The Illinois Counseling Association is a partnership of associations representing professional counselors who enhance human development.

Information on making submissions to the Journal of Counseling in Illinois can be found on the ICA website under Publications. Manuscripts should be sent to the editors electronically.
The Journal of Counseling in Illinois Welcomes Two New Co-Editors

Welcome to Volume 4:1 of the Journal of Counseling in Illinois! The Illinois Counseling Association is pleased to welcome its two new Co-Editors, Dr. Ken Oliver and Dr. Katherine M. Helm who are excited to share this 2017 edition with ICA readership. Before they describe the outstanding contributions found in this edition, they would like to introduce themselves and describe their collective vision for the journal moving forward.

Co-Editor Bios

Ken Oliver, PhD., LPC has served as a clinical mental health counselor in mental health, residential, and educational settings for nearly 20 years. A St. Louis native, Dr. Oliver currently serves as Associate Professor, Division Chair for the School of Education, and Program Director in the graduate counseling program at Quincy University in Illinois and is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Missouri. He has served on several ACA-division journal editorial boards and currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Schultz Foundation. He is married and the father of one boy and two girls.

Katherine M. Helm, PhD is a professor of psychology and director of Graduate Programs in Counseling at Lewis University where she teaches a wide range of graduate counseling courses in the clinical mental health counseling. Dr. Helm is a licensed psychologist and regularly sees individual and couples clients. Dr. Helm supervises masters and doctoral practicum and internship students. Her scholarly contributions are in the areas of individual and couples counseling, sexuality issues and education, counselor training and supervision, multicultural issues in counseling, the treatment of trauma for sexual abuse, pedagogy of multicultural courses, and cultural competency training. Dr. Helm has counseling and consultative experiences in psychiatric hospitals, community mental health, college counseling centers, and other agency settings.

CO-EDITORS NOTES: THE JOURNAL OF COUNSELING IN ILLINOIS

In this edition of the Journal of Counseling in Illinois, we are pleased to present six articles on several important counseling-related topics. The first article by Joseph Campbell, Julia Champe, and Asher Pimpleton-Gray explores how students in an undergraduate career decision-making group engage in the decision-making process in choosing careers. Students participated in 14-session psychoeducational groups as part of a college for-credit course. Groups were facilitated by masters’ level counselors-in-training. The authors describe a group work approach to career decision-making and exploration as well as how students learn about themselves, their values, and potential careers in their interactions with other members in the groups in addition to structured and experiential activities by facilitators.

The second article by Vincent J. Walsh-Rock, Toni R. Tollerud, and Charles E. Myers explores assessment of school counselor supervisors in Illinois. This article highlights the lack of consistent supervisory models in school counseling settings as well as the challenges school counselor supervisors face in providing supervision to on site trainees. This research surveyed school counselors in Illinois to explore more about current practices for providing supervision to school counselors-in-training. The article provides thought-provoking recommendations for school counselors supervising trainees in school settings.
The third article by Sarang Lim, Heidi Larson, Deborah German, and Hannah Driscoll illuminates how effective peer encouragement through the use of peer mentors can be for transfer students who struggle to acclimate to new school settings. The authors review the literature on the many challenges these students face in their adjustment to new school environments as well as some of the risk factors these students face (e.g. lower peer support and grade point average). Data was collected from students engaged in structured peer mentor relationships and their overall success in their adjustment to the new school was investigated.

The forth article by Teresa Fletcher, Wesley C. Allen, Audrey DeShields, and Thomas J. Bonsignore considers how works of fiction and motion pictures reflect the views society has of how mental health is portrayed in society. This article utilizes a case study to demonstrate specific ways in which film can be brought into the counseling room and used collaboratively within the counselor-client relationship and the process of psychotherapy. The film *Insight Out* is used with a client presenting with Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID).

The fifth article by Nathan C.D. Perron and Toni R. Tollerud, performs a qualitative study exploring international counseling students’ insights about the field of counseling and how the field is perceived in their respective countries. The article also details the significant contributions international students can make to the field of counseling in the United States and abroad.

The sixth article by Trey Fitch, Rachel Mills, and Jennifer Marshall, studies veterans in a VA Hospital with a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) diagnosis and explores several themes in group work with these patients. Each patient group was facilitated by a new counselor or counselors-in-training. Ten group themes were found. A model for trauma treatment, *Seeking Safety*, is utilized for the patients with PTSD in this study.

The depth and breadth of these articles contributes to the field of counseling in varied ways. We believe that the articles in this edition of the journal have significant potential to inform our work with clients and students as well as provide readers with promising opportunities to delve into areas which broaden their own professional knowledge base.

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Journal of Counseling in Illinois (JCI) Sections and Guidelines for Authors

The Journal of Counseling in Illinois is dedicated to increasing the quality and quantity of professional dialog among Illinois counselors by publishing articles concerned with contemporary issues for mental health professionals.

Sections:

**Research:** These manuscripts focus on qualitative and quantitative research studies that are useful to counseling practice. Studies may be small in nature and can include preliminary findings that will lead to larger research projects. These manuscripts may include program evaluation studies. However, all studies must adhere to rigorous data analysis standards. In these manuscripts, the review of the literature provides the context and need for the study, logically leading to the purpose and research questions. The methodology includes a full description of the participants, variables and instruments used to measure them, data analyses, and results. Authors are expected to discuss the clinical significance of the results.

**Practice:** These manuscripts focus on innovative approaches and techniques, counseling programs, ethical issues, and training and supervision practices. They are grounded in counseling or educational theory and empirical knowledge. Some evidence of effectiveness in practice is provided. The goal of this section is to offer ideas and techniques for immediate application to practice.

**Professional Exchange:** These manuscripts are designed to provide readers with information about significant current issues and/or trends in the counseling field. These manuscripts may be reviews of the literature and/or position papers. Relevant areas include diversity, accreditation, licensure, certification, counselor function, needs of special client populations, supervision issues, issues effecting Illinois counselors, issues effecting divisions, regions, or chapters, and other timely topics.

**Professional Dialogue:** These manuscripts are written to stimulate dialogue, discussion, and debate related to critical issues of interest to the JCI readership. Initial submissions will include a well-reasoned, thought-provoking manuscript on a topic of interest and the names of two potential contributors who will respond/react to the concepts in the original manuscript.

**Media Reviews:** These manuscripts are written to review current media relevant to mental health professionals. Each review must include information about how the reader may access the media and background of author relevant to materials being reviewed. Authors may submit reviews on media they have written or developed themselves.

Reviews must be informational and scholarly in nature and cannot be advertisements for the media.
**Manuscript Preparation:** All manuscripts should be prepared according to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th ed.). Authors should consult the APA Publication Manual for guidelines regarding the format of the manuscript, abstract, citations and references, tables and figures, and other matters of editorial style. Tables and figures should be used only when essential. No more than three tables and two figures with each manuscript will be accepted. Figures (graphs, illustrations, line drawings) must be supplied as camera-ready art (glossies prepared by commercial artists) whenever possible. If electronic artwork is supplied, it must be a minimum resolution of 600 dots per inch (dpi) up to 1,200 dpi. Halftone line screens should be a minimum of 300 dpi. JPEG or PDF files are preferred. (See APA Publication Manual, pp. 150–167 for further details on figure preparation.) Figure captions are to be on an attached page, as required by APA style. JCI does not publish footnotes. Instead, incorporate any footnotes into the text or include an endnote.

Authors must also carefully follow APA Publication Manual guidelines for nondiscriminatory language regarding gender, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic identity, disabilities, and age. Lengthy quotations (generally 500 cumulative words or more from one source) require written permission from the copyright holder for reproduction, as do reproductions or adaptations of tables and figures. It is the author’s responsibility to secure such permission, and a copy of the publisher’s written permission must be provided to the Editor immediately upon acceptance for publication.

**Manuscript Length Limitations:** Each manuscript submission is limited to no more than three tables and two figures. In total, manuscripts submitted to the Research section must not exceed 20 pages, including references. Manuscripts submitted to the Practice, Professional Exchange and Professional Dialogue are not to exceed 15 pages. Media review manuscripts are not to exceed 10 pages.

Manuscript titles are limited to 80 characters. Abstracts are limited to 75 words. Any submissions that do not adhere to length limitations may be returned without review.

**JCI Editorial Review:** Manuscripts are reviewed by at least two editorial board members. Manuscripts typically undergo revision before final acceptance. The Editors make final decisions regarding publication.

JCI has a completely electronic manuscript submission and review process. Electronically submit as attachments one copy of the manuscript with authors’ names and affiliations on the cover sheet, along with a letter briefly describing the topic of the manuscript and identifying the appropriate JCI section to oliveke@quincy.edu and/or helmka@lewis.edu. The subject line of the e-mail message must state “JCI: manuscript submission.”

JCI expects authors to follow the ACA Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014) regarding publication, including authorship, concurrent submission to only one publication, and informed consent for
research participants, and piecemeal publication of research data. In a cover letter, authors should include statements indicating that they have complied with specified ACA ethical standards relevant to their manuscript.
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A Career Exploration and Decision-Making
Psychoeducational Group: Supporting Undergraduate Students and Training Graduate Students

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Abstract

The article describes a semi-structured 14-session psychoeducational career group, offered as a 2-credit, half-semester course facilitated by masters-level group counselors-in-training. The group exposes a culturally diverse undergraduate student population to developmentally-relevant career concepts, tools, and activities. This approach emphasizes group process and cultural awareness for group member career learning. This article describes a group work approach to career decision-making and exploration for undergraduates, group career activities, experiential group exercises, the group course format, goals, and an outline of sessions. Additionally, descriptive data on the undergraduate students and course evaluations are presented, as well as areas for future research.

Over the past 20 years, in response to research and theory, group work for career exploration and decision-making has evolved to reflect changes in the field of career counseling (e.g., Clark, Severy & Sawyer, 2004; Sullivan & Mahalik, 2000; Symes, 1998; Whiston, Brecheisen & Stephens, 2003). While career counseling has traditionally been conducted using an individual format (Dagely, 1999), the literature suggests a long history of group work for career and vocational exploration (Kivlinghan, 1990; Proehl, 1995). In career texts, groups are typically described as alternatives to individual counseling and an efficient means of service delivery to multiple clients (e.g., Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009; Patton & McMahon, 1999; Sharf, 2009). Most group approaches described in the literature are brief, highly-structured instructional or workshop models focused on content delivery. A small body of literature (Pyle, 2000; Santos, 2004; Symes, 1998), however, indicates career group work is an effective modality and suggests that the nature of group work, in which the group process enhances members learning, enriches the career exploration and decision-making processes. As career counseling has evolved from reliance on a problem-solving and trait-and-factor approaches to include consideration of the multiple internal and career-external influences on the individual (Duffy & Dik, 2009), group work seems an excellent fit to explore internal and external career influences. What has yet to be articulated is a generalized group work approach that employs group processes, career education, and group work theory in service to the career discovery process.
This article presents a semi-structured psychoeducational career group that exposes a culturally diverse undergraduate student population to developmentally-relevant career concepts, tools, and activities. This approach emphasizes group process and cultural awareness for group members’ career-learning. Brief descriptions of career-group literature and career concepts are presented, followed by a description of the career-group course. The course and group format, goals and overview of group career activities, experiential exercises, and an outline of sessions are included. Group course evaluations and directions for future research are included.

Structure and Process in Career Groups

While modest in scope, existing literature provides support for group work as an effectual modality for career counseling. Career groups have been found to be as effective as individual career counseling (Oliver & Spokane, 1998) approaches to increasing women’s career self-efficacy, vocational exploration and commitment (Sullivan & Mahalik, 2000), and decreasing career indecision for undergraduate students (Brusoski, Goldin, Gallagher & Moore, 1993). Most research on the effectiveness of career groups has been on structured groups (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009). Research on process-oriented career group work, a more recent development, is sparse. Structured career groups are more effective than non-structured career groups, perhaps because activities are consistently implemented, thus providing a stable method of service delivery (Brusoski, et al., 1993; Whiston, Brecheisen, & Stephens, 2003). However, in a critique of highly structured, non-process-oriented career groups, Dagley (1990) argues such interventions do not allow for the type of group member interaction and subsequent group-level therapeutic factors that promote change in the individual.

More recent career group work indicates an increased attention to group process (Pyle, 2000; Santos, 2004; Symes, 1998). Sullivan and Mahalik (2000) theorize that a process orientation in a women’s career group encouraged members to be more actively involved in their career development, resulting in sustained gains in treatment outcomes. In one of the few studies on process in career groups, Kivlinghan’s (1990) analysis of nearly 40 years of career group research determined whether, and the extent to which, group process factors (Bloch & Crouch, 1985) were significant to career group interventions. The analysis indicated the most relevant group factors were guidance (i.e., types of information, delivery, by whom, and in what sequence), self-disclosure (i.e., clients sharing personal information), learning through interpersonal action (i.e., member-to-member interactions) and self-understanding (i.e., participants learning something important or new about themselves) to assist clients in career exploration and decision-making.

Other authors have noted the importance of affective variables to career processes and argue that career exploration and decision-making are enhanced when therapeutic factors like catharsis, interpersonal effectiveness, altruism and instillation of hope are present in career groups (Santos, 2004; Symes, 1998.) The presence of these factors gives group members emotional relief from anxiety, promotes self-awareness, and gives group members a sense of hope for their career-related future. In contrast to more structured approaches to career group work, Santos (2004) described the importance of emotionally charged discussions to career group dynamics, including increasing interaction and cohesion among members. Pyle (2000) argues that effective career counseling helps individuals address affect-laden issues of identity while also helping them access information related to career exploration and choice. The use of groups for career counseling has the potential to mitigate the frequently intimidating prospect of
career exploration and decision-making through the group experience. Career groups, like all groups, give members the opportunity to practice social skills, receive feedback, learn new information about themselves and others, give and receive social and emotional support, and learn from others (Bloch & Crouch, 1985; Dagley, 1990; Kivlinghan’s, 1990; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). The presence of group process factors, such as catharsis, altruism, and instillation of hope increases the efficacy of group work and is therefore likely to increase successful outcomes in career groups (Kivlinghan, 1990). Therefore, the processes inherent in group work enhance the processes of career counseling.

**Traditional and Contemporary Approaches in Career Groups**

Traditional approaches in career exploration are logical, systemic and information-driven, structured, and focused on content delivery over group process (Dagley, 1999). Historically, a ‘trait-and-factor’ approach (i.e., matching relevant work characteristics of abilities, interests, and values with information regarding job activities, demands, and rewards) to career counseling has been the dominant service delivery model. Criticism of this approach is due to oversimplifying career issues and, by extension, career counseling (Patton & McMahon, 1999). Over the past 3 decades, however, career theory has evolved to include more complex conceptualizations of the career exploration process wherein internal and external forces, life roles, relationships, and culture, among many other factors, influence the career decision-making process throughout the lifespan (Hansen, 2003; Sharf, 2009). Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2009) illustrate this complex conceptualization of career exploration process in their advocacy for a counseling-based approach in which career counselors attend to the therapeutic relationship and “empower clients to articulate their experiences, clarify their self-concepts, and construct their own lives” (p.244). There is some evidence that career group work has responded to this complexity as group workers incorporate activities and approaches drawn from other therapeutic modalities such as family counseling (Malott & Magnuson, 2004) and narrative therapy (Clark, et al., 2004). A review of career workshop and instructional course literature reveals similar complex conceptualizations (e.g. Gold, Kivlighan, Kerr &Kramer, 1993; Reese & Miller, 2006; Scott & Ciani, 2008).

While no existing career model identifies as most appropriate for use with groups, group work seems particularly suited to career exploration for a myriad of reasons. Contemporary career approaches, broadly speaking, identify influential career factors: life and family roles, cultural and social messages, and relational dynamics. The inherent interpersonal learning of semi-structured career decision-making and exploration groups group makes them an ideal milieu within which to engage in such discovery. A group context in which therapeutic factors such as reality testing and intellectualization, (Corsini & Rosenberg, 1955), interpersonal learning, universality and group cohesiveness (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005), among others, are present may provide degrees of support and learning unavailable in individual career counseling. In sum, while groups have long been used for career counseling, more contemporary perspectives on the career exploration process, in which a complex interplay among multiple internal and external factors affect career development, indicate the characteristic strengths of group work make it a good fit for career exploration and decision-making.
Course Description and Rationale

In the following section, the authors describe a 14-session psychoeducational group for undergraduates enrolled in a career decision-making course. The goals of the course are to increase career related knowledge and the world of work; increase self and career awareness skills, abilities, and values; develop career decision-making and job seeking skills; and increase insight into environmental supports and challenges. Most students enrolled in the course identified as freshman or sophomore and master’s-level graduate students in a CACREP accredited program facilitated the course in a psychoeducational group format. This model balances career education, content, experiential group activities, and process approaches. Group experiential activities in the course draw from trait-and-factor, life-span development, social cognitive career theory, and multicultural theory to help meet the needs of students at different phases of the career decision-making and exploration process, while also using a more complex conceptualization of career decision-making as advocated for by Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2009). The emphasis of the course is on career content, group process, and member interaction to increase career knowledge, skill, and self-awareness. This approach is designed to serve the spectrum of career needs of college students. Undergraduate students experiencing career indecision need world-of-work information and information on skills and abilities to make academic and career decisions (Amundson, Harris-Bowlsbey & Niles, 2009; Pyle, 2000). In addition to world-of-work information, students experiencing career indecisiveness due to intra-psychic issues, such as family of origin messages, prejudice and discrimination, and fear could benefit from counseling-type career interventions.

The structure, in which a psychoeducational group model is used as the whole of an undergraduate career course, is somewhat unusual in career counseling, counselor education, and group training. For counselor educators and group workers considering implementing a multi-level instructional and training model within an academic setting, course structure and learning objectives are described, and an overview of group session content and activities, supported by a session-by-session outline is included. Finally, program evaluation and directions for future research are presented.

An Undergraduate Career Decision-Making Group

For over 2 decades, the exploration and decision-making career group course has been offered through a CACREP-accredited counselor education program situated in a large, rural Midwestern university. The course exposes three academic levels of students to career counseling and group work: undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral. Using a psychoeducational group format, the course provides undergraduate students with an alternative educational experience for academic and career exploration, master’s-level counseling students with advanced training in group facilitation and career counseling, and doctoral students with teaching and supervision experience. The undergraduate course has been designed as the core training experience of counselors-in-training and allows group students to work directly with a low-risk population, apply career counseling theory concepts and practice interventions in a group setting, while simultaneously developing group facilitation skills under supervision. Although the undergraduate course has been under the direction of several counselor education faculty members over the years, the concept, purpose and structure of the career group course have remained stable as the course content, instructional methods, and group work approaches have
evolved to reflect changes in the fields of group, career, and counselor education. In its current incarnation, the career group emphasizes an increased use of process approaches within the psychoeducational group framework, and members’ awareness of social and cultural influences on career development.

**Career Group Course Purpose**

The course is promoted in the university catalog for undergraduate advisement as a course specifically targeted at the undecided/deciding student (Counselors’ Advisement Catalog 2014-2015, Southern Illinois University Carbondale). It is designed to aid undergraduate students in academic and career exploration development. Goals of the course are to (a) increase knowledge of career resources and the world of work, (a) increase awareness of career-related skills, abilities, and values, (c) develop career decision-making and job seeking skills, and (d) increase insight into environmental supports and challenges influencing academics and career. A review of section enrollment records for the 2009-2010 academic year indicates that 127 students enrolled in 13 sections, with an average enrollment of 10 students per section. The majority (43) declared sophomore standing, while 34 were freshman, 27 were seniors, and 16 were in their junior year. Seventy-seven of the students declared a major field of study and 50 were undeclared at enrollment.

The course is a 2-credit mid-semester course during both the fall and spring semesters. Mid-semester courses are common at this university, offering students the opportunity to pick up additional credits to meet general education requirements from the university's core curriculum. The mid-semester scheduling also attracts students who may be under-performing in a full-semester course. Anecdotal reports from undergraduate academic advisors suggest that a portion of students who enroll in the career group course do so in an attempt to salvage a grade point average threatened by a failing grade in another course.

For many undergraduate students, the small class size is an unusual, and usually positive, academic experience. On course evaluations, group members rate their agreement on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). In a recent semester, 46 of 53 students enrolled in 5 career group course sections completed the evaluation and mean scores were calculated (See Table 1). Students overwhelming agreed that they enjoyed the course (4.75), the class was a good learning experience (4.72), and that they would take another class taught in the same way (4.24). Additionally, students reported that the class helped clarify career goals (4.54) and that learning was enhanced by the group format of the class (4.33). The average undergraduate class size at this university is 47 students (Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2009), so the typical undergraduate rarely experiences the peer and instructor interaction, group discussion, or feedback available in the small groups. Students earn points for completed assignments and attendance toward a final grade, but not graded on group participation. The intention of the career group course is to provide undergraduates with a positive and alternative learning experience, and group leaders provide multiple opportunities for earning extra credit throughout a semester.

**Career Group Course Design**

Over the course of the seven-week session, career group classes meet for 1 hour and 50 minutes twice a week for 14 sessions. To meet enrollment demands, section enrollment is 13
students. However, in keeping with best practices for group size (Corey & Corey, 2008), efforts are made to keep group size between 8 and 10 students. Because the course is open to all undergraduates, it is not possible to follow best practices for member screening (Corey & Corey, 2008) prior to the start of the groups. Group facilitators provide referrals for campus support services, including counseling, when necessary.

Master’s-level counseling students in an advanced practicum facilitate the group sections as solo group leaders or in co-leader pairs. Prior to the advanced practicum, counseling students complete a 3-credit hour career counseling course and a 3-credit hour course in group theory and practice. Group leaders must videotape all sessions in accordance with CACREP practicum standards (2009) so formal informed consent procedures, including recording permissions, are conducted as part of course orientation, and with all entering class members.

Career Group Content

Group facilitators follow a manual of sequential session outlines detailing didactic instruction, experiential activities, and processing questions. Pre-determined questions for each activity and session are included on session outlines to help group leaders attend to process (DeLucia-Waack, 2005; Furr, 2000). Sessions are organized around a series of orienting ideas or themes that guide leaders and group members in career exploration (Blustein, 1997; see Table 3). Orienting themes promote career self-awareness and are presented as a series of self-reflective questions: (a) Who are you?, (b) What do you like to do?, (c) What are your strengths?, (d) What’s important to you?, (e) What are your supports and challenges?, (f) What’s in your future?

Group session themes summarize key components of career decision-making and exploration, including occupational interests, skills, abilities, values, social and cultural influences, and planning and decision-making behaviors. While leaders must present all career content, they are encouraged to adjust the rate at which they cover career material, taking into consideration a group’s needs and development. To further accommodate a particular group’s progress through the pre-established content and allow group leaders to develop session content in response to group interest and needs, three of the latter sessions are open sessions.

Because experiential exercises and activities are, “the driving force in effective structured groups” (Furr, 2000, p. 38) a variety of activities are used to enhance member learning and engagement with career content. The sequencing of activities is based on course learning goals, group development (Tuckman & Jenson, 1977), and intensity (Jones & Robins, 2000). Intensity is the degree to which an activity evokes anxiety or affective sharing paired, such as requiring more member self-disclosure, and occurs later in the group course to allow for the development of a supportive group environment. Research supports the use career interventions including written exercises and between-session research on world of work information (Brown, Ryan Crane, Brecheisen, Castelino, Budisin, Miller, & Edens, 2002) as these have been associated with positive career-choice outcomes.

In the first five sessions of the career group, members are introduced to foundational career concepts through several well-known career instruments. The assessments aid members in beginning the process of career self-exploration and reinforce the first three group session themes (i.e., Who are you?, What do you like to do?, and What are your strengths?). The Keirsey Temperament Sorter –II (Keirsey, 1998), the Career Decision Difficulties Questionnaire (Gati, Krausz & Osipow, 1996), the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Evaluation-Short Form (CDSE-SF; Betz, Klein &Taylor, 1996), an interest profiler (Lewis & Rivkin, 1999) and a skills profiler
(http://www.careerinfonet.net) are used. The CDSE-SF is administered as a paper-and-pencil assessment in the first or second session and provides group leaders with a base-line assessment of members’ self-efficacy for basic career decision-making behaviors. Group leaders review members’ results to facilitate group discussion about perceived self-efficacy and to develop individual and group learning goals. All other instruments are completed on-line; students print out their results for discussion and process in group. Time constraints preclude individual consultations of assessment results so leaders conduct group interpretations and facilitate group member discussion for each assessment. Individual consultation time is offered to group members outside of group. See Table 1 for additional descriptions of the questionnaires used in the career decision-making group class. The purpose of the questionnaires and assessments are to help group members start a process of self-exploration and serve as a basis for discussion and process in the group.

Table 1

*Description of Questionnaire/Assessment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire/Assessment</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
<th>Description and Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keirsey Temperament Sorter-II</td>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Personality questionnaire to help people better understand themselves and others; closely associated with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Decision Difficulties Questionnaire-Short Form</td>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Locate the specific focuses of the client's career-decision making difficulties (e.g., lack of motivation, indecisiveness, dysfunctional beliefs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Decision Self-Efficacy Evaluation-Short Form</td>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Measures individual degree of belief of successfully completing tasks necessary to make significant career decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Profiler: O*Net ®</td>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>Helps individuals identify their work-related interests and translates these interests into occupations that closely fit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills Profiler: America’s Career InfoNet</td>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Helps to create a list of client skills and match the skills to job types that use those skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Early in the class, one activity asks each student to pair up and find a partner for research on different careers. This activity helps members develop career research skills, integrate assessment results, and form a working relationship with another member. Over several sessions, group members meet with a partner with whom they share career information. Members use their partner’s assessment results, information gleaned from interviews conducted in session, and group experiential exercises to research possible careers for each other. For example, in Session 4, group leaders facilitate an interactive game to introduce group members to Holland’s (1997) RIASEC typology for career interests, an experiential exercise that reinforces the assigned homework for that session. At the conclusion of the partner project, members present the results of their partner’s research in group using Occupational Fact Sheets and a flow chart outlining possible steps toward a selected career for their partner. Because it is assigned early in the group course, the activity serves as a group development strategy to forge interconnections among members (Conyne, Crowell & Newmeyer, 2008) and increase group cohesion and altruism (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) among members. However, when one partner appears less invested in the project or the course as a whole, it is recommended that group leaders address it directly and be prepared to make alternative arrangements if one partner fails to complete the assignment.

Other assessment measures include the use of brief worksheet exercises on time management and prioritization and group experiential exercises like the Values Auction (Walters & Lumsden, 2000) and Procrastination Destination which help members identify short-term and long-term goals, assess the allocation of time and effort toward these goals, and explore the frequent gaps between professed priorities and actual behaviors. Activities in Session 7 and 8 are designed to help group members increase awareness of internal and external factors influencing their academic and career decision-making. The Occupational Family Tree (Gibson, 2008), Fallout Shelter (Arnold, 2010) and the Stereotypes and Discrimination discussion require more self-disclosure in group. By this point, most groups have developed a level of cohesiveness and comfort, and members are willing to share their thoughts and feelings in group. The Occupational Family Tree exercise can evoke strong emotional reactions in members as they reflect on family history and, often, their own status as first-generation college students. The Fallout Shelter exercise exposes members’ unacknowledged assumptions about gender and the subsequent discussion of members’ experiences of discrimination is usually challenging and productive. Throughout these exercises, members identify barriers to career or academic success and strategize to prevent or confront future barriers (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 2002). For the final project, a Career Flow Chart, that asks members to develop and present a graphic depiction of the sequential steps needed to achieve a specific academic or career goal. The presentation includes a reflective process on potential barriers to success and an opportunity to seek feedback from group members and group leader. A complete outline of the course, including timing of questionnaires to sessions, is presented in Table 3.

In the final third of the career group course, group members and leaders use the agenda-free sessions to plan learning units focused on career skill development. Guest speakers, résumé clinics, mock interviews, and group interviews are utilized. Group leaders report high investment and energy from members for these group-defined sessions and may encourage member involvement by awarding extra credit for students who attend a mock interview session in appropriate business attire, for instance. Leaders often plan for members to become familiar with
campus-based career resources by scheduling guest speakers to present on topics of interest or planning a ‘field trip’ to the university’s career services center.

**Program Evaluation and Future Directions**

The career group course gives undergraduates a unique educational experience by attending to their career concerns in a supportive group environment. While anecdotal evidence from students, academic advisors, and faculty suggests the course is useful, empirical research is needed. On course evaluations, group members rate their agreement on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) to 14 statements addressing general, personal and specific learning goals, group course format, group leaders, and students’ responsibility for learning and provide a written response. In a recent semester, 46 of 53 students enrolled in 5 career group course sections completed the evaluation and mean scores were calculated (See Table 2). Highest mean scores were for the following statements: The instructor showed an interest in the students (4.80), I enjoyed this class (4.78), and the instructor cared about our learning (4.78). Written responses to the sentence stem “The most important thing I learned from this class was” were categorized into three themes; concrete skills, career action plans, and interpersonal awareness. Concrete career-related skills included resume and cover letter writing, interviewing, and decision-making skills. All members reported having developed career action plans and clarified career goals. Interpersonal learning statements indicated members learned “how to express myself to other I don’t know,” “It is ok to share a piece of yourself with others and open up,” “that I am not alone in my struggle to figure out what to do in my future,” and “how to be a better person and improve my confidence.” Several statements reflected more than one theme. Examples are “Be strong, be yourself, and get to where you want to be,” “There are jobs that fit my personality and skills,” and “What I want in a career. I also learned more about my values, goals, morals, strengths and skills.”

Multiple avenues exist for future research on career group work. While self-efficacy has been one of the most researched constructs in the career field (Betz, 2007), there has been little research on student self-efficacy and career group work. While there exists a small body of research investigating undergraduate career courses (Gold, Kivlighan, Kerr & Kramer, 1993) and the effects of such courses on career decision-making and self-efficacy (Reese & Miller, 2006; Scott & Ciani, 2008), there is little investigation into career groups. With few exceptions (e.g. Kivlighan, 1990; Sullivan & Mahalik, 2000), there has been little investigation into the group processes impacting career groups, nor has there been any systematic investigation into diversity effects in career groups.

In this article, we have described a psychoeducational career group designed as an undergraduate course aimed at aiding students’ career exploration and decision-making. By using a semi-structured format that strives to balance content delivery and group process, group members are introduced to traditional and contemporary career activities, and are engaged in group discussion and experiential learning. This approach pays particular attention to strategies to increase career related knowledge and the world of work; self and career awareness, career decision-making and job seeking skills; and insight into environmental supports and challenges of undergraduate students, while providing a rich academic experience for counselors-in-training in psychoeducational group facilitation and career counseling. We have attempted to add to the literature on career groups by describing both the career group and its structure within an undergraduate education setting. Future research could focus on student learning outcomes on
career exploration and the decision-making process, or other variables that impact these processes. For example, a study could examine the effectiveness of a career group versus individual career counseling by having a control group, related to decision-making and exploration. Future research can focus on specific activities (e.g., skills and interest profilers, mock interviews, etc.) relate to changes in career decision-making. Additional research is necessary to understand the role of group process in career exploration and decision-making.

References


Counselors’ Advisement Catalog, 2010-2011, Southern Illinois University.


**Table 2**

*Career Group Student Evaluation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I enjoyed this class.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>.417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The class was a good learning experience.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>.502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I would take another class taught in the same way.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>1.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. This class helped me clarify my career goals.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>.657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. This class was a waste of time.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.46*</td>
<td>.780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I learned more about myself through this class.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>.736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. This class helped me clarify my academic goals.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>.688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The instructor was enthusiastic about the subject.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>.455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The instructor showed an interest in the students.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>.401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The instructor cared about our learning.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>.417</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. This class was helpful.  & 46 & 4 & 5 & 4.67 & .474 \\
12. My learning was enhanced by the group format of this class. & 45 & 3 & 5 & 4.33 & .739 \\
13. This class was more difficult than other classes I have taken. & 45 & 1 & 5 & 1.56* & .893 \\
14. I put in the effort necessary to earn a good grade in this class. & 46 & 2 & 5 & 4.48 & .888 \\

*Note. Reverse score (*)

Table 3

Weekly Session Schedule for Career Decision-Making Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Learning Objectives</th>
<th>Tasks/Activities</th>
<th>Homework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Who are you?”</td>
<td>Understand course purpose &amp; goals</td>
<td>Informed consent</td>
<td>No homework is assigned in the first session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Become comfortable with the group experience</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Establish group guidelines</td>
<td>Fantasy Career; Hopes &amp; Concerns; CDSE-SF (Betz &amp; Taylor, 2001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Group guidelines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Who are you?”</td>
<td>Integrate new members</td>
<td>Introduction of new members</td>
<td>Complete Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey, 1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identify personal, work values</td>
<td>Revisiting group guidelines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Giving &amp; receiving feedback</td>
<td>Best/Worst Jobs (Minor, 2005)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Become familiar with online resources</td>
<td>How to give &amp; get feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intro to online resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“What do you like to do?”</td>
<td>Understand similarities/differences in personality types</td>
<td>Discussion and interpretation of Keirsey Temperament Sorter</td>
<td>Complete Interest Profiler (Lewis &amp; Rivkin, 1999) and CDDQ (Gati, Krausz &amp; Osipow, 1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Insight into priorities for current and desired lifestyle</td>
<td>Time Pie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Apply personal characteristics and work values to career choice</td>
<td>Interview partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“What do you like to do?”</td>
<td>Understanding how interests relate to career choice</td>
<td>Discussion and interpretation of Interest Profiler &amp; CDDQ</td>
<td>Complete Work Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Exploration and understanding of the Holland</td>
<td>Cruise Game</td>
<td>Research two careers for partner; one career for self based on collected data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Practice feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>“What are your strengths?”</td>
<td>Evaluate skills and abilities for career options</td>
<td>Discussion and interpretation of Work Assessment</td>
<td>Complete Skills Assessment (<a href="http://www.careerinfonet.net">www.careerinfonet.net</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Form action plan for finding career</td>
<td>Brainstorming skills and abilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative assessment w/ partner</td>
<td>Present career research to partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Create a flowchart for partner’s career</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>“What is important to you?”</td>
<td>Understand results of Skills Assessment</td>
<td>Interpretation of the Skills Assessment</td>
<td>No homework is assigned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Apply skills to career choice</td>
<td>Values Auction (Walters &amp; Lumsden, 2000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understand how values influence personal choices</td>
<td>Lifestyle Triangle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>“What are you supports and challenges?”</td>
<td>Identify external factors on career choices</td>
<td>Occupational Family Tree (Gibson, 2008)</td>
<td>No homework is assigned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understand how procrastination affects academic and career process</td>
<td>Destination Procrastination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>“What are your supports and challenges?”</td>
<td>Understand how stereotypes influence career choice</td>
<td>Fallout Shelter (Arnold, 2010)</td>
<td>Complete occupational fact sheet on career choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increase awareness of stereotyping and discrimination in workplace</td>
<td>Stereotypes and Discrimination discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>“What is in your future?”</td>
<td>Members understand career-specific information gained from career research on Occupational Fact Sheets</td>
<td>Presentation of Occupational Fact Sheets</td>
<td>No homework is assigned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion and planning open sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Sessions developed by group leader(s) based interests and needs. May be used for ‘catch-up’ or additional content</td>
<td>TBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Sessions developed by group leader(s) based interests and needs. May be used for ‘catch-up’ or additional content</td>
<td>TBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>“What is in your future?”</td>
<td>Members will understand the job interview process</td>
<td>Mock Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understand Flow Chart assignment &amp; presentations</td>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion of requirements for Flow Chart Presentations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Flow Charts due next session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>“What is in your future?”</td>
<td>Identify specific career goals and plan steps to reach goals</td>
<td>Presentation of Flow Charts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understand requirements for Final Project Essay</td>
<td>Discussion of requirements for the Final Project Essay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Final Project Essays due next session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>“Saying good-bye.”</td>
<td>Evaluate current career goals and formulate a plan action</td>
<td>Presentation of Final Project Essays</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engage in termination activities</td>
<td>Termination activity to be decided by group leader(s), group members, or both.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluate group participation and group experience</td>
<td>Evaluations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No homework is assigned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Assessment of School Counselor Supervision in Illinois

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Charles E. Myers
Eastern Kentucky University

Abstract

Due to inconsistent training of clinical counseling supervisors in the school setting, supervision models developed for school counselors are often not applied and as a result, the benefits of supervision for school counselors are not fully realized. This research surveyed school counselor supervisors in Illinois to learn about the challenges of providing supervision in schools, conditions necessary for supervision, and recommendations for preferred supervision training modalities.

The increasing complexity of mental health issues, socioeconomic stressors, family dysfunction, and large caseloads threatens the professional identity of school counselors. These cases often include adolescent depression, suicidal ideation, teen pregnancy, substance use, societal pressures, anxiety, and social skill development (Black, Bailey, & Bergin, 2011; Borders & Drury, 1992; Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Page, Pietrzak, & Sutton, 2001). Even when parents follow through with counseling referrals, school counselors may be called upon to support treatment goals, manage ongoing behavioral issues, monitor effects of psychotropic medication, or to provide mental health counseling if community-based services are not available (Black et al., 2011; Sutton & Page, 1994). The dynamic of needing to address complex mental health issues without supervision and support can lead to counselors feeling overworked, alone, burnt out, and unhappy with their roles resulting in a decrease in effectiveness (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Herlihy, Gray, & McCollum, 2002).

Counselors have multi-faceted roles fashioned by an assortment of cognitive, emotional, behavioral, social, and situational factors. School administrators often serve in the role of providing supervision for counselors and may be ill equipped to offer supervision with fidelity because they lack training in counseling (Borders & Usher, 1992). Herlihy et al. (2002) wrote, “supervision can be an effective means of assisting school counselors to maintain and enhance their competence. . . . mitigate[ing] against stress and burnout” (p. 55). A lack of supervision for school counselors has been a consistent theme in the literature. Barret and Schmidt (1986) wrote, school “counselors often are the sole mental health professionals able to assist such students, yet find themselves without the support of regular supervision” (p. 51). Even as far back as the 1970s, Boyd and Walter (1975) identified the lack of supervision for school counselors by comparing the school counselor to a cactus, saying that, by necessity, both must grow and thrive with the minimal amount of “nutrients” (p. 103). Bultsma (2012) also suggested that not
requiring supervision for school counselors may result in the profession not fulfilling its role to mentor new counselors.

The reason clinical supervision has been a neglected issue in school counseling may be a perception that school counselors do not have the same level of need for supervision as clinical mental health counselors do (Herlihy et al., 2002). Disparity in counselor roles and an unclear professional identity significantly contribute to the lack of significance placed on clinical supervision for school counselors. Duties that school counselors perform often are not clearly associated with school counseling work. As a result, many school counselors see their skills as adequate because few of their daily tasks involve clinical work. Another possible reason for the lack of focus on supervision for is that school counselors who are not accustomed to having their work examined may be unaware of the benefits of supervision (Borders & Usher, 1992). Barret and Schmidt (1986) suggested that the lack of supervision could be a reason why principals assign non-counseling duties to counselors. School counselors may also view supervision as an additional responsibility, for which there is no time in their day for supervision meetings (Herlihy et al., 2002).

“Within the counseling profession there is growing consensus that supervision of counselors by counselors is important” (Liles & Wagner, 2010, p. 4). Understanding how this finding may apply to school counselors may provide opportunities to advocate for increased availability of trained school counseling supervisors. Studer and Oberman (2006) identified that it also important that trained school counseling supervisors are also well versed in the American School Counseling (ASCA) National Model in order to align supervisory practices in the same framework school counselors experienced in graduate school. However, even though school counselors may have received training in the ASCA National model, few if any master’s students received any supervision training in their graduate program (Liles & Wagner, 2010). Identifying this connecting thread between how school counselors are trained, how supervision is conceptualized in the school setting, and the readiness level of supervisees to engage in the supervision relationship, is an essential step in understanding the factors contributing to successful supervision for school counselors.

In the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) 2016 CACREP Standards, Section 3.P., internship site supervisors are required to have:

(1) a minimum of a master’s degree, preferably in counseling, or a related profession; (2) relevant certifications and/or licenses; (3) a minimum of two years of pertinent professional experience in the specialty area in which the student is enrolled; (4) knowledge of the program’s expectations, requirements, and evaluation procedures for students; and (5) relevant training in counseling supervision. (CACREP, 2016, p. 13)

CACREP has responded to the call made by Liles and Wagner for counselor education programs needing to design and deliver professional development for site supervisors to increase supervision effectiveness, foster networking and information, and strengthen partnerships between colleges and supervision sites (Liles & Wagner, 2010). Counselor education programs need to continue strengthening relationships with internship sites to ensure effective supervision experiences for graduate counseling students are realized. Only when counselor education programs and counseling training sites work in consort for the benefit of supervisees will the CACREP standards be implemented with fidelity.
School Counselors Perceptions of Supervision

The literature on school counselor supervision is limited, consisting mostly of state-level surveys. Two national surveys and one state survey provide a lens to examine the crisis of school counselor supervision. Page et al. (2001) surveyed practicing school counselors (n = 267). Survey analysis found that only 13% of school counselors were currently receiving individual clinical supervision and only 10% were receiving group clinical supervision. Twenty-nine percent of survey respondents reported receiving peer supervision weekly. The survey results causing the greatest need for further study found that 57% of counselors wanted to receive clinical supervision but 33% felt that they had no need for clinical supervision. A similar survey (Sutton & Page, 1994) given to school counselors in Maine (n = 493) found 63% of counselors surveyed desired supervision and rated supervision goals as “somewhat to most important” yet, only 20% were receiving supervision. Sutton and Page (1994) suggested that the lack of involvement in supervision by school counselors indicates confusion in an evolving profession. Page et al. 2001 survey identified the same two goals as the Maine study. Sutton and Page (1994) also found that “taking appropriate action with client problems” and “developing skills and techniques” (p. 36) were essential supervision goals for school counselors. Page et al. identified factors from the survey that seemed to relate conceptually to the focus of Bernard’s (1997) Discrimination Model (DM). The DM identified three roles for supervisors including teacher, consultant, and counselor. At the core of the model is the need for supervisor’s to be intentional in the role they are using to meet specific supervisee needs. Based on these results, survey authors recommended the use of the DM for the supervision of school counselors due to the supervisor roles identified in the DM would easily transfer to the school supervision setting. Page et al. (2001) recommended training a pool of supervisors to bridge the gap for school counselors seeking supervision.

Studer and Oberman (2006) used the School Counselor Supervision Questionnaire (n = 73) to survey practicing school counselors who were American School Counselor Association (ASCA) members from the Southern region. Studer and Oberman’s focus differed from the Page et al. (2001) survey in that they focused on the training students receive in supervision as outlined in the ASCA National Model (Bowers & Hatch, 2005). The majority of respondents indicated that they had not received any training in supervision even though 49% of the survey respondents reported using the ASCA National Model in their school when working as a counseling intern.

As a follow-up to these earlier studies, Perera-Diltz and Mason (2012) conducted a national survey (n=1557) to assess how supervision for counselors was being applied in schools. Overall, they found that the number of school counselors providing supervision has increased in comparison to the Page et al. (2001) study. They also found that the number of school counselors receiving supervision has also increased. Blakely (2009) investigated supervision effectiveness and supervisory activities using the ASCA model, which was not a realized model in earlier studies. Blakely (2009) found that there was not a significant difference between Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) counselors and non-RAMP counselors in supervisory readiness, although RAMP counselors were much more effective in implementing supervisory activities. The American School Counseling Association (ASCA, 2016) Ethical Standards for School Counselors cites only one reference for the supervision of school counselors. Section D offers guidelines for the supervision relationship with interns calling for a “collaborative supervision
model” that is “culturally competent”, and outlining a clear path of due process should a counseling intern experience difficulty with their development.

Outside of this section, the Ethical Standards for School Counselors (ASCA, 2016) gives no direction for clinical supervision of practicing counselors, supervisors, or school administrators. As a result, the Ethical Standards for School Counselors (ASCA, 2016) stand in sharp contrast to standards written in the American Counseling Association (ACA; 2014) Code of Ethics. According to the 2014 ACA Code of Ethics, counselors who offer clinical supervision services must be “trained in supervision methods and techniques. Counselors who offer clinical supervision services regularly pursue continuing education activities including both counseling and supervision topics and skills” (Standard F.2.a). A gap of supervision training exists between the two sets of standards, potentially placing many school counseling supervisors out of compliance with the ethical standards recognized by the profession. To assess this gap, a survey was designed to learn about the supervision experiences of Illinois Counseling supervisors. To understand how supervision for Illinois School Counselors is occurring and to what degree supervisors are experiencing challenges in providing supervision may assist in crafting professional development experiences that support an increase in valuing supervision for both supervisors and supervisees.

Method

The purpose of this research was to conduct a needs assessment of school counseling supervisors to assess readiness to provide supervision, quality of supervision experiences, and training needs of supervisors. This survey was derived from perceived needs and issues articulated by school counselors supervising counseling internships through counselor supervision training sessions and state conference dialogues.

The major areas of interest for the survey included: supervisors demographic information (i.e., gender, ethnicity/race, grad levels of school level, public/private; location urban/suburban/rural, academic background, professional certification/licensure, professional affiliations), past supervision training experiences, methods for maintaining supervision competences, supervisor school counseling issues, school specific counselor supervision skills, types of supervision training desired, perceived level of supervision support, and skills/competencies needed to supervise school counselors. Reflection questions were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale on which 1 = poor and 5 = excellent.

Procedure

The survey was sent via e-mail to 582 Illinois School Counselor Association (ISCA) members, 212 Directors of Counseling and Students Services of Suburban Chicago members, which is a professional group of school counseling administrators representing over 100 high schools from Cook and collar counties, and Chicago Public School Counselors. Survey recipients were asked to complete the survey if they had supervised counseling interns in the past and to also forward the survey to other school counselors who have supervised counseling interns. Over a two-month period, 176 surveys were completed. As it is not possible to know how many school counselors received the survey, it is not possible to determine a percentage of survey respondents.
Participants

Participants responding to the survey encompassed schools of the following types: 8.8% elementary \((n = 15)\), 12.4% junior high/middle \((n = 21)\), 84.7% high school \((n = 144)\), alternative school 1.8% \((n = 3)\); and private 5.5% \((n = 9)\), public 94.5% \((n = 154)\). Location of schools represented: 13.5% rural \((n = 23)\); 65.3% suburban \((n = 111)\); urban 21.2% \((n = 36)\) with 11 respondents choosing not to answer this question. Seventy-six and one half percent of survey respondents identified as female and 23.5% identified as male. Race distributions consisted of 1.8%-Asian, 6.6%-Black/African American, 1.2% Multiracial, and 90.4% White, with 6.5% indicating Hispanic ethnicity. In general, the survey participants were mainly White female school counselors from suburban high schools (61.3%).

Participants were mainly members of the Illinois School Counselor Association (72%) and/or the American School Counselor Association (21%). The professional organizations with the smallest number of participants were those representing counselor supervisors. Even though several survey respondents identified one or more professional associations, 16% did not identify membership in any professional organization.

Participants represented a myriad of professional backgrounds with the vast majority possessing an Illinois Professional Educator License with a School Counselor endorsement (97.1%), followed by School Administration endorsement (31.2%). Of significant note was that 20.6% of survey participants held some level of clinical counseling license (Licensed Professional Counselor, Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor), which is not required to be a school counselor in Illinois. Some participants identified having more than one credential.

Data Analysis

The research team structured the survey to illicit personal and professional demographics, past supervision training experiences, satisfaction with supervision training, and supervision knowledge areas needed for supervising counseling interns. The research team reviewed mean scores and response areas that were outliers in the data. Attention was also given to participant response areas that were few in number as possible emergent themes for future study. Survey participants were also asked to respond to four open-ended questions. These questions were, “What are your main concerns regarding the supervision of school counselor interns,” “What are the skills you believe are most important in supervising school counselor interns,” “What do you need most to be a successful in supervising school counselor interns,” and “Anything else you feel we should have asked or need to know regarding school counselor supervision?”

Two levels of coding were used to analyze the open-ended responses. Descriptive Coding was used for the first level as a means to identify topics in the responses as opposed to content (Saldaña, 2013). Description coding is essential to determine what the survey was about in words or short phrases that identify topics being discussed not just abbreviations of content. In Vivo Coding was the second coding technique used. The purpose of this coding technique is to capture language that captures unique vocabulary related to culture (Saldaña, 2013). In Vivo coding identifies unique words or phrases that capture individual experiences in ways unique to the respondent. Applying this technique afforded the research team the opportunity to gather authentic supervisor thoughts and to capture their experiences.
Results

The survey attempted to illuminate survey participant’s supervision training, skills for continued professional development in supervision, issues for school counselor supervisors while providing supervision, support received from university supervisors when working with interns, and perceptions of possible training opportunities. Several themes emerged from both the quantitative and qualitative data that captured survey participant thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about effective supervision experiences.

Supervision Training

Only 42% of participants rated the quality of their supervisor training. The mean score for these participants was 3.5, reflecting favorable experience about supervision training. Supervisors identified that they received supervision training in workshops (50.9%), professional conferences (38.6%), school district in-services (29.8%), and university courses (28.1%). Supervisors indicated they relied heavily on professional membership (63%), professional journals (56.3%), and regional workshops to maintain supervision skills and knowledge. Of significant note was that only 17.6% of respondents received supervision training as a part of graduate-level study. Also of interest was 42.9% of participants identified their supervision training coming from in-district workshops.

Survey participants commented on several occasions the need for additional training in providing supervision. This assertion aligns with less than half of participants identifying any past supervision training. One participant captured this theme by stating: Should there be any requirements for a school counselor supervisor? When a counselor with more experience takes an intern and has them doing non-counseling work for them, or has skewed views on what a school counselor should do. I wonder if there should be more requirements/screenings for who is allowed to supervise the future leaders of our profession!

Supervisor School Counseling Issues

Participants were asked to rate 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important) the importance of nine different areas that related to supervising school counselors. The topics listed are in rank order of importance: Academic Advising ($M = 4.59$), Personal/Social Concerns ($M = 4.44$), Student Advocacy in the School ($M = 4.41$), Career and Post-Secondary Readiness ($M = 4.37$), Post-Secondary Education ($M = 4.28$), Crisis Intervention ($M = 4.22$), College Counseling ($M = 4.16$), Ethical and Legal Concerns ($M = 4.15$), and Student Advocacy Outside of school ($M = 3.95$).

Supervisors added depth to these issues reporting, “interns need to maintain good communication” and “to be flexible” especially when working with school personnel. One survey participant shared that:

Interns tend to be very enthusiastic, which is fun and positive. However, they may need to be cautious and temper some of what they learn until they build the relationships in the school building. For that reason, the intern needs to learn to look to the supervisor for the guidance and helping them be better recognized among the teaching staff.

When asked about areas of supervision knowledge competence, participants identified Managing Caseload ($M = 4.14$) and Collaboration with Counseling Referrals and Parents ($M = 4.17$) as areas needing additional training.
4.22) as the highest areas of perceived competence and Mental Health Disorders and Referrals (M = 3.77) and Difficult Interns (M = 3.5) as the lowest score areas. This theme was also reflected in participants identifying Academic Advising (M = 4.59) as the highest knowledge area. Possibly, these results reflect the academic focus of counseling graduate programs or schools relegated to working predominantly on academic student issues.

**Supervision Skills**

Participants were asked to rate the importance of training in 10 supervision skill areas. Skill areas are listed in rank order of importance: Collaboration with Counseling Referrals and Parents (M = 4.22), Counseling Micro Skills (M = 4.16), Managing Caseload (M = 4.14), Counselor Identity (M = 4.09), Ethical and Legal Issues (M = 4.07), Developmental Stages and Ages (M = 4.02), Intern Evaluation (M = 3.97), Case Conceptualization (M = 3.80), Mental Health Disorders and Referrals (M = 3.77), and Difficult Interns (M = 3.50).

In responding to the most important skills necessary for school counselor supervisors, themes of sharing, organization, communication, leadership, and patience surfaced as the most salient issues. Speaking to these themes, a participant commented, “Sharing my experiences . . . good or bad might help to give emerging counselors a realistic perspective of school counseling work.” Another supervisor remarked, “Organizational skills provide a structured and meaningful experience for interns.” Most importantly, this supervisor went on to advocate for “having high expectations of professionalism and accountability” as essential components for successful intern experiences. A final remark captures the spirit of the supervisory relationship: “be able to have the student trust your judgment; being able to trust your student.”

Several survey participants offered sage words for supervisors in fostering successful supervisory relationships. “Patience, reflection and processing with supervisees about their experiences, concerns, and questions is paramount; making them feel safe to ask those odd questions.” Supervisors who demonstrate empathy in their supervisory relationships appear to experience growth in supervisees. As supervisors recognize the path they have traveled to competency, they are more readily able to understand the developmental growth in supervisees. One survey participant captured this theme saying that “strong counselor skills in the supervisor and having enough time to discuss, direct, and teach the intern a broad range of responsibilities so that the intern can have a wide variety of experiences” as being the most important qualities. This supervisor also included “a supportive department that allows the intern to be involved” is vital to effective internship experiences. Summing up the benefits of being a supervisor one participant shared “being a supervisor takes time, but can be incredibly rewarding as you watch the intern grow and develop their own identity as a counselor.”

**Perceived School Support to Have Interns**

Participants reflected a high degree of confidence in their preparation to supervising interns with a mean score of 4.08. Participants overall responses were favorable about the level of support they received from their school (M = 4.14), their district (M = 3.90), and their intern’s universities (M = 3.71). However, in the analysis of narrative comments supervisors felt that interns are “unaware of the lack of counseling for the social emotional piece.” Survey participants identified issues of “lack of support,” “not engaging with interns,” and a “lack of university screening for strong school counselor candidates” as issues needing attention prior to
the internship experience. A theme repeated by a few supervisors pertained to the “preparation for school experiences, especially if interns have not previously been in educational settings.”

Types of Supervision Training Preferred

Survey participants identified the need for increased supervision training opportunities. Participants were asked to rate their preference regarding different supervision training methods. On a scale of 5 (very interested) to 1 (not interested at all), participants ranked their preferences in the following order: Regional Workshops ($M = 3.94$); School District In-Service ($M = 3.50$); Online or Mixed Workshop ($M = 3.45$); Webinar ($M = 3.21$); and University Course ($M = 2.93$). Participants commented that “some on-site collaboration with University supervisors” would be preferred to “problem-solve intern training issues” and that “support from ISCA (Illinois School Counselor Association), ASCA, and local workshops to keep current on how best to support and educate school counseling interns” would be helpful in providing excellent intern experiences.

Discussion

Survey participants revealed confidence to provide supervision but responses reflecting a lack of a theoretical framework for supervision were consistent throughout the survey. This theme was best captured in that only 10.1% of participants received training in counseling supervision in their master’s program and, as a result, relied only upon their own supervision experiences to inform supervision practices. With only 10% of participants having a clinical counseling license (i.e., Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor), the vast majority of respondents fell on the short side of training in the field of clinical supervision even though 92.6% of participants reported having supervised a school counseling intern. The fact that 31.5% of participants reported having post-master degree training in supervision is encouraging. This figure exceeds the 10% of participants who are Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors who are required to engage in supervision training. Seeing this trend of participants seeking supervision training is a positive sign but access to trained supervisors remains a barrier for school counselors in Illinois.

The second theme in the study was the developmental needs present for interns and supervisors. Several participants spoke about the need to provide more systematic internship experiences for emerging counselors. Supervisors overall identified developmental perspectives when designing school counseling internship experiences. “Delegating tasks so interns can get experience” was one technique cited by several supervisors with the intention of providing “individual and group counseling experiences with students” as opposed to being delegated to only “administrative and non-student contact roles.”

In general, supervisors shared high expectations for new interns. Several supervisors wrote about the lack of counseling skills for new interns as a deterrent for successful internships. Even when interns were at basic developmental levels, supervisors overwhelmingly felt that “open dialogue,” “authentic relationships,” “and willingness to take supported risks” were essential in counseling interns developing throughout internship experiences.

The third theme surfacing in the data were the dynamics needed to foster successful internship experiences. In general, participants felt they received favorable support from their school, district and universities for working with interns. Clearly if school counselors do not feel supported to provide counseling internship experiences, they will be less likely to not only
provide internship experiences but also less likely to invest the amount of time needed to develop intentional internship experiences designed to meet the developmental needs of school counselors. School counselors are encouraged to find opportunities to share the benefits of having counseling interns with administrators and other school counselors. Taking action to communicate these advantages will bring value to supervision experiences.

Supervisors understanding of the conditions necessary for supervisors and supervisees speak to core conditions needed in supervisory relationships. When supervisors are only able to draw upon personal supervision and anecdotal experiences, a winnowing of supervision skills could transpire due to isolated practice. Building a broad network of supervisory experiences across the state will assist in fostering a common supervisory language and understanding of the benefits of intentional supervision for interns, counselors, and ultimately for the students they serve.

Although not identified as a research question in the survey, several supervisors offered thoughts about how to structure supervision experiences from interviewing interns, assigning interns to counselors, and suggested models for school counselor supervision. One supervisor asked, “How do you select interns and once selected how do you decide which counselor gets the intern?” Another comment made pertained to counselor training,

Many college counseling programs ask only questions about social/emotional counseling. Much of a counselor's job is academic, college and career guidance. Some college programs think that counseling interns give in-depth therapy for 45-minute sessions with students. With student caseloads of 400 students, that type of service is not possible in a school.

Another supervisor said,

There should be some set models for school counseling intern experiences. I believe that all interns would benefit from receiving a "mini caseload" of students so they can work with a select group of students throughout the year on academic, social, and emotional issues.

Finally, a supervisor advocated, “Interns should have some protection against schools using them in a primarily clerical role. Universities can help by offering incentives to supervisors (i.e., tuition waivers) for the time and energy required to properly supervise a counselor intern.”

Conclusions

With the continued threat of budget restrictions, focus on technology education, and focus on student achievement, school counseling and other supportive services often find themselves on the list of positions to be cut in schools. Dollarhide and Miller (2006) wrote, “School counseling, as a profession, is at a crossroad” (p. 250). At this crossroad are unique opportunities for school counselors to emerge as change agents in schools. Their training in counseling skills, advocacy, data-driven decision-making, and facilitation afford school counselors the ability to work in a wide variety of settings and with a myriad of student needs.

As schools implement the nation’s focus on Common Core Curriculum (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011), it is paramount that school counselors also define themselves as core to the educational experiences of students. Having intentional supervision models in place that hold true to evidence-based practice to support professional development of school counselors and to educate school administrators about school counselor roles is essential. The consequences of ignoring supervision as a critical professional responsibility can have the
potential for a deleterious effect on school counselors and the students they serve. Most importantly, articulating how school counselors can have a positive effect on student academic achievement, behavior, and attendance is necessary to increase school administrators’ positive perceptions of school counselors. Unifying the voice of school counselors through a common practice of supervision will provide a platform to support professional school counselor identity.

Suggestions for Future Research

The research team documented and analyzed several models in this review. A common gap noted is the need to engage in longer term studies with a true random sample (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997). Due to the discrepancy in counselor role identification, further qualitative research is needed to learn more about the work of counselors in different settings, geographic locations, schools with a variety of demographics, financial resources dedicated to provide clinical supervision, and counselor longevity. Using case studies or quantitative research instruments measuring satisfaction, learning, and work could provide feedback for supervisors and provide a means of comparing these models against each other to determine which model, under which conditions, and with which supervisees is most effective (Miller & Dollarhide, 2006).

This survey identified similar themes found by Norem, Magnuson, Wilcoxon, and Arbel (2006). Their study identified maturity, autonomy, perspicacity, motivation, self-awareness, and openness to feedback as the core factors related to “stellar supervisees.” Possible sharing of this model with supervisees may contribute to supervisees’ understanding of what behaviors are expected in supervision (Norem et al., 2006). Supervisees appear to benefit from demystifying the supervision process and are able to develop the ability to self-reflect.

Another significant need identified for further research is work identifying implementable and maintainable school supervision models so that they become a part of the culture similar to supervision in mental health counseling. Having large caseloads and a myriad of non-counseling related responsibilities stretches the ability to actually embed supervision models within a counselor’s day. Researching clinical peer supervision models further will add to the possibility of a future where counselors consistently identify themselves as Professional School Counselors as evidenced by the supervision they receive.

References


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The Power of Peer Encouragement: Addressing the Difficulty of School Acclimation for Transfer Students

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Abstract

Transfer students, particularly in high school, are under extreme pressure as they attempt to adjust academically, personally, and socially into a new school. The purpose of this study is to raise awareness of variables that impact transfer students’ graduation rates and create support in the school for smoother acclimation. A peer-mentoring group is utilized to reach out to the transfer student population at a local high school. The participants in this study include high school transfer students as well as junior and senior peer mentors. Quantitative data was collected on transfer students’ attendance, discipline, GPA, and graduation rates, and surveys were created to measure the effects of having a peer mentor. This study demonstrated that 81.3% of the transfer students felt more involved in the school, 87.6% felt the program helped them become assimilated with their peers, and 78.2% felt it supported their education.

Transfer students are vulnerable to a number of potential challenges. Adolescents who transfer schools are more at risk for dropout than those whose school setting remains consistent (School Transfers, 1999). This population is often marginalized in the midst of a busy year. In the 2013-2014 school year, a rural, Midwestern high school found that their non-transfer students had a 91% graduation rate, while transfer students had a 73% graduation rate (Illinois State Board of Education, 2014). The disparity between these numbers highlighted the need for additional attention and support for the transfer student population. Therefore, a transfer outreach team was implemented to create support for transfer students. The proximal goal was to increase these students’ rates of attendance, school involvement, and GPA in order to meet the distal goal of increasing overall graduation rates. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how data collection and peer outreach can produce smoother acclimation for transfer students and increase transfer students’ feelings of cohesion within the school.
Literature Review

Student Mobility

Studies on student mobility have found different results in regards to the potential negative impacts that come from moving. These differences could be due to varying research designs, controlling for different variables, and differing definitions of mobility (Eddy, 2011). Some studies define mobility as the change of residence, while others define mobility as moving from one school to another. Eddy (2011) pointed out that studies have used definitions of mobility that refer to “within-year transfers, between-year transfers, transfers outside of the original district, and transfers within a district” (p. 4). The variety of definitions used for the same term can cause confusion and affect the results; therefore, it is important to define the term ‘student mobility.’ In this literature review, student mobility is defined as transferring from one school to another at any point in the year.

Student mobility is an issue that can have consequences in multiple areas of a student’s life. It takes approximately 12 to 18 months for a family to adjust after moving and “feel at home” (Wilson, 1993). This transitional period is especially problematic for students whose families may move every few years—giving them only a small time to adjust to a new environment. Students may feel isolated and keep to themselves rather than reaching out to other students. One explanation for this social withdrawal is due to the fear of another move and being separated from newly developed friendships (Weisman, 2012). If a student anticipates moving again in the near future, making friends may seem unnecessary or not worth the risk.

In addition, students who transfer may experience gaps in their knowledge or experience repetition depending on the content and pace of the curriculum taught at the two or more schools in which they attended (Grigg, 2012). Also, depending on when a student transfers, students may not be able to try out for certain teams or leadership positions in extracurricular activities; a lack of involvement in activities during the final two years of high school could be mistaken by college or career committees as a lack of effort rather than a lack of opportunity (Sutton, Muller, & Langenkamp, 2013). Mobility affects students personally, socially, and academically and those in low socioeconomic status groups or special education have been found to be at particular risk for negative impact.

Low socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status is one of the most significant and constant elements related to school achievement (Toutkoushian & Curtis, 2005). Students’ socioeconomic status is most often indicated by their eligibility for free or reduced meals. The United States Department of Agriculture (2014) deemed that a family of four living with an annual income of $31,525 or less would be eligible for free meals and those families with an annual income of $44,863 would be eligible for reduced-price meals.

Families in poverty move 50% - 100% more often than families that are financially stable (Dalton, 2013). Students living in poverty can become trapped in a cycle of mobility and academic failure, which eventually perpetuates an impoverished life (Bracey, 2004). Bracey (2004) states, “…poverty is not an excuse; it is a condition. Like gravity, it affects everything” (p. 636). Researchers propose these students have more struggles as a result of moving (Norford & Medway, 2002) and often have skill deficits in social, psychological, and academic areas (Parke & Kanyongo, 2012). Students that are the most mobile are the ones that need the most structure (Dalton, 2013), but they are too often overlooked.
Special education. Individuals with disabilities face a wide variety of challenges in their individual, micro and mesosystems. The American Psychological Association [APA] (2016) reports “disabilities among children and adults may affect the socioeconomic standing of entire families.” APA (2016) found that over 40 million people in America live with a disability and most live in poverty. These families are at risk for frequent mobility in order to accommodate their students, but schools or communities are not or cannot always be as accommodating to the different needs of these students.

Research has also found that students with disabilities have higher rates of suspensions and expulsions, truancy, and dropouts (Cannon, Gregory, & Waterstone, 2013). Special education students have a dropout rate that is approximately twice that of regular education students (Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2002). Amongst those students, those with a learning disability constitute 36% of the dropout rate and those with an emotional or behavioral disability constitute 59% dropout rate (Thurlow, et al., 2002). The correlation between disabilities and low socioeconomic status (American Psychological Association, 2016) puts special education students at risk for higher mobility (Bracey, 2004), and thus the negative effects associated with transfer students.

Effects on the School

Mobility evidently affects students and families, but the transferring of students also affects the school (Paik & Phillips, 2002). In a study examining student performance on the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) test, Engec (2006) found that as the number of transfer students in a school year increased, the overall student performance on the LEAP tests decreased. Lower test scores, graduation rates, attendance, and GPA affects school standing and funding, which in turn affects the school as a whole.

In addition, teachers are expected to help assimilate the student into the school, but teachers typically begin learning about their students’ learning styles and personality at the beginning of the year. Grigg (2012) found that regular attendance helps teachers diagnose students’ abilities, but transfer students throw a wrench into the teacher’s rhythm of teaching. A teacher has to take extra time and effort to meet the transfer student outside of class, but in the midst of balancing so many other students, this task is often neglected (Grigg, 2012). This oversight can decrease classroom cohesion as transfer students feel marginalized and apathetic. The transfer process affects students, staff, and the school as a whole, but little research has been published on specific programs designed to help transfer students. The following study discusses the initial effects of a program aimed at creating purposeful support for transfer students.

Pilot Study on the Effects of a Transfer Program through Peer Outreach

Research shows that there is a stronger sense of connectedness and overall success if a transfer student feels supported by his or her peers (Karcher, 2005). Therefore in 2013, one faculty and four counseling graduate students at a mid-sized university partnered with the administration and staff at a rural, Midwestern high school to implement Austin (2012) B.I.O.N.I.C (Believe It Or Not I Care) peer mentoring program that produced successful results in another Midwestern high school. The transfer team was one of four teams that were designated to reach out to the marginalized populations in the school. In addition to the staff that
was involved in organizing and coordinating the program, student mentors volunteered their time to assist the mentees within their respective team.

The mentor group was composed of willing and high-achieving junior and senior leaders to help address the difficulties of transfer students. In order to become a mentor, each student had to have recommendations from two teachers and signed parental consent. Mentors were expected to display exemplary character, leadership, and behavior because they served as role models for other students. Mentors were also required to maintain a GPA of at least 3.0 and model attendance in order to demonstrate their commitment to academics, the school environment, and the mentoring program. The mentors attended a three-day training in the summer to discuss the program’s expectations. Peer mentors participated in a series of modules and lectures to build leadership skills such as communication, empathy, courage, and problem-solving. During the school year, monthly meetings were conducted by the team coordinator for the mentors and staff to receive continued training and support. The goal of the transfer outreach program was to unite students and staff to shoulder the responsibility of making both an individual and holistic difference in the transfer students’ experience in the school.

Participants

During the 2014-2015 school year, a rural, Midwestern high school with a total of 1,063 students had 65 students transfer throughout the duration of the year. Forty-two students were out-of-district transfers, and 23 students had previously been previously enrolled at this high school and later moved back to the high school. These 23 students elected to turn down an opportunity for to have a peer mentor due to their familiarity with the school, so this study focused on the 42 students that received a mentor. Of the 42 transfer students, there were 15 freshmen, 16 sophomores, 9 juniors, and 2 seniors. Ethnicity of the participants included 32 Caucasian, 2 bi-racial, 7 African American, and 1 Asian. Forty-eight percent of the participants arrived at the school after the school year already started. Twenty-six percent received special education services. Sixty-seven percent of the students lived in a one-parent household. Eighty-three percent received a free or reduced lunch.

Data Collection

School data. Skyward, a data-tracking program, was used to collect data on the 42 transfer students from August 2014 to April 2015 in order to provide awareness of how the transfer student population fared in comparison to the rest of the school. It provided the following information: number of absences, tardies, and grade point averages (GPA).

Intake interview. The intake questionnaire focuses on three areas: the individual, the school, and the future. - There were 10 questions collecting information specific to the student. Some illustrative items are, “I live with,” “My responsibilities outside of school are,” and “Reason for moving.” The second area of the questionnaire focused on school. Some of the information gathered in this section includes favorite and least favorite school subject, activities that are difficult, what help is needed to be successful, the hardest part about transferring to a new school, and two goals for the semester. The last area of the questionnaire is about the student’s future. It includes questions about career goal, post-secondary education, what might
hinder completion of their goals, and who can students feel can help them in achieving these goals.

**Surveys.** The 42 transfer students who received a peer mentor from the transfer team filled out an end of the year survey to rate how the transfer outreach program impacted their transition to the school. Eight of the 15 questions were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Some illustrative items were, “Do you feel transfer mentoring has helped your attendance?” or “Do you believe mentoring has helped create a positive school climate for you?”

**Procedure**

Upon registering for school, all transfer students met with their school counselor to fill out the intake questionnaire then were paired up with a peer mentor. On the first day at school, transfers student received a welcome gift, a full tour of the school, an introduction to teachers from their mentor, and psychological support from the transfer team. Mentors checked in on their transfer mentees throughout the year at the monthly luncheon, to create an opportunity for new students to meet other mentors and transfer students. Mentors informed their mentees of school events and extracurricular tryouts or meetings in order to increase their sense of belonging. At the end of the year, the transfer students filled out a survey to rate how they felt about the B.I.O.N.I.C. program and its impact on their transition to the school.

**Results**

Table 1 provides the results from Skyward. The results indicate that the transfer students in this study appeared to struggle more than an average student. The school population had an average of 1.19 days missed of school whereas transfer students had an average of 12.58 school days missed. Analysis of the subgroups of transfer students revealed that special education students had a significant amount of days missed in any given school year. Grade point averages also showed a significant difference from the overall students averaging a 4.11 GPA to transfer students averaging a 2.42 GPA. This data provides awareness for the school to dedicate specific attention and intervention for this - population.

Table 1. Average absences, tardies, and grade point average (GPA) for all students, transfer students, and regular education vs. special education subgroup.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>All Students</th>
<th>All Transfer Students</th>
<th>Transfer Regular Ed. Subgroup</th>
<th>Transfer Special Ed. Subgroup</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absences</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>12.58</td>
<td>9.38</td>
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<td>Tardies</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>5.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The intake questionnaire helped both the transfer student and counselor create a plan of how the student planned to succeed during and after high school. However, the most effective component of the outreach program was the use of peer mentors. End of the year surveys suggest that students from the transfer outreach program experienced smoother transitions, connectedness to peer groups, and increased academic achievement because of their connection to a peer mentor. Out of the 42 transfer students, 62.5% felt the program helped their school attendance, 71.9% felt supported by their mentor, 62.5% attributed extracurricular involvement to the program, 68.7% perceived a positive school climate, 81.3% of the transfer students felt more involved in the school, 87.6% felt the program helped them become assimilated with their peers, and 78.2% felt it supported their education. The only critical feedback that a few students provided was a desire for more time with his or her mentor. - It would also have been helpful to compare the transfer students that had a mentor verses those who opted out of having one in order to measure a quantitative difference that the transfer outreach program had on student success.

Discussion

The data from Skyward shows that transfer students still struggle more than the overall school population. The graduation rate of the 2014-2015 school year showed that 95% of the non-transfer students graduated, but only 70% of transfer students graduated. However, in the sample of 42 transfer students, only two were seniors whereas 31 were underclassmen, so the effects of the transfer outreach program on overall graduation rates are inconclusive until the 2017 – class graduates. In addition, there are many confounding variables that affect a transfer student’s likelihood of graduation including credit transfer within schools, special education, socio-economic factors, familial support, frequency of mobility, and other factors. If this study is carried out in other schools with a larger, - more diverse sample population, cultural, gender, and racial factors can also be considered in regards to transferring students’ adjustment.

Nonetheless, the self-reported data of the 42 transfer students reveals that having a peer mentor influenced their attendance and academic achievement. Therefore, the data from Skyward and the present graduation rate reveal the need for continued attention to the transfer population, while the transfer outreach program successfully addressed the proximal goals of this previously marginalized population.

Conclusion

Students come and go throughout the school year, so schools must be proactive about assisting the acclimation process for transfer students more than once or twice a year. The transfer outreach team provided comprehensive support for new students in order to increase their academic, social, and emotional success within the new school -community. In turn, the mentors learned how to develop important life skills and character growth. This effort promoted cohesion among administration, counselors, teachers, and students as they worked to create a welcoming school climate for - transfer students.

Presently, the mentoring program and transfer team is still ongoing at this Midwestern high school. The welcome gift for the new transfer students now includes a handout detailing all of the extracurricular activities offered at the high school and is discussed with the mentee during lunch to help inform and educate the student on the many opportunities in which they can get
involved. Furthermore, the peer mentor is asked to check in with their mentee within 3 days of their initial meeting by texting, talking to them in between classes, and reminding them of the upcoming luncheons each month. Future research explore how cultural, ethnic, and previous academic achievement might also impact a transfer student’s GPA. This study’s investigators will begin collecting the student’s previous GPA in order to gauge academic performance as a transfer student. The - relationship transfer students have with mentors who transferred into the current Midwestern high school themselves, compared to the relationships with mentors who have not transferred before, will also be explored in future research. The transfer student population is multifaceted and more research is needed to comprehend how to best assist and support these students successful integration within a new school academically, emotionally and socially.

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Inside Out and Dissociative Identity Disorder: A Metaphor in Clinical Practice

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Abstract

Works of fiction and motion pictures specifically have provided the counseling profession endless examples of how mental health related issues are portrayed in society. The following case study chronicles treatment for dissociative identity disorder. The client and clinician worked collaboratively using Inside Out movie references to promote communication and progress towards goals in counseling.

“Did you ever look at someone and wonder, ‘What is going on inside their head?’” (Joy, Inside Out, 2015). Counselors and mental health professionals are consistently trying to relate to a wide array of clients from diverse backgrounds. Counselors further attempt to understand the subjective experiences of clients and develop or co-construct creative and meaningful interventions. In order to optimize the counseling experience and promote healthy functioning, clinicians have an increasingly abundant range of tools to achieve these goals, including motion pictures (deShazer, 1988; 1991; Haley, 1987). The following case study chronicles a client diagnosed with Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) where six alter personalities were identified. The movie, Inside Out (Rivera, Docter, & Del Carmen, 2015), was used to provide a metaphoric framework to conceptualize, discuss and reframe alter activity, and restructure the host and alters to work towards cooperation in a positive and productive way.

Film in Counseling

The film industry provides the counseling profession with valuable opportunities to capitalize on the notion that “art imitates life.” Counselor educators use film to add variety to their teaching repertoire, to present visual depictions of behaviors, stimulate class discussions, and explore reactions of students (e.g., Hudock & Gallagher-Warden, 2001; Koch & Dollarhide, 2000; Toman & Rak, 2000). Works of fiction, including movies are incorporated into courses such as marriage and family counseling (Gladding, 1994; Hudock & Gallagher-Warden, 2001; Higgins & Dermer, 2001; Maynard, 1996; Shepard & Brew, 2005; Sheperis & Sheperis, 2002),
diversity (Pinterits & Atkinson, 1998), group counseling (Gary & Grady, 2015; Tyler & Reynolds, 1998; Yazici et al., 2014), psychopathology or diagnosis (Fleming, Piedmont, & Hiam, 1990; Toman & Rak, 2000), counseling theories (Cag & Acarb, 2015; Cook, 2009; Koch & Dollarhide, 2000; Toman & Rak, 2000), human development (Kirsh, 1998; Paddock, Terranova, & Giles, 2001), and career counseling (Scholl et al., 2014). Experiential learning, including the use of expressive arts, has been further implemented to bridge the gap between classroom theory and counseling practice (Granello, 2000; Higgins & Dermer, 2001; Koch & Dollarhide, 2000).

Film characters portray characteristics and behaviors associated with the mental health profession in an interesting and provocative format to make abstract concepts more tangible, particularly for counseling students (e.g., Gladding, 1994; Gladstein & Feldstein, 1983; Maynard, 1996). For example, film can help students make sense of what a client may be experiencing (Warren et al., 2010) and has been used to develop empathy (Gibson, 2007), conceptualization skills (Higgins & Dermer, 2001; Koch & Dollarhide, 2000; Tyler & Reynolds, 1998) systemic thinking, and promote observation and insight (Gladding, 1994; Hudock & Gallagher-Warden, 2001). Films display concepts in a familiar and relatable way thereby demonstrating how the tenets of theory(ies) can apply to life (Toman & Rak, 2000). By providing both visual and auditory stimulation, movies can provide examples of course content both passively (watching) or actively (searching) to enhance learning.

Cinematherapy can be described as the process or practice of instructing clients to watch films relevant to their life issues for therapeutic gain (Gladding, 2016). The depiction of problems and solution-oriented endings can provide cathartic experiences (Lampropoulos & Spengler, 2005). Film has also been proven to be a highly effective tool in clinical practice (Ballard, 2012; Marsick, 2010; Priester, 2008). Motion pictures are valuable as a therapeutic resource because they are inherently appealing to clients across the spectrum of mental health. The fact that they are largely designed for entertainment purposes in no way diminishes their potential to be useful in a therapeutic setting. Counselors can use movies to promote discussion and self-awareness (Hesley & Hesley, 1998; Jones, 2000; Schmitt, 1999). Clients can identify with characters, situations or movie plots to address a multitude of issues. For example, clinicians can use movies to build rapport (Hébert & Neumeister, 2001; Hébert & Sergent, 2005), engage in the counseling process (Suarez, 2003), process emotions (Shallcross, 2011), prepare for the future (Duncan, Beck & Granum, 1986), or search for life meaning (Schulenberg, 2003; Simon, 2002). Additionally, movies can be used as metaphors within counseling to build rapport, provide a less direct form of communication, plant seeds for growth, and reframe problems (Cirillo & Crider, 1995; Heston and Kottman, 1997; Sharp, Smith, & Cole, 2002).

Metaphors can be described as “phrases, images, or story lines that symbolize, through analogy, another object, idea, person, situation, or relationship” (Heston & Kottman, 1997, p. 92). Metaphors can be introduced spontaneously or intentionally and initiated by the counselor, the client, or both and be used in a variety of ways. The use of metaphors depersonalizes the discussion, thereby disarming defensiveness and allowing various principles and ideas to be applied to one's own perception and experience (Mitchell, 1994). Research into the efficacy of metaphors in the realm of counseling has steadily increased over the past few decades (e.g., Berlin, Olson, Cano, & Engel, 1991; Fletcher, 2000; Lyddon, Clay, & Sparks, 2001; Priester, 2008; Tay and Jordan, 2015).

Many movies considered literary or artistic metaphors can have therapeutic value (Heston & Kottman, 1997) and can be used as a stimulus for discussion in transferring concepts learned
in therapy to life (Fletcher, 2000; Sharp, Smith, & Cole, 2002). Both clients and counselors can benefit in the use of metaphors to recognize and make sense of complex and abstract psychological experiences and communicate in a more clear and concise manner (Kopp, 1995; Stott et al., 2010). Specifically, clients who have experienced trauma may benefit from the use of metaphor in “trauma talk” which is the sharing of the experience and consequences of traumatic events that may cause high levels of anxiety and hyperarousal (Tay & Jordan, 2015). Given that the development of dissociative identity disorder manifests in childhood when a child endures prolonged or complex trauma (Schauer & Elbert, 2010; ISSTD, 2014), it seems commonsensical that a metaphor might be useful as an adjunctive resource in treatment.

**Dissociative Identity Disorder**

Dissociation is the disruption of normal integrative processes of consciousness, perception, identity, and memory, which can also be defined as “the self” (Pais, 2006). Dissociative identity disorder (DID) is described in the DSM-5 as the presence of two or more distinct personality states accompanied by alterations in affect, behavior, consciousness, memory, perception, cognition, and/or sensory-motor functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). These personality states may have two or more names and mannerisms and often assert themselves for control within the “host” individual. Individuals with DID often report histories of childhood trauma with insufficient protection and nurturing (Pais, 2006).

According to the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation (ISSTD), the most commonly used method of treatment for dissociative identity disorder is the trauma model (2011). The development of alters, (also referred to as identities, alternate identities, self-states or personality states) to cope with the stress of surviving prolonged trauma necessitates trauma-focused treatment (Brand, Loewenstein, & Spiegel, 2014). The trauma model is a tri-phasic treatment involving active work between the therapist and client to integrate the alters into a more unified state (Brand, Loewenstein, & Spiegel, 2014; ISSTD, 2011). In the first phase, establishing safety stabilization and symptom reduction, clinical work includes reducing negative symptoms such as self-harm while improving self-awareness, coping, and communication skills. Phase one of treatment can be a very prolonged process since it is vast in nature and attends to several different needs, all of which are critical, before effectively navigating through the traumatic experiences of the past. Symptom stabilization is ongoing with careful attention to pacing in order to maintain safety, reinforcing skills and staying grounded in reality. Phase two can begin once symptoms are steadied and there is adequate cooperation and coordination among self-states in order to begin to process trauma in more detail. Phase three includes focusing on current and future life issues such as establishing healthy relationships as well as meaningful activities and work (ISSTD, 2011).

Dissociative identity disorder has gained public interest through works of fiction such as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Stevenson, 1886) or *Fragments* (Jones, 2003). DID has received attention in the film industry with movies such as *Three Faces of Eve* (Johnson, 1957), *Sybil* (Babbin, 1976), and *Primal Fear* (Lucchesi & McMinn, 1996) that potentially stigmatize and stereotype individuals suffering from the disorder in a way that may be counterproductive to accepting a diagnosis and engaging in treatment (Hesley & Hesley, 1998; Schulenberg, 2003; Wedding & Niemiec, 2003). In order to counter the negative and misunderstood portrayals of individuals who suffer from DID, the animated movie, *Inside Out* (Rivera, Docter, & Del Carmen, 2015) can be beneficial to the counseling process. The following case study
demonstrates film as metaphor in the treatment of DID within the context of the trauma model. The client, “T” has graciously contributed to the writing of his personal experiences using concepts from the movie as points of reference.

Client History

T is a 41-year old male who has been in counseling for 18 months. T was diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder at the age of 34 when he was hospitalized prior to being incarcerated and entering the prison system. He confirmed the presence of six alters and reported an extensive history of psychological evaluations that resulted in his diagnosis. Although T has no memory of traumatic childhood events, sexual abuse by his maternal grandfather was confirmed by extended family members and supported T’s diagnosis. T’s grandfather is suspected of sexually abusing his own (six) children as well as his grandchildren and concomitantly the adults in T’s life were neither protective nor nurturing.

T often articulated cognitive dissonance identifying and organizing his inner world and attempted to find alternative mechanisms (i.e., metaphors, television shows) to describe his experiences. For T, the character he most related to came from the television series, *The Hulk* (Johnson, 1978) whose presence brought nothing but destruction and chaos and was something to be avoided. Consistent with the aforementioned concept of negative stigmatization, T identified with the character, David Banner and attempted to deny, avoid, suppress, and control his dangerous alter(s). However, T was able to positively identify with the characters in the movie, *Inside Out*, which provided a metaphoric framework for treatment while enhancing the therapeutic environment with much needed comic relief.

Inside Out

*Inside Out* is an animated movie about Riley, an 11 year-old girl, and her fluctuating emotions, which are characters located in the “control center” of her brain. In Riley’s mind, the control center is regulated mostly by the emotion, Joy. Although the other emotions, Anger, Fear, Disgust, and Sadness are present, Joy makes sure that Riley does not experience unpleasant emotions for very long and Sadness is not allowed to have any kind of lasting impact on Riley’s long-term memories. For T, the emotions identified in the movie correlate to his alter personalities, which allowed him a mechanism to describe his alters and communicate in real time how his alters are influencing him. For example in T’s reality, the unpleasant emotions (Anger, Sadness, Fear, Disgust) far outweigh the positive emotion, Joy. The movie characters are identified and corresponding alter personalities described.

The Alters

Riley and T are similar in that they both are at the mercy of emotions, however in Riley’s case, the emotions all have her best interests at heart. One character, Anger, feels very passionate about things being fair, particularly for Riley. Anger is quick to overreact, which can result in rash decisions and has little patience for life’s difficulties or when things do not go as planned. This concept is in direct contradiction to T’s angry alter, Seth who can be destructive and place T in harmful or tumultuous situations. Seth can be impulsive and difficult to predict, leaving T anxious and worrisome, particularly in stressful situations. We believe Seth served to protect T
and endured abuse when T was a child. In identifying patterns, Seth appears to become active when there are injustices, if T is not being treated fairly, or if T is not asserting himself in situations where people are perceived as trying to manipulate him. When T is overwhelmed, Seth often takes over with anger and rage; he feels the entire world is unjust and he trusts no one.

Sadness is a character in the movie who is often ignored or is ostracized due to being an unpleasant emotion. At one point, she is told to stand in a circle and not touch anything; she has difficulty finding her place in a world that does not want her around. T’s corresponding alter, Phil, is “…Sadness on steroids. You can’t reason, negotiate, or bribe him to change his view. When he is active it feels like I have entered a black hole” (T, personal communication, December 9, 2015). There is no hope in life as Phil focuses on everything that is wrong, what has failed and everything that will go wrong or fail in the future. Phil has a lot of suicidal ideations and feels as if everyone, especially him would be better off if T did not exist.

In the movie, Disgust is highly opinionated, has a refined taste and also tends to influence Riley towards certain behaviors or social situations. T’s alters, Tony and Patrick both share a part of disgust, however in a completely negative way. According to T, they “represent the disgust that has been dealt to me in my life.” Tony is the “sleazy car salesman that will do anything to get the sale. He is sexually seductive, cunning and manipulates, lies, flatters, and sweet talks to get what he wants regardless of the consequences or who it hurts. Patrick is monstrous, sinister and isolated and lurks in the back of his mind in a very dark closet” (T, personal communication, December 9, 2015).

Fear is the emotion that keeps Riley safe by identifying potential disasters, pitfalls, and risks in everyday life. T. J. is a 5-year-old alter who is terrified of getting into trouble, especially if things are not done correctly. His anxiety is almost paralyzing and he panics when forced to interact with anyone in a position of authority, such as a probation officer or a judge. He sometimes feels as if he does not deserve good things and has guilt when life is going well or someone is nice to him.

Last but not least is Joy, who is optimistic and always looking for the bright side to every situation. Although T does not have an alter personality that directly corresponds to the optimism of Joy, The Presence and at times, T. J. comes closest in comparison. The Presence symbolizes confidence and tends to be most active when people around T are in crisis or need help. The Presence is best able to cope with adversity and sees every failure as experience that will lead to success. T. J. represents the joy of a child on Christmas morning, a blissful, exciting, and innocent happiness. T. J.’s happiness comes out randomly in an attempt to recapture the lost childhood.

For Individuals who struggle with mental illness, specifically DID, simple things in life are more complex, problems are more difficult to solve, and the ability to manage emotions requires skill, patience, and practice. As T has moved towards the second phase of treatment, where safety and emotional stability is necessary, we have continued the metaphor and incorporated concepts from positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988), as well as structural (Minuchin, 1974) and strategic (Haley, 1987) therapies, to reorganize and improve the “control center”.

Operating from a strengths-based approach, we identified the positive attributes each alter possessed. These strengths are accessed as validation of the presence of alters as well as their role in T’s survival of the abuse (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). Concepts from structural family counseling were useful when conceptualizing the Control Center. According to Minuchin (1974), the family structure is based on hierarchy in which the parents are higher on the chain of
command followed by the children. T is in the role of parent and charged with the responsibility of setting boundaries, maintaining the safety, monitoring the overall functioning of his alters in addition to modifying, and regulating the system. Strategic family therapy techniques have been useful in restructuring the control center and sequencing interventions (Haley, 1987). Creative strategies have been implemented throughout phase one in order to build rapport, utilize strengths, and generate objectives for further progress.

**Restructuring the Control Center**

In the movie, Joy is in charge of the “Control Center” and other emotions depend on Joy to solve problems, organize memories, and find the fun. In other words, she manipulates the control center so that Riley experiences Joy most often and deeply. The other characters contribute to discussions but ultimately defer to Joy until life events created an overload of emotions surpassing Joy’s ability to be in control. In the end, Joy learned that suppressing Sadness, in particular, and concomitantly the other emotions, only resulted in dysfunction, chaos and pandemonium. Experiencing and managing emotions is necessary in life. Or in metaphoric terms, all emotions have a place at the control center and learn to work together to navigate through life in order to achieve a meaningful existence.

Similarly, T identified with the concept of the “Control Center” and has referred to the power struggle between himself and the alters. T has felt as though the Control Center is set to “auto pilot” and described his difficulties as alters each have an agenda and have randomly attempted to manually circumvent the system to meet their own needs. Also, T has felt manipulated and drained of energy in his attempts to manage the constant turmoil and commotion. Similar to Joy, T viewed the alters as destructive and entities to be avoided, suppressed, or controlled. In attempting to reframe T’s perception of each alter’s role and purpose, signature strengths (survival skills) have been identified (Seligman, 2002, 2006, 2011). Alter strengths have been used to develop and improve coping skills so that T can maintain emotional stability, improve communication, and build confidence in his own ability to manage stress as well as foster cooperation and move towards integration.

Similar to an oppositional teenager acting out to bring attention to a dysfunctional family system, alter activity (Seth in particular), served to highlight deficits in healthy functioning for T. Historically, Seth was demeaning towards T and treated him with disdain. Seth saw T as weak and powerless and is therefore helpful in determining when T is overwhelmed, is being manipulated or needs to be more assertive. For example, T had difficulty setting boundaries with his mother, who was often oppressive, demanding and disrespectful. These behaviors triggered Seth, who responded vehemently and often sabotaged T’s relationships, work and treatment. In therapy, Seth’s experiences were validated rather than ignored and consequently T realized he had control and choices regarding his mother’s unrealistic expectations. Once T learned to be assertive and set boundaries, he became empowered and has gained overall confidence. Metaphorically speaking, T gave Seth a “station” at the control center, but T acts as the filter between the Seth and the rest of the world. T has made great strides in becoming more assertive and has had success navigating obstacles with less discomfort and stress.

Sadness, and in tandem with T’s alter, Phil is difficult to endure, but serves a very important purpose. Phil represents the self-directed hate, loathing, guilt and shame related to the abuse as well as the loss of “normality” and overall happiness. When Phil is present, T is encouraged to explore his own sadness (i.e., his father’s death, dissatisfying job, divorce, prison)
and acknowledge emotions, however unpleasant rather than attempting to suppress or avoid, which was acknowledged through discussions relating to the movie.

The role of Disgust has been tricky as T has only been able to view Tony and Patrick as “all bad” and only having a negative influence on behavior and resultant consequences (i.e., prison). T grew up hypersensitive to criticism and internalized negative beliefs that he is “disgusting” and a bad person with no redeeming qualities whatsoever. Incorporating a strengths-based approach, we developed a hypothesis that both Tony and Patrick represent the truth and hidden memories of what his abuser attempted to displace onto T as a child; what the abuser did was disgusting and appalling, however as T was a victim of abuse, he is not disgusting. In other words, when Tony and/or Patrick are active, T worked towards remembering that the abuse was in the past. Tony and Patrick sacrificed so that T could survive and can serve to represent strength, resilience, hardship and the ability to persevere. Incorporating positive self-talk as well as embracing his own strengths can assist T as he continues in treatment. As memories of the abuse surface, the role of Disgust may evolve as Tony and Patrick fade away or integrate within the “control center”.

T. J. represents T’s childhood, which was tainted with abuse and innocence was lost to fear and terror. During intense and stressful moments, T. J.’s presence and activity signify that T may be at risk for potential harm or negative consequences. For example, T. J. began to panic at the thought of interacting with individuals in authority (i.e., police or probation officers) or when Seth is threatening harm. We addressed the fears and differentiated between irrational fears generated by past experience (e.g., going back to prison) and realistic fears (e.g., he has not broken the law or violated his probation). We facilitated plans of action to install feelings of security, safety, and comfort; such as we registered T’s dog, Charlie as a service animal. When Charlie accompanies T, T. J. exhibited less fear and we also reinforced past good behaviors and maintaining open communication with authority figures. T can invite T. J. to share a station at the “Control Center” to approach situations with caution and work towards living without debilitating worry, dread and fear.

T related to the misery of a control center with no Joy, thereby necessitating more fun and recreation. T and his girlfriend baked cookies, watched television or played with toys to arouse T. J. intentionally and instill a sense of pleasure. T engaged in more enjoyable activities (i.e., going to movies, bowling) and explored more meaningful career opportunities in order to incorporate more Joy. As T has experienced some success, he has gained confidence and momentum as evidenced by his ability to remain in his own home and keep himself physically safe from harm while maintaining part-time employment.

T worked towards setting boundaries, asserting himself, solving problems and reframing his alters to value their strengths without suppressing their existence. The ultimate goal in counseling is for T to be able to live a healthy, productive and happy life, which could include a well-balanced “Control Center” where alters cooperate or a fully integrated T. Regardless of the outcome, the movie, Inside Out has provided T with a therapeutic metaphor for his journey as well as much needed comic relief.

Conclusion

Incorporating the movie, Inside Out in treatment with this particular client has several implications for clinical practice. First and foremost, the movie provided a way to communicate (via metaphor) and discuss issues. The ability to talk about painful experiences in this manner...
decreased triggering of alter activity and accompanying negative symptoms. The concept of the “control center” provided the context of goal directed activities such as being able to be in control, while acknowledging alter activity, kept the client on task during and in-between sessions. The movie provided a humorous way to break tension and reduce negative alter activity while allowing T to learn and practice better coping skills. As a result, this client improved overall functioning, built momentum in a positive direction, and increased his overall confidence.

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International Counseling Insights: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Perspectives of International Counseling Students

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the perceptions and beliefs represented by a group of five doctoral international counseling students (ICSs) from the same United States university. A review of the literature identified themes related to international students and the counseling profession, including the internationalization of counseling, ICS experiences, multicultural/international competence, and the development of the counseling profession. Concepts from ecological theory offered a framework for understanding the data collected from participant interviews. Three key areas of emphasis emerged from the research, including concepts related to origins in education, valuing collectivism, and approaches to counseling. These concepts offered discussion for considering new insights for the counseling profession, understanding ICS perceptions in the current study, and considering how to advance counseling practice and education internationally.

So I think, now that you are talking about it, it might be the things that signify life to us that would actually be symbolic of counseling. So for instance when you want to baptize a child, you would use things like salt, because . . . you would use salt for taste, and honey for sweetness . . . What you are trying to bring to a situation of crisis, you are trying to bring life and you are trying to bring honey, and you are holding it kind of like a calabash. I don’t know if you, do you know what a calabash is? . . . It is actually shaped like that [pointing to a vase on the table], but it’s wider. So it is shaped like that vase, but it’s wider. And so you are holding that, with everything that you can put in it that signifies life . . . . Yeah, and I think that would be the symbol [of counseling], that would be the picture; that you are bringing this life to this person. And you would be willing to share that.

Anuli described this image of what she believed represents counseling to the people of Nigeria. As the counseling profession spreads further throughout the globe, this picture of the calabash offers one helpful artifact for considering what the profession provides, not only people for African culture, but throughout the world. This simple gourd carries a connotation of life, service, and support to such a degree that a US-based non-profit organization was developed around the principle (Calabash Consortium, 2014). The Calabash Consortium (CC) recognized that, while the calabash is a fruit with a number of various functions over the years, it also stands as a symbol of life, collaboration, strength, resiliency, and abundance. A calabash is eaten as food, holds water, is depicted in art, and has many other uses. With this image, the CC explained
their ideology that each person holds the ability to empower others. Anuli provided this vivid description of a calabash as a symbol for what counseling could mean to the world—a source of life and healing.

The World Health Organization (2011) identified the need for qualified mental health care as a top priority in order to improve the quality of life for individuals throughout the world. This followed a climate of increased concern for the international community to support neighboring countries during times of disaster (American Psychological Association, 2006; Prewitt Diaz, 2008; Schweiger, 2005; The World Health Organization, 2012). In considering how to develop greater skills and awareness to meet this need, counseling professionals are encouraged to consider a valuable asset already in existence. One of the greatest resources available to the counseling profession may be the international counseling students (ICSs) who now attend universities throughout the United States (US) and other developed countries. ICSs can provide fresh and valuable insight about how counseling may be perceived in their countries of origin. Integrating international perspectives into counselor education may provide greater awareness of counseling training and practice across the globe, and inform ways that communicate respect and value.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to help understand relevant cultural perspectives with regard to counseling among international students in a counseling doctoral program for Counselor Education and Supervision at a Midwestern university accredited by CACREP (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs). The research focused on exploring the unique contributions ICSs offer by evaluating the counseling profession in their home countries, their own integration of cultural identity with counselor identity, the unique qualities and traits valued by their cultures, and how the counseling profession as a whole stands to benefit from the influence of their native cultures. First a review of the literature will provide a greater awareness of what already has been identified in research among ICSs. Second, participants’ responses to the questions in this study will be explored.

**Literature Review**

The aim of this study was to obtain perspectives of ICSs regarding their view of the counseling profession, and the view of their cultures of origin. This review of the literature has produced several key categories and concepts that related to the ICS experience throughout academic programs in the US. The notable categories include: 1) internationalization of counseling, 2) international counseling student experiences, 3) multicultural/international competence, and 4) the development of the counseling profession.

**Internationalization of Counseling**

The internationalization of counseling (or the spread of the counseling profession across the globe) continues to be a growing area of attention within the profession (Gerstein & Ægisdóttir, 2007; Hoskins & Thompson, 2009; Leong & Ponterotto, 2003; Ng, Choudhuri, Noonan, & Ceballos, 2012; Perron, Tollerud, & Fischer, 2016; Stanard, 2013). In light of this globalization, educators, researchers, and various other stakeholders have identified the significance of international students as natural avenues for enhancing the expansion of knowledge throughout the world (Jacob & Greggo, 2001, Lau & Ng, 2012). Counseling students represent only one segment among the broader group of international students in the US, yet they
inform the global community with unique perspectives regarding the current need for counseling professionals.

A renewed focus on ICSs as part of exploring counseling internationalization may require a broader objective within the counseling profession. The WHO (2012) expressed urgency with providing qualified mental health care in areas where there is much need. This recognition was followed by the Mental Health Gap Action Programme in 2008, which used evidence-based technical guidance, tools, training packages, and other resources to expand service provision in countries abroad, especially where resources are limited or non-existent. ICSs have the potential to shape the progress of professional internationalization when they return to locations with limited resources for mental health care or counseling services.

**International Counseling Student Experiences**

Students who pursue an advanced degree in counseling are already accepting the challenge of a rigorous academic experience as described by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016; Stanard, 2013). Embarking on such a degree in a second language and a different culture presents even greater challenges. Another area of content evident in the literature addresses experiences and the ongoing challenges that occur for ICSs when entering American counseling programs (Jacob & Greggo, 2001). Reid and Dixon (2012) emphasized this point by reporting, “Common problems that international students often confront on a daily basis include: language barriers, cultural differences and racial discrimination, social interaction and personal adjustment difficulties” (p. 30). Lau and Ng (2012) went on to include other important factors related to the adjustment process of ICS integration into their new environments such as educational and legal stressors.

Not only do ICSs experience the ongoing challenges common to international students, but they also face the challenge of developing their own professional identity, and finding the skills and concepts that will be applicable to their home context (Smith & Ng, 2009). In this search for counselor identity and expertise, ICSs provide the opportunity for successful contributions to the counseling field. Relevant factors among ICSs support this development including concepts such as training level, acculturation, supervisory working alliance, counseling self-efficacy, role ambiguity, and multicultural discussions in supervision. (Ng & Smith, 2012). Lau & Ng (2012) went so far as to suggest that ICSs within the counseling programs of the US help improve inclusivity and reduce ethnocentricism, while expanding opportunity for authentic multiculturalism and internationalization. ICS experiences also highlight the significance of a third construct related to ICSs in the literature: multicultural/international competence.

**Multicultural/International Competence**

Multicultural competence received a great deal of attention within the counseling profession since the 1990s (CACREP, 2016; Ng, 2006a; Ng, 2012). Evidence suggested that multicultural conversations within counseling programs tended to be geared more toward American majority and minority students rather than across cultures in general (Ng, 2012). Elsewhere ICSs found their multicultural counseling training offered benefits in the areas of knowledge and awareness, despite the limited applicability of skill development for their countries of origin (Smith & Ng, 2009). This study went further to highlight that ICSs felt that cultural immersion was very important for comprehending multicultural factors.
educators were encouraged to re-direct efforts with multicultural training from simply theoretical and reflective constructs, to more experiential learning paradigms that influence multicultural development.

Further studies identified the development of international counseling competencies and traits among counseling professionals as most important in the field (Ng & Smith, 2012; Perron, Tollerud, & Fischer, 2016; Repetto, 2008). Further development of competency tools could expand beyond a tendency to focus on multicultural competencies that were developed from a Western perspective. Such competency measures allow ICSs to enhance the necessary skills for counseling internationally. ICSs offer promising potential to influence our understanding of competency because they have unique exposure to both counseling concepts and the cultural affiliations of their home countries.

Development of the Counseling Profession

The benefit of influence from ICSs does not simply end with the development of international competencies and counselor awareness. There is great opportunity for ICS perspectives to serve as valuable resources of information, and to benefit from the academic and cultural practices from around the world. Jacob and Greggo (2001) suggested their presence may also enhance the services available to immigrants and international students within the US, better care for individuals in their home countries, and add to the development of the counseling profession. Ng (2012) emphasized that “internationalization may well develop as a sixth force that propels the growth of professional counseling in every nation to be a legitimate profession among other mental health professions” (p. 3). ICSs may just be the driving force that produces a monumental shift in the development of effective counseling constructs and practices on a global scale.

It was observed that 53% of CACREP programs had international students in 2004, and it is likely for this percentage to increase with the growing need that existed (Ng, 2006a). The majority of counselor educators in one study indicated that ICSs impact their programs in positive ways and are seen as valuable assets to the co-learning experience (Ng, 2006). Enhancing the experience and development of ICSs may be a key component in advocating for the importance of the counseling professional across the globe (Gerstein & Ægisdóttir, 2007).

Key Considerations from the Literature

The importance of recognizing and supporting the development of ICSs was considered in relation to the evidence reviewed throughout the professional literature. The internationalization of counseling was recognized as an increasing phenomenon, reflecting some of the global and academic influences that have promoted recent progress. International counseling student experiences identified potential challenges that can be alleviated and the various assets that become apparent in the educational process. Literature indicated multicultural/international competence will be enhanced with the input of ICSs who contribute to professional competence out of their growing cultural identity and counseling awareness. The presence and participation of ICSs also shows promising support for the development of the counseling profession as a whole. These concepts evidenced in the literature offered further direction with how to conceptualize the current study, which seeks to understand the perspectives of ICSs, along with their countries and cultures of origin. It would appear that the utilization of
ICSs to advance the need for counseling throughout the world remains underdeveloped in the literature. Further research could assist with understanding the mutual relationship of counseling internationalization and the ICSs who would likely be on the forefront of promoting this advance. This review of the literature provided evidence that further inquiries are needed to access the full potential available among the ICSs.

**Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

The aim of this study is to fill that gap of information on international counseling students evident in the literature and capture a greater understanding of both the cultural perspectives of ICSs and the counseling profession as it is perceived in various settings around the world. In order to grasp these perspectives interwoven with the ICS experience, various definitions were employed to help understand the data, and clarify the concepts used throughout the study.

*International counseling students* (ICSs) can be understood throughout this study as the population of doctoral-level counseling students who have entered the United States to study professional counseling. Closely linked is the notion of *culture*, which involves a collection of common traits, practices, language, perspectives, traditions, and beliefs that are exercised among a group of people that identify with one another (Gushu, Sciarra, & Mejia, 2010). This idea of personhood is distinct from an identity that may be ethnically-oriented (meaning the hereditary/biological affiliations within a group) or nationally-oriented (meaning the group of individuals grouped within the same established political boundaries). The *internationalization* of counseling relates to the advancement of the counseling profession around the globe (Gerstein & Ægisdóttir, 2007; Stanard, 2013). The *counseling profession* may be recognized as the body of individuals who have been equipped with knowledge and skills to promote mental health support, and who adhere to similar ethical principles and standards as outlined by professional organizations such as the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2005), CACREP (2016), and the International Registry for Counsellor Education Programs (IRCEP; Stanard, 2013). *Counseling traits* may be regarded as those professional and personal qualities and practices that encompass the identity of professional counselors (Perron, Tollerud, & Fischer, 2016; Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2010).

This study utilized principles of ecological theory in order to establish a conceptual framework for understanding the information obtained from these participants from various cultures. Ecological theory suggested human behavior results within a dialectic between person and environment (Cook, Heppner, & O’Brien, 2005). The unique positions of ICSs offered insight on perceptions related to their home country, and perceptions of their development as counseling professionals. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977) first established the principles for understanding ecological perceptions, and those concepts are applied to ICSs in the context of this study. Bronfenbrenner proposed the notion that four major environmental subsystems influence human behavior. *Microsystems* involved the interaction with immediate environmental setting, the *mesosystems* included interrelations among major settings, *exosystems* had no direct interaction but extended from the mesosystem in ways that impinge on the individual, and *macrosystems* resulted from overarching institutional patterns. This study assumes each participant’s interaction within each of ecological system across the lifespan influences their own perceptions and cultural affiliations. The ICS identities demonstrated the influences of family, culture, education, and even the counseling profession based on their unique experiences.
The various ecological subsystems provided a structure for understanding descriptions offered by ICSs throughout the interviews. While each ICS came to the interview process with a number of identities, they were asked to describe what factors contributed to their sense of personal and professional identity. Individual ICS values became pronounced when exploring the various ecological influences regarding the counseling profession. The main emphasis of the ecological perspective promotes value for cultural perspectives. In a similar manner, Tang et al. (2012) applied an ecological perspective to focus research on person-environment harmony using several key principles, including: 1) Interaction/ Interconnection/ Collaboration/ Openness; 2) Sustainability; 3) Meaning-making, and 4) Socio-location issues. Understanding such applications of ecological theory to research helped inform the development of research questions and conceptualizing the data obtained from participants.

The phenomena related to cultural perspectives naturally apply to ICSs because they are pursuing higher education outside their home culture. Not only must they consider the influences of their native systemic realities, but they are challenged with the need to adapt to a newly-defined system to achieve their academic and professional goals. Nearly every participant came from a different country, with the exception of two participants from South Korea. They all shared commonalities. Participants were enrolled at the same university, they were from countries outside the one in which they were studying, and they were actively pursuing development in the counseling profession. The counseling program itself served as a form of mesosystem in which ICSs identify with faculty and colleagues as some of their closest connections while in the US (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Perron, 2017). Special attention was given to explore the perceptions of counseling in the cultural setting from which they came to the US, in addition to ways in which their cultural backgrounds and experiences can contribute to the counseling profession.

Methodology

The setting of the research among the ICSs was in a doctoral program for Counselor Education and Supervision at a Midwestern university in the US. The program was accredited by CACREP (2016) and focused on research, scholarship, and best practices for the field of counseling. The program is known for a focus on multi-cultural advocacy, and attracted numerous international students each year. The following qualitative study targeted participants enrolled in a doctoral level counseling program as international students. Live interviews and artifacts presented by the participants provided the data used to gain insight into their perceptions. Approval for conducting the research and publishing the data from this study was granted by the university’s institutional review board (IRB).

Research Questions

Several key research questions were used to guide the ICS interviews. These research questions asked: 1) How do participants describe the counseling profession in their home countries? 2) How do participants see their cultural identities integrate with their development as counseling professionals? 3) What traits do participants consider beneficial for counselors offering support in their cultures? In what ways do participants find these traits exercised most appropriately in their home cultures? and 4) What are some unique qualities of the participants’
cultural experiences or beliefs they believe can enhance the counseling field? What can other counseling professionals learn from their cultures?

Participants

The participants in this study included international students actively enrolled in the doctoral counseling program of a Midwestern university in the US. A system of purposeful sampling was utilized to select the participants for the study. In this particular doctoral program, 100% of the international students at the time participated in the study. Although the participants varied by age, ethnicity, and nationality, they were all female because no male international students were enrolled in the program at the time. Each participant spoke English as a second language, but spoke at an advanced level and was experienced with the concepts of counseling. The participants were also familiar with the process of research studies in order to advance education and the counseling profession as a whole, so they graciously offered their time to benefit the current study. The names of the participants have been altered to protect their identities. The five participants of the study are named here as: Zhang Li from China, Mercy from Kenya, Seoyeon from South Korea, Miya from South Korea, and Anuli from Nigeria. The Division of International Affairs at the university (personal communication, February 4, 2014) reported that 800 international students representing 64 countries in a variety of programs attended the university at the beginning of the academic year prior to this study taking place. The largest national group was from India, followed by China, and then Saudi Arabia. On a national level, the Institute of International Education (2016) reported that the United States received 974,926 students in the 2014-2015 academic year. The top three sending countries were represented by students from China (31.2%), students from India (13.6%), and students from South Korea (6.5%).

More pertinent to this study was information regarding the Counseling Department of the university. The Department reported that nine international students were enrolled in the Spring 2014 semester as graduate students in counseling (including both the Masters level and Doctoral level). (personal communication, February 14, 2014). Out of those nine students, five comprised those doctoral ICSs interviewed for this study.

Data Collection

The plan for collecting data from the participants included having one interview lasting about 60 minutes long for each of the five ICSs who were interviewed. A grounded theoretical approach to qualitative study was applied during the interviews to discover information related to the research questions detailed above. The interviews explored the personal perspectives and experiences influencing their journey into the program, and their culture’s view of counseling as they perceived it. Each of the interviews was audio-recorded and transcribed for further coding and analysis. Two artifacts provided by two of the participants were included in this study. The first included the image of a calabash in Nigerian and African culture, used to portray the cultural perspective of counseling. The second artifact was the image of a child counseling room that would exist in Chinese schools, which depicted the state of counseling in that setting.
Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through a process of open coding for each transcript with each interview in an attempt to “capture as many ideas and themes . . . but always stay close to what has been written down” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 151). Transcripts were reviewed in detail for core themes from the data in order to draw observations and common themes among the participants. Interpretation of the data proceeded with an inductive method using both first and second levels of analysis to highlight common experiences of the participants interviewed. This included initially labeling descriptions of content from the data, and then going back over the data to code common themes that emerged. These coded concepts were then compared across participant data to identify the core themes. As Erickson (1986) has stated, “In searching for key linkages the researcher is looking for patterns of generalization within the case at hand, rather than for generalization from one case or setting to another” (p. 148). While multiple areas of similarity emerged from the data, the three greatest areas of commonality among the participants were discussed with greater detail.

Researcher Role

The key researcher was also a student in the doctoral program working toward the same degree, and had become familiar with each person that agreed to be interviewed. IRB approval was obtained from the university with written signatures confirming informed consent from all participants. The researcher’s dual role as classmate colleague and researcher potentially influenced the study in positive and negative ways. For example, although performing the researcher role as a natural insider comes with many benefits, assumptions and biases do have a greater potential to occur compared to possible efforts to explore descriptions further during interviews. There was also the potential for participants to avoid sharing what they truly thought if they felt it may be offensive or harmful to the study.

While there were many differences in background, perceptions, and even beliefs, the key researcher made concerted efforts to assure that the collected data was not filtered inaccurately through biased lenses. Clarifying information was an intentional priority, not only during the immediate interview but also when compiling data by asking each participant to verify the content of their words and offer feedback. Effort was made to talk openly about the strong Western influence of the doctoral program throughout this study, and to discuss potential biases. This added to the rationale for why obtaining this data was crucial for both Western learners and the international community of counselor educators, supervisors, and professionals.

Trustworthiness

Participants were included in the review process in order to increase overall trustworthiness of the data presented in the study. Participant were given the opportunity to review the quotes used from their interviews, and to evaluate key findings in order to identify if their quotes were used properly when drawing conclusions during the coding and application process. Each participant verified both the accuracy of their statements represented in the study, and the manner in which they were applied. These participant confirmations offered a high level of reliability with the data used in the current study.
Findings

The information provided by participants offered a variety of descriptions of the counseling profession among the different countries represented. This article describes areas that received the greatest emphasis during the interviews. The three major themes that emerged from the information gathered by participants included: 1) *origins in education*, and 2) *valuing collectivism*, and 3) *counseling approaches*. With each of the first two respective concepts, there was agreement about how counselors can be better equipped to demonstrate value of these principles. The third category was summarized as counseling approaches because it included several different but related concepts that were mentioned by participants throughout the study.

Origins in Education

The ICSs provided a glimpse into the early development of the counseling profession within the represented countries where professional counseling (such as taught from CACREP, 2016 standards) is a much newer concept. Among the similarities of the participants from Asian and African countries in this qualitative study, each of the participants found their way to counseling by first entering or pursuing the field of education. This concept was not represented in the literature, and was an unexpected finding among the participants. Each one described their early focus on serving as school teachers, yet they were drawn into the counseling profession through their experiences as educators. Participants also described there was an interest in counseling that grew out of their roles as educators in their countries, but they also did not feel equipped to deal with the mental, emotional, and behavioral challenges exhibited by many students they served.

In the final year of completing her undergraduate education degree, Zhang Li was able to take a counseling exam in the first year China ever offered a counseling certification. The qualifications were only that one graduates with a Bachelor’s degree in either education or psychology, and pass the national exam. Zhang Li was a young doctoral student from China during this study, and she described her early interest in pursuing this certification:

During my Bachelor’s degree I took an internship as the high school teacher. So I took this position, internship position, for about three months as a high school teacher. I enjoyed teaching and interacting with students for sure. But sometimes I feel like there is so much more that as a teacher I cannot help.

Despite passing the exam with ease, Zhang Li still described feeling that she lacked the skills necessary to support students with confidence in a counseling role. “Even though I passed the exam, I had no idea what the counselor will do.” Now coming to the close of her doctoral program in Counselor Education and Supervision in the US, Zhang Li expected to return to China with the desired competence to practice professional counseling, provide counselor education, and advance the profession.

Mercy was a single woman from Kenya and a doctoral candidate in the program. She had already accepted a full-time faculty position at another Midwestern US university in Counselor Education and Supervision. Mercy described her extensive experience in the classroom, yet she also described her motivation to return and become equipped better to assist students adequately.

Well for me it was, ah, a long process because I initially trained as a high school teacher, and I taught high school for about 10 years before I decided that I wanted to go back to school, but even in that time that I was teaching back in my country. Because at the time
we didn’t have a lot of trained counselors, usually what happened was one teacher or two will be picked and they are given the office of guidance and counseling.

Immediately upon being hired to her first teaching position, counseling responsibilities fell into her lap as she was given the office of guidance and counseling in the school. This later became an area of great interest as she pursued a Master’s degree and now had nearly completed her doctorate in the counseling field.

This passion for something new, exciting, and useful was a common perception among participants. Seoyeon came to this university from South Korea also working to complete her doctorate in Counselor Education and Supervision. Seoyeon was so motivated to develop the necessary skills for helping people that she even left her status as a doctoral candidate in another PhD program in South Korea to pursue what she felt would align more closely with her aspirations to help others.

Actually I was Kindergarten teacher. So I worked at early childhood education field for over 5 years. During that time I met many children with emotional and mental health issues. At that moment I did my best to help them, but I confronted a kind of limitation, yeah a limitation. So I thought sometimes I feel like really frustrated, because if they have some behavior problem, such as ADHD or depression or anxiety, I can’t, I couldn’t control them in the class. And I was a teacher, so I had a lot of children in the class. So I couldn’t control, but I really wanted to help them. But I couldn’t do anything for them professionally. So, ah, yeah. That’s why I decided to study more about counseling or psychotherapy . . . I was really motivated, was REAL motivated actually. Rather than I wanting to get a degree, actually I wanted to help children with mental health problems and wanted to help people. So my issue was from the field, not just a wish for a diploma. So that’s why I can move forward, even though it was really tough. It was a long time, so it was a big decision to come over here. I had to quit everything, my job, my life with the family, everything. It was a big decision.

This level of sacrifice and determination continued throughout her studies in the US. Seoyeon was joined by her daughter three years prior, when her daughter was only five years old. Her daughter had begun experiencing difficulty with the absence of her mother so she came to live with her. Seoyeon described how she continued to meet the demand of working through a rigorous program, while managing the challenges of a single mom. The eagerness to engage in counseling, teaching, and research was described with passion as Seoyeon discussed her anticipation with completing her doctorate and moving to the next stage.

The path for Miya of South Korea also began after the initial pursuit of a career in education. Miya anticipated completing a degree in order to teach Kindergarten. She described how the “educational aspect, or being a teacher will be, is kind of, is respected a lot in my culture,” and being a Kindergarten teacher was “a good career for a woman.” Yet Miya concluded this [teaching Kindergarten] would be “kind of boring” compared to her future goals and aspirations. Like other participants, however, Miya first became exposed to psychology and counseling in her undergraduate work. She not only became interested, but changed the direction of her studies to pursue a counseling degree:

It was interesting, my second semester I took the counseling children class. So it just opened my mind. Like wow, how do they have this kind of course? Because I was not interested in my major at all, but because the second semester my interest for my picture for my future career gradually became changed.
Anuli provided a unique perspective as a woman of Nigerian heritage. While she was born in the United Kingdom to Nigerian parents who were attending university, she returned to Nigeria at the age of nine, where she grew up and continued her education through graduate school. She later returned to the United Kingdom after graduate school to pursue further education and practice as a social work educator (Anuli described this as the closest equivalent to a school counselor in the United Kingdom at the time). Now she resided in the US as a second year doctoral counseling student at the university. Anuli also knew when she set out for college she wanted to pursue teaching and counseling. This certainly presented challenges in Nigeria, where she described having to “sell herself to schools” in order for them to allow her to complete her school counseling internship. This was a foreign concept that required convincing at that time. Anuli graduated in the third class ever offered for counseling students in Nigeria. “So when the opportunity came to go to university, I just thought, what would I want to do, and I decided I wanted to teach, just like my mom was a teacher, and I also wanted to be a counselor.”

Travelling, learning, teaching, and practicing in three different countries throughout her life, Anuli has always maintained her desire to support young people in the school counseling setting. Anuli’s decision to begin the doctoral program in the US was a way to return to the roots of her early motivation to engage counseling in the school setting.

The data presented by participants suggested counseling as a profession was given more attention in the school settings they encountered. It was from this standpoint that the profession had been introduced and began to grow. Anuli reflected on the development of the counseling profession in Nigeria as it emerged out of the schools and has continued to spread to other environments.

I think in the main [way] counseling is used, or it was used in schools, and it’s still used in schools . . . . That was the primary entry point. I never, like here there are community counselors. My memory of Nigeria is that our counselors were very much starting from the prospect of school counselors.

Valuing Collectivism

In addition to this entry point for counseling in education, the participants unanimously emphasized the importance of supporting the value of collectivism. Gerstein and Ægisdóttir (2007) likewise have highlighted the importance of understanding the individualistic-collectivistic cultural differences that exist between Eastern and Western cultures in order to offer counseling services that are truly supportive and respectful of those receiving it. Offering support in other cultures may require different conceptualizations of how counselors approach the individual and the environment as a whole (James & Gilliland, 2008). This concept received validation among all the participants of the study, as they clearly expressed their belief that valuing the collectivistic perspective would be crucial to offering meaningful counseling experiences.

Yeah, I found out a lot of counseling theorists, they value people’s independence. And if an adult is independent, that is viewed as a good quality, as mature. But in my culture it, sometimes it is opposite. If you are mature you are more aligned, your value is more aligned with your parents, and you spend more time with your parents and taking care of them and taking care of your family with responsibilities; taking care of your family and relatives and those, instead of focusing on your own individual success and
independence. So that in my culture is the view of the mature. But I can see both sides are very valuable.

Zhang Li of China offered this description above as a direct response to the question of values that are important for counselors to understand. In a similar manner, Mercy described explicitly, “It is also the fact that, we [people of Kenyan] are more collectivist; we come from a more collectivistic value system as opposed to individualistic; that is another thing to remember, that especially sometimes if you are working with a young person, you might want to find out where does the family come in.” So considering the implementation of family counseling was recognized as an important concept in Kenyan culture.

The family was likewise recognized as the most common entity through which people typically manage problems on a daily basis. Seoyeon added that recognizing collectivism would be important in her home culture as well.

Korean culture is collective. So it means they usually try to solve their problems, [or solve] their problems within their family. And grandparents or adults are used for counselors in their family. So they wanted to keep their problem within family, and they wanted to resolve their problem by themselves with family.

Seoyeon later compared this notion with the concept of ‘saving face,’ which also serves as a significant concern expressed within Korean culture as a whole. Anuli echoed similarities of her experience with Nigerian culture, where she observed the tendency to keep concerns within the family or closed group: “one concept is: why should I be telling you my business when I can tell a friend or tell a relative?” In light of this tendency, Anuli raised the point that confidentiality then becomes crucial in order to avoid any tendency of going against the established system. Once people are convinced the counseling setting is one of complete confidentiality, it may be perceived as a safe place to share. Still, the barrier of going outside the family system remains.

Although fully identifying with South Korean identity, Miya described some of the challenges she experienced within a collectivist culture. Miya described the manner in which decisions are made is not easy, as each decision requires consideration of everyone involved. Especially for Miya as the youngest in her family of four children, it was crucial for her to consider the preferences and opinions of her parents and older siblings. “It is not simple at all. So just because of the collective culture everything is intertwined, you know, entangled. So making decisions is not easy.” Miya described this concept to emphasize how importance collectivism must be considered in counseling settings in her country.

Counseling Approaches

In addition to the need to consider a family counseling approach as described above, the participants also provided some commonalities regarding certain counseling approaches that are discussed in the literature. Approaches that most notably emerged within this study included directiveness, psychoeducation, and a focus on harmony. Each of these counseling approaches were described by participants as particularly valued in their home countries.

Directiveness. The role of the counselor was regarded as a place of honor in Zhang Li’s experience, much like the role of a teacher. With this reality, participants described the importance for counselors to recognize that people would come to counselors with an expectation of receiving a more directive approach to whatever challenges may be experienced. As opposed to offering helpful reflections, Zhang Li explained how she believed the Chinese
perception would generally believe “a good counselor [will] have good advice.” Anuli likewise attributed her own tendency of directiveness to her Nigerian roots, explaining how it is based on the relationship and knowing the person. Therefore one is able to speak directly into a person’s life to assist in the change process.

This expectation of directiveness was also reiterated on a number of levels, including the desire for efficiency and recognizing hierarchy. These concepts were described as important to consider when counseling in South Korea. Seoyeon explained, “In my country clients use someone to go and change themselves quickly, and so the skills, directive skills, is more important in my country . . . more directive and more short-term, and yeah, like brief therapy.” Miya further indicated:

Well, maybe they will be, they will be looking forward to being told to do something; kind of a directive approach. Because you know there is a power differential. . . So that’s why they are kind of expecting, ‘what kind of thing will they be telling me?’ Kind of like a prescription: tell me what I have to do.

**Psychoeducational.** The use of a psychoeducational approaches to counseling may be more palatable among the countries represented with some of the participants. This notion was supported throughout the interviews, and directly expressed among two of the ICSs. Seoyeon explained the collectivist nature of Korean culture and the strong value on education, related to an increased receptivity toward a psychoeducational approaches among counselors. In this way she described how the “psychoeducational approach will be more comfortable to them [people of South Korea] rather than psychological service or psychological counseling.” Anuli described how some of the most successful contributions of counselors outside the school setting in Nigerian culture has been accepted through a form of psychoeducation.

I think if you are out in the community, your role then becomes less of a counselor. Your role becomes more of an educator. So you are educating people to go and get testing for AIDS, or you are educating people to look after their, the importance of clean water, or you are educating people on the importance of this . . . trying to make sure the people are committed to the UN regulations, as opposed to sitting with me in the room . . . counselors have also been at mother and baby clinics, so teaching young mothers how to breast feed.

**Focus on Harmony:** Having a focus on harmony became a recurrent them among the participants as well. Zhang Li described how “there is a big part in Chinese culture that we really value harmony.” She went on to describe how it is valued that a counselor maintain this disposition between themselves, others, and the environment:

So going to a counselor, [they] themselves should be in a peaceful situation . . . in harmony with others, with the environment . . . a balanced perspective of the world, and being in a balanced way.

Both Seoyeon and Miya described harmony as an important aspect of South Korean culture as well. While Seoyeon associated the concept with a demeanor of friendliness, respect and passion, Miya attributed this cultural value to the Confucian undertones that influence much of South Korean culture as a whole.
Discussion: International Insights to Take Away

At the outset of this study, the vivid description of the calabash portrayed the image of how Anuli pictured counseling within the context of her home country. This study embraced the value of that analogy for understanding the need of counseling support around the world, most specifically among the ICSs and the various cultures they represented. The case was made at the outset regarding the reasons ICSs provide a unique opportunity to inform the counseling profession about how to best support various countries throughout the world. Further insights into the counseling profession, and into the worlds of the ICSs, emerged from the qualitative interviews that occurred.

The literature review offered a foundational description of ways to conceptualize ICSs and their involvement with the counseling profession on the ‘world stage.’ Concepts evident in the literature included: 1) the internationalization of counseling, 2) ICS experiences, 3) multicultural/international competence, and 4) the development of the counseling profession. An ecological perspective provided a framework for considering how ICSs might interact with multi-systemic factors they encounter (microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems). This became evident amidst ICS interactions with family, culture, and even the counseling profession. Interviews with the ICSs provided descriptive commonalities that emerged from the study. Most notable in the findings that were analyzed were core concepts including: 1) origins in education, 2) valuing collectivism, and 3) approaches to counseling. Each concept was described by the ICSs as ways to understand their perceptions on how counseling concepts are conceptualized in international settings.

While the information may not be generalized across all ICSs or international counseling professionals, it does offer useful information regarding how counselor educators and supervisors may consider supporting necessary growth and development among ICSs. The study also helped validate the meaningful and valuable experiences of ICSs that enter programs in countries foreign to them. The core concepts identified in the study provided a basis from which counselors may continue exploring questions regarding where to go to offer support and prevention efforts that may be necessary.

The study highlighted the challenges observed among ICSs, not only as described throughout the literature, but also among these ICSs themselves. Implications for this study amplify the idea that much work has yet to be achieved in the counseling profession internationally. Commonalities evident within the interviews revealed that ICSs have the potential to play key roles in advancing the counseling profession throughout the world. Future research may explore further concepts depicted in this study in a variety of ways. Finding ways to support counseling students in developing greater awareness of international counseling needs would be an area of research that could offer much benefit to the profession.

In light of this hopeful future in international counseling, I recall Zhang Li offered a mental and visual image that served as a thoughtful artifact evident in Chinese culture. She described the image of an empty play therapy room in a Chinese school, which can help to represent the ongoing challenges that exist for the counseling profession in her country and beyond. She explained her thoughts, saying:

[The] Chinese government really emphasizes adolescent and children’s mental health, and they require that each school has a counselor. But there is no training program like what we have here [in the US] . . . One of the problems is the Chinese government required each school, [that] they have play room for children, like play therapy room, but
we don’t have a therapist. So we only have a room, but what is the point if no one knows how to use it effectively. But in the government document, law, or policy, they require the room rather than requiring the professional counselor. So I have struggled with that. What is the point with having the room if no one knows how to use it?

The tendency to employ a ‘backwards-first’ model with addressing needs is not unique to China. This description speaks to the need for ongoing support and advocacy to enhance the mental, emotional, physical, and even academic health throughout the world. It also provides an image of what many countries with less-developed counseling programs have the potential to experience. May this image of an empty therapy room remain in constant thought in order to help provide the motivation needed for all counselors, researchers, and advocates who desire to see people’s mental health needs supported properly throughout the world.

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Counseling Themes from Group Work with Military Personnel in a Hospital Setting

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Abstract

This study examined the themes from group counseling of active or retired military personnel in a hospital setting. Trauma and substance abuse were the main presenting content themes outlined, and group process themes were also discussed. Three people who completed counseling internships in this setting were interviewed. Fourteen themes were identified from the interviews. The themes explored group process, content, and other factors.

Keywords: group counseling; trauma; counseling military; substance abuse; qualitative

Group counseling is used to address Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in a variety of settings (Najavits, 2004). In this study the counseling interns and counselors used the Seeking Safety trauma counseling model to work with military members in a hospital setting. Najavits (2013) has studied the effects of group work on trauma and substance use disorders (SUDs). The Seeking Safety model was developed as a result of this research and has been shown to help clients reduce the symptoms of trauma and substance abuse (Najavits, 2004; Najavits, Weiss, & Liese, 1996). This particular model is one of the most researched and widely used group approaches for trauma and SUDs. The Seeking Safety model supplies content themes and activities. This study expands Seeking Safety content themes to explore the qualitative nature of the specific themes from interactions with clients as reported by the counseling interns and counselors in this study. Additionally, group process and dynamics themes (Capuzzi & Gross, 2002; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) are explored as observed in this setting. Seeking Safety (Najavits, 2002) is an evidence-based, present focused, therapy designed to help individuals dealing with trauma, PTSD and substance abuse issues. This model, which uses handouts for clients and specific guidelines for counselors has been used in a variety of settings including individual, group, and residential settings. The manual can be used alone or with other treatment approaches. Seeking Safety has 25 topics that can be taught in any order. Some of the sample topics include: safety, boundaries, PTSD, support, healthy relationships, and coping among
others. The manual’s overall focus is on 5 principles: (1) making sure the client is able to attain external and internal safety; (2) integrating PTSD and substance abuse treatment; (3) focusing on new ideas to deal with PTSD and substance abuse issues to replace the old ones; (4) content areas revolving around thinking, action, interpersonal relationships, and case management; and (5) the group process in dealing with clients with PTSD and substance abuse problems.

Group work can be a highly effective intervention for helping people with PTSD (Najavits, 2002). However, counseling interns or counselors new to this population are probably unfamiliar with what to expect regarding client reactions and group dynamics. The purpose of this study is to identify content and process themes for group work with military personnel in hospital settings. The research question were: (1) what group content themes would be reported from counseling interns and counselors working in group formats with military personnel in hospital settings; and (2) what group process and dynamics themes would be reported from counseling interns and counselors working in groups with military personnel in hospital settings.

Methods

The current study utilized a thematic analysis (TA) to categorize and analyze qualitative data (Harper & Thompson, 2012). In this study three interning or newly graduated counselors were interviewed to clarify the themes found within the treatment groups of active and former military personnel. The outcome of TA is to emphasize the most important content of the data and can include cognitive, affective, and other elements.

Participants

Criteria for inclusion in a qualitative study includes having experience conducting counseling groups with the topic of interest and the ability to clearly communicate those experiences (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2007). The researchers interviewed three participants who met the criteria. All three participants were from the same hospital setting and they all worked as counseling interns. Approximately ten people in the region met the criteria for the study and were invited to participate. Three of these individuals volunteered to be participants in the current study. Participant 1 was an African American middle-aged male. He possessed experience leading counseling groups in a hospital setting. Participant 2 was a Caucasian middle aged, female. Participant 3 was a Caucasian young adult male. Participants 2 and 3 were both currently leading groups as part of their internship experience. Participant 1 was a recent graduate of a clinical mental health program who had completed his internship prior to this study.

All three participants were part of a CACREP accredited clinical mental health program located in the Southeast. Two were current students and one graduated in the past year. They were contacted via email and invited to participate in the study and were provided informed consent and study information as approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University.
Their participation was voluntary. The strength of the sample is the amount of experience they had in the setting of interest. Limitations of the sample include the small number of participants.

The research team included three individuals and one external auditor. The lead researcher was a middle aged Caucasian male. He has been a licensed counselor and counselor educator/teacher for more than 18 years. The second researcher was a middle aged Caucasian female. She has been a licensed counselor for over 17 years. The third researcher was a young adult aged Caucasian female. She was a Master’s level student in a mental health counseling program. The external auditor had recent training in qualitative research methods. He was a Middle aged Caucasian male and a licensed counselor.

Procedures

A semi-structured interview (see Table 1) was used to collect information from the counseling intern and counselor participants. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The researchers recorded the responses on video and wrote notes describing participant responses. A member check was performed to address the validity of the responses. A member check is when the researcher paraphrases the response back to the interviewee and asks participants to determine the accuracy of how the researcher recorded his/her response. The researchers applied the steps of thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). In step one the researchers became familiar with the data through transcription, reading, and note-taking. Second, the researchers developed initial codes from the data. Individual units of meaning (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2007) were extracted from the responses. Third, initial themes were developed from the research team. These units were analyzed and themes were developed based on the data. Reliability is enhanced by the use of recordings, member checks, and inter-rater coding. In addition, an external auditor was used to give ongoing feedback about the validity of methods begin utilized. In step four, the research team reviewed the themes from the broader context of the entire data set. For step five, the research team defined and labeled the specific themes using a collaborative approach and utilizing an external reviewer for feedback. In step six (Braun & Clarke, 2006) the research team generated a report to present the findings. Several drafts of the final report went through review with the team and the external auditor.

Interview Form

Interview questions (see Table 1) were designed based on general concepts of group work from Capuzzi and Gross (2002) as well as Yalom and Leszcz (2005), the counseling model Seeking Safety, and the research questions of the current study. General group work concepts included group stage, structure, and type of groups. Initially a set of items were drafted based on general concepts and the research questions. All 3 participants were trained to apply the Seeking Safety Program so this model was understood as the framework used with the group counseling sessions. The training was based at the site and provided under live supervision of the site.
supervisors. An external reviewer provided comments and edits and a final list was developed. Interviewers were given flexibility to use follow up questions as appropriate.

**Results**

The interview data from three interviewees were analyzed by three researchers and an external auditor. The responses were first divided into individual units. If multiple themes occurred from a response it was broken down into separate units of data representing each theme. Then each unit was coded by the three researchers and the process was monitored by the external auditor who provided ongoing feedback. A final list of themes was agreed upon by the researchers and then the data was recoded using those themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this section the themes will be outlined with examples based on their frequency and significance in relation to the research questions.

**Theme One: Universality**

Universality was described by the researchers as the benefit of sharing common experiences. An example of this theme from a participant is: “I think that the biggest benefit that I have seen is the group has been through similar experiences. I have been hearing that a lot from the active duty members that I worked with that they don’t feel like they have that back at what every base or where ever they are from and that’s one of the reason why they have never shared or opened up or dealt with a lot of the issues that they are having. They just said that how beneficial it has been for them to come to a place, like where I work, and have that setting where there are a lot of other veterans and service members who have been through the same thing and same experiences that they can really relate to.

**Theme Two: Catharsis**

Catharsis was described as the benefit of emotional release when expressing painful experiences. An example of this theme from a participant is: “A benefit was expressing it, getting it off their chest, finding a way to deal with something. That client was honest, they said that was the first time they ever told anyone this, blurted it out to 10 other people in the group. I think that was very releasing for that person in the group.”

**Theme Three: Substance Abuse**

The substance abuse theme was described as the maladaptive use of alcohol, illegal drugs, and prescription drugs. Several examples are provided: “They get mad and they drink. They drink to get rid of some of their anger”; “On the chemical dependency (CD) groups we relate it towards their substance use, what are those big days that cause you to use, was it the death of a friend? Holidays are big days to drink, a lot of annual big occasions, military balls where everyone is drinking. Some of these are events that you can't necessarily avoid or skip. So
you know being aware of those dates that are difficult for you and being able to prepare for them coming up, how can I help ensure that I don't relapse.”

**Theme Four: Self-Defeating Thoughts**

Self-defeating thoughts were described as negative thoughts that relate to problems with trauma, substance abuse, adjustment to being home, and other mental health issues. Examples included: “If they lost some friends or comrades in combat they felt that they should have been lost too. I frequently hear I wish I had lost a leg or I wish I had a physical wound or I wished I had died”; “They think they are weak, I always hear the word broken, that they are broken if something is mentally wrong. They frequently hear suck it up, and of course army, marines and special forces guys, it’s particularly hard because they should be able to get over it in their minds. They just think that if they ask for help they are broken. He did such a horrible thing. He felt he didn't deserve to live.”

**Theme Five: Self-Forgiveness**

Forgiveness was a theme that occurred often in connection to guilt. A few examples include: “I always tell this to clients, people tend to forgive others but they don't tend to forgive themselves, and I let them know that it's ok to forgive themselves. You have to forgive yourself”; “They can't take responsible for that loss, they are only one person.”

**Theme Six: Exit/Discharge Counseling**

This theme relates to adjustment issues relating to coming back from a deployment, or ending military service. One example is: “They have to deal with other issues once they are discharged from the hospital, some people might have pending charges or pending discipline actions going to be imposed on them, so you just try and work with them right then and there. And hopefully it's enough to carry them from the discharge from the hospital and what every else they have to deal with.”

**Theme Seven: Lack of Services**

Theme Seven was described as problems with a lack of resources for mental health issues. An example of this theme is: “I think that the biggest benefit that I have seen is the ability of having the group of everyone that has been through similar experiences or they have a lot of levels that they can relate to. It seems like, I have been hearing that a lot from the active duty members that I worked with that they don't feel like they have that back at what every base or where every they are from and that's one of the reason why they have never shared or opened up or dealt with a lot of the issues that they are having.”

**Theme Eight: Roles and Cliques**

Theme Eight was described as roles that members assume over time in the group setting.
An example of this theme is: “They brought a diversity of experience, the people that I had a chance to work with that were military, they were different ranks in the military different services, all branches, different gender and everything. Because when you put military people in that type of setting, a group setting, it is always interesting to see who is going to take on the leadership role. These groups, you didn't necessarily see the so called Captain or officer take on the leadership role, it might have been a young person or enlisted persons.”

**Theme Nine: Resistance/Confronting**

Theme Nine was described as the need to address client resistance to change through counseling. An example includes: “A skill I learned that is really big, and I learned it early on, is handling confrontation with a disruptive group member or a dominate group member. Not long after I started there, I was doing a group and one of the patients in the group got upset with me because they felt like I was cold and cut off. They felt like I didn't open up and share enough about myself and who I was. If there is someone that has an outburst or someone that is dominating the group being able to redirect them towards the group topic or getting other people individual so it's not just one person talking the whole time. Deescalating someone that's being really very intense and causing disruption to the rest of the group was important.”

**Theme Ten: Stages of group**

Theme Ten was described as experiences related to changes in group over time. Since these were open groups they observed clients change over time within the group process as opposed to group change of time. An example of this is: “For us it's really strange because it's always coming and going. We have patients there three days that we have assessed and it's ok for them to go back to their base. We have a patient who has been there 90 days. So for him it can be a little painful because he has been through all of our groups numerous times.

**Theme Eleven: Group Types**

Theme Eleven was described as experiences related to the two types of groups offered, process groups and psychoeducational groups. Three examples are included: “We generally do about two psycho-educational groups in the morning and then we have what we call process group in the afternoon, which is more of a traditional type of group where they are leading it. Mostly being able to share with each other their experiences and feedback and stuff like that.”; “A lot of those activities that start with the psycho-educational group, but then you see the fruits of their labor in the process group, although the seed was planted in the psycho-educational group.”; “We do two psychoeducational groups a 9 and 10, so their back to back.”

**Theme Twelve: Materials/Activities**

Theme Twelve related to specific materials and curriculum used in the group meetings. Several examples of this theme are listed: “One of the group materials that we use is seeking
safety, which is one that is pretty popular.”; “Homework assignments, the CBT worksheets where they go through and write up what they think about the presenting problem and those irrational thoughts and beliefs that they have.”; “The activity that I like the most was the journal, it helped to put in perspective what happened today and at this time.”; “We do cognitive process therapy which is about 12 sessions, so when you get into four, five, or six, somewhere in there, you normally have already written an impact statement and the traumatic account where you have to talk about one trauma that you want to focus on. So then not only have they written it they have rewritten it and have details.”

**Theme Thirteen: Military Culture**

Military culture was a theme that represented experiences with military attitudes, language, and values as they related to the group experiences. A few examples include: “For them one of the biggest ones that I push them for is the thought of, you got to be selfish with their own treatment. A lot of times you get them in there from, that military culture, they are there, they are serving, it’s like they either say mine is not on the same level as theirs. Their issues are way worse than mine, I shouldn’t be having a problem, I shouldn’t be complaining or I shouldn’t be here, someone out there that is worse than me.”; “You get the ones coming in that really want to be the helper and helping everyone else, and that’s all well and good but it’s one of the things I have been stressing that they get to the point where they can be selfish with their own treatment and realize that I am here for me and I got to work on me, and I have to do what’s best for me and my treatment and that’s one of the big things that I push.”; “I think the differences among branches depends more on occupation, its odd for me to think, the medics and nurses, they seem to take it harder because they are helpers, they are trained helpers who sometimes can't help. I also don't think they have the training of going into a combat zone as someone who is trained in special forces who expecting to get shot at.”

**Theme Fourteen: Anger**

Theme Fourteen was described as the emotional and behavioral reactions to anger. Two examples are provided: “A lot times when you dealing with PTSD that ties into their anger. They will try not to express their anger because it’s always been deemed a bad thing, so essentially they are bottling it all up, kind of like a soda bottle that keeps getting shaken up and it eventually explodes.”; “I tell them if you are getting angry or upset it’s ok to express that anger as a natural feeling, that everyone has, that’s a normal feeling for people to have and it’s ok to express that. They ask who says that I have to keep it buried until I can’t take it anymore and it has to just explode? Why do I have to wait to get to that point to be able to share what I am feeling, why do I have to keep that anger hidden to where it boils up and comes out as rage, instead of being able to address that anger for the things that have upset me.”
Discussion

Tanielian and Jaycox (2008) highlighted the prevalence of trauma and depression in military personnel. Participants reported in Theme Twelve that they used a structured curriculum, Seeking Safety (Najavits, 2002), to address these issues. A wide variety of activities has been provided under the themes of cognitive, behavioral, interpersonal, and case management. The CBT component addressed the self-defeating thoughts described in Theme Four. It is highly recommended that new counselors working with the military become familiar with these activities. These groups were conducted as mainly psychoeducational groups and according to results of Theme Eleven the content is used later in process groups that are more open-ended and client-directed.

Yalom and Leszcz (2005) identified universality as a primary therapeutic factor of group work. Knowing that your experiences are shared with others provides relief to clients and promotes catharsis which was identified in Theme Two. This is especially relevant to working with members of the military who are often afraid to identify weakness or vulnerability within that context. In Theme One counselors described this factor as one of the primary themes they observed.

According to Eisen et al. (2012) substance abuse is a common problem for military personnel who have been exposed to trauma. In Theme Three counselors discussed their observations regarding this issue. Groups focused specifically on chemical dependency (CD) were offered. The CD groups incorporated content from the twelve step model and from motivational interviewing. In particular, CD issues were problematic when clients reported intense emotional reactions to trauma and also during periods when triggers for CD were prevalent. Other triggers included thoughts of guilt that were described in Theme Five.

The National Center for PTSD (2015) stated that heightened emotional reactivity was common in people who experience traumatic events. In Theme Fourteen counselors discussed how anger was a major issue and that often times clients communicated they had difficulty expressing this anger. The interns concluded that giving the clients permission to express the anger was an important treatment strategy. The counselors in Theme Twelve highlighted the utilization of CBT activities in treatment. Specifically, the worksheets from a CBT manual (Greenberger & Pedesky, 1995) were used. These included thought records and other CBT activities. The CBT model links with Theme Four and self-defeating thoughts. One common self-defeating thought was that it was not fair that they returned safely when other people did not make it home. In Theme Nine the issues of client resistance and confrontation were presented. The example provided was that clients might become disruptive or may dominate the group thus avoiding progress or insight. Cowan and Presbury (2000) framed resistance as a client defense from perceived threats.

Stages of group were identified in Theme Ten and client roles were identified in Theme Eight. Interns noted that as clients spent time in the program that they assumed leadership roles in the group. The process occurred without regard to client rank in the military. But since the groups were open each client reflected a different stage of group. Tuckman’s (1965) stages of
group were evident but not in the context of group evolution, but in the context of the group member. A strength noted of the open group format was that group members with more time in the program would mentor the new members. A disadvantage was that it was challenging to meet the needs of members at different stages of the process.

**Conclusion**

In this qualitative study the researchers interviewed three counseling interns who provided group counseling to members of the military in a hospital setting. This setting was part of an internship and practicum for a CACREP accredited clinical mental health counseling program. The purpose of the study was for the interns to describe group work themes and provide insight and activities for other counselors who work with this population.

Applying a qualitative format, the researchers used interview data to highlight themes (Harper & Thompson, 2012). Fourteen themes emerged from the data that can be used to assist other counselors who might work in similar settings in the future. For example, counselors can benefit from examining problems with leaving the site or knowing to address the lack of services available in some cases. The identified themes were: universality; catharsis; substance abuse; self-defeating thoughts; forgiveness; exit counseling; lack of services; group roles; resistance; group stages; types of groups; group activities; military culture; and anger. These themes emerged in the context of combat trauma, non-combat trauma while deployed, issues with adjustment to returning home, sexual assault, substance abuse and other related factors.

The participants identified several suggestions for counselors who work in these settings. First, group work is especially useful in this context because the concept of universality was so important to the clients. Additionally, being in the military is a unique cultural experience, so being around others who have experienced this unique cultural phenomenon was a critical factor to the positive therapeutic experiences of group members. It was important for them to feel understood and feel a connection to other group members. Knowing others had similar reactions was therapeutic because in many cases people in the military avoid expressing any mental health problems. Second, CBT was the most recommended approach along with mindfulness techniques. The Seeking Safety Program was the most used curriculum for activities and structure. The program applies many CBT related concepts and activities. Third, in many cases clients exhibited dual diagnosis and substance abuse problems were frequent. Obtaining extra training in substance abuse counseling would be highly beneficial. Fourth, the concept of military culture was discussed frequently in the interviews. Awareness of military terminology can help counselors connect with the group members. A fifth recommendation is to focus heavily on exit counseling and transitioning out of the hospital. Finding outpatient care and support groups can be some of the most important elements of counseling. Many clients reported difficulty in finding resources in the community that matched their needs.

In conclusion, counselors can provide a valuable service to members of the military by offering group counseling services. A variety of themes were identified in this study regarding group process and content within these groups. As counselors expand their role with providing
services to the military, especially in light of access to the Veterans Administration, this information can be especially relevant.

References


**Table 1**

**Interview Items**

1) What are some of the biggest benefits witnessed among group members while you were leading groups for the center?

2) Can you tell us about the structure of the groups?

3) Can you talk a little bit about the types of groups?

4) Can you describe the stages of group you observed?

5) How many groups a day were conducted?

6) What things have you learned to say to yourself to be functional and work well as a group leader there?

7) Any topics that you might struggle with?

8) What other client issues are brought in with dealing with PTSD and dealing with substance abuse?

9) Can you tell us a little bit about training at the site?

10) If you had to make a list of 3-4 interventions that were most helpful to you at the beginning what would they be.

11) How would you sum up your whole experience running groups there?

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