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Factors Affecting Master's Counseling Students Pursuing Doctoral Degrees

**POSTER
PRESENTATION**

OCTOBER 1, 2020

**WALDEN
UNIVERSITY**

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Acknowledgement

*Thank you to **Dr. Gary Szirony** and **Rick Cicchetti** for guiding my research study to completion.*

Abstract

Student leadership identity development is critically important for preparing mental health counseling students for the professional world. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) does not mandate master's level mental health counseling programs to incorporate leadership curriculum. The findings concluded master's level counseling students could benefit from leadership curriculum as preparation for leadership positions within the field and influence pursuance of higher learning.

Doctoral Capstone

Problem

Leadership aids the development of counselor self-efficacy (Gibson, Dooley, Kelechner, Moss, & Vacchio, 2012), which is essential in the delivery of services between counselor and client (Brogan, Suarez, Reh fuss, & Shope, 2013).

However, **counselors do not receive formal leadership training** within master's level mental health counseling programs (Green, Miller, & Aarons, 2013; Paradise et al., 2010).

There is a **lack of attention** regarding the integration of **leadership curriculum in counselor related programs** as well as whether developing a leadership identity influences pursuance of higher education (CACREP, 2016; Paradise et al., 2010).

Purpose

This quantitative study investigated whether Socially Responsible Leadership Scale-Revised 2 (SRLS-R2) scores for Change, Consciousness of Self, and Congruence (as measured by the SRLS-R2), gender, and/or race predict intent to pursue a doctoral degree among master's level mental health counseling students enrolled in CACREP-accredited counseling programs.

Investigating factors that predict pursuance of a doctoral degree is essential to the professional identity development of master's level counseling students.

Significance

Counseling students engaging in leadership initiatives during their educational experiences enhance leadership development earlier in their professional careers (Janson, Stone, & Clark, 2009).

The outcome of this study could inform master's level counseling program leaders of the need to implement leadership education programming and predict the pursuance of higher educational goals such as obtaining a doctoral degree.

Theory or Framework

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977) suggests that an individual's thought process regarding personal efficacy, self-regulation, and self-efficacy were influenced through social modeling. Individuals learn from observing others as well as personal experiences, which in turn promotes new behaviors, cultivates new competencies, and incites positive behavioral outcomes (Eslami, Norozi, Hajihosseini, Ramazani, & Miri, 2018).

In this study case, SCT could be modeled through student interactions with faculty members and staff, peers, educational environments, and professional organizations. The ability for students to encompass leadership roles demonstrates the ability to form critical thinking skills and problem solve, which aligns with master's level counseling educational training.

Relevant Scholarship

Leadership is an important facet of a developing a counselor identity and sustainability in the field (Barbarà-i-Molinero et al., 2017).

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) predicted that employment rates of counselor professionals **in the year 2026 will triple** due to the increased needs for **addiction and mental health services**. To meet these predicted needs, investigating professional development of counselor identity is necessary, as it can increase career longevity (Hamann, 2016).

Increased career knowledge and skill development, competitive employment opportunities, higher earning potential, and personal growth are cultivated from professional interactions of mentorship.

Developing **relationships** with faculty members, staff, mentors, and peers **strengthen students' professional identity development** as future counseling professionals.

There is an educational disparity between conferred bachelor's degrees and doctoral degrees in the field of psychology/social services. The National Center for Education Statistics report **gender disparities** in degree completions for **master's degrees versus doctoral degrees; 80% of the counselor professionals** employed in the field are **women** (Protivnak & Yensel, 2017).

Research Question

Do SRLS scores for Change, Consciousness of Self, and Congruence, as measured by the SRLS-R2, gender, and/or race predict intent to pursue a doctoral degree among master's level mental health counseling students enrolled in CACREP accredited counseling programs?

Participants

Random Sampling Method

Out of 93 opened surveys, 61 masters' level counseling student participants attending a CACREP program completed the online survey (65.5%).

An additional 32 participants (52.4%) attempted to complete the surveys but were removed due to not completing the survey questions.

Procedures

Online survey administered through social media, Walden participant pool, and CESNET

SRLS-R2/Demographic survey was used for collect data through SurveyMonkey

Data was transferred to excel spreadsheet after completion of each survey

Data was input into SPSS for analyzation

Analysis

A multiple regression was used to analyze the data with SPSS.

Findings

No statistically significant relationship was found between intent to pursue a doctoral degree (outcome variable) and the SRLS scores for Change, Consciousness of Self, and 60 Congruence (SRLS-R2) and/or race (predictor variables).

Further statistical analysis revealed gender accounts for a significant percentage of variance between the variables ($p < .027$) and pursuant of a doctoral degree.

Data also revealed 85.2% of master's level counseling students agreed they possessed SRL constructs of Change, Consciousness of Self, and Congruence, yet further analysis revealed leadership constructs did not predict students' pursuant of higher education.

Interpretation

The results align with current research that gender is a factor for whether a student pursues a doctoral degree. Additionally, the findings indicate men seek leadership positions post graduation more than women or other gender identification.

Limitations

Online survey format-master's students lack knowledge of importance for participation in research studies

CACREP only master's level students

Social media sites refused to allow further survey postings after March 11th due to importance of informing nation about Covid-19

There is a need to understand why 32 students gave consent but did not complete the first question that asked whether student thought they were a social change leader.

Recommendations

Program Level Efforts

- Encourage knowledge for the importance of masters' level students to participate in doctoral research studies

Future Research Efforts

- Widening the student participants to include non-CACREP students as to assess whether non-CACREP programs integrated leadership curriculum for student leadership identity development
- Broadening on campus recruitment participation
- Expand upon gender demographic to encapsulate accuracy of gender identification of student population

Social Change Implications

Increased awareness for developing a leadership identity that informs social change awareness and actualization during masters program.

Development of leadership club at university level promoting socially responsible engagement at university and community level.

Counseling professionals would seek leadership skill development/education post-graduation.

Motivation to engage/initiate social change initiatives/projects/legislation through importance of socially responsible leadership identity post-graduation.

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