *John Cobb: A Contemplative Approach to Social Justice*. It featured John Cobb, a lawyer, educator, and former president of Naropa University. In the podcast, he discussed the need for expanded civic education and the view that exploring history and culture at large has become a political undertaking. Throughout the interview Cobb discussed the contemplative approach, which allows the learner to place their personal experience within the context of society and social justice. For counselors, the study of social justice, multiculturalism, and the culture in which they work is not only prudent, it is a matter of ethics (ACA, 2016).

There was both a pre- and post-journal requirement for each podcast. Prior to listening to *John Cobb: A Contemplative Approach to Social Justice*, participants were asked to reflect upon the concept of social justice and its relationship to both the profession of counseling and their own professional development and identity. After viewing the podcast, they were asked to

respond to these questions once again and consider the contemplative approach to the issue as they experienced through the podcast.

*Podcast 2.* The guest of the second podcast, *Jayson Gaddis: Exploring the Dynamics of Interpersonal Relationships*, was a former counselor and Naropa graduate specializing in wilderness therapy. Gaddis discussed a contemplative approach to interpersonal relationships. He further expounded upon the need to foster self-awareness to best understand the relationships with family, clients, and other professionals. Within the realm of counseling, interpersonal relationships play a vital and integral part in professional counselor development.

The journaling requirements for this podcast asked that participants consider how they develop relationships both personally and professionally, with a focus on the development of their counselor-client relationships. Additionally, they were asked to express how that concept fits within their current understanding of their professional identities. The journal requirement concluded with the participants discussing their strengths and weaknesses around applying relationship development to their work. As with the first podcast, the post-journal requirements asked the respondents to reconsider these questions considering the contemplative lens presented by the podcast.

*Podcast 3.* The last of these podcasts, *Building Synergy to Mind, Body, and Spirit* is part of a podcast series from Palo Alto University called *The Thoughtful Counselor*, and featured Sydney Wasdin. Wasdin is a professional counselor and yogi who integrated yoga and mindfulness-based contemplative concepts into her clinical practice. In this episode, she discussed the use of physically engaging contemplative practices alongside the therapeutic relationship as a means of creating a more holistic approach to counseling.

Participants were asked to journal about using contemplative practices as a supplemental part of their in-the-moment counseling skills. The aim of this prompt was to encourage participants to reflect on their own skills as an aspect of their professional identity development, particularly skills with a contemplative focus. As with previous responses, the journal requirements in this case again asked the student counselors to consider the benefits and challenges of using contemplative practices directly with clients.

**Post-Intervention Interview.** Once the study was completed, each of the participants engaged in an individual semi-structured post-intervention interview where they described their overall participation experience and what they learned about contemplative practices (Appendix H). This interview primarily focused on how, if at all, participants' impressions and understandings of contemplative practices and professional counselor identity were impacted by the intervention. The semi-structured format was chosen as both major concepts of the study were complex and this allowed for a breadth of responses while maintaining a focus on the aims of the study. Participants were given an opportunity to discuss their overall experience as well. These interviews were conducted remotely over Zoom and were recorded, transcribed, and checked for accuracy. They ranged in time from roughly 16 minutes to about 22 minutes.

### **Data Analysis**

Each approach to case study analysis features specific procedures which outline the process of analyzing data (Yazan, 2015). I followed Stake's instrumental methodology, which began with determining if direct interpretation or categorical aggregation was a more appropriate strategy (Stake, 1995). The first of these reviews statements from participants for statements which directly reveal their experience, and the second seeks to determine categories of experience from themes present throughout participant responses. In an instrumental case study,

categorical aggregation is typically used as the purpose is to find the underlying relationships between concepts (Stake, 1995). Likewise, this study used categorical aggregation.

Once a researcher begins the categorical aggregation approach, the first step of the process is discerning patterns, called “correspondence” by Stake (1995), within the data. These patterns are developed from existing literature and driven by the research questions; more patterns may develop as the research and analyses continue. The results of this analysis leads to something Stake refers to as “particularisation,” or revelation of the unique details of a specific case on an in-depth level. While the researcher may not be able to generalize these results outside of the study, the particulars can be used to discover themes throughout the case which can be compared to the body of literature existing around the subject.

As with any approach to research, Stake was concerned with the validity of the data collected and thus the results of the study. His approach gives preference to triangulation as a validation strategy, and he suggested four possible options for this process (Stake, 1995). For this study, I used two types of triangulation suggested by Stake (1995), plus member checking. First of these was investigator triangulation in which the primary investigator compared the interpretations of other researchers and found areas in which their interpretations align. I worked with a co-coder to compare and contrast codes developed from a single participant’s responses. In doing so, we noted which impressions we each gained from the data and consolidated our analysis into a unified form that provided additional validity. I also used a second form of triangulation called methodological triangulation, which occurs when multiple methods of data gathering are compared and found to support the same findings. In this case, I gathered data from multiple participant journals and a post-intervention interview. This is what Stake (1995) considers to be the foremost form of triangulation. Once a method or methods of triangulation

have been chosen and completed, Stake suggested member checking as a final form of validation. I allowed participants to review the interpretations of the researchers to ensure a minimal amount of bias was present, and the experiences of the participants were best represented. This was done by sending the initial individual case analysis to each participant once those reports were complete. They were given an opportunity to review this analysis, though no participants provided any feedback on the analysis. This is the final step of data analysis in Stake's instrumental case study approach (Stake, 1995).

### **Analysis Procedures**

In the initial step of analysis, all audio recorded data were transcribed using UTK's secure version of Zoom software. The process of coding qualitative data occurs in stages (Saldaña, 2021). In this study, the transcripts of the interviews and journal entries were checked for accuracy and then data from one participant was reviewed by the researcher and a co-coder. Each coder described their initial interpretations of the data. A combination of pre-established codes and researcher-developed codes established through data review were formulated into a codebook by each coder to help guide and support case study research (Stake, 1995). After reviewing the data, a process of open coding allowed us to note consistencies within the data such as common ideas, statements, or patterns within and throughout journal responses (Saldaña, 2021). The coders created codes statement by statement. After creating these notations, we compared each coders' notations and developed an updated codebook to identify these commonalities. Once codes were created, I completed a process of combining similar codes.

Once codes were developed, they were analyzed for themes. Like codes, themes in case study research are developed from common elements throughout the data, but additionally their development is guided by the research itself (Flick, 2022; Saldaña, 2021). Themes from the

literature were compared to the data in this stage, and outcomes of research are largely determined from these themes. Naturalistic generalizations were formed and related in narrative descriptions of researcher interpretations of the most meaningful and salient aspects of the data (Stake, 1995). With the exception of formulating new codes, the entire process of coding was then repeated with each set of participant data. Finally, in a process of cross-case analysis, themes were once again derived from the entire quintain of participants and related as research findings in Chapter Four (Baxter & Jack, 2005; Stake, 2006).

Data triangulation occurred as outlined above and following the guidelines of Stake (1995). The responses were taken following a variety of activities, interventions, and over the span of several weeks which will achieve data source triangulation. Because data was drawn from two methodological sources (journal entries and interview responses), methodological triangulation was considered to have been achieved. Additionally, I asked my dissertation chair to review the data to achieve investigator and theory triangulation. Once these themes were established, I began the process of member checking in which participants were invited to review the analysis and provide feedback on how accurately it reflects their own experience. Each of the four participants were notified when the analysis of their data was complete, and given an opportunity to review that analysis, though none responded with feedback. Following member-checking, the process of cross-case analysis reviewed the common themes of the quintain and attempted to categorize them in a manner that was meaningful to the research question. While unique themes were discussed, the cross-case analysis primarily focused on creating an overall analysis of the themes throughout the quintain within the context of this study.

Implications of the research will be discussed in the conclusive stages of the research. The outcomes of data will be compared to the research questions. I will discuss how this work

contributes to the overall body of research in the related fields. Lastly, suggestions for further research will be outlined.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness of data in case study analysis, as with many types of qualitative research, is often established through a process of triangulation. This allows for data to be reviewed multiple times or from multiple sources to establish consistency and lower the probable influence of bias. In this study, triangulation will be established through two processes: participant review, and multiple sources for data.

Asking participants to review the outcomes of data analysis provides an opportunity for additional insight and helps confirm the conclusions (Flick, 2022; Yazan, 2015). The participants were afforded the opportunity to provide feedback on themes developed from their reflections and interview responses throughout analysis. Additionally, they were sent research questions and additional information gathered from the literature at the time of member checking to provide greater context and elicit more comprehensive responses to the findings (Flick, 2022; Yazan, 2015).

The second form of triangulation comes through use of multiple data sources. Journal responses to prompts and transcripts of interviews will be compared to establish themes more strongly. Naturalistic generalizations (Stake, 1995) derived from both sets will also be compared to find which concepts are most common, salient, and relevant to the organizing concepts of this study. Using an inductive coding method for both sets of data will allow codes to be compared in a valid manner (Flick, 2022). The themes derived from those codes were examined for those that repeat between data sets, and multiple methods of gathering data allowed reciprocal support of the categories and themes discovered through the research process (Flick, 2022).

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter began with an introduction to qualitative research concepts, and more specifically case study design. I then described instrumental case study and indicated it would be the chosen design for this study. After describing my own potential bias and positionality regarding the subjects of this research, I discussed the student counselor participants and the procedures for recruitment. Next, I outlined the intervention, noting the use of focus groups and journals as means of data collection, and completed the chapter with an outline of the process of analyzing that data, including triangulation methods such as member checking and researcher triangulation as means of ensuring the validity of the analysis. The next chapter will review the findings of the study.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Findings**

## **Individual Case Analyses**

The goal of this study was to examine how contemplative practices and concepts in counselor training impact the development of professional counselor identity. Participants completed contemplative practices and submitted reflections on podcasts that present counseling concepts through a contemplative lens. The individual analyses of their unique cases revealed a diverse range of experiences and responses to the intervention. Following the individual case analyses, a multi-case analysis of all the individual participant cases will be presented.

### **Case 1: D**

The first participant was D, a 31 year old, female, White student counselor in a clinical mental health counseling program. She reported engaging in contemplative practices daily to weekly and had experience with meditation, yoga, and prayer primarily. Analysis of D's responses revealed three themes: professional self-discovery, value-guided professional identity, and depth through contemplation. Her path to professional self-discovery was discussed in terms of both becoming a counselor and the changes in professional perspective that occurred throughout the intervention. The theme of value-guided professional identity was expressed by her focus on helping clients, understanding their experiences, commitment to continued learning, and establishment of professional boundaries. The last theme, depth through contemplation, was highlighted by the transformative impact of contemplative practices on D's reflection, awareness, and perspective on the counseling profession and herself within that profession.

D discussed her experience becoming a professional counselor through the lens of personal experience with counseling and both a desire for and focus on helping others. Through the historical context of the profession, her own personal context with counseling as a client, and the context of the lives of the clients she envisions, she came to place herself within the field of

counseling. She discussed her journey in such statements as: "I had another Master's degree before this and was doing a whole different thing. And then my life was richly impacted by my counseling experience, and then I thought 'Hey, I can do this.'" This indicates a strong connection between her professional and personal life paths.

Further self-discovery occurred for D throughout the intervention, which appeared to be followed by a shift in perspective that was largely focused on the nuances of context within the realm of the counseling profession. She referred to a strong feeling of curiosity that was provoked by some of the podcasts and journaling experiences and an openness to further explore issues that were brought up throughout the intervention. D best expressed this integration by writing "It has reminded me to stay curious and open and to do my own work, because our own work is important in informing how we show up in our professional counselor identity." At times she noted how the contemplative practices facilitated this shift, and D often noted a desire to learn more and further consider how such practices could be beneficial in her personal and professional life. She reflected on how the act of further pursuing knowledge and personal growth was in itself a facet of developing a professional counselor identity.

D's professional counselor identity was largely defined by the values of the profession with which she most identified. Specifically, D discussed empathy, compassion, social justice, spirituality, and a commitment to continuous learning at various points in her journals and interviews. Additionally, establishing professional boundaries and a decided consideration of the ethical bounds and responsibilities of counseling were a frequent focus of her responses. Furthermore, she discussed the integration of values and professional identity from the contemplative experiences within the intervention, which provided an opportunity to reflect and define personal and professional values and to more strongly integrate them into her identity. She

illustrated this integration when she wrote “Anything that you're practicing regularly or incorporating into your daily life, whether that be, you know, how I engage my kids, or how I engage the world around me...my neighbors, and then, in the counseling profession: how I'm engaging clients.”

Lastly, the participant further discussed the role of contemplative practice as she elaborated on the benefit of deeper consideration through such practices. D also noted the difficulties in utilizing such practices in both personal and professional settings. While D viewed contemplative practices and perspectives as allowing for further self-reflection, providing a focused time for such activities, and enhancing her relationships with herself and clients, she also was aware that a certain level of skill, support, and space was required to make the most of those things. Two statements well exemplified these competing ideas. In one journal response she stated: “Anything that allows us to find our feet figuratively and literally...has always provided a rich experience that allows me to, number one: learn more about myself, and number two: interact more authentically and grounded and secure than if I wasn't practicing, you know, these contemplative things.” In another, the participant said: “Finding time outside of being a parent, being a student, being an intern, being a partner, you know, being a caretaker, all of these things that makes it challenging.” These quotes reveal a delicate balance in making use of contemplative practices of which D was keenly aware.

In summary, D's experience in the study was characterized by discovery of professional identity through professional reflection, integration of professional and personal values, and deepened consideration of counseling ideas. Although she recognized the practical challenges of using contemplative practice to expand and enhance her professional work, she indicated a developing perspective through contemplation throughout her responses.

## **Case 2: Carmen**

The second participant, Carmen, was a 26 year old female student counselor in a mental health counseling program. She identified as both White and Hispanic. She stated she had regular experience with contemplative practices such as meditation, mindfulness, and yoga. She did not specify how regularly she engages in contemplative practices, but indicated that she does so when opportune. Carmen's responses during the intervention revealed a strong consideration of and sensitivity to the culture, background, and experiences of her clients. Throughout the study, she discussed a significant bond between her current professional identity and her role as a student counselor motivated to learn as much as she can. Lastly, she spoke across her journals and her interview about her decided focus to represent herself authentically in her professional practice.

Carmen's responses made it clear that an awareness of the varying backgrounds and experiences of her clients was key to her approach to and understanding of counseling. This attention was strongly connected to her desire to present herself authentically. She maintained a focus on how therapeutic practice might be shaped to consider varying clients, and she contextualized contemplative practices within that perspective. Carmen reflected, "I really liked the way that the guest speaker on the podcast described...you don't actually understand someone until they say that you've understood them, and they feel like you understand. Otherwise, you're kind of just having your own version of what they're saying and having a lot of personal biases, like we all do." For Carmen, working with clients began from a place of respectful consideration of the individual, and contemplative practices provided an additional avenue with which to do that.

Beyond awareness of her clients' experiences, Carmen expressed her sense of professional identity through self-awareness, including a particular awareness of her role in the profession at this stage, which seemed to be enhanced by undertaking the contemplative practices in the study. She was conscious of her position within the field. During this process of professional self-discovery, she noted how the reflections in the study provided her language with which to conceptualize and an opportunity to consider that process more intentionally. Regarding how the intervention caused her to reflect upon her own professional identity she said, "So not an outward-facing, like, thing, but like an inward-facing thing. That was kind of new and I hadn't spent too much time, I guess, considering it specifically. It's kind of in development right now." She noted that the intervention primarily granted her these new avenues to explore and new means of conceptualizing ideas she already held strong. She noted how it reinforced the values which motivate her work, and provided a method of furthering that connection, reflecting upon it, and using that connection to guide her practice. By enhancing her professional self-awareness, Carmen saw a means of more authentically representing herself in her profession saying, "I need to do the work to continue to incorporate useful things even if I don't feel like it. And hopefully I can encourage other people to do that and not just have that be a hollow suggestion. But, to truly do that myself."

Her responses regarding the difficulties of contemplative practice tended to center upon finding ways to genuinely connect to the concepts for herself and clients. She noted the increased discussion of mindfulness and other contemplative practices had grown significantly in her experience from social media and other outlets recently. She expressed her concern in the statement "I think sometimes that can become kind of, like...I don't know...any, like, overexposure, can make it hard for people to engage with these things." Additionally, she

considered these practices in the context of client background and spoke about being mindful of the diverse needs and expectations of clients when introducing new topics and techniques. With her focus on client background and exposure to contemplative concepts, Carmen's responses showed consideration of how past experience affects how a counselor approaches these ideas.

Carmen's commitment to obtain authenticity and legitimacy through professional growth was present throughout her responses in this study. Her attention to the unique backgrounds of her clients, coupled with her goals of representing herself genuinely reflected a desire to create therapeutic relationships with foundations in honest representation. While she saw herself as a professional that still has a wealth of growth ahead of her, she showed an earnest desire to develop with integrity and saw contemplative practices as a means to guide that development.

### **Case 3: AL**

AL was a 24 year old female student counselor in a mental health counseling program. She identified as both White and Hispanic. She spoke of leading group mindfulness activities for work, and some experience with other mindfulness practices but only reported doing so occasionally. AL's journal and interview responses revealed a student counselor who identifies significantly with the role of a client advocate, drawing from clients' backgrounds to best understand and assist them. She saw herself as a learner within the overall profession; AL spoke throughout the study about her desire to grow her identity through expanding her knowledge of the field and her confidence in her practice. For her, contemplative practices provided a path toward more intentional practice, which helped to provide professional confidence to expand her identity and integrate the new ideas she was so excited to experience.

AL described her experience in becoming a professional counselor as rooted in a desire to advocate for her clients, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds. Her identity was

largely shaped by this motivation coupled with her view of herself in the role of a student counselor. When discussing social justice for example, she stated "I would like to be well-rounded and a multiculturally competent counselor. Within that identity...is that aspect of social justice." As a student counselor, she expressed a commitment to further this goal and gain as much experience as she can so that she may be best suited to provide such advocacy. She contrasted this with her current stage in the profession when she said "I enjoy learning new techniques, learning new modalities. Seeing what works best. I think since I've had semesters already of practice with real live clients, I think that I've really established a style of counseling." Through statements such as these, she underscored her identity as a nascent counselor building her skills and knowledge to a point that she can best serve her clients in their unique needs.

In her discussion of contemplative practices, AL noted the reflective benefits and acknowledges a desire to learn more so that she felt more competent in using the practices and can do so with a feeling of authenticity. These considerations were once again connected to her understanding of herself in the role of a student counselor as she expressed with the statement "As a graduate student, it's kind of easy to get wrapped up in the quickness of everything, and so just using different contemplative practices could help me personally to just slow down and be in the moment of what I'm doing rather than just focusing on everything that is going to be happening." She further reflected upon her wish to approach the concepts with caution when she said "I would obviously want to practice more and become educated on what would work best." Throughout her responses, she expressed herself through the perspective of a professional who was growing in her career through new experiences and knowledge.

The intervention seemed to have given AL some sense of improved self-efficacy, however. She stated that learning about contemplative practices and perspectives gave her

something of a guide toward intentionality in practice saying, “The intentionality of it is really important.” Additionally, she expanded her understanding of her identity as opposed to altering it. She best expressed this in statements such as “I would not say that experiencing a contemplative approach...has altered my counseling identity very much, but it has expanded my knowledge which I am always excited to do!” This once again revealed AL’s core desire to learn and grow as a counselor, and her perspective that contemplative practice is a means to deepen that growth and provide an intentional method of doing so.

AL’s responses reveal a student counselor who found professional confidence through intentionality and self-reflection. She was motivated to further establish herself in counseling so that she may best serve her clients through advocacy. Contemplative practices played a role in helping her develop her sense of competent practice and professional identity.

#### **Case 4: Soo**

The last of the participants in this study was Soo, a 57 year old, female, White student counselor in a clinical mental health counseling program. Soo wrote that she practices yoga every morning and attempts to do many regular everyday activities, such as playing the piano, with a mindful mindset daily. Her reflections revealed uncertainty about her professional identity with a certain focus on client needs. While she was hesitant to solidify the concept of her professional identity at this stage of her development, Soo showed a desire to use contemplation to further consolidate her ideas of her professional self into a cohesive professional identity.

Soo referred to her professional identity as something of a work-in-progress. Her reflections revealed that she viewed who she was within the field as an evolving concept, stating “I don't necessarily feel like I have a professional identity yet... I'm still working on that.” However, she reflected upon a few aspects that seemed to coincide with how she wishes to

develop and practice as a counselor. Soo was particularly aware of the environment she created as a counselor, and she hoped to create a supportive and safe space for her clients to do therapeutic work. This was exemplified by statements like "I need my clients to feel like I am a safe container for them to explore themselves in an honest way." While she was not entirely sure of her professional identity, she seemed secure in her client-centered approach to understanding and practicing counseling.

Soo appeared to view contemplative practices as congruent with maintaining this perspective, in particular as they help her reflect upon where she can best match her intentions with her actions. When discussing contemplative approaches to interpersonal relationships, she said, "I think I have done that in relationships as well. I tend to interrupt and assume instead of actually wanting to connect." Furthermore, she found herself reflecting upon ethical issues that could come up when using contemplative practices with statements such as, "The biggest risk... is the possibility of boundary violations. I live in a really small town, so I will run into my clients at the grocery store." This focused reflection on values driving her practice further expresses her focus on what is best for clients, and helps to solidify her growing identity as a client-focused practitioner.

While Soo still identified herself as a counselor whose identity is not yet completely defined, the intervention seemed to provide her with some new perspectives on how to gain insight on herself and her clients. Soo had significant experience with contemplative practices prior to this study, but she reflected that coupling the ideas with counseling considerations caused her to think about how best to be present and authentically represent herself to her clients. She again referenced her desire to put clients first by saying, "I think...recognizing where my body is that could distract me from being present for the client like...being tired in a session, or

being hungry, or something with a distraction.” She indicated that her goal was to put the clients’ needs first, and contemplative practices could be an effective avenue for doing just that.

Contemplative practice for Soo was primarily a means to deepen her professional self-exploration. While she still searched for her professional counselor identity, she knew that it involved careful consideration of what is best and most ethical for her clients. The activities of the study helped give her a practical method of doing just that.

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

Cross-case analysis of the impact of contemplative pedagogy on the professional identity development of four student counselors revealed three themes: professional self-discovery, deepening connection to professional values, and contemplative practices providing a guide to professional development. The experience of the intervention showed change in perspective that informs professional identity development through self-reflection and deliberate practice.

#### **Professional Self-Discovery**

The journal and interview responses revealed a captured moment in the professional journeys of all the participants and a blossoming sense of the complete trajectory of their careers leading up to this point and continuing into the future. D’s previous experience as a client led her to the profession of counseling. During the intervention, she described her professional journey as one prompted by curiosity which was expanded through the contemplative practices and stated an openness to new experiences which broadened her understanding of herself within the profession and the profession as a whole by exploring nuance in the counseling field. Carmen’s experience was one of introspective reflection. She spoke of a new “inward-facing” perspective on her counseling identity which was prompted by contemplative reflection. AL stated a focus on growth through learning and found new contemplative means of integrating new knowledge.

Soo refined her professional journey of client-centered approach through contemplative practice, while still reflecting that she feels very much at the beginning of that journey. Throughout all participant responses, a common deepening of their understanding of their professional motivations promoted by introspection and curiosity led to a more refined understanding of identity.

### **Deepened Connection to Values**

Each participant described the professional and personal values that drove them in their counseling development and expressed how the activities in the study created a richer connection between those values and their professional identities. D's responses were frequently focused on how she was integrating personal and professional values. The contemplative concepts within the intervention prompted an understanding of specifically how her values guide her professional action. Carmen primarily highlighted values related to authenticity and respect for client backgrounds. Reflection helped her to further consider client-perspectives and her own personal motivation. Like Carmen, AL expressed a commitment to multicultural competence, but she conceptualized this through client advocacy. Both Carmen and AL identified with their roles as student counselors and expressed continued learning as a means of increased confidence. Their common value of professional growth through learning was also commonly expanded by the intervention. For Carmen and AL, contemplation expanded their understanding of how their values connected to identity and gave them language to expand learning and growth. Soo's professional values tended to focus on client support and safety. The contemplative concepts prompted reflection on her intentions and an attempt to align her core values with her professional intentions. For all participants, contemplation became a means to self-reflect upon

professional action and align with those values they each held deeply, thus creating coherence in professional identity.

### **Contemplation as a Guide**

Throughout the study, participants repeatedly described the benefits of using contemplative practices and concepts as a method to guide their discovery, practice, and understanding of the counseling profession. D spoke about the focused self-reflection afforded to her by contemplative practice. She saw it as a means to explore her professional curiosity through contemplative action. These actions both created and guided her curious self-reflection. Carmen's responses often noted the new language granted to her through the study which helped her to better express and connect to her values. She found new avenues to explore to help maintain the novelty and authenticity of both contemplative practice and herself in professional practice. AL saw the intentionality of contemplative practice as especially beneficial. With it, she saw a means to create presence within a counseling session and truly be there with her clients. Soo's contemplation returned often to ethics and client needs. Contemplative practice provided a concrete method to keep herself focused on the client and avoid countertransference. Across participants, use of contemplation was a guide to alignment of intention and practice. Reflection granted space and time to slow down and truly commit to the work and learning. The participants all spoke of their professional identity development through intentional self-awareness, authentic practice, and focused consideration.

### **Conclusion**

The participants in this study revealed through their responses a variety of shifts in perspective as well as insights they developed during the intervention. For some participants, a shift in their understanding of their professional self came from the reflection of contemplative

practices. For others, it was an expansion of their current understanding of their professional identities. Participants discussed a stronger understanding of how their personal and professional values align with that professional identity as well. Through contemplative practice, each participant found a method of exploring and executing the ideas they learned and developed in this process. The insights gained from these findings can guide practice, training, and research in counseling by emphasizing contemplative practices and their impacts on professional identity development through intentional development of self-awareness.

**Chapter Five**  
**Discussion and Implications**

The findings of this study indicated three themes that were apparent across cases in the quintain. Namely, participants discussed a journey of professional self-discovery, a deepened connection to professional values, and the view of contemplative practices as a useful guide to intentional reflection and effective counseling practice. In this chapter, I will discuss how these findings support and expand upon the current base of relevant research literature, describe the limitations of the study, and consider the implications of these findings for practitioners, educators, and researchers.

### **Discussion**

The results of this study revealed that contemplative concepts helped to deepen the connection between counselor values and counselor identity. Through intensive reflection, participants were able to better express their values and to create new and stronger connections between those values and their practice. Across their responses, every participant discussed what values drove them to become counselors and how those values continue to shape their professional choices. These participants rarely came to a new understanding of their concepts of professional identity. Rather, they found new ways to describe that identity through values and saw more ways in which their values were present in their professional choices. Through doing this, three of the four participants related an increased sense of self-efficacy with both contemplative practice and the counseling work they do whether that included using practices with clients or for their own growth. Consistent with literature surrounding the subject, professional self-concept and choices were the strongest means of conceptualizing professional counselor identity. For many professional counselors professional identity is largely driven by the unique personal choices of a counselor. This is reflected in their values, the interventions

they choose, and how they conceptualize their theory of practice (Brott & Myers, 1999; Dekruyf et al., 2013; Woo et al., 2016).

In this study, participants found new connections to counseling concepts with which they were already familiar. Prior research highlights how contemplative practices and a contemplative lens lended student counselors a means to connect more strongly to class materials (Byrnes, 2012; Grossenbacher & Parkin, 2006). This adds an additional benefit of a contemplative approach to training in that it may create a bond between students and material that they are currently learning and may help them reflect on previous learning and create deeper connection after time has passed. The literature makes it clear that pairing contemplative practices with classroom material helps students find themselves in the learning (Haynes, 2005), and study results seems to indicate that participants could recontextualize counseling concepts they had previously learned and add that new understanding to their professional identity development.

Professional identity was strongly related to participants' sense of their own personal and professional values. Each participant discussed how the contemplative concepts and practices allowed them to further consider what made them who they are as counselors and often came to the conclusion that it is what they value about counseling and how they want to best serve their clients that was most critical in determining who they are. Contemplative pedagogy has been shown to be effective in helping counselors develop a sense of their personal character (Coburn et al., 2011; Lynn, 2010; Repetti, 2010). Through improved self-awareness and focused contemplative reflection, students and practitioners come to broaden their sense of themselves in the profession and to consolidate the varying aspects of their professional selves into a cohesive identity (Repetti, 2010). Using contemplative practices and listening to concepts presented in a contemplative manner helped to deepen the connection between values and identity for the

participants, which supported what the literature has shown. Something unique in this study was the new language participants often found to describe those values and to express their connection to them. The participants often referenced their ethical drive to practice counseling that is driven by core counseling values, and like previous studies (Dekruyf et al., 2013; Woo et al., 2016), the current study indicated that contemplative reflection resulted in clarity of understanding just how best to connect their intentions to their practice.

Mastering contemplative practices themselves was key to creating a sense of professional self-efficacy according to the research on contemplative pedagogy (Chrisman et al., 2008; Shapiro et al., 2007). Likewise, participants expressed an improving sense of confidence and competence as they continued to engage in contemplative practices. Most notably, the practices created a scaffold upon which to build all the concepts, values, and interventions they were considering throughout their responses. As they came to view contemplative concepts and practices in the lens of professional counseling, each found that the focused awareness and deep consideration of contemplative practice gave them a concrete method of exploring those concepts. All the participants noted an appreciation for the “slowing down” of their thoughts and the care they gave themselves in setting aside time for contemplation of their professional identities. Whatever concepts they were considering, they found an intentional path to practice, understanding, and personal growth through contemplation. This was not especially unique to this study, as it is well-supported in the literature on contemplative pedagogy (Coburn et al., 2011; Zajonc, 2013). However, taken in the context of professional identity development, this study supports the notion that contemplative pedagogy can be a support in that realm as well.

Literature also reveals that professional counselor identity is tied to the professional engagement counselors undertake (Gibson, 2016; Luke & Goodrich, 2010). Counselors tend to

consider their place in the profession as part of their identity. Although it was not a major theme of the analysis, participants in this study discussed these topics throughout. Two of the participants referred to their roles as student counselors; at times they coupled that with anxiety around being in the nascent stages of their professional development. These participants tended to see the interventions of the study as opportunities to engage in continued learning and saw each activity as a form of professional engagement. These concepts were related to the theme of professional self-discovery which was discovered in the cross-case analysis, and the contemplative practices indicated a promising path toward new and deeper means of professional engagement.

One theme of the literature on professional counselor identity development which did not bear a strong connection to this study was that of professional relationships. While these relationships are crucial to the development of counselors and help guide the core aspects of what will become their identities (Gibson et al., 2015; Luke & Goodrich, 2010; Murdock & Stipanovic, 2013; Wagner & Hill, 2015; Woo et al., 2016), participants in this study rarely made mention of these relationships as particularly important at this stage in their careers. Some participants mentioned teachers, former counselors, and colleagues who helped them to conceptualize their professional selves, but these mentions were fleeting and not typically the focus of their reflections. No participants mentioned a connection to their professional relationships after completing contemplative practices, indicating that deeper reflection on their identities did not tend to lead them to consider those relationships as strongly tied to their journey of professional self-discovery.

Between professional counselor identity development and contemplative pedagogy, the main common concept is the development of self-awareness (Coburn et al., 2011; Zajonc, 2013).

This study provides additional support to that connective idea. The shifts in perspective that each of the participants experienced can all be related back to enhanced and expanded self-awareness, particularly through the theme of professional self-discovery. Whether it was the new language that participants found to clarify their self-concepts, or the deeper connection to what it is that drives them professionally, each participant related a stronger sense of professional self-awareness through contemplation. The most critical consideration for this study was the impact of a contemplative approach to counselor training on professional identity, and the effect of the intervention on this common ground of self-awareness was the most critical finding of the study. Every theme that was borne out through the analysis (i.e., professional self-discovery, deepened connection to values, and contemplation as a guide) has a strong relationship to developing professional self-awareness that has a strong presence throughout nearly all of the literature on both professional counselor identity development and contemplative pedagogy.

### **Limitations**

This study had multiple limitations. The population of self-selected student counselors who showed interest in participating exhibited a high level of comfort with the subject matter and the expectations of the intervention, namely participating in contemplative practices. This could have created bias in the data and may thus not be truly representative of the population as a whole. Additionally, while this study was limited to student counselors having taken skills and ethics courses, this led to all the participants being at similar career stages and thus may limit the scope of the results. A limitation with the procedures of the study also existed. Participants were meant to complete responses at regular weekly intervals, but due to various interruptions and commitments most of them submitted journals after some extended periods of downtime which at times lasted as much as three weeks between responses. The nature of the procedures and the

collection of data through remote electronic submission also meant that I could not verify the fidelity with which the participants completed the activities. Their responses revealed depth which indicated they likely listened to the podcasts with sufficient attention; however, I cannot verify that they participated in the breathing meditations as instructed, for example.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study have many implications for all realms of professional counseling. The first of these realms is that of clinical practice. From a theoretical standpoint, contemplative approaches to identity development can be woven into counselors' understanding of their approach to counseling. The theme of professional self-discovery helps tie clinicians to their chosen theory by enriching their personal connection to the theoretical model, improving core value of genuineness, and creating more intentional practice. A deepened connection to values connects counseling theory to the profession as a whole. It helps to contextualize aspects of theories with clinicians' personal and professional values. Clinicians can use contemplation as a guide to connect all of this to the actual practice of counseling by giving a practical sense of how to consider applying theory and values to counseling practice. Contemplative practice and reflection can provide a "roadmap" of ways to deeply consider the aspects of theory and how to use them in practice rather than just considering them in the abstract.

To implement these concepts into their professional lives, practitioners might listen to contemplative speakers on topics close to their theory. One of the podcasts used in this study focused on social justice, which might help feminist therapists make a personal connection that is relevant to their theoretical orientation, for instance. For clinicians managing ethical dilemmas or other professional conflicts, contemplative meditation could provide a means to connect with their values and better conceptualize the issues and make appropriate decisions. If a counselor is

concerned about presenting themselves authentically, or doing work that is fulfilling to help ease burnout, contemplative journaling to self-reflect could be a means to guide themselves through the challenges.

For the training of student counselors, this study's findings support a contemplative means to lead students down the path of knowledge. The deepened connection to values affords a means to connect students to professional values and ethics. Counselor educators might consider coupling contemplative practices with assignments that are focused on such values and ethics to promote a stronger understanding through enhanced personal connection. Perhaps most directly, the theme of using contemplation as a guide to development provides additional means of instruction, which could reach more students. In creating an intentional method of developing professional identity, student counselors might gain a more robust orientation to the profession. As written reflection is common to training professional counselors, one concrete example of applying these findings to counselor education is the incorporation of contemplative journaling as enhanced reflection. This represents a promising way to better guide students to themselves, and student counselors can use contemplative practices as a concrete way to make counseling development decisions.

Counselor educators looking to make use of these findings could consider ways of connecting class materials to professional identity development using contemplative practices. An instructor in a professional ethics class might, for example, use a contemplative case study to present a case of ethical conflict and pair a meditation or reflective journal with prompts using a contemplative lens. This might allow student counselors to "find themselves" in the issue and more deeply consider how they might act in those situations. When time is available, allowing for contemplative moments for student counselors to connect personally with material, especially

that which is central to professional identity such as theory, ethics, and skills, could be a promising way to provide a novel path to take in the information and contextualize it to professional identity. Inviting guests to classes to show use of bodywork with clients, or allowing yogis to showcase how yoga promotes awareness could create a connection while promoting identity development.

For future researchers of both professional counselor identity development and contemplative pedagogy, this study provides a point of entry to expand the knowledge of the field. One direction in which to build on this study might be by considering varying professional focuses. Each of the student counselors in this study were in mental health programs, so a study focusing on school counseling students, for example, might broaden the findings. Additionally, there are many contemplative practices that were not explored in this study, and including the various options that exist could also be helpful. This study was limited to a relatively brief window of time in these students' development, so observing long term effects from student counselors through seasoned practitioners would likely reveal promising findings. Additionally, examining this experience with student counselors at different career stages could prove fruitful. For example, student counselors just beginning a program might reveal a unique perspective compared to those in this study who had already experienced many of the counseling concepts related to identity development. Future research can examine the ways contemplative pedagogy can improve the learning of student counselors. A study which examines how well students and clinicians retain and incorporate contemplative practices over time could have vast positive implications for the profession of counseling.

As all the participants in this study expressed interest in and experience with contemplative practices as well as other similar experiences, researchers may wish to explore this

topic focusing only on student counselors with little or no experience with contemplative practices, as that likely informed the responses of the participants in this study. Likewise, as these few participants all came from clinical mental health backgrounds a larger sample exploring a variety of counseling foci could expand our understanding of these findings. Lastly, the methods of this study made it difficult to ensure fidelity of participation and limited the depth of information in the data. A more directly involved research approach such as an examination of a skills course developed with a contemplative pedagogical framework could provide more robust data.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine how using contemplative practices and concepts might inform the professional counselor identity development of student counselors. Although research in the field extols the benefits of contemplative practice with counselor skill development, self-care, and wellness, I aimed to add to the literature by specifically examining professional identity development. Using an instrumental multiple-case study, I asked four participants to engage in regular contemplative breathing meditations, listen to podcasts which presented topics relevant to the counseling profession discussed through a contemplative lens, journal about the experience, and complete a final interview discussing their overall impressions following the study. The findings of the study indicated participants shifted perspectives and gained insight on both contemplative practices and professional identity. Through the themes of professional self-discovery, deepened connection to professional values, and using contemplation as a guide to development, participants discussed how their understanding of themselves as counselors expanded and changed.

The findings support research which indicates contemplative practices support and enhance self-awareness, and that self-awareness promotes insight into professional counselor identity. These results can be useful in helping practitioners develop stronger connections with their motivations, intentions, and knowledge of the field, and can help counselor educators find new methods of connecting students to classroom material while promoting a depth of understanding of themselves as growing professionals. Further research might examine different professional focuses, varied contemplative practices, and how this impact might continue over a counselor's career.

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## Appendix A

### Recruitment Email

Hello potential research participant!

My name is Tony Burch, and I am a PhD candidate in the Counselor Education program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I'm reaching out to you because I am conducting a research study to examine how contemplative practices (meditation, mindfulness, yoga, etc.) inform professional counselor identity development in student counselors such as yourself! If you are interested, you will be asked to participate in a brief orientation, and a written or audio-recorded initial journaling activity about professional counselor identity and contemplative practices. You will then listen to three contemplative-focused podcasts about topics related to counselor identity, perform regular breathing meditation, and journal about these experiences. Finally, you will participate in a brief interview about your experience in the research study. Interested participants must be student counselors who have completed both a professional ethics course and a counseling skills course.

The research study will cover the span of six weeks, and will require approximately six hours of engagement from you. Those who complete the first journaling activity will receive a \$10 digital Amazon gift card, and an additional \$10 digital Amazon gift card upon completion of each additional journal. Those that complete the final interview will receive an additional \$20 Amazon gift card as compensation for their time and commitment (totalling \$60 in compensation).

Your participation in this research study is voluntary, and if you wish to do so, please follow this link: <https://forms.gle/UeciynbuMvemwNpp6> and complete the informed consent. You will then complete a screening and demographic survey and schedule your orientation session.

Please contact me at [tburch1@vols.utk.edu](mailto:tburch1@vols.utk.edu) with any questions!

This research study has been approved by the UT Institutional Review Board (#) under the advisement of Dr. Melinda Gibbons (IRB Approval Number: UTK IRB-23-07860-XP). If you have questions for Dr. Gibbons, she can be reached at [mgibbon2@utk.edu](mailto:mgibbon2@utk.edu).

Thank you again and best regards,  
Tony Burch, MS

## Appendix B

### Consent for Research Participation

**Research Study Title:** Using Contemplative Pedagogy to Encourage Professional Counselor Identity Development: A Case Study

**Researcher(s):** Tony Burch, MS, University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
Melinda Gibbons, PhD, NCC, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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#### **Why am I being asked to be in this research study?**

We are asking you to be in this research study because you are a student counselor who has completed an ethics course and a skills course. Your training and experience puts you in a unique position to grant insight into the process of professional identity development.

#### **What is this research study about?**

The purpose of the research study is to examine how a contemplative, self-awareness driven approach to education coupled with contemplative practices can inform the development of professional counselor identity development. Research currently focuses on the benefits of contemplative practice with counselor skill development, self-care, and wellness. I hope to add to the literature by expanding into the area of professional identity development.

#### **How long will I be in the research study?**

If you agree to be in the study, we will ask you to participate in an orientation session regarding the details of the study and the process of using the relevant technology (approximately 30 minutes). You will then be asked to complete a pre-intervention journaling exercise which may be audio recorded (2-5 minutes in length) or written (1-2 pages in length). You will also be asked to listen to three separate podcasts (between 25 and 62 minutes each), one per week for three weeks. Additionally you will be asked to participate in a guided breathing meditation (approximately 5 minutes) three times per week during the three week intervention. You will be asked to write journals about these experiences each week for three weeks. Finally, you will be asked to participate in a brief post-intervention interview regarding the experience (approximately 30 minutes). The intervention will span the course of five weeks. We will also ask you to complete a demographic survey prior to the initial journaling activity. During analysis, we will ask you to participate in member checking by spending about 30 minutes reviewing your transcript for accuracy. The total duration of participation is expected to be approximately six hours over the course of six weeks.

#### **What will happen if I say “Yes, I want to be in this research study”?**

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to:

- Complete an online demographic survey to collect your demographic information.
- Complete a pre-intervention audio-recorded or written journal about your understanding of professional counselor identity and your experience with contemplative practices.
- Listen to three approximately 60 minute podcasts about contemplative practices and perspectives in counseling.

- Follow a guided breathing meditation for approximately five minutes before each podcast and twice more each week during the intervention at a time of your choosing.
- Journal about the experiences of the intervention once per week following a unique journaling prompt each week.

**What happens if I say “No, I do not want to be in this research study”?**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Declining to participate or withdrawing participation will not affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Tennessee.

**What happens if I say “Yes” but change my mind later?**

Even if you decide to participate now, you may withdraw at any time.

However, following the voluntary member checking, all transcripts and journals will be de-identified, and the ability to withdraw data from the study will no longer be available.

If you decide to withdraw before the study is completed, your transcripts, demographic data, and journals will be deleted. If you would like to withdraw from the study, please email Tony Burch at [tburch1@vols.utk.edu](mailto:tburch1@vols.utk.edu) or Dr. Melinda Gibbons at [mgibbon2@utk.edu](mailto:mgibbon2@utk.edu).

**Are there any possible risks to me?**

It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but we believe this risk is small because of the procedures we use to protect your information. These procedures are described later in this form.

It is also possible that you may experience discomfort, sadness, or other emotions during the journaling and reflection process. You may choose to stop participating at any time, and you may decline to answer any interview questions. If you need mental health or wellness resources, we will provide you a list upon your request.

**Are there any benefits to being in this research study?**

There is a possibility that you may benefit from being in the study, but there is no guarantee that will happen. Possible benefits include improved self-care, self-awareness, and a better understanding of your professional identity. Even if you do not benefit from being in the study, your participation may help us to learn more about professional identity development. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

**Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?**

We will protect the confidentiality of your information by asking you to create a pseudonym and separating all identifying information from collected data. All files connected to the study will be stored on a password protected computer in a secure drive. Informed consents and documents with your name will be stored separately from the data files with no connection between the participant and pseudonym after transcription. Interview recordings will be transcribed through **Zoom** transcription, a confidential, secure transcription process. Audio recording will be destroyed at the completion of the study. Only the primary investigator and faculty advisor will have access to the audio files until they are destroyed.

If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information we collect about you. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.
- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling.

**What will happen to my information after this study is over?**

We will keep your information to use for future research or other purposes. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from your research data collected as part of the study.

We may share your research data with other researchers without asking for your consent again, but it will not contain information that could directly identify you

**Will I be paid for being in this research study?**

Participants who complete the initial journaling activity will receive a \$10 digital Amazon gift card upon completion. They will then receive an additional \$10 digital Amazon gift card upon the completion of each podcast journaling activity. Those who complete the post-intervention interview will receive a second \$20 Amazon gift card upon completion. The gift card codes will be sent to your email.

**Will it cost me anything to be in this research study?**

It will not cost you anything to be in this study. The researcher does not intend for there to be additional or unnecessary cost to you and will work with you to find an option that incurs little or no cost to you should that become necessary.

**What else do I need to know?**

Up to 20 people will take part in this study. Because of the small number of participants in this study, it is possible that someone could identify you based on the information we collected from you. You will be asked to create a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of your data. No other information that could be specifically linked to you will be reported within this study.

**Who can answer my questions about this research study?**

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers, Tony Burch, [tburch1@vols.utk.edu](mailto:tburch1@vols.utk.edu), 865-964-3595 or Melinda Gibbons, [mgibbon2@utk.edu](mailto:mgibbon2@utk.edu), 865- 974-4477.

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Phone: 865-974-7697

Email: utkirb@utk.edu

### **STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By typing my full name in the textbox and checking “I consent to participate” I am agreeing to be in this study. I will receive a copy of this document after I sign it.

[check box] I consent to participate in this research study.

[check box] I do not consent to participate in this research study. (If selected your name will not be collected.)

Type full name here: \_\_\_\_\_ [textbox]

Date [Google Form auto populated]

[Check box] I would like to have a PDF copy of this document emailed to: [email address input]

## **Appendix C**

### **Screening and Demographic Survey**

As I stated earlier, my name is Tony Burch and I am completing a research study as part of my degree requirements for my PhD in Counselor Education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The following form will request demographic information from you as a potential participant in this research study. The information gathered here will be confidential and protected on a password-protected secured drive. I appreciate your interest in the research study!

Screening Questions:

1. Are you currently enrolled in a Counselor Education graduate program?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
2. Have you completed both a professional ethics and a counseling skills course as required by your Counselor Education program?
  - a. Yes, I have completed both.
  - b. No, I have completed one of these courses but not the other.
  - c. No, I have not completed either of these courses.

[If Yes to all of the screening criteria]

Thank you for your interest in this research study. It seems you meet the initial criteria for the research study. Please provide the following demographic and contact information and you will be directed to a form to schedule your orientation session. If you have any questions, please feel welcome to contact me, Tony Burch at [tburch1@vols.utk.edu](mailto:tburch1@vols.utk.edu).

[If No to any of the screening criteria]

Thank you for your interest in this research study. It seems you do not meet criteria for this research study, as such your responses will be deleted and removed from our records. If you have any questions, please feel welcome to contact me, Tony Burch at [tburch1@vols.utk.edu](mailto:tburch1@vols.utk.edu) or Dr. Gibbons at [mgibbon2@utk.edu](mailto:mgibbon2@utk.edu).

#### Demographic Questions

1. Name:
2. If selected for this research study, what pseudonym would you like to use?
3. Pronouns:
4. Age:
5. Race/Ethnicity [check all that apply]:
  - a. American Indian, Alaskan Native, Native American
  - b. Asian
  - c. Black or African American
  - d. Hispanic or Latino/a/x
  - e. Multiracial
  - f. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - g. White
  - h. I prefer not to say
  - i. Please specify:
    - i. [open ended short answer]
6. What university do you attend?
7. Email address (where I can send research study related documents):

8. Do you prefer to receive contact about this research study by email or phone call?

a. Email

b. Phone call

9. What is your phone number? [optional]

Thank you for completing this survey! Please follow this link [[Link to Doodle Poll](#)] to schedule a time for your orientation session. I will contact you shortly to confirm your session.

## Appendix D

### Data Collection Procedures

#### Orientation and Pre-Inte

1. Participants will be asked to participate in a pre-intervention orientation meeting that will introduce them to the study and provide an opportunity to address any questions or concerns. The orientation will be held using Zoom's secure video conferencing software. The researcher will conduct the orientation in accordance with the Orientation Script (see Appendix E).

#### Journals

1. Participants will be asked to complete a pre-intervention journal which will be the first step in the data collection process. In this journal they will be asked to discuss their understanding of contemplative practices and professional counselor identity prior to beginning the intervention (see Appendix F)
2. Breathing Meditation Videos
  - a. Participants will be asked to view and participate in breathing meditation.
    - i. Link:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFSc7Ck0Ao0>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFSc7Ck0Ao0>
  - b. Participants will view these videos and follow along with the meditation prior to completing journals and listening to podcasts
  - c. Participants will be asked to view these videos twice more weekly at times of their choosing during the three weeks of the intervention.
3. Podcasts
  - a. Participants will be asked to listen to three podcasts (one per week) which present interviews with various educators, practitioners, and others with experience in contemplative practice in manners relevant to counselor development. These range from roughly 25 minutes long to just over 60 minutes long.
    - i. Link 1: <https://mindful-u-at-naropa-university.fireside.fm/john-cobb-contemplative-approach-to-social-justice>
    - ii. Link 2: <https://mindful-u-at-naropa-university.fireside.fm/jayson-gaddis-exploring-the-dynamics-interpersonal-relationships>
    - iii. Link 3: <https://concept.paloalto.edu/resources/the-thoughtful-counselor-podcast/building-synergy-to-mind-body-and-spirit>
  - b. Participants will listen to these following five minutes of guided breathing meditation and pre-journaling (see Appendix G).
  - c. Participants will be asked to journal about their experiences and understanding of the concepts and practices discussed in the podcasts following the provided journaling prompts (see Appendix G).

- d. All journals will be completed online using Google Forms, for written responses, or Zoom, for audio recorded responses.

#### Final Interview

1. Participants also will be asked to participate in a post-intervention interview once all the journaling procedures have been completed. This will also be conducted by the researcher in accordance with the Post-Intervention Interview Protocol (see Appendix H) and will be audio recorded and stored using Zoom's secured software administered by UTK.
2. Upon completion of each focus group, the audio recording will be transcribed using Zoom's software and reviewed by the researcher for accuracy.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

1. After each interview, the researcher will make note of initial impressions and interpretations and add that information to the field notes.
2. Review participant journal responses as they are submitted, making note of initial impressions and interpretations and adding that information to the field notes.

### **All Research Data:**

1. Review the transcriptions, recordings, and journals, starting with one randomly selected participant, noting assertions made and describing the researcher's initial interpretation of these assertions (Stake, 1995).
2. Begin formulating a code book from the review of the initial participant's responses using an inductive coding method (Flick, 2022), and compare the codes to the remaining participants responses from each source of data collection to confirm the coding conventions.
3. Begin organizing the interpreted data into categories based on seemingly significant patterns throughout responses (Stake, 1995). Use Dedoose software to assist in organizing and coding recurring instances of data.
4. Perform an intentional review of the coded data noting instances of repeated, emphasized, or salient codes and responses that attend to key issues of the case (Stake, 1995).
  - a. Establish patterns across coded data by noting consistent, repeated occurrences throughout participant responses.
  - b. Derive themes from these patterns relevant to foci of the study.
5. Formulate naturalistic generalizations by attempting to relate an accurate description of the participants' experiences (Stake, 1995). This should be a narrative description of the researcher's interpretation of what is most meaningful to the participants' experiences, and how they relate to the guiding concepts of the study (Stake, 1995).
6. Ask a co-coder from the research team to complete steps 2-6 for a randomly selected group of 25% of the respondents in order to validate the analysis through researcher triangulation. Compare the co-coder's findings to the remaining participants to verify that the conventions are accurate and valid.
7. Outline the themes of the quintain itself, and organize those themes into similar clusters which provide the basis of the cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006).
8. Compare data from participant journals and interviews in order to validate analysis through methodological triangulation.
9. Complete member checking
  - a. Share transcript and naturalistic generalizations (Stake, 1995) with participants and allow participants to respond with feedback and corrections.

- b. Review data throughout the process of analysis and compare to participant feedback, making corrections and additions as needed.
- 10. Detail the research findings in chapter four of the dissertation.

## Appendix E

### Orientation Script

My name is Tony Burch, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I am collecting data as part of my dissertation requirement for my PhD in Counselor Education. Welcome, and thank you for choosing to participate in this research study! As a reminder, your identifying information will be kept confidential throughout the research study and will be destroyed upon completion of the research study. Following this orientation, you will be given access to a secured Google Drive folder that only you and the principal investigators will have access to. You will submit your journals that you complete as part of this research study by uploading them to this drive. Did you have any questions regarding the informed consent or screening survey you completed?

This research study will begin with a pre-intervention journal which may be either a **two to five minute audio recorded** or **one to two page written** journal regarding the use of contemplative pedagogy as it relates to counselor identity. If you choose to do this in audio recorded form, you will record using Zoom's secure software and submit the recording and transcript to your Google Drive folder. Should you choose to do this in written form, you will open a new Google Doc within your secured folder and complete the journal there. You will be emailed a code for a digital \$10 Amazon gift card once your journal is submitted. Do you have any questions regarding the pre-intervention journal?

Once you complete the pre-intervention journal, you will be sent a link to a guided five minute breathing meditation video which you will complete twice during the following week at

times of your choosing. One week later, you will be sent a link to the first podcast which presents an interview with an educator or practitioner with experience in contemplative practice in manners relevant to counselor development. These podcasts range in length from 25 minutes to just over 60 minutes. You will be asked to complete the guided breathing meditation once again (a total of three times in the week) prior to listening to the podcast. You will then be asked to complete two journals totalling **two to five minute audio-recorded** or **one to two page written** reflection. One prior to listening to the podcast, and an additional after listening to the podcast. These journals will follow prompts about the podcast and contemplative practice experience. You will be asked to repeat this entire process (three breathing meditations, a podcast, and a journal) on each of the following two weeks after (for a total of three podcasts, nine meditations, and three journals). You will be emailed a code for a digital \$10 Amazon gift card each time a journal set is submitted. Do you have any questions regarding the intervention?

Lastly, upon completing the last podcast journal, you will be asked to schedule a final interview with me regarding your overall experience. This interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. You will be emailed a code for a digital \$20 Amazon gift card once your interview is completed. Do you have any questions regarding the final interview?

Do you have any further questions or concerns regarding the research study?

Thank you again for agreeing to participate. Your time and commitment is greatly appreciated! You will be sent a link to your secured Google Drive folder where you will find the prompt for your initial journal. Please complete this by \_\_\_\_\_.

## Appendix F

### Pre-Intervention Journaling Prompt

Today you will complete either a **two to five minute audio recorded** or **one to two page written** journal regarding the use of contemplative pedagogy as it relates to counselor identity.

As part of the initial demographic survey, you were asked to submit a preferred pseudonym for the duration of the study, and that pseudonym will replace your given name throughout this study. All other identifying information will be excluded from the transcripts and the research that follows. Your participation is voluntary and may be rescinded at any time during or after the study.

#### Main Questions

1. Professional counselor identity can be defined as a professional understanding of the history, ethics, perspective, and practice of counseling. How do you personally understand or conceptualize professional counselor identity?
  - a. How do you conceptualize your own professional identity at this point in your career?
2. Contemplative practice is a term which is often used broadly to describe activities aimed at improving attention, concentration, awareness, and connectedness. How do you conceptualize or understand contemplative practice?
  - a. What are some examples you're aware of and how do you see those practices functioning?
  - b. What experience, if any, have you had with contemplative practices?
3. Do you believe contemplative practice might be beneficial either personally and professionally? If so, how?
  - a. Do you see any potential challenges? If so, please describe them.

4. How do you predict engaging in relevant contemplative practices might inform your own professional identity development, if at all?
5. What other thoughts do you have on these topics?

## Appendix G

### Journaling Prompts

For this exercise, you will be asked to journal regarding your counseling experiences and your experiences with contemplative practice in two stages. The first stage will be completed before listening to *Podcast Title*, and the second will be after. The following prompts are intended as a prompt to guide the topics of your journals. Please respond as honestly and thoroughly as you can.

#### Pre-Listening Prompt

1. Discuss the importance of (*conceptual theme of the podcast*) in the context of counseling. Include your experiences, if any, engaging with this concept within the bounds of counseling.
2. Discuss how (*conceptual theme of the podcast*) fits within your professional counseling identity.
3. What challenges could you predict to enacting/engaging with (*conceptual theme of the podcast*)? What are some possible benefits of integrating this (*conceptual theme of the podcast*) into your counseling work?
4. What is your level of comfort with (*conceptual theme of the podcast*)? Do you feel confident engaging clients regarding this concept? How might a contemplative approach to (*conceptual theme of the podcast*) affect your level of confidence?

#### Post-Listening Prompt

1. Describe your understanding of (*conceptual theme of the podcast*) now that you have heard it discussed and exemplified through a contemplative lens. What have you come to better understand? What questions do you still have?
2. What possible challenges and benefits do you now see to integrating a contemplative understanding of (*conceptual theme of the podcast*) into your work and identity?
3. Discuss how experiencing a contemplative approach to (*conceptual theme of the podcast*) changes how you conceptualize your professional counselor identity, if at all.

## **Appendix H**

### **Post-Intervention Interview Protocol**

Today you will be participating in an interview regarding the use of contemplative pedagogy as it relates to counselor identity. You have completed the previous journaling requirements for this study.

My name again is Tony Burch and I will be facilitating this interview. It is being audio recorded, and will later be transcribed so that it can be analyzed. All identifying information will once again be excluded from those transcripts and the research that follows. Your participation is voluntary and may be rescinded at any time during or after the interview. Do you have any questions before we start?

#### **Main Questions**

1. What is your understanding of contemplative practice now that you have completed the requested activities of this study?
  - a. What are some differences, if any, in the way you conceptualize contemplative practice?
  - b. What, if any, contemplative experiences stood out for you? What made them significant for you?
2. Do you see any benefits of contemplative practice, either personally and professionally now that you have engaged in this study? If so, what?
  - a. What are some of the challenges you experienced with engaging with these practices or concepts, if any?
3. Has your understanding of professional counselor identity as a concept changed now that you have completed the activities in this study? If so, how?

- a. How do you conceptualize your own professional identity at this point in your career?
  - b. How do contemplative practices or concepts fit in with your view of your own professional identity, if at all?
4. How, if at all, has engaging in contemplative practices informed your own professional identity development?
5. What other thoughts do you have on these topics?

Probes used throughout the interview:

- Tell me more about that.
- Can you give me an example?
- Can you elaborate on that?
- This seems related to \_\_\_\_\_, do you agree? If so, what connection do you see between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_?

## **Vita**

Tony Burch is a professional school counselor from Indianapolis, Indiana. Tony graduated from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 2008 with a bachelor's in psychology, and again in 2013 with a master's in school counseling. He has worked with children in mental health and educational settings since 2009. He began pursuing a doctoral degree in 2014, while working with students with intellectual and developmental disabilities at the University of Tennessee's FUTURE Program. He worked with that program until 2016 when he became professional school counselor and has held that position in multiple school districts since that time.