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The Lived Experiences of Gatekeepers in Counselor Education Training Programs

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

The Lived Experiences of Gatekeepers in Counselor Education Training Programs

by

Jessica Motroni Banik

MA, University of Central Florida, 2009

BS, University of Central Florida, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

Walden University

August 2021

Abstract

Gatekeeping is an essential function within the counselor education training system that is aimed at helping counselors in training (CIT) achieve competency to practice. The process entails monitoring counselor development at critical points in the process of entering the profession. However, there continues to be gateslippage, with a high percentage of CITs with problematic behaviors completing their training programs, putting the public at risk. There is a lack of research focused on understanding gatekeepers' lived experiences, including how they resolve challenges within the system. The purpose of this hermeneutic study was to understand the lived experiences of gatekeepers in the counseling profession, including those related to gatekeeping challenges and how they are addressed in the counselor education system. The emerging gatekeeping theory proposed by Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen provided the conceptual framework for exploring the gatekeeping phenomenon. The data collection and analysis process focused on how gatekeepers make meaning of their experience. Five themes with eight subthemes emerged. The five themes were (a) protecting client welfare as an anchor, (b) using an internal gatekeeping process aligns best practices, (c) supportive relationships and the significant impact in gatekeeping, (d) gatekeeping experiences have an impact on the gatekeeper, and (e) gatekeeping experiences and impact lead to evolving best practices. The findings highlight how gatekeeping is an essential process, cannot be done in isolation, and individuals learn from their experiences. These results may inform the counselor training community about best practices to help decrease gateslippage, which may result in better client care and lead to positive social change.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family who believed in me and supported me throughout the process. To my husband, Chuck, who provides unwavering dedication and always supports my goals. To my daughter, Eleanor, who inspires me to see the magic and wonder in life and teaches me to stay curious and young at heart. To my Peanut, who did not get to finish the degree with me and was always one of my greatest supports. Lastly, to my family for always believing that I can do anything I seek to accomplish.

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Thank you to my cohort who were alongside for the ride. We had some amazing experiences that I will always be thankful for. I am grateful for all the wonderful people I have met. I have learned so much with and from you all. Thank you to my friends, near and far, who provided support, offered a call, and sent messages of support throughout my doctoral learning. I am grateful that I have a village to support me.

I want to thank my family for all their support. My husband has had many late nights and provides encouragement to continue reaching my goals. My daughter who allowed me to continue my schooling. I hope she learns she can do anything she sets her mind to. My Peanut who was a part of my world for 15 years and was a constant source of support. I would not be here without the support of my family; thank you for always pitching in and helping out so I had the time to reach my goals.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Gatekeeping is the process of monitoring counselor development at critical points in the process of entering the profession (Homrich, 2009). Gatekeeping is an essential component of the counseling profession for all members of the counselor education community. Gatekeepers are any individuals who assess the personal dispositions and clinical skills of counselors in training (CIT) to achieve the primary goal of ensuring competency to practice (Bhat, 2005; Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brear et al., 2008; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). Counselor competence is the CIT's acquisition and implementation of knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to become an effective counselor (Tate et al., 2014). This professional competence is measured by the successful completion and graduation from a counseling training program, passage of a national exam, and completion of postgraduate hours and any additional state requirements (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014; Even & Robinson, 2013).

Gatekeepers are faculty, site supervisors, clinical directors, and additional supervisors who execute these functions throughout the counselor education system (Freeman et al., 2016; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Thorensen, 1969). Gatekeepers are placed throughout the counselor education system to ensure that students or graduates are meeting competency standards and to provide protection to the general public (ACA, 2014; Goodrich & Shin, 2013; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Thorensen, 1969; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). The gatekeeping process promotes student equity, fulfills instructional and ethical responsibilities, maintains program integrity, ensures quality of

graduates, enhances the profession, and emphasizes the interests of the community (Brear et al., 2008).

Current survey research findings point to roadblocks impeding gatekeepers from executing gatekeeping functions smoothly and effectively (Bhat, 2005: Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Rust et al., 2013). Concerns include, but are not limited to, individuals admitted with problematic behaviors and licensed professionals committing ethical violations contributing to gateslippage (Even & Robinson, 2013; Rust et al., 2013). *Gateslippage* is a term created by Gaubatz and Vera (2002) to identify CIT graduates who are not appropriate to practice in the profession (Rust et al., 2013). I conducted this study to learn more about gatekeeping experiences in the counselor education system. The generation of such knowledge will increase the efficacy of gatekeeping in the counselor education community as well as increase protection to the general public (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016). As a result, this study may benefit not only counselor educators but also individuals seeking counseling services.

This chapter will solidify the identified need for continued research in the gatekeeping phenomenon. The literature demonstrates the prevalence of gateslippage within the counseling progression. This discussion highlights the need for further research to explore meaning through the lived experiences of gatekeepers in the counselor education training system. Research suggests that there are evolving concepts of gatekeeping that deserve attention and that learning more about the gatekeeping experience will enhance gatekeepers' ability to execute this vital function (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Gaubatz & Vera, 2006). In this chapter, I will provide background

information on the gatekeeping phenomenon; state the problem and purpose of the study; present the research question; provide overviews of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks and nature of the study; and discuss the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

Gatekeeping is an essential function within the counselor education system aimed at helping the CIT achieve competency (Bhat, 2005; Even & Robinson, 2013; Freeman et al., 2016; Goodrich & Shin, 2013; Thorensen, 1969). There has been an evolution of terminology as research continues to explore gatekeeping (Brear et al., 2008; Brown, 2013). Currently, counselor educators have attempted to be more consistent in the use of terminology to decrease negative connotations of CIT behavior (Brown, 2013). Although the language is still inconsistent, the use of the term *problematic behaviors* appears to be the terminology of choice over *deficient* or *impaired* (Brear et al., 2008; Brown, 2013; Goodrich & Shin, 2013; Rust et al., 2013). Specific areas of concern that gatekeepers address include ethical behaviors, symptoms of mental health, intrinsic dispositions, counseling skills, feedback, self-reflective abilities, personal difficulties, and procedural compliance (Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brown, 2013).

Program training is one sizeable and vital component of the counselor competency open system (Goodrich & Shin, 2013; Thorensen, 1969). Gatekeeping, in this component of the system, starts from preadmission and continues throughout the training program (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Different subsystems within program training may impact competency levels. For example, Even and Robinson

(2013) found that those who graduated from a Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) offering performed better on the National Counselor Exam (NCE) and had fewer ethical misconduct investigations. The interactions of various subsystems add to the complexity of evaluating counselor competency (Even & Robinson, 2013). In this continuous evaluation process, there are multiple assessments created for gatekeepers to utilize in the evaluation of counselor competency (Bhat, 2005; Brown, 2013; Tate et al., 2014). Formal assessments or performance appraisals are beneficial for CIT and gatekeepers at different benchmarks throughout graduate programs and postgraduate supervision (Bhat, 2005; Kress & Protivak, 2009; Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014).

Even with continuous assessment, a certain percentage of CIT in the population are not appropriate to counsel in the community (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Teixeira, 2017). Approximately 10% of CIT admitted to a counselor training program at any given time are not appropriate to practice (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Rust et al., 2013; Teixeira, 2017). Even and Robinson (2013) reported that there were 453 ethics violations from licensed professional counselors from 31 states during data collection, with 27.6% of the cases due to competency concerns. These individuals may represent cases where gatekeeping procedures may have been missed and are viewed as gateslippage (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Rust et al., 2013). Additionally, survey research has indicated that roadblocks impeding the effective execution of gatekeeping functions result in system dysfunction (Bhat, 2005; Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016). Therefore, gatekeepers and their experiences are an essential part of the CIT training system that

significantly impacts system functioning (Brear et al., 2008; Henderson & Dufrene, 2017; Homrich, 2009).

Problem Statement

With all the systemic forces and feedback mechanisms in the counselor education system, gatekeepers serve an essential role in counselor development (Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Thorensen, 1969). There is a breadth of quantitative and survey research literature on gatekeeping. Previous research on the gatekeeping phenomenon has addressed ways to improve system functioning regarding mitigating lawsuits following dismissal from the training program, advocating for formalized procedures for effective gatekeeping, and gatekeepers' willingness to deal with problematic peers (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2014, 2015; Henderson & Dufrene, 2018; Kress & Protivak, 2009; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). Based on this literature, Kress and Protivnak (2009) and Henderson and Dufrene (2011) have established a formalized professional development plan (PDP) process that supports gatekeepers' needs to remediate problematic behaviors or impairment, address proper due process, and efficiently manage legal ramifications (Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). Additionally, these developments provide best practices to strengthen and reinforce the gatekeeping role in the counselor competency process (Henderson & Dufrene, 2017).

There continues to be gateslippage with up to 10% of CIT admitted having experienced problematic behaviors in their training programs (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Gaubatz & Vera, 2006). The latest gateslippage research from Gaubatz and Vera (2006) estimated that up to 2.8% of that population graduate without addressing problematic

behaviors, but peer estimates suggested that up to 18% graduate without addressing problematic behaviors during training. There is further evidence of gateslippage in research by Even and Robinson (2013) who noted that regardless of percentage of reported violations, when licensed professionals engage in ethical misconduct, the behavior discredits the whole profession. Therefore, responsibility for gatekeeping in counseling training programs is paramount to the counseling profession. Furthermore, Crawford and Gilroy (2013) indicated that there is inconsistency in how counselor educators perform gatekeeping responsibilities. It appears, from the early stages of preadmissions through the completion stages of graduation, that gatekeepers may not be fully addressing concerns related to problematic behaviors and are inconsistent in their approach (Crawford & Gilroy, 2013; McCaughan & Hill, 2015; Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2015). To compound this problem, there are continued roadblocks that gatekeepers are experiencing in this role, thereby decreasing system functioning (Bhat, 2005; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016).

Freeman et al. (2016) found that about two thirds of site supervisors do not contact faculty with concerns regarding gatekeeping. Additional roadblocks such as empathy veils (where counselor educators may be reluctant to engage in gatekeeping due to their levels of empathy with the CIT), institutional conflicts, fear of litigation, and not feeling comfortable being evaluative continue to hurt executing this function (Bhat, 2005; Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brear et al., 2008; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016). Much of the existing research is through survey or quantitative analysis, and there is a lack of detailed data from gatekeepers and their experiences. Due to the continued gateslippage, there is

evidence that there is continued dysfunction in the counselor education system. Exploring this phenomenon from a new methodology and lens may enhance the understanding of gatekeeping. The research and social problem is that some CIT continue to slip through the gate into practice. Specifically, there is a lack of research focused on understanding gatekeepers' lived experiences, including how they resolve challenges within the system. Understanding the experiences of the gatekeepers may help to enhance effective gatekeeping practices for counselor educators and training programs.

Purpose

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of gatekeepers in the counseling profession, including discussing how gatekeeping challenges are addressed in the counselor education system. In this research, gatekeepers are any supervisors, counselor educators, and clinicians who are involved in the process of monitoring and evaluating competence in CIT (Bhat, 2005; Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brear et al., 2008; Foster & McAdams, 2007; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). This detailed understanding can increase knowledge about how roadblocks and barriers impact executing the gatekeeping role or how they lead to system dysfunction. This distinct purpose will help to enrich the research by providing the contextual, real-life experiences of gatekeepers in the counseling profession. These experiences illuminate aspects of the system that are working well with gatekeepers and how to resolve roadblocks, leading to more effective functioning. My objectives included understanding effective gatekeeping practices and the essence of ethical challenges and gatekeeping roadblocks (i.e., empathy veils, lack of

multicultural sensitivity, and fear of retaliation), while exploring patterns in counselor training gatekeeping for future research.

Research Question

How do gatekeepers in counseling training programs make meaning of their gatekeeping experiences including resolving gatekeeping challenges as it relates to best practices?

Theoretical Framework

Gatekeepers in the counselor education training system have a distinct role in the development of CIT. Yet, there is limited information about the lived experience of these gatekeepers (Erbes et al., 2015). This study provides understanding of the depth and meaning of gatekeeping experiences for those individuals in the counselor education training system. I used a hermeneutic phenomenology as a theoretical framework to gather the breadth of meaning and dynamics of this essential function for counselor educators. Chapter 2 will include additional details on how this use of theoretical framework furthered understanding of the lived experiences of gatekeepers.

Phenomenological Tradition

Phenomenology is a qualitative research tradition that provides an opportunity to explore in-depth perspectives individuals with experiences in gatekeeping (see Creswell, 2016). Phenomenology comes with two views, descriptive and interpretive. Both approaches to phenomenology state that meaning is derived from gatekeepers' experiences (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Porter, 2000). Although descriptive phenomenology describes the meaning of the phenomenon, interpretive phenomenology

interprets the phenomenon (Dowling & Cooney, 2012). The most significant difference between these two approaches involves the use of bracketing. Bracketing is the process where the researcher removes thoughts and judgments about the phenomenon (Hays & Wood, 2011). In interpretive phenomenology, known as hermeneutics, the researcher does not bracket out their perspective. These perspectives are essential to interpreting the studied phenomenon (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Higgs et al., 2014).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Researchers who use a hermeneutic phenomenology approach make meaning of a phenomenon through interpretations to deepen understanding. The hermeneutic circle by Ricoeur (1981) offers a broad, yet comprehensive way of using language to enhance meaning (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Ricoeur, 1981). Ricoeur (1975) proposed that interpretation through the hermeneutic circle through movement between questions and response to determine context values and meaning (see Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). Ricoeur's theory of interpretation focuses on the use of language, reflection, and use of self through three levels of analysis (Ghasemi et al., 2011; Ricoeur, 1981). The first level is distanciation, provides the objective distance. The next level includes enacting the hermeneutic circle to enhance understanding. Through this understanding comes appropriation, or making meaning of the phenomenon (Ghasemi et al., 2011; Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Ricoeur, 1975, 1981). This evidence-based framework supported understanding the lived experiences of gatekeepers in counselor training programs.

Conceptual Framework

In addition to the hermeneutic tradition, an emerging gatekeeping theory provided the conceptual framework for this study. Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen (2010) used grounded theory to explore the gatekeeping process. This emerging theory indicates that gatekeeping is a four-stage process that begins in preadmission screenings of academic aptitude and interpersonal interactions. The gatekeeping process continues postadmission with course grades, standardized tests, and interactions with fieldwork supervisors and faculty. Remediation plans support those CIT who are not meeting expectations and need additional support. The remediation outcome is the final phase of the gatekeeping theory. The remediation outcome is successful, unsuccessful, or neutral. Unsuccessful remediation leads to program dismissal, whereas neutral remediation is where students may complete the program but not adequately address concerns (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). This emerging gatekeeping theory aligns with exploring the lived experiences of gatekeepers as they discuss problematic behaviors and gateslippage. This conceptual framework, coupled with the hermeneutic design, provides a unique lens for interpreting the meaning of gatekeeping and the challenges gatekeepers experience (Shaw & DeForge, 2014; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework for the study. The framework incorporates the four phases used by Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen (2010).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework


```
                    ( Application )
                         |
                         v
  ( Admitted ) <-- [ Phase 1:      ] --> ( Not Admitted )
                  [ Preadmission   ]
                  [ Screening      ]
                         |
                         v
( Competence  <-- [ Phase 2:       ] --> ( Problematic
    Met )         [ Postadmission  ]        Behaviors )
                  [ Screening      ]
                         |
                  [ Phase 4:       ]
                  [ Successful     ]
                         ^
                  [ Phase 3:        ]
                  [ Remediation Plan ]
                         |
                  [ Phase 4:    ]   [ Phase 4:     ]
                  [ Indifferent ]   [ Unsuccessful ]
                         |                 |
                         v                 v
              ( Training          )   ( Dismissal )
              ( Completion        )
```
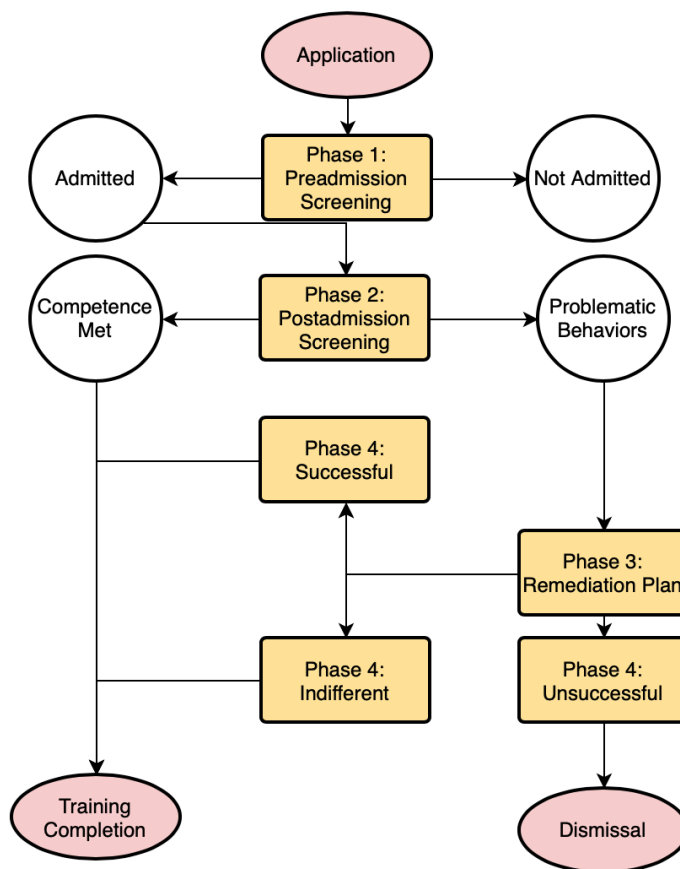
Nature of the Study

The study was qualitative in nature and involved the use of a hermeneutic phenomenological research design. Although descriptive phenomenology can be used to gather a rich and in-depth perspective of the lived experiences of gatekeepers in the counselor education system, interpretative phenomenology allows for the identification, description, and interpretation of the gatekeeping phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007; Kafle, 2013; Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers who use the hermeneutic

phenomenology approach explore not only how participants experience the phenomenon, but also consider the language of the participants (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). My goal in using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was to discover meaning and a sense of understanding of gatekeeping and gateslippage through interpretation (see Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Higgs et al., 2012; Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Shaw & DeForge, 2014). As I further discuss in Chapter 2, quantitative research methods would not have capture the depth and complexity of the essential role of gatekeepers in the counselor education training system in the development of CIT.

Definitions

Gatekeepers: Individuals who assess personal dispositions and clinical skills of CIT to achieve the main goal of ensuring competency to practice (Bhat, 2005; Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brear et al., 2008; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999).

Gatekeeping: The process of monitoring counselor development through stages and critical access points (Homrich, 2009). Gatekeeping is an ethical responsibility to monitor and evaluate student suitability for professional practice and competency and to remediate or prevent those struggling with competency from becoming counselors (Brear et al., 2008; CACREP, 2016).

Gateslippage: A term that refers to a CIT who graduate who are not appropriate to practice in the profession or who graduate without addressing problematic behaviors (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002; Rust et al., 2013).

Problematic behaviors: Attitudes or characteristics important to the learning process that may interfere with functioning (Brown, 2013; Wilkerson, 2006). As

pertaining to CIT, these behaviors may present concerns related to ethics, mental health, intrinsic characteristics, feedback, skill development, self-reflection, and procedural compliance (Henderson & Dufrene, 2012).

Professional development plan (PDP): A contract created by faculty and CIT to address a trainee's problematic behaviors. This contract documents expectations from faculty, specific behaviors being addressed, specific tasks to address behaviors, and consequences if the problematic behavior does not improve (Kress & Protivnak, 2009).

Remediation: A planned attempt by gatekeepers to explore and address problematic behaviors to support student development and increase professional competency (CACREP, 2016; Dougherty et al., 2015; McAdams & Foster, 2007).

Assumptions

I assumed that gatekeepers, both counselor educators and site supervisors, know the concepts of gatekeeping and are currently engaging in this function in their role in the CIT training program. Additionally, I assumed that gatekeepers understand the ethical responsibility of engaging in gatekeeping functions including evaluation and remediation by following the ACA (2014) *Code of Ethics*. Last, I assumed that these gatekeepers have engaged in at least one gatekeeping encounter. These assumptions underpinned the study as not all graduate programs engage in the gatekeeping processes or engage in gatekeeping in the same manner. Therefore, it was important for all participants to understand gatekeeping to share their lived experience.

In the research process, I assumed that all participants met eligibility criteria before engaging in the interview process. Another assumption was that participants

would be willing to engage in a semistructured interview and engage in any follow-up contacts and member checks that would be requested. This assumption was necessary to explore the lived experiences of gatekeepers and to allow flexibility in deriving meaning from each participant.

Scope and Delimitations

I chose participants who had a master's degree in mental health counseling or a related field as a full-time, part-time, or site supervisor. These individuals were attached to a CACREP Mental Health Counseling or related training program engaging in gatekeeping responsibilities. Individuals excluded were gatekeepers from non-CACREP programs and those individuals outside of mental health counseling training or related programs such as social work or psychology training programs. Participants were from diverse geographical locations across the continental United States. Additionally, the sample was met by having participants solicit other prospective participants throughout the United States.

Limitations

Potential challenges included recruitment of participants through snowball sampling as I was working from the assumption that participants knew others with gatekeeping experiences. Another limitation with interviewing participants is that their self-report may not fully capture the challenges they faced when executing gatekeeping functions. I was the main instrument in this qualitative research study. Although I had not engaged in gatekeeping functions in counselor training, I have engaged in gatekeeping with licensed clinicians, which may have added biases in my interpretation of

gatekeeping phenomenon. I used a reflexive journal and member checks to address biases and interpretation of any data collected.

Significance

This research filled a gap by providing an in-depth account of gatekeeping and gateslippage through the stories of individuals executing this role (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). This study was unique as it moved past documentation of gateslippage rates toward an understanding of gatekeepers' perceived challenges and factors that positively impact their ability to perform gatekeeping duties. Additionally, I used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to gatekeeping that provided an encapsulating view of gatekeeping, building on current literature. The results of this research provide insight into the lived experiences of gatekeepers in counselor training programs as information highlights the meaning of gatekeeping (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Last, results increase understanding about gateslippage to inform the counselor education population and enhance protection to the public (ACA, 2014).

Summary

Counselor educators have an ethical duty and responsibility to engage in gatekeeping functions (ACA. 2014). In this chapter, I provided background information on the gatekeeping phenomenon and explored the research problem, which is that 10% of CIT may be experiencing problematic behaviors during their time in a counselor education training program and differences in gateslipping rates (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Gaubatz & Vera, 2006). In this introductory chapter, I defined key gatekeeping terms and explored the assumptions, scope, and limitations of this current research study.

As I further discuss in Chapter 2, it is imperative that more research, from a qualitative lens, be conducted to benefit the counselor education community and better protect the general public from those CIT who are not suitable for professional practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Gatekeepers serve a vital role in the counselor education training system to promote counselor development (Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). There is ample existing quantitative and survey research on the gatekeeping phenomenon. This research has highlighted best gatekeeping practices, increased system functioning to mitigate retaliation, evidence-based formalized gatekeeping policies, and addressing problematic peers (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2014, 2015; Henderson & Dufrene, 2018; Kress & Protivak, 2009; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). PDPs are a collaborative process to support the CIT by addressing problematic behaviors and ensure due process (Henderson & Dufrene, 2011; Kress & Protivnak, 2009). Significant evidence-based gatekeeping practices strengthen the gatekeeping role as well as provide continuity to the training system (Homrich, 2009).

CIT who struggle with problematic behaviors without being addressed or remediated before program completion run a risk to the general public. Approximately 10% of CIT admitted to training programs experience problematic behaviors (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Gaubatz & Vera, 2006). Gaubatz and Vera (2006) estimated that approximately 10% of CIT admitted to training programs experience problematic behaviors. Recent faculty estimates from Gaubatz and Vera suggested that gateslippage rates differ between faculty and student perceptions, with higher rates of gateslippage from student perceptions. To compound gateslippage concerns, there is inconsistency among gatekeepers on how to perform gatekeeping functions (Crawford & Gilroy, 2013). Therefore, gatekeeping from the preadmission through program completion leads to

potential system dysfunction as individuals are not consistent in their approach (Crawford & Gilroy, 2013; McCaughan & Hill, 2015; Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2015). In addition to inconsistent methods, there are roadblocks to executing these functions, continuing to impact system functioning (Bhat, 2005; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016). For example, two thirds of site supervisors do not contact faculty with concerns with interns regarding gatekeeping, which highlights concerns with continuity (Freeman et al., 2016). Further challenges such as empathy veils, litigation, and institutional conflicts also can negatively impact gatekeeping responsibilities (Bhat, 2005; Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brear et al., 2008; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016).

With these roadblocks impacting the process and systems, there is continued concern with gateslippage. There is a lack of information from the gatekeepers executing these functions in training programs; therefore, exploring the gatekeeping phenomenon with a new lens will enhance meaning and understanding. The significant problem of gateslippage poses a risk to the community, and it is imperative to understand the lived experiences of gatekeepers and how to resolve gatekeeping challenges. Understanding more about this phenomenon will continue to enhance the gatekeeping practices for counselor educators and training programs to protect the general public.

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of gatekeepers in the counseling profession, including discussing how gatekeeping challenges are addressed in training programs (Creswell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Thorensen, 1969). Gatekeepers are any individuals who are involved in the training process of evaluating competence in CIT for practice (Bhat, 2005; Brear & Dorrian,

2010; Brear et al., 2008; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Knowing more about challenges that impact executing the gatekeeping role or how they lead to system dysfunction is beneficial to current gatekeepers in practice. Furthermore, this purpose helps to enhance knowledge and understanding by providing the contextual, real-life experiences of gatekeepers in the counseling profession. These experiences highlight aspects of the system that are working well with gatekeepers and how to resolve challenges, leading to more effective functioning. Objectives for this study included understanding effective gatekeeping practices and the essence of ethical gatekeeping challenges, as well as exploring gatekeeping patterns in counselor training.

This chapter solidifies the identified need for continued research in the gatekeeping phenomenon. There is literature supporting that there is continued gateslippage; therefore, further research was needed to explore meaning through the lived experiences of gatekeepers in the counselor education training system. The research indicated there were evolving concepts of gatekeeping that deserved attention (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Gaubatz & Vera, 2006). This chapter highlights avenues of collecting the literature, important design elements including theoretical and conceptual frameworks, as well as the background of literature that illuminates critical aspects of the gatekeeping phenomenon.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review for this hermeneutic phenomenological study consisted of textbooks and peer-reviewed journal articles published in the last 5 to 7 years. Additional literature of seminal and significant works of gatekeeping highlighted the gap in specific

areas of this research phenomenon. The following databases were utilized within the institution's library: PsychINFO, PschARTICLES, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest, and Google Scholar, which linked to the institution's library. Through this thorough literature review, search terms and their pairings included: counselor competence, gatekeeping, counselor education, gateslippage, CACREP, remediation, ethics, best practices, and PDPs. Combinations of search terms were gatekeeping in counselor education, gatekeeping interventions, gateslippage rates, counseling professional development, counselor education remediation, remediation interventions, and burnout.

The literature search brought forth valuable information on a variety of aspects of the gatekeeping phenomenon. There is a theme of the evolution of gatekeeping in terminology, lessons learned throughout time, and best practices of the gatekeeping process. Terms and practices have shifted over time, and yet, challenges remain. The continued challenges make this phenomenon dynamic to execute and there are different practices among gatekeepers. Additionally, there have been numerous, quantitative and survey studies that highlight the significance of the gatekeeping role in CIT development and most importantly, protecting the public from those CIT who are not suitable for practice.

There is limited literature with in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of gatekeepers enacting this role. Many current research studies that explore this phenomenon have been through surveys and quantitative research methods. There is a similar qualitative study that examined the lived experiences of counselor educators in

gatekeeping. Erbes et al. (2015) noted two emerging themes from their phenomenological analysis, including gatekeeping procedures and challenges of gatekeeping. Erbes et al. continued to reinforce the evolving procedures for best practices and the challenges gatekeepers experience. Overarching themes included gatekeeping procedures and challenges of gatekeeping. Erbes et al. reported that more qualitative studies on gatekeeping would be beneficial to the counselor educator. Additionally, Erbes et al. suggested that larger samples and a wider range of participants from across the country are needed to enhance the gatekeeping research. I explore these themes, using an increased sample and geographical distance.

Theoretical Foundation

Gatekeepers in the counselor education training system have a distinct role in the development of CIT. Quantitative research methods do not capture the depth and complexity of this essential role. There is limited information from the lived experience of these gatekeepers. This study provided an in-depth understanding to the depth and meaning of gatekeeping experiences for those individuals in the counselor education training system. Therefore, I used hermeneutic phenomenology as a theoretical framework to gather the breadth of meaning and dynamics of this essential function for counselor educators (see Creswell, 2016).

Descriptive and Interpretive Phenomenology

Phenomenology offers the ability to gather an in-depth perspective to understand the lived experiences of gatekeepers (see Creswell, 2016). Phenomenology evolved out of the philosophical works of Husserl and his viewpoints of intentionality (Dowling &

Cooney, 2012). The theory postulates that meaning is derived from the subjects' experiences and thoughts of the phenomenon (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Porter, 2000). Within this framework, there are two differing perspectives: descriptive and interpretive. To reach the essence, the researcher must bracket preconceived notions about the phenomenon not to influence the participants' experience (Dowling & Cooney, 2012). Bracketing is the qualitative practice of the researcher refraining from adding judgment about the phenomenon and removing it from the research process (Hays & Wood, 2011). Heidegger, a student of Husserl, believed it was not enough to describe the phenomenon-it was also to be interpreted (Dowling & Cooney, 2012). Heidegger believed that interpretation would lead to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). One of the differences is in the thought process behind bracketing out viewpoints. Interpretive phenomenology stated that the researcher cannot separate knowledge from the interpretation and perspective is how people make sense of the world, and consequently, the phenomenon (Dowling & Cooney, 2012). This process began the evolution of hermeneutics (Dowling & Cooney, 2012).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The aim of hermeneutic phenomenology is to discover meaning and a sense of understanding through interpretation (Higgs et al., 2012; Shaw & DeForge, 2014). Ricoeur offered the broadest hermeneutic analysis and enacted the hermeneutic circle (Dowling & Cooney, 2011). The hermeneutic circle is the movement back and forth from understanding parts to understanding the whole phenomenon (Boell, & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010).

Ricoeur (1975) differed from other interpretive theorists as he proposed that interpretation is the process in which the exchange between question and response determines the context values or meaning. Therefore, Ricoeur's theory of interpretation offered a broad, but comprehensive, systemic way of interpreting the data focusing on language, reflection, and understanding of self (Ghasemi et al., 2011; Ricoeur, 1981). Specific to his theory of interpretation are three levels of analyzing data through (a) distanciation, providing objective distance, (b) understanding, enacting the hermeneutic circle, and (c) appropriation, to make meaning. I used the hermeneutic framework to interpret the lived experiences of gatekeepers and enhance understanding of gatekeeping.

Conceptual Framework

I used Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen's (2010) emergent theory of gatekeeping as an integrated conceptual framework which has a hermeneutic phenomenological foundation to explore the gatekeeping phenomenon (see Figure 1). Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen used grounded theory to develop an emerging theory of gatekeeping. Results indicate that gatekeeping is a four-stage process that starts with the preadmission screening of academic aptitude and interpersonal interaction. Gatekeeping continued throughout the program through course grades, standardized tests, as well as interactions with faculty and site supervisors. If students are not meeting expectations, remediation plans are put in place to support those needing additional assistance. The last phase of the gatekeeping practices theory is whether the remediation outcome is successful, unsuccessful, or neutral. Unsuccessful remediation will lead to students being dismissed or otherwise leaving the training program. Indifferent or neutral remediation includes

marginal results, where students may complete the program but not fully address faculty concerns. This theory is compatible with exploring the gatekeeping phenomenon, problematic students, and gateslippage rates (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Using this theory enhances the hermeneutic design of this study by providing a lens for interpretation and meaning making of gatekeeping and gateslippage experiences (see Shaw & DeForge, 2014; Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

Background of Gatekeeping

Gatekeepers in the counselor education community are responsible for ensuring counselor competency when completing their training program (Henderson & Dufrene, 2017). Gatekeeping literature has evolved through lessons learned in a variety of contexts, proving the dynamic nature of executing this role effectively. Counselor educators continue to explore ways to unify gatekeeping procedures, and it is imperative to know and understand the background of gatekeeping literature (Homrich, 2018).

Significance

Gatekeepers systemically assess personal dispositions and clinical skills of CIT to achieve the primary goal of ensuring competency to practice (Bhat, 2005; Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brear et al., 2008; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). *Counselor competence* is defined as the acquisition and implementation of knowledge and skills needed to become an effective counselor (Tate et al., 2014). Measurement of professional competence includes graduating from a training program, passing a national exam, completing postgraduate hours, and meeting any additional state requirements (ACA, 2014; Even &

Robinson, 2013). It is the role and responsibility of gatekeepers to protect the public from

counselors who are not suitable for the profession (ACA, 2014). Addressing problematic

behaviors is an essential element of this process (Henderson & Dufrene, 2018).

Therefore, gatekeepers in the counselor education system need to be prepared to execute

the gatekeeping functions throughout the training program (Homrich, 2018).

Domains of Clinical Training

Henderson and Homrich (2018) highlighted the domains of clinical training in

their edited book on gatekeeping in the mental health professions. There is limited

consistency beyond ethical standards for professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal

standards for CIT (Homrich et al. 2013). Homrich (2018) proposed that there are three

domains of clinical training to ensure counseling competency: academic knowledge,

personal and professional behavior, and therapeutic skills. Helping professions are unique

due to the assessment of personal and professional behaviors to ensure competence

(Homrich, 2018). Therapeutic skills and academic knowledge have standardized

evaluations; personal and professional behaviors are more ambiguous than academic

knowledge, and each training program determines the expectations, making these

concepts more nebulous (Homrich, 2018).

Council for Accreditation for Counseling Related and Educational Programs

(CACREP). Although there are few standards for personal and professional behavior,

CACREP offers academic standards for competency in the profession. CACREP offers a

process and accreditation for training program requirements to meet specific criteria in

academic knowledge and therapeutic skills (CACREP, 2016; Urofsky, 2013). The six

domains encompass multiple aspects of the counselor training process, including the

learning environment, professional counseling identity, professional practice, evaluation,

specialty areas, and doctoral standards (CACREP, 2016). However, CACREP does not

dictate the manner and ways in which the training programs execute the standards

increasing subjectivity in counselor competency.

American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics. One of the pillars of

ethical standards for gatekeeping includes the ACA (2014) *Code of Ethics*. Multiple

codes address executing gatekeeping functions due to the complexity of the role.

Counselors, CIT, and supervisors are to monitor for any impairment that would

negatively impact the client (ACA, 2014). Additionally, some guidelines support that

gatekeepers evaluate and give feedback to provide support or remediation to address any

problematic behaviors (ACA, 2014; Homrich et al., 2014). Most importantly, these

ethical standards support the overall goals of protecting the public from those struggling

and not able to provide quality care in the community (ACA, 2014; Brear et al., 2008;

Henderson & Dufrene, 2018). These standards are clear but do not share how to execute

the roles highlighting the ambiguity in gatekeeping concretely.

Terminology

Evolution and Inconsistency. Gatekeeping practices have been evolving, so has

been the specific terminology associated with this phenomenon. The counseling

profession has gone through a myriad of terms that have been associated with other

professions through the development of the gatekeeping process. Some of the terms

associated with gatekeeping which have shifted over time to include psychological fitness

and impairment (Baldwin, 2018). With these terms came negative connotations where counselor educators have been working to find the more appropriate term to describe problematic behaviors that enact the gatekeeping process.

Psychological fitness was a gatekeeping term described in other disciplines, specifically in the military culture by licensed psychologists (Johnson et al., 2008). Gatekeepers found the term psychological fitness convoluted as it identified mental and emotional stability and the ability to practice effectively (Johnson et al., 2008). This definition provides the illusion that an individual met diagnostic criteria which presented problems with accuracy in the counselor education field. Many of the problematic behaviors that gatekeepers see may not be directly connected to a diagnosis; therefore, psychological fitness is not an appropriate term for this phenomenon (Baldwin, 2018).

Gatekeeping has frequently referenced the term *impairment* in the literature. While the medical field utilized this term in the 1970s, the mental health professionals began to use impairment in the 1990s through the American Psychological Association (Baldwin, 2018; Henderson & Dufrene, 2018). *Impairment* was used to describe individuals struggling with any form of mental health issues, substance abuse, and inappropriate relationships with clients. Due to the wide range of concerns, a clear and concise definition has been successful (Baldwin, 2018). Impairment, like psychological fitness, may infer a diagnosis which may not be accurate. However, impairment is used in recent ethical guidelines including the American Psychological Association (2017), American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (2015) and ACA (2014) *Codes*

of Ethics, which continue to promote inconsistent or inaccurate uses of gatekeeping terms (Baldwin, 2018).

Current Terminology. Through the evolution of terms that have not worked with the gatekeeping phenomenon, there have been terms that encapsulate the breadth of challenges counselors may experience: *competence* and *problematic*. The term *competence* allows flexibility for situations, developmental struggles, and varying intensity of remediation (Baldwin, 2018; Henderson & Dufrene, 2018). Competence is the successful attainment of skills and knowledge (Baldwin, 2018). Therefore, competency attainment encompasses a range of skills and standards for clinical training that includes all domains of clinical training (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014).

When describing struggles with competence, *problematic* is a term that incorporates all domains of clinical training — the term *problematic* decreases negative connotations as opposed to words like incompetent. Using the term problematic behavior allows for a CIT to struggle at any point in their training, whether it be temporary, chronic, and does not define severity (Forrest et al., 1999; Homrich, 2009). There are variations in the literature as this vernacular becomes more prominent that includes, but is not limited to, problematic behaviors and problems of professional competence (Brown, 2013; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Rust et al., 2013).

Gatekeeping Process

Throughout the CIT program, gatekeepers will assess, evaluate, and remediate problematic behaviors. This assessment will support the CIT as well as ensure competency to practice in the community. Through the process, gatekeepers have the

opportunity to explore the CITs' developmental stages, cultural context, and interpersonal skills. If problematic behaviors persist and cause concern, remediation is the resulting process to support the development and directly address the problematic behaviors.

Assessment Stages

Admission. Before anyone enters a counselor training program, there is a pre-admission screening process (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Gatekeepers, primarily faculty, have the opportunity to make an individual assessment on whether or not the potential student will be successful in the field of counseling (Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014). Many programs utilize screening tools in addition to the admissions application such as personal statements, letters of recommendation, and research statements (Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014). These items help gatekeepers understand more about the person who has applied, including the ability to master therapeutic skills and explore their professional relationships (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010).

Many programs will continue the pre-admission gatekeeping process through an interview (Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014). Training programs utilize group and individual interviews to assess abilities to be successful in the field and to be an asset to the program (Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014). These interviews may also include a writing prompt, social mixers, and orientation to the field (Swank & Smith-Adcock, 2014). Even with these pre-admissions screening processes in place, problematic behaviors will still arise within some CITs' time in the program. As a result, gatekeepers still seek effective pre-admission screening measures and incorporate additional assessment processes within the program.

Coursework. Postadmission screening is another essential element in the gatekeeping process. After a CIT is admitted, academic aptitude and interpersonal interactions can be assessed through courses (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). This assessment can be completed through grades and standardized assessments (Glance et al., 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). In addition to academic aptitude, observations of behavior and interactions are noted in the classroom, conferences, residencies, and social situations. One method of measurements for interpersonal interactions is how well the CIT integrates feedback (Glance et al., 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010).

Field Work Experiences. Fieldwork practicum and internship are milestone courses that assess the full breadth of the domains of clinical training programs (DePue & Lambie, 2014; DeLorenzi, 2018). Fieldwork experiences provide a new dimension of learning through practical experiences to help the CIT develop further in preparation for entering the workforce (CACREP, 2016). This vital point in the training program provides gatekeepers the opportunity to assess a myriad of competencies (DePue & Lambie, 2014). These clinical experiences are usually the final benchmark of the training process and can be challenging to assess systemically (DePue & Lambie, 2014; Swank & Lambie, 2012).

Assessment Tools and Process

Throughout the training process, there are many methods and tools to provide feedback to assess counselor competency (DeLorenzi, 2018). Assessments are formative, summative, and developmentally appropriate for the CIT's development. CACREP

(2016) and ACA (2014) noted standards and expectations for counselor development; however, these guidelines do not indicate how to measure development and competency. Therefore, the lack of consistency increases the ambiguity and each training programs' expectations of counselor competency.

Informal Assessments. Gatekeepers need to provide ongoing, contextual, and intentional feedback to foster growth (DeLorenzi, 2018). Combining formal and informal assessment provides the opportunity to highlight strengths and areas of improvement to support development. Therefore, programs utilize both informal and formal assessments throughout the training process and document accordingly to ensure proper execution of gatekeeping functions. Informal assessments include providing feedback in the classroom experience and supervision that is accurate and reliable through observations and interactions (Falender et al., 2009). While informal assessments provide immediate feedback for growth, assessments are more subjective and based on the experience of the gatekeeper.

Formal Assessment and Tools. Each program has the potential to utilize tools that measure counselor competency (Swank, Lambie & Witta, 2012). Course grades only assess one domain of clinical training: academic knowledge. Formal assessment tools provide gatekeepers structured guidelines to assess and measure levels of competency in multiple areas of training (Garner, Freeman, & Lee, 2016). These tools present more standardized, objective criteria to provide feedback to promote development that meets program and training standards. However, there is a myriad of different tools that are utilized and vary across programs (Tate et al., 2009). Many tools offer the ability to

provide formative and summative feedback to the CIT, support documentation on arising issues, and track progress in training with limited reliability and validity (Garner et al., 2016). Some of the more popular assessments in the literature include the Counseling Competencies Scale and the Professional Counseling Performance Evaluation (Kerl et al., 2002; Swank et al., 2012). There is still subjectivity in these assessments based on the gatekeeper providing the feedback.

Counselor Development and Prevention

There is a cognitive and developmental process for CIT to achieve competency levels. Helping CIT progress includes implementing varying methods and techniques (Granello, 2002). In addition to integrating cognitive complexity and interpersonal skills, there are developmental and contextual considerations. During this learning process, gatekeepers are supporting growth and preventing problematic behaviors before they occur.

Cognitive and Developmental Considerations. CIT are not expected to achieve competency at the start of the training program. Counselors will develop cognitive complexity throughout the program especially after their first practicum course (Granello, 2002). Counseling literature on cognitive complexity and developmental progress comes from Perry's (1970) model of higher education learning and development and Skovholt and Ronnestad's (1992) counselor development model as well as Kohlberg's (1984) theory of moral development (Eriksen & McAuliffe, 2006; Granello, 2010). Bridging these models of thought and development help to understand the essential growth for CIT to include: cognitive complexity, empathy, flexibility, autonomy, and interpersonal

integrity (Chandler, Alexander, & Heaton, 2005; Eriksen & McAuliffe, 2006; Lambie & Sias, 2009). With the dynamic development of these skills, gatekeepers assess if CIT are struggling with an appropriate development or problematic behaviors during program progression as no model captures all behaviors (Thanasiu, 2018).

Best Practices in Gatekeeping

There are a continuum of behaviors and experiences on which CIT may need support from their program. Certain problematic behaviors need to be addressed with more immediate attention as these behaviors are seen as barriers to moving forward in the training program (Dufrene & Henderson, 2018; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Gatekeepers may engage in remediation, an element of the gatekeeping process that addresses problematic behaviors, including deficiencies in clinical skills, professional dispositions, and academic knowledge, hindering the CIT ability to move forward successfully (Homrich, 2018; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). This supportive intervention is met with specific goals and objectives to help develop the trainee's domains of clinical training (ACA, 2014). The outcome of the remediation will determine the next course of action from the gatekeepers (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010).

Legal Considerations

Gatekeepers are mindful of legal and ethical dynamics when engaging in gatekeeping. Previous legal cases have brought essential considerations into the gatekeeping process including ensuring CIT have their First Amendment Rights and Due Process (Hutchens, Block, & Young, 2012; Kerl et al., 2002). Gatekeepers initially utilized the ruling from an allied profession to help guide the gatekeeping process, *Board*

of Curators of the University of Missouri v. Horowitz (1978) to guide the integrity of the counseling profession. This case from the medical field stated the United States Supreme Court ruled medical schools could include not only academic performance, but clinical skills and demeanor as a determination for suitability (Kerl et al., 2002). Notable legal cases from counseling programs include: *Plaintiff v. Rector and Board of Visitors of the College of William and Mary (2005), Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley (2011), and Ward v. Wilibanks (2011)* continue to highlight the need of gatekeepers' adherence to legal and ethical mandates (Hutchens et al., 2012; Kerl et al., 2002; McAdams et al., 2007).

   First Amendment. Recent cases, *Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley (2011), and Ward v. Wilibanks (2011)*, explicitly address CIT First Amendment rights. These cases have evolved with CIT and managing religious beliefs about working with the LGBTQ population. These cases highlighted important considerations regarding ethical codes and the interplay with freedom of speech (Baldwin, 2018; Hutchens et al., 2012). Ensuring CIT first amendment rights is an important consideration in the gatekeeping process as there is a difference in gatekeeping if the CIT is disregarding the ACA (2014) *Code of Ethics* and ethical responsibility (Hutchens et al., 2012).

   Due Process. Literature also supports ensuring adherence to both forms of due process in the gatekeeping process. First, *procedural due process* in counselor education training systems ensure that any trainee has the notice and right to a hearing (Kerl et al, 2002). *Substantive due process* ensures that the training program is consistent and fair with all CIT (Homrich, 2009; Kerl et al., 2002). Therefore, gatekeepers cannot dismiss any CIT without that person's knowledge or ability to defend themselves (Baldwin,

2018). This process highlights the need for a thorough informed consent, documentation, remediation plans, and dismissal policy for each program for gatekeepers to follow as any policy can become ambiguous (Baldwin, 2018; Homrich, 2009; Hutchens et al., 2012).

Standardization and Documentation. The case *of Plaintiff v. Rector and Board of Visitors of the College of William and Mary (2005),* used the formal remediation plan and thorough documentation to uphold the university's decision for gatekeeping practice (McAdams & Foster, 2009). There has been strong evidence for standardizing and thoroughly documenting gatekeeping procedures (Foster & McAdams, 2009; Hutchens et al., 2012). Training programs should have standardized policies for gatekeeping in place to ensure the process is fair, consistent, and applied in a uniform fashion with CIT exhibiting problematic behaviors (Hutchens et al., 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen 2010). CIT should also be aware of the gatekeeping process and procedures in the student handbook and each course syllabus (Hutchens et al., 2012). With the approximate numbers of CIT who may not be appropriate for the profession, it is essential to have the proper procedures in place before anyone starts the program (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002).

Remediation

Gatekeepers must address problematic behaviors including problems of professional competence through remediation (Dufrene & Henderson, 2018). Remediation plans, including a PDP, are behaviorally focused remediation plans and contracts between the counselor education training program and a CIT (Kress & Protivnak, 2009). Because the gatekeeping process starts before admission, the remediation process happens with current trainees in the program.

Approaches and Models

While there is a legal and ethical responsibility for gatekeeping, the path to executing gatekeeping is not clear (Henderson & Dufrene, 2017). Remediation plans are individualized, contextualized and serve as a contract co-created to support development of identified barriers and problematic behaviors (Kress & Protivnak, 2009). Lumadue and Duffey (1999) highlighted early models from the mid 1990's on how to execute gatekeeping. Lumadue and Duffey (1999) continued with a new model to evaluate student performance using the Professional Performance Fitness Evaluation. After a problem area is identified, a three-member faculty committee creates the remediation plan (Lumadue & Duffey, 1999).

Wilkerson (2006) proposed that a therapeutic process model would be beneficial to approaching remediation. The therapeutic process model starts with informed consent through manuals and syllabi where the CIT understand the evaluation methods. Intake and assessment occur through the admissions process and program matriculation. Gatekeepers next use evaluations to monitor progress and competency. If problematic behaviors arise, a treatment or remediation plan is created to enhance student performance. Lastly, termination includes either successful completion of training program or dismissal if goals cannot be met (Wilkerson, 2006).

Homrich's (2009) best practices model begins through the admissions process and throughout training. Trainees are informed through handbooks, program philosophy of the systemic assessment, and evaluations that will occur during the training process (Glance et al., 2012). The assessment process has regularly scheduled (i.e. end of first

term, end of each academic year, and through each clinical field placement) evaluations that are fair and consistent. Remediation begins with informal problem-solving attempts, including documentation and tracking. If the problematic behavior persists, a faculty committee presents a remediation plan to address concerns and build competency (Homrich, 2009).

Many gatekeeping best practice models include overlapping features that begin during the admission process. Additionally, CIT should be properly notified of the systemic and ongoing assessments for competency (Homrich, 2009; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Wilkerson, 2006). Remediation plans are a consistent part of the gatekeeping process that include multiple faculty members and co-created with the student (Homrich, 2009; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Wilkerson, 2006). Lastly, the remediation plans have limited outcomes including successful, unsuccessful or indifferent. While these models synthesize the process, the details of what a remediation plan includes vary from each CIT and PDP (Henderson & Dufrene, 2018). Glance et al. (2012) highlighted that 48% of programs enacted the gatekeeping process practices indicating potential for gateslippage will still occur if best practice models are not enacted.

Remediation Plan Interventions

PDPs are contextual and are created to support the needs of the CIT. As Wilkerson (2006) described, the remediation process mirrors the treatment plan, where the remediation interventions serve as concrete objectives to meet competency goals. Teixeira (2017) noted that CACREP and non-CACREP interventions are similar. While

each plan is individualized, interventions fall into two broad categories: developmental (nonclinical) and clinical interventions.

  Developmental. There are a variety of interventions that support non-clinical developmental needs of CIT. The more prominent interventions include advising, coursework, written assignments, and personal counseling. Some may be required to meet more frequently with their faculty advisor to discuss obstacles and problem-solving strategies (Homrich, 2009; Kress & Protivnak, 2009). Literature also suggests that many PDP's included additional or repeated coursework in didactic and/or clinical courses (Henderson & Dufrene, 2018; Teixeira, 2017; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). This provides the CIT the opportunity to obtain certain skills or concepts that may contribute to their success. Some plans include additional writing assignments to show competency goals related to their plan which may involve enhanced understanding of a specific topic, outside readings and documentation, and written reflections increasing insight (Henderson & Dufrene, 2018).

  One of the consistent, yet controversial interventions is the use of personal counseling as a requirement of a PDP (Henderson & Dufrene, 2018; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Personal counseling can be an intervention to increase insight into interpersonal and intrapersonal obstacles interfering with program success. However, the literature is conflicted on whether personal counseling should be required or recommended. Henderson and Dufrene (2018) and Kress and Protivnak (2009) detailed that some plans include consent for faculty to connect with provider and

acknowledgement of PDP. Teixeira (2017) and Homrich (2009) reported that referrals or suggestions to attend counseling are appropriate.

Clinical. Remedial interventions may be included to address specific concerns that interfere with clinical fieldwork. Interpersonal, intrapersonal, and academics may interfere with clinical competency. Interventions include attendance at workshops, ceasing fieldwork, co-facilitation in sessions, and increased supervision (Henderson & Dufrene, 2018; Homrich, 2009; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Specific workshops to increase clinical skills are appropriate for PDPs that are not addressed through repeated coursework (Henderson & Dufrene, 2018; Kress & Protivnak, 2009). Based on the severity of the problematic behavior and ethical guidelines for counselor educators, slowing or postponing fieldwork may be indicated (Homrich, 2009). Some plans may require resolution of the PDP before continuing with fieldwork (Henderson & Dufrene, 2018). Subsequently, a co-facilitator may be a requirement of the PDP to support the CIT and to provide mentorship (Homrich, 2009; Teixeira, 2017).

A consistent clinical intervention involves increased supervision in many PDP's (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Increased supervision provides an opportunity to work more closely on increasing trainee development and monitor client welfare. Intensified supervision has the ability to support the student academically and personally as they work through their PDP. This intervention can be modified in a myriad of ways to support competency development. Some plans may require extra supervision sessions to increase the frequency of meetings with faculty for accountability (Homrich, 2009; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Often increased supervision involves providing

more video-taped sessions for review (Homrich, 2009; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Supervision provides CIT with opportunities to show their growth and progress and receive feedback from their faculty to enhance development (Henderson & Dufrene, 2018).

Foundations of Gatekeeping and Gateslippage

It was crucial to explore the background of gatekeeping, gateslippage, and the social issue that gateslippage presents to the community as it related to this current study development. Lumadue and Duffey (1999) highlighted the legal and ethical dilemmas to justify the rationale for a gatekeeping model. Gaubatz and Vera (2002) created the term gateslippage to identify missed opportunities to address problematic behaviors. Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen (2010) developed an emerging theory of gatekeeping. Even and Robinson (2013) continued to illuminate that there are individuals with problems of professional competence practicing in the community. Brown-Rice and Furr (2016) furthered the research problem about roadblocks in the gatekeeping process. A critical review of this literature indicates that gatekeeping is a dynamic process that requires further understanding through the gatekeepers' experiences.

Lumadue and Duffey (1999) provided the field with an ethical and legal literature review on gatekeeping functions and models. This article provided a strong foundation for the role faculty play as gatekeeping in counselor training programs. The authors introduced the Southwest Texas State University (SWT) gatekeeping model developed from the integrations of Frame and Stevens-Smith (1995) and Baldo et al. (1997) models. The SWT model has a formalized structure for gatekeeping with a systemic evaluation of

student performance. CIT were given the evaluation criteria in admission packets and each syllabus to ensure due process. The ACA *Code of Ethics* supported the use of formal instruments used to evaluate CIT competency. This model chose to use the Professional Performance Fitness Evaluation (PPFE) to assess counseling skills and ability, professional dispositions, competence, maturity, and integrity. If there were deficiencies, the faculty formed a three-person committee to determine the course of action. Lumadue and Duffey (1999) sources were relevant and valid, although now may be seen as outdated as some sources were older than 5 years before publication. The use of operational definitions and detailed descriptions enriched the rationale for the SWT model. However, a theoretical framework with additional research on its effectiveness would have strengthened the support for SWT use. Lumadue and Duffey (1999) noted that future research is needed on the model's effectiveness, faculty concerns, and faculty resistance as gatekeepers.

The SWT gatekeeping model continues to be relevant and has evolved with gatekeeping literature. Lumadue and Duffey (1999) provided a history of gatekeeping, legal and ethical mandates from ACA, and how ACA developed to include faculty as gatekeepers of the profession. The historical context of this article filled a gap in the literature and practice. Lumadue and Duffey (1999) are widely cited in the current literature, highlighting the model's continued relevance and sound foundation to enhance gatekeeping practices. The PPFE is not the only validated instrument in providing a continuous evaluation. The SWT gatekeeping model embraces a comprehensive, systemic approach that aligns with this study's conceptual framework. This model was

useful to this study as it explores gatekeeping challenges, best practices, and gatekeeping challenges.

Gaubatz and Vera (2002) brought new terminology for the phenomenon of those CIT who graduate without having to address their problematic behaviors. These researchers surveyed 118 counselor educators to answer five research questions, (a) what percentage of students are estimated by faculty in their programs to be deficient or to have received remediation for deficiencies? (b) Is program accreditation status related to gatekeeping effectiveness? (c) Are other program-level characteristics related to gatekeeping effectiveness? (d) Are faculty member perceptions of institutional pressures to avoid screening, concerns about teaching evaluations, and student-initiated lawsuits related to willingness to remediate or dismiss deficient students? (e) Does the use of formalized gatekeeping procedures result in lower gateslipping rates? Results indicated that faculty estimated that 10.4% of master's students were not suited for the field. Gateslipping students were higher among programs that had a higher percentage of adjunct faculty, greater institutional pressures, or those concerned with getting sued. CACREP programs had a lower percentage of deficient students compared to non-CACREP training programs. Lastly, formalized gatekeeping procedures lead to more effective gatekeeping processes.

The sample size and return rate enhanced the validity and generalizability of the results (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002). However, the self-report measure did not get tested for reliability or validity, which may have had an impact on the responses and the self-report of students and programs. Additionally, due to the potential bias of responses or errors in

self-report, there is a propensity to have more errors. Overall, this study identified that gateslipping is a problem at CACREP and non-CACREP training programs as evidenced by the results that gateslipping occurs even with different rates among training programs. This indication supports the assumption that gateslipping continues to be a concern and needs continued exploration of formalized gatekeeping procedures. This study continues to reinforce that the roadblocks have been prevalent, as evidenced by the current Brown-Rice and Furr (2016) study.

Approximately 10 years after the Lumadue and Duffey (1999) gatekeeping model, Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen (2010) engaged in a qualitative, grounded theory study to find a theory of gatekeeping practices in counselor education. The purpose of this study was to review considerations around gatekeeping and remediation to provide an emerging theory of gatekeeping practices in the counselor education training system. This form of qualitative research was appropriate to generate a theoretical explanation of the gatekeeping phenomenon and practices. This grounded theory study investigated gatekeeping beliefs, behaviors, and current practices. Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen (2010) conducted eight 60-90-minute interviews at a regional conference. The results indicated that there are four phases of the gatekeeping process: preadmission screening, postadmission screening, remediation plans, and remediation outcomes. The preadmission screening process included application materials such as standardized testing, grade point averages, recommendation letters, and personal statements. This process also included individual or group interviews. The post-admission screening process included graded courses and evaluations completed within the program. Many of

the remediation plans involved intensified supervision and personal development. This gatekeeping theory explored remediation outcome categories of successful, unsuccessful, and indifferent or neutral outcomes.

Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen (2010) provided a valid and relevant rationale for the theory creations using grounded theory, although the peer-reviewed sources were outdated. More current literature would strengthen the rigor and scholarly nature of the rationale. The results of this theory appear generalizable to many counseling programs, which supported this theory for the conceptual framework of this study. As this is an emerging theory that fills a gap in the literature, it also opens a gap of literature on gatekeeping practices in remediation and outcome. The research in this article does build upon previous gatekeeping literature and has the ability to scaffolding current practices on this developing theory. Future research, including variables and best practices to enhance or shift the theory, is needed. Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen (2010) provides an opportunity for this study to see it in practice as the conceptual framework for counselor training programs.

Even and Robinson (2013) engaged in a quantitative analysis of CACREP accreditation on ethical violations for those currently in the field using current or archived data from licensing boards. This study explored a sample of 453 of ethical misconduct of licensed professionals in thirty-one states. The purpose was to examine the type and frequency of ethical violations among graduates of CACREP and non-CACREP programs, those with ethics training, and the graduate degree of violations. Categorical variables were years in service, and graduate degrees, and the dichotomous variables

were accreditation and ethics training. Even and Robinson (2013) utilized a multiway

frequency analysis, which examined the interaction among the variables. There was a

significant difference between CACREP and non-CACREP graduates and the frequency

of ethics violations. Interaction effects were significant among, years in service, graduate

degree, ethics training, and accreditation. There was no significant difference between

forms of ethics training.

Even and Robinson (2013) offered empirical support for CACREP standards with

their strong literature review and initial results. This study did build on previous literature

on differences among CACREP and non-CACREP programs and ethics training

strengthening the results. However, this study cannot be a general statement where more

literature and quantitative analysis is required to make stronger correlations about

differences from graduates of CACREP and non-CACREP programs. More confirmatory

research is needed to fill the gap to endorse CACREP ethics standards or to say there was

a causal link. Yet, the initial results do provide continued justification for gatekeeping in

counselor education training programs.

Brown-Rice and Furr (2016) employed a survey to counselor educators at

CACREP accredited institutions to learn more about CIT with problems of professional

competence (PPC). Three hundred seventy participants completed the Problems of

Professional Competency Survey- Counselor Educator version (PPCS-CE) survey tool

online. The instrument consisted of a demographic questionnaire and well as questions

about counselor educators and students with PPC and program protocol. Results indicated

that inadequate clinical skills and unprofessional behaviors had a significant impact on

counselor educators. The roadblocks to gatekeeping included empathy veils, concerns of cultural sensitivity, and fear of retaliation. A majority of counselor educators reported knowing program protocol on addressing problematic behaviors.

These survey results built upon on previous literature on the evolution of gatekeeping practices. The limitations of this survey included that there was not an opportunity to expand on the roadblocks or PPC. This current research study would build upon this current survey as more rich lived experiences will be shared connected to these survey responses. Brown-Rice and Furr (2016) confirmed a gap in the literature that gatekeepers are experiencing challenges to the gatekeeping role, which strengthens the rationale for exploring gatekeeping with a qualitative lens. Additionally, the only counselor educators surveyed were faculty, highlighting the need to include other members of the system, site supervisors and clinical directors. Brown-Rice and Furr (2016) noted that further research is needed to support negotiating these established barriers to ensure CIT does not slip through the gate into practice. This current study directly addresses learning more about the barriers in gatekeeping to support increased system functioning and decrease gateslippage.

Summary

There is a wide range of literature surrounding the gatekeeping phenomenon including how counselor educators talk about gatekeeping and the terminology used to knowing the breadth of barriers to gatekeeping in the field. Literature is consistent regarding the essential gatekeeping timelines as well as many of the strategies to support CIT through PDPs. Although the literature is consistent on the importance of

gatekeeping, there is still a lack of understanding the gatekeepers lived experiences. There is a concern of disparity in estimates of gateslippage and navigating interventions successfully. Specifically, the counseling community is unaware of how gatekeepers resolve challenges that arise during this process.

This study provided insight into how to better protect the public from those CIT that are not suitable to practice in the field. This study will educate the counselor education community to be more proactive in training programs to decrease gateslippage. With counseling training programs having more evidence to support the gatekeeping interventions more successfully, the public will feel more confident in utilizing counseling services.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of gatekeepers in the counseling profession, specifically discussing how gatekeeping challenges are addressed in the counselor education system (Creswell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Thorensen, 1969). By using phenomenology, I obtained a rich and in-depth perspective of the lived experiences of gatekeepers in the counselor education system. By using interpretative phenomenology, I was able to identify, describe, and interpret gatekeeping experiences. The hermeneutic phenomenology approach enable an exploration of not only how the participants experienced gatekeeping but also what language the participants used to enhance meaning.

This study provides additional insight of the lived experiences of gatekeepers in the counselor education training system. The specific research question was, How do gatekeepers in counseling training programs make meaning of their gatekeeping experiences including resolving gatekeeping challenges as it relates to best practices? In this chapter, I describe the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, data analysis plan, and issues of trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

The goal of using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach is to discover meaning and a sense of understanding through interpretation (Higgs et al., 2012; Shaw & DeForge, 2014). Key assumptions of hermeneutic phenomenology are (a) there is shared understanding, (b) construction of knowledge is through language, (c) findings emerge from interactions with researcher and participants, and (d) subjectivity is valued (Shaw &

DeForge, 2014; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). This design allows for interpretation more than descriptive phenomenology.

There are multiple theorists of hermeneutic phenomenology. I focused on Ricoeur's (1975) adaptation of hermeneutic phenomenology. Ricoeur (1975) differs from other interpretive theorists as he proposed that interpretation is the process in which the exchange between question and response determines the context values or meaning. Additionally, interpretation is the fundamental split before subjective intentions from the researcher and the objective significance from participants (Ghasemi et al., 2011). Therefore, interpretation fills the gap between what is meant to be said and what statements mean outside of the participant's intentions.

Ricoeur's theory of interpretation offers a broad, but comprehensive, systemic way of interpreting the data focusing on language, reflection, and understanding of self (Ghasemi et al., 2011; Ricoeur, 1981). The theory involves three levels of analyzing data through distanciation, understanding, and appropriation. The first phase, distanciation, refers to putting the lived experience at a distance. This involves being objective about the text and solely focusing on explaining what the text says (Ghasemi et al., 2011). The second phase of interpretation in Ricoeur's theory involves enacting the hermeneutic circle. Ghasemi et al. (2011), Kafle (2011), and Paterson and Higgs (2005) detailed the nature of understanding through the hermeneutic circle. This process involves repeated engagement with the text (Ghasemi et al., 2011; Kafle, 2011). This engagement is the ongoing movement from reflective reading parts of the text and the whole text to allowed for deeper understanding (Ghasemi et al., 2011; Kafle, 2011; Paterson & Higgs, 2005).

The last, most important phase of the theory of interpretation is appropriation, making

something one's own (Ghasemi et al., 2011; Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Ricoeur, 1975,

1981). This involves the principle of "fusion of horizons" (p. 346), where the

interpretation fuses the past, present, and future understanding of the hermeneutic circle

(Paterson & Higgs, 2005). Appropriation overcomes the cultural distance to reveal and

bring together to bring meaning (Ricoeur, 1981). The meaning includes the interpretation

infused with self-interpretation of pre-understandings, to increase understanding of self

(Downing & Cooney, 2012; Ghasemi et al., 2011; Ricoeur, 1981).

This approach was essential as it captured the common experiences of

gatekeeping to explore the nuance and complexity of this role (Creswell et al., 2007;

Hays & Wood, 2011). Hermeneutic phenomenology fit my worldview of incorporating

my preunderstandings of gatekeeping without bracketing (see Dowling & Cooney, 2012;

Kafle, 2013; Ricoeur, 1975, 1981). I appreciate and acknowledge that people are

incapable of total objectivity, as reality is subjective (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). The

interpretive nature of hermeneutic phenomenology proposes that meanings are

constructed by people in unique ways that are contextual and personal (Ajjawi & Higgs,

2007). Gatekeeping functions are personal experiences full of nuance and complexity that

benefit from the interpretive paradigm (Ajjawai & Higgs, 2007; Paterson & Higgs, 2005;

Shaw & DeForge, 2014; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Hermeneutic phenomenology supported a

further understanding of gatekeeping through interpreting individuals' experiences.

Ricoeur's theory of interpretation, which is supported through multiple resources,

was a valid method to increase the rigor and alignment of this study (see Ghasemi et al.,

2011; Tan et al., 2009). My research questions sought to make meaning and interpret the participants' lived experiences, which is in line with Ricoeur (1981). The language of the participants was important to capture the essence of gatekeeping (see Ajjawai & Higgs, 2007; Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Shaw & DeForge, 2014; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Survey and quantitative research methods have illuminated roadblocks and barriers to successful gatekeeping. Hermeneutic phenomenology brought a contextualized meaning that will bring forth a new meaning to this phenomenon (Ajjawai & Higgs, 2007; Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Shaw & DeForge, 2014; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Interviews align well with Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology due to the enactment of the hermeneutic circle (Ghasemi et al., 2011; Kafle, 2011; Paterson & Higgs, 2005). Studying the layers within interviews in data collection allows for more interpretation and complex meaning-making, rather than just description of participants' experiences (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). This process was beneficial to staying attuned to the participants' responses as I explored the meaning of gatekeeping.

Role of the Researcher

Participant and researcher identities impacted the research process (Bourke, 2014). Because I was the main instrument, it is essential to explore elements of the role of the researcher (see Bourke, 2014). This examination includes issues positionality and reflexivity, relationships with the gatekeeping phenomenon, relationships with participants, and researcher bias.

Positionality and Reflexivity

Positionality and reflexivity are cornerstones of qualitative research (Bourke, 2014; Shaw & DeForge, 2014). Positionality refers to acknowledging subjectivities, sense of self, and social positioning (Bourke, 2014). Reflexivity, in this study, was the ongoing process of examining and reflecting upon my personal beliefs and worldviews of gatekeeping, the systems framework, and my connection to gatekeeping research (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Additional considerations in reflexivity were essential due to the use and implementation of a hermeneutic phenomenology research design (Shaw & DeForge, 2014). Hermeneutic phenomenology values subjectivity and a researcher's preunderstandings; therefore, it was imperative to address reflexivity through the research process (see Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Ricoeur, 1975, 1981; Shaw & DeForge, 2014). Specifically, I explored and identified the impact of my horizons and how they impacted the eventual interpretation during the fusion phase of appropriation (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Ricoeur, 1975, 1981; Shaw & DeForge, 2014).

Relationships With the Research and Participants

As a doctoral student, I have had a personal and professional connection to the gatekeeping phenomenon. I have previously been through the gatekeeping experience as a CIT in a brick-and-mortar graduate counseling program as well as currently going through the gatekeeping process as a doctoral student in an online Counselor Education and Supervision program. Professionally, I have seen and experienced clinicians struggling to attain competency, navigate boundaries, and follow protocol during my

clinical career. Through these personal and professional experiences, I gained a curiosity

for the gatekeeping phenomenon and how clinicians enter into clinical work. In pursuing

this research interest, I sought to better understand the viewpoints from gatekeepers in the

counseling profession and how CIT may either slip through the gate or struggle

posttraining. I invited professional contacts made at state and national conferences to

participate in sharing their gatekeeping experiences, thereby decreasing any ethical issues

related to dual relationships.

These experiences led me to have a close relationship with the gatekeeping

phenomenon. I have been immersing myself in gatekeeping and counselor competency

literature throughout my time in the doctoral program. I have engaged in selecting

conferences regarding counselor competency and gatekeeping, specifically, to ensure that

attendees have the appropriate content for continuing education units. This level of

intimacy comes with preconceived notions and I had to monitor of potential biases as I

have become familiar with the research literature and my preunderstandings of the

gatekeeping phenomenon (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Ravtich & Carl, 2016; Ricoeur,

1981; Shaw & DeForge, 2014). Additionally, I identified as using a systems theory

theoretical orientation as a counselor. Therefore, I find myself in a close relationship with

the theoretical framework. This connection had the ability to influence how I perceived

the literature I read as well as participants' responses (Shaw & DeForge, 2014).

Addressing and Managing Biases

Addressing and managing personal and professional biases are essential in the

qualitative research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used multiple techniques to address

biases, including a reflexive journal, instructor feedback, peer debrief, and member checks (Morse, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Keeping an ongoing reflexive journal allowed me to continuously acknowledge my biases and helped to deepen my intentionality, reinforcing the distanciation process of the theory of interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Ricoeur, 1975). Additionally, I utilized two forms of dialogic engagement (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Within this research process, I received oral and written feedback from my committee on project development and transcripts. This feedback process was valuable for increasing my reflexivity and strengthening my research process. I also engaged in peer debriefing to address and manage bias. This structured meeting helped me to address biases, positionality, and reflexivity to increase rigor in my qualitative study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Spall, 1998). Last, member checks are an important method of addressing biases as many participants reviewed my interview notes and 3-5 pages of the transcript after each interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Participants had 1 week to review the transcript portion and provide feedback. This interaction with participants helped me further address biases and accurately reflect participants' descriptions and interpretations (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

I studied the lived experiences of gatekeepers in the counseling profession, and participants came from across the continental United States and worked at agencies and higher education institutions. The target group of interest were counselor educators who were involved in a counselor training program working with CIT. The ideal participants

were CACREP-accredited counselor education full- and part-time faculty from Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) or related programs (e.g., Marriage and Family Therapy and School Counseling) and practicum or internship site supervisors. Participants serving in full- and part-time faculty roles were involved in processes such as admission interviews and process or course instruction. Participants serving in the role of site supervisors were providing site supervision during students' practicum or internship experiences. In broadening my range of participants, I enriched the data collection process by speaking with members of the gatekeeping population in their respective setting. Having participants from a variety of settings helped me explore patterns of gatekeeping experiences.

For my research plan, I utilized a snowball sampling or chain sampling strategy (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Using snowball sampling, I started with a small number of information-rich participants who could refer additional participants with gatekeeping experiences (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Participants were those who met the inclusion criteria, who executed gatekeeping responsibilities, and who knew others who may be willing to participate (Patton, 2015). Inclusion criteria included a master's or higher degree and involvement in CACREP counselor training through supervision or coursework, admissions interviews, practicum, or internship instruction. I had reviewed previous research with counselor educators as the primary population (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Therefore, I incorporated site supervisors who were involved in the CIT training process to increase the depth of understanding of the gatekeeping phenomenon. Through

this sampling strategy, I wanted to attain a sample size of 10-12 participants for individual interviews to reach saturation (Baker et al., 2012; Guest et al., 2006; Mason, 2010; Patton, 2015). I attempted to include 5-6 site supervisors and 5-6 counselor educators to increase representation from all members of the training system involved in gatekeeping. Mason (2010) reported that saturation is the guiding principle for achieving the appropriate sample size for phenomenological or other qualitative studies. Saturation is when no new themes emerge from the data collection process (Baker et al., 2012; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Patton, 2015). Many qualitative researchers agree that saturation is one better determination of sample size and research rigor (Baker et al., 2012; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Guest et al., 2006; Mason, 2010; Patton, 2015). Therefore, I collected data from notes taken during the interview process and transcribed interviews until meeting saturation.

Instrumentation

I used semistructured interviews and researcher notes to collect the data from the participants. The semistructured interviews involved a set procedure, but the questions were open-ended, which offered the opportunity to probe for more information to gather the lived experience of the gatekeeper (Adams, 2015; Merton, 1956, 1987). Interview questions were reviewed with the committee for clarity and alignment of the research question (see Appendix). The audio recorded interviews were transcribed by an outside party to meet criteria for distanciation (Ghasemi et al., 2011; Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Ricoeur, 1975, 1981). I reviewed the interviews multiple times before identifying and marking meaning units (Creswell et al., 2007; Patterson & Williams, 2002).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I started with a small number of information-rich cases identified through the

listserv and professional contacts through email. These were individuals who had noted

significant gatekeeping experiences, were information-rich, and met inclusion criteria

(Patton, 2015). I sent a formal invitation to members through email to the professional

listserv. There was a maximum of three invitations with one sent every 2 weeks. Those

interested emailed me to learn more and set up the interview. I audio recorded all

interviews and follow-up contacts to become familiar with the language and the

participants (see Patterson & Williams, 2002). I collected data through audio or visual

Zoom conferencing interviews. Interviews were set up to last from 60 to 90 minutes. All

interviews were audio-recorded with all personal information redacted to enhance

confidentiality. Follow-up phone calls with a portion of participants were scheduled after

the initial interview if additional information or clarity was needed. Participants exited

the study after member checks have been completed (Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis Plan

Hermeneutic phenomenology helped continue to uncover the meaning and

increase the understanding of the gatekeeping phenomenon as told by individuals who

execute this role (Shaw & DeForge, 2014). In-depth interviews of gatekeepers supported

a deeper understanding of gatekeeping experiences (Patterson & Williams, 2002). After

transcription of the audio recordings and follow-up phone calls, appropriate data analysis

included assigning meaning units. Meaning units in hermeneutic phenomenological data

analysis are phrases and sentences pulled directly from the participants' responses that

stand on their own (Burnard, 1994; Patterson & Williams, 2002). Meaning units highlighted meaningful phrases from the participants' language regarding gatekeeping experiences (Patterson & Williams, 2002). To continue data immersion, I utilized NVivo, qualitative data analysis software, to further identity meaning units. After labeling meaning units, I assigned categories by grouping meaning units together (Burnard, 1994; Patterson & Williams, 2002). I utilized pattern coding for second cycle coding within each interview and then between interviews (Burnard, 1994; Saldaña, 2016). Second cycle coding was used after meaning units were labeled to help establish summaries in smaller categories, themes, or concepts (Saldaña, 2016). If these meaning units repeated, pattern codes were explanatory or inferential helping to identify an emerging theme (Saldaña, 2016).

Finally, I assigned thematic labels (Saldaña, 2016). Interpreted themes came from the meaning units and categories (Patterson & Williams, 2002). Identified themes in this approach sought to understand and explain interrelationships (Patterson & Williams, 2002). Interpretations were written, incorporating current, relevant, empirical support (Patterson & Williams, 2002). These themes provided the interpretation from the researcher, incorporating conceptual understandings to develop meaning (Patterson & Williams, 2002). Each interview was analyzed after completion to incorporate insights before going into the next interview with a different participant (Patterson & Williams, 2002). This practice helped to enhance the understanding of the gatekeeping phenomenon in evolving themes of the study that will benefit current and future counselor educators through gatekeeping challenges (Patterson & Williams, 2002).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies require trustworthiness as opposed to reliability and validity of quantitative studies. Guba (1981) developed four dimensions of trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, to ensure rigor in this qualitative study. The quality of the research process and rigor is important to hermeneutic phenomenology (Kafle, 2011).

Credibility was needed to ensure that the study represents the phenomenon (Morse, 2015). I utilized a reflexive journal which supports all four dimensions of trustworthiness (Morse, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010). I attained credibility with the use of peer debriefing, member checks, and prolonged engagement with the gatekeeping phenomenon (Morse, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010). I sent 3-5 pages of transcriptions and notes to multiple participants to ensure accuracy of interpretations (Morse, 2015). I maintained a prolonged engagement with the gatekeeping phenomenon through diligence to following current research and professional organizations (Morse, 2015). I engaged in peer debriefings with committee members and dissertation colleagues to address reflexivity and bias (Morse, 2015).

Transferability, close to external validity, was where the study could transfer to other situations (Morse, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). A thick description was obtained through the use of semi-structured interviews (see Appendix). Semistructured interviews allowed for probes to gather more information and data about

gatekeeping and its challenges (Morse, 2015). This strategy attended to thoughts of appropriate sample size and enhance indicators of approaching saturation (Morse, 2015).

Dependability or reliability of qualitative research includes ensuring the study, when replicated would return similar results or consistency (Morse, 2015; Leung, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). The use of triangulation, verifying the accuracy, and comparison with myself, the committee, and participants strengthened the consistency (Leung, 2015). Additionally, a thorough audit trail of materials and processes strengthened the study's dependability (Leung, 2015; Morse, 2015).

Confirmability addressed the objectivity of the study (Shenton, 2004). The extensive admission of my role as the researcher, reflexivity, and the methodological description increased rigor in confirmability (Morse, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010). A thorough examination of researcher positionality and reflexivity in a reflexive journal continued to reinforce objectivity (Morse, 2015). The audit trail continued to strengthen evidence-based methodology, which increases the confirmability of the study (Leung, 2015; Morse, 2015).

Ethical Procedures

When embarking on a qualitative study with human participants, it is important to address proper ethical procedures. I submitted all documentation to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before recruiting any potential participants. I solicited voluntary participants through personal contacts and the use of a professional listserv. I was approved to post on the unmoderated counselor education and supervision listserv. The invitation met IRB criteria and provided necessary information to potential participants.

Furthermore, the university and the committee involvement provided the appropriate institutional permissions to complete this study including: prospectus approval, proposal approval, and IRB approval.

With the snowball sampling procedure, participants were volunteers that met the inclusion criteria. Participants also offered the names of potential participants. I sent the appropriate invitation to the provided contact information. To mitigate any intrusion of solicitation, I contacted potential participants with a one-time invitation. Gatekeeping may cause psychological stress for those executing the role or perceived coercion to participate; therefore, participants were able to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time (Bradburn, Sudman, & Wansink, 2004). Interview questions centered around gatekeeping experiences of previous or current students, and confidentiality and FERPA were maintained to mitigate any concerns of unwanted intrusion of student privacy (Bradburn et al., 2004; Groves et al., 2009).

Participants explored in-depth gatekeeping experiences which may relate to current employment or reputation in the field (Bradburn et al., 2004). Additional protections of confidentiality included anonymous identification or pseudonyms. I did not collect any personal identification to protect confidentiality. My committee members and I reviewed interviews and other forms of data. I used a transcription company to review and transcribe the audio-recordings and have signed non-disclosure agreement forms. A personal computer with password protection and a VPN network stored all data. Transcription selections were provided to participants during member checks through encrypted emails to ensure privacy. After transcription and analysis, I engaged in

telephone debriefing with volunteering participants. These meetings helped to address biases, positionality, and reflexivity to increase rigor in this qualitative study, as well as discuss emerging patterns (McMahan & Winch, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Data will be destroyed after 5 years per university requirement.

Summary

Qualitative research takes thorough and detailed consideration of design and aligned methodology. The research design aligned properly with the research method to ensure the most appropriate themes are uncovered to answer the research question. There were careful considerations of trustworthiness and ethics to enhance the rigor of this qualitative study (Morse, 2015). All of these elements aligned to provide additional insight of the lived experiences of gatekeepers in the counselor education training system and explore how challenges are addressed and resolved.

Chapter 4: Results

Gatekeepers in the counselor training program are individuals who ensure the competency of counselors in training (Bhat, 2005; Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brear et al., 2008; Foster & McAdams, 2007; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). These gatekeepers are responsible for monitoring each counseling student's progress to ensure that the public is protected by promoting competent counselors and ensuring that those not appropriate for the profession do not harm clients (ACA, 2014; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016). It is imperative that counselor educators, supervisors, and clinicians working with counselor training programs provide an ethical, comprehensive assessment continuously throughout training to support competency (Bhat, 2005; Brown, 2013; Tate et al., 2014).

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the meaning of the lived experiences of gatekeepers in counselor training programs, including how they are resolving gatekeeping challenges (see Creswell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Thorensen, 1969). I explored the meaning of gatekeeping. The study responds to the need for enhanced knowledge about challenges gatekeepers experience, increased best practices to decrease gateslippage, and understanding of how gatekeepers overcome the challenges when executing this important responsibility (Bhat, 2005; Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brear et al., 2008; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016). I investigated the patterns and effective practices of gatekeeping in counselor training programs and the essence of ethical challenges and roadblocks.

In this chapter, I provide a thorough description of the research process and procedures utilized in this study, leading to the overarching themes. Additionally, I detail the setting, demographics, data collection, and data analysis. Last, I present evidence of trustworthiness, including details of this study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability that enhanced the study's rigor.

Setting

Interviews took place in my private home office offered through virtual Zoom video calls or telephone-based on participant preference. One person chose to complete the interview process via telephone. The virtual interviews provided an opportunity to gather a broader range of participation from across the United States, and it was a safe way to collect data during the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews occurred over 4 months; the pandemic that may have impacted participation availability.

Demographics

All participants self-reported demographic information at the beginning of the interview process. Participants were geographically dispersed individuals from across the continental United States. Participants were counselor educators, faculty group supervisors, site supervisors, and supervisors for licensure.

Participant P010

Participant P010 identified as a counselor educator with a PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision. He self-reported as a full-time faculty member and was halfway through the 30th year as a faculty member. Participant P010 reported being 26 years at his current university.

Participant P020

Participant P020 has a PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision. She identified as an assistant professor and coordinated internships for the Mental Health Counseling track at a CACREP accredited program. This participant had worked at one university for 5 years.

Participant P030

Participant P030 identified as having a PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision. This participant has been a graduate assistant during their doctoral program and an adjunct faculty member at multiple higher education institutions. Participant P030 self-reported having 4 to 5 years of experience and was in the first semester at their current institution.

Participant P040

Participant P040 has a PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision. This participant was a school counseling associate professor and program coordinator. This individual has been an adjunct faculty member and a full-time faculty member. This individual had been at their current university for 5 years.

Participant P050

Participant P050 identified as having an EdD in Education. This participant was a full-time faculty and manager of the counseling clinic on site. This individual had 22 years of experience in training counselors with 16 of these at the current university.

Participant P060

The participant was a doctoral candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision and has a Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. This participant was the director of a master's counseling program and a supervisor for state licensure applicants. This individual had 13 years of experience and 4 years at their current university.

Participant P070

Participant P070 was currently a doctoral candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision and has a Master of Science in Education with a concentration in Mental Health and Addiction. This individual was a group supervisor for practicum and internship students and teaches counselor education. Participant P070 was at their current university for 3 years and recently started a private practice.

Participant P080

Participant P080 has a PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision. This participant supervised practicum and internship students at a local community college with CACREP student counseling interns. Participant P080 had been involved in counselor training for approximately 6 years and had been at the current organization for eight and a half years.

Participant P090

Participant P090 has a PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision. Participant P090 had a group practice for children and adults and was currently supervising practicum or internship students. Participant P090 had been involved in counselor training for approximately 8 years and 3 years as owner of their current group practice.

Participant P0100

Participant P100 has a PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision. This participant supervised practicum and internship students enrolled at a CACREP university as an affiliate faculty member. Participant P100 had been involved in counselor training for approximately 6 years. The participant had been at the current agency for over 2 years and had served in an affiliate faculty capacity about one year and a half.

Data Collection

I collected data from 10 participants over a 4-month period. Participants had experience in gatekeeping connected with CACREP universities as either full-time faculty, part-time faculty, or involved counselor training through supervision during practicum or internship. Throughout the 4 months, I used listserv postings and social media in addition to sending invitations to professional contacts. I also posted an ad with the state counseling association to reach site supervisors connected to CACREP counselor training programs due to recruitment challenges. Through snowball sampling, I sent email invitations and informed consents to potential recruits. Potential participants were asked to review the informed consent and respond that they understood the study and consented to be a participant. After receiving consent, I collaborated on finding a mutually agreed-upon date and time that was convenient to the participants for a 60-90 minute virtual or telephone interview.

During the 4 months of data collection, I conducted virtual Zoom video interviews with nine participants and a telephone interview with one participant. One

participant requested a telephone interview and, while it was a variation of the planned virtual interview, allowed me to interview them about their gatekeeping experience and meet the participant's scheduling needs. I interviewed each participant for a one-time interview that lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. I started each interview by reviewing the study's purpose and research questions, reviewing the informed consent, and asking if they had any additional questions or concerns. I let participants know that they could voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time. Upon agreement, I asked for the background demographic information and began the interview guide's semistructured questions (see Appendix). Each participant was asked 15 open-ended questions with additional probing questions to gather more information about gatekeeping and the impact of their gatekeeping experiences. Each interview allowed the participant to share anything about gatekeeping that was not covered in the structured questions. I ended the interviews by asking if they were interested in a debriefing call to clarify any experiences or add to their initial interview. All participants were asked if they wanted to review 3-5 pages of transcripts for member checking. After each interview, I noted any thoughts, reflections, or considerations during the interview process in a reflexive journal.

I audio-recorded all interviews using a personal recording device for verbatim transcription to review for the nuance of participant language for this study's hermeneutic nature. Interviews were transcribed by hand or through NVivo's automated transcription service. I checked all transcriptions for accuracy from the audio recordings. I deleted any identifying information, including name and university or agency affiliation from the transcripts to ensure no one could identify participants. All audio recordings, transcripts,

and supporting materials were stored in a password-protected personal computer and NVivo file used for data analysis.

Data Analysis

I utilized Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenological design for data analysis. Upon completing each interview, I wrote reflections and understandings in a reflexive journal before completing the following interview. I transcribed interviews using NVivo's automatic transcription software. For distanciation, I followed the audio recordings and read the transcriptions for accuracy and what meaning units were standing out in the participants' responses (Ghasemi et al., 2011; Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Ricoeur,1975, 1981). I reviewed the transcripts and pulled meaning units directly from participants' narratives (Burnard, 1994; Patterson & Williams, 2002). This action led me to look directly at the responses from an objective manner to achieve distanciation (Ghasemi et al., 2011; Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Ricoeur,1975, 1981). I utilized the reflexive journal to note emerging patterns within and between interviews to build on emerging themes (Patterson & Williams, 2002).

Once meaning units were assigned, I listened to audio recordings again and explored additional meaning units from participant responses moving into Ricoeur's understanding by enacting the hermeneutic circle (Ghasemi et al., 2011; Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Ricoeur, 1981). Upon reviewing audio recordings and transcripts for the second time, I conceptualized and created categories for the meaning units (Burnard, 1994; Patterson & Williams, 2002). From the meaning units, I assigned codes describing the meaning units such as Best Practices, where participants shared "repeating a class,"

"taking a semester off," "consistent documentation," and "communication with their instructor at school." The Care and Concern code reflected participants sharing "being person centered," "compassionately, empathically lay this out and say, we want to help you," and "compassionate and care, but still being very clear and firm." For the code Gatekeeping Challenges, participants noted "a lot of multiple relationships that happen," "entailed some death threats for me and other faculty," and "unwillingness of lack of awareness about personal issues and how they're influencing their work. The code Protecting Clients included participant statements such as "above all, make sure there is no harm being done to client" and "what it means to be a gatekeeper is to protect the public from my students." After the second review of all audio recordings and transcripts, I utilized the reflexive journal to note enhanced patterns or shifts in categories as more emerging themes were identified (Burnard, 1994; Patterson & Williams, 2002). I reviewed all meaning units within and between interviews to explore unique and common categories and patterns (Saldaña, 2016).

I used conditional highlighting in the Apple operating system, Numbers, to see what categories were coded most often and analyzed participant responses to explore frequency as a pattern coding method (Saldaña, 2016). At this time, meaning units were coded in NVivo to continue the hermeneutic circle. I incorporated my preunderstanding of the phenomenon without bracketing and utilized the reflexive journal to note my findings as I reviewed transcripts and patterns (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Kafle, 2013; Ricoeur, 1975, 1981). Then, I reviewed and analyzed the meaning units from participant responses and applied the second round of categories for alignment before reviewing all

transcripts a third time (Ghasemi et al., 2011; Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Ricoeur, 1975, 1981).

I reviewed all participant transcripts for a third time to continue data immersion to allow for deeper understanding and shifted into appropriation (Ghasemi et al., 2011; Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Ricoeur, 1975, 1981). For the third review of transcripts, I assigned more formal thematic labels by hand and NVivo (Saldaña, 2016). Initial codes that were similar or could better describe the meaning broadened into categories such as Emotional Impact as the participants reflected "a sinking feeling in my stomach," "pride" and "some fear." The category Building Supportive Relationships reflected the statements "conversations with students on a regular basis" and "I wanted her to feel supported." The category Internal Gatekeeping Process referenced internal thoughts that impacted gatekeeping choices such as "I internalized quite a lot of them [best practices] as they are a good fit for me," "be reflective," so often when I'm making decisions I think, what was it like for me?," and "what does the gate look like?" These themes came from the frequency of coding within and between interviews that highlight the meaning of gatekeeping and how gatekeepers resolve challenges as related to best practices. In the third review of transcripts, subthemes emerged within the prominent overarching themes from the in-depth interviews, enhancing the appropriation cycle of Ricoeur's theory of interpretation (Patterson & Williams, 2002; Saldaña, 2016).

Discrepant Data

One participant did not identify any ways that gatekeeping impacts them. When answering any questions on impact, the participant identified that gatekeeping did not

have an impact. However, this participant did note that the gatekeeping process takes time, and they did identify there were challenges. Therefore, the identified responses corresponded and were similar with other participants' responses on the time expansive nature of the process and impact to daily work and therefore added to emerging themes of impact.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Throughout data collection and data analysis, I was attuned to enhancing trustworthiness. Guba (1981) explored the four dimensions of qualitative studies' trustworthiness to include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Exploring these dimensions increases the rigor of my hermeneutic research design and, ultimately, the findings of this study.

Credibility

I achieved the dimension of credibility through a couple of different methods. First, a reflexive journal was instrumental to the process as it was able to capture and document my research process and my pre-understandings (Morse, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010). I also used an interview guide (see Appendix) to encourage consistency in the discussions across interviews (see Creswell, 2013). In addition to these methods, I engaged in member checks as I emailed 3-5 pages of transcripts with meaning units, first cycle, and second cycle coding for review (Morse, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010). Lastly, I attended to the credibility dimension with prolonged engagement with the gatekeeping phenomenon (Morse, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010). I collected data from

participants across 4 months and continued to gather evidence-based research to incorporate into data analysis (Morse, 2015). I further engaged in peer debriefings with committee members to address reflexibility and bias (Morse, 2015).

Transferability

I attended to the dimension of transferability through thick descriptions of in-depth semistructured interviews. The semistructured nature of the interviews allowed openings for deeper prompting and understanding of the participants' gatekeeping phenomenon (Morse, 2015). I also documented my research process through the reflexive journal, including recruitment, data collection, and data analysis to support transferability (Morse, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Through comprehensive data collection and analysis, I attended to data saturation and themes as they began to reoccur within participants narratives and between group participants (Morse, 2015).

Dependability

I utilized multiple methods to attend to the dimension of dependability. The reflexive journal helped to ensure the study could be replicated and would return with consistency. I completed a detailed audit trail within the reflexive journal that highlighted each step of my data collection and analysis to strengthen dependability (Anney, 2017; Leung, 2015; Morse, 2015). Additionally, I utilized triangulation of data sources, analyzing and comparing themes and emerging patterns with existing research in the counselor education and gatekeeping experiences. I continued to explore current research patterns of gatekeeper's experience through other qualitative studies and their emerging themes further strengthening dependability (Anney, 2017; Leung, 2015).

Confirmability

I attended to confirmability to increase the objectivity of the study (Shenton, 2004). I focused on this dimension through the use of the reflexive journal and audit trail. The reflexive journal and recorded memos addressed my role as the researcher, addressing bias, and the research process (Morse, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010). The audit trail with the reflexive journal supported me in staying evidence-based in my hermeneutic methodology. These tools supported in following Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory of interpretation, proper coding in the hermeneutic circle, and exploring my pre-understandings of the material to find emerging themes in participants' responses (Morse, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010).

Results

The hermeneutic phenomenological design supported gaining a deeper understanding of gatekeepers' lived experiences. Through the data collection and analysis phases of this hermeneutic design, I listened to the participants' experiences through in-depth, semistructured interviews. Participants discussed their best practices in gatekeeping, internal process when exploring gatekeeping experiences, challenges, the emotions and connection to the gatekeeping work, as well as, how they overcame challenges and made meaning of their gatekeeping experiences.

The research question "How do gatekeepers in counseling training programs make meaning of their experiences including resolving gatekeeping challenges as it relates to best practices?" guided the data collection and analysis process to have five

emerging themes with eight subthemes. The five themes were (a) protecting client welfare as an anchor, (b) using an internal gatekeeping process aligns best practices, (c) supportive relationships have a significant impact in gatekeeping, (d) gatekeeping experiences have an impact on the gatekeeper, and (e) gatekeeping experiences and their impact lead to evolving best practices and internal gatekeeping process. Table 1 provides example quotations for each theme and subtheme.

Table 1

Emerging Themes of Gatekeepers' Experiences as They Relate to Best Practices

Emerging theme	Example quote
Protecting Client Welfare Is an Anchor (n = 10)	"an ethical responsibility to ensure that the people who enter the profession come through our programs are capable of operating in a very basic level, basic professional level." (Participant P050)
Aligning Best Practices (n = 10)	
Transparent Communication	"Providing a sufficient amount of challenge and being honest and open with them about what I'm seeing and what I need to be seeing." (Participant P030)
Focus on Growth and Development	"being able to recognize the personal growth that we all hopefully are going through as we shift into this field and trainees just start at a place where they really recognize the value that certainly they get it on a logical level." (Participant P070)
Multicultural Considerations	"Who I am as an educator, a counselor, as a person, as a professor, and to be more self-aware of how I interact with my students and the different identities that they bring into the classroom, the different cultures, the different attitudes, the different generation." (Participant P050)
Gatekeeping With Gatekeeper	"assess students and colleagues in ways that are healthy for the profession and to remove students that may be displaying problematic or concerning behaviors and talk to faculty that may be doing the same." (Participant P040)

(*table continues*)

Emerging theme	Example quote
Supportive Relationships Impact Gatekeeping ($n = 10$)	
Building Supportive Relationship With Students	"Part of my role as an advisor, I have those conversations with students on a regular basis. We talk a lot about where they are growing really well, areas where they may be struggling, what that's been like for them or what they think is going on. I talk a lot about them being proactive with me. So, if they are having a hard time not being afraid of coming to talk to me as their advisor" (Participant P020)
Relationships With Colleagues	"make people aware of and all the ethical practices that you follow but have a trusted supervisor that you can say anything to because your supervisor can help you do what you need to do." (Participant P080)
Gatekeeping Experiences Have an Impact on Gatekeeper ($n = 9$)	
Professional	"it takes a lot of energy sometimes, take an enormous amount of time to deal with, and document, and inform everybody." (Participant P020)
Emotional	"So, I think it's a huge part of counselor education, it's maybe not a part that we talk about as much because it can be unpleasant. But really, I mean, it's a piece of every single thing that I do in my job as an educator." (Participant P020)
Gatekeeping Experiences and Their Impact Lead to Evolving Best Practices ($n = 10$)	"How do I turn what I've gone through here and, I guess molded that are crafted into something that's just a way to help our profession. So, I actually did a research project on it." (Participant P040)

Emergent Main Theme 1: Protecting Client Welfare as an Anchor

All participants (n=10) noted in their responsibility in gatekeeping was to protect clients from harm and ensure the competency of CIT being able to ethically serve clients in the community. Participant P010 stated, "number one ethical is client welfare." Participant P080 highlighted, "Our ethics are not new and we are in this profession and we do have to be gatekeepers because it's not just that individual going out and working on a computer; that's the individual going out and working on other human beings." Many participants noted the ACA (2014) *Code of Ethics* and ethical principles as a guide in making meaning of their experiences. All participants discussed their ethical responsibility as something they take seriously and is the foundation of gatekeeping. Participant P080 stated, "Honesty, fidelity, being true to our practice and our ACA ethical guidelines always having like a supervision backup." These results align with Schuermann, Harris, and Hazlett (2018) regarding gatekeepers' professional responsibilities. Participant P070 noted:

> Kind of protective piece of making sure that the people that we're putting into the field are going to be a good place in their own development and in their training to best serve their clients and making sure that we're keeping anyone that's at risk of doing harm, either intentionally or unintentionally from entering the field.

P020 also shared, "gatekeeping is to me the idea that I ultimately need to make sure I am protecting the clients that my students are working with now and the clients they would potentially be working with in the future." P020 continued to share how the work in the classroom connects with future ethical practice

I've had students with some plagiarism issues that had to be addressed and that's

an issue at the university but also an issue ethically. You know, if students are not

willing to be honest about their work, how are they going to be honest in practice?

So, trying to connect the things going on in the classroom with professionalism

and what things show up. And their work as professional counselors sometimes

thinking writing a paper has nothing to do with me being a counselor so always

trying to make those connections, but it does and here's why cause you need to be

able to understand these theories or explain them to your client or need to be

honest about things and these are important principles of the profession.

P090 also noted the responsibility to protect clients stating, "it is a huge honor to hold

emotional space for another person." P090 added:

Gatekeeping is my ethical responsibility to ensure that client care is upheld not

just for the profession, but also for the facets of leaders that we are in the

community because we just don't do one thing as counselor… I think of it like an

oath, when you when you say to the state, I'm going to carry somebody's mental

health in my hands, I feel like that needs to translate through all areas of your life.

P040 detailed the responsibility, "have an ethical responsibility to make sure that they're

competent and capable of not doing harm, to be of help." This participant continued later

in the interview and highlighted:

if we're potentially letting somebody out into the world that would then cause

harm, I don't want that. I don't want that for our profession. I don't want that for

the student or the client. I don't want that for the counselor. I don't want that for our profession as a whole.

Participants directly or indirectly spoke about using the principle of nonmaleficence, or do no harm, when thinking about intervening or addressing a problematic behavior with a student. Participant P030 reported "above all, make sure that there's no harm being done to clients" and Participant P100 who shared, "I am teaching you and helping you grow help further the counseling field and not to do harm." Participant P040 reflected on how they see their role in gatekeeping when protecting clients, the students may work with as they shared:

> So if we're not working hard together and we're not integrating the skills and you're not working hard at seeing, like, how to perform suicide assessments, then conceivably if I let you through, if I don't monitor those things and make sure that you have a level of confidence that we need, then conceivably what I'm saying to you is (and you're showing me), that one day when you get out into the world and you're a middle school counselor, and you don't have the training that you need, and a student comes to you because they are contemplating suicide, and you miss those cues, you miss those flags that you need to be attentive to. And then that student, while trying to reach out for help from you, doesn't get the help that they need from you and they go home and they complete suicide. That means that we've failed them, and that means that I didn't do my job and gatekeep in a proper way.

Five of the 10 participants noted that the ACA (2014) *Code of Ethics* is instrumental in the gatekeeping role with Participant P060 stating, "I use the ACA Code of Ethics." Participants reported recognizing the impact that gatekeeping has on all stakeholders and ultimately based some of their decisions on the impact of CIT on future clients. Participant P050 shared it is "an ethical responsibility to ensure that the people who enter the profession come through our programs are capable of operating in a very basic level, basic professional level."

Emerging Main Theme 2: Aligning Best Practices

All participants (n=10) identify that they have their own process when enacting the gatekeeping process. Participant P040 reflected "it's a hat I constantly wear." Each participant indicated their thought process and approaches to align their best practices. Participant P020 discussed how important their process is when executing gatekeeping with:

> I have to consciously bracket those feelings and thoughts and put them aside and consciously really focus on what I need to do to make sure that the students and the clients and everyone involved are going to be safe and successful.

Participant P080 shared:

> I believe that if we are upholding that gatekeeper role, it's not so much how it impacts it, it's how it drives it. Because everything we're doing is so big, it's first making sure an individual reaches their potential and learns best practice so they can go out and do their job appropriately.

Similarly, Participant P040 reported "it's just a constant thread in…this giant

tapestry of what's comprised of our programs." This theme further reflects on the genuine process and thoughts of gatekeepers. There are four subthemes that emerged including: transparent communication, focus on growth and development, multicultural considerations, and gatekeeping with gatekeepers.

Subtheme A: Transparent Communication

Five of the 10 participants noted that being transparent in communication about gatekeeping starts when vetting program applicants during the admission process. Participant P040 said "it starts at the admission process" and Participant P050 similarly stated, "gatekeeping begins at admissions." Participant P050 also believed in having open communication about gatekeeping from the beginning, stating, "best to have that conversation from the beginning." Participants noted that after admission, transparent communication continues throughout the training program. Participant P030 valued open communication as they stated being "very clear about my expectations with student or supervisees." Participant P050 noted that "you're giving consistent feedback throughout the program." Also, Participant P030 shared "Providing a sufficient amount of challenge and being honest and open with them about what I'm seeing and what I need to be seeing." Participant P070 reported that they wanted to see even more communication and transparency in their role as supervisor as they stated "just being more transparent about the process and what function it's serving." Lastly, P100 stated "…I'm always very clear cut or part of my traditional gatekeeping is up front is having a conversation about what my role as a supervisor is, how much I love the job of counseling."

Subtheme B: Focus on Growth and Development

Seven of the 10 participants discussed the inherent focus on the students' growth and development. Participant P080 identified with a "humanistic centered approach." Participant P010 also shared:

I think most counselors would avow stance they are humanistic in orientation, which would imply that we believe in the innate potential of individuals to grow and develop a long pass of relevance for them. Which to your question would then assume, if I really want to be a counselor, I'd be given a chance to do that. On the other hand, we are then limited by notions about what are the necessary skills to be clinically effective, what is a judgement process which makes me ethically sound?

Participant P030, P040, and P050 discussed challenging the negative stigma of gatekeeping and how they focus on growth and development. Participant P030 noted "gatekeeping can be very scary and nebulous and kind of almost villainous." Participant P040 continued with "I don't think I ever go into gatekeeping, you know, looking to catch somebody and then, you know, make their lives miserable… we're supposed to be a part of the solution, not part of the problem." They continued, "my internal compass with this all is like I come into this thinking positively, unlike perhaps they can turn it around, like perhaps we can work together." Participant P050 also noted the wide range of views of gatekeeping stating:

If people think gatekeeping is just about keeping people out of the profession that are inappropriate, then they have a very narrow view of gatekeeping…we are to

help our students succeed and develop…how do I by gatekeeping, seek to have my students succeed and to develop and to become more self-aware and to learn that they are the sharpest tool in their toolbox?

Participants P050, P070, and P080 reflected on the importance of growth and development during the training process. Participant P050 shared "not forgetting that this is a developmental process for everybody concerned." Participant P070 continued, "being able to recognize the personal growth that we all hopefully are going through as we shift into this field and trainees just start at a place where they really recognize the value that certainly they get it on a logical level." Participant P080 discussed gatekeeping with a focus on growth indicating, "we are meant to help them first. But if we see something that could be problematic or concerning, it's also our responsibility to either address it with ourselves or within the regulations of their program or whatever the practices are." Participant P090 when discussing an intern growth process empathically shared, "I didn't let her not grow in my presence." Lastly, participant 080 really highlighted the importance of gatekeeping with focus on growth stating,

I feel like it's something that drives what I do. And I feel like it's something that should drive what we all do. Because if our goal is to teach as a faculty member or even teach us and as a supervisor, site supervisor, teaching the skills and the different situations. Our goal behind that is so that they can practice with us and they can go out and provide positive experiences for their clients and, you know, help them the best of their ability.

Subtheme C: Multicultural Considerations

Four of the 10 participants directly mentioned multicultural and diversity considerations in program admissions, supporting growth in their students, and the gatekeeping process. Participant P010 reflected on thoughts regarding considerations to admit students from diverse backgrounds to their program stating "...if you want to broaden the diversity of your students, where do you find them?"

When discussing a successful gatekeeping encountered with a student reflecting on multiculturalism, privilege, and oppression, Participant P040 stated, "not just a part of the culture to talk about those things in the area." The classroom conversation led to continued supportive work in multiculturalism for this student as they continued:

> that student I just had one or two conversations about it, they set up advising
>
> appointments on their own and worked with my colleague on it, and then actually
>
> now getting to going into practicum, is continuing to set up conversation with me
>
> about it. So now that I got into practicum and for work with clients, how do I keep
>
> an eye on this stuff and how do I have these conversations, how do I recognize
>
> this stuff, and can we work on this in supervision?

Participants P030 and P050 also discussed how multiculturalism impacts the gatekeeping process. These participants' experiences align with challenges shared in Brown-Rice and Furr (2016) as survey results indicated struggles with the role of diversity in gatekeeping. Participant P030 noted a potential concern with gatekeeping "sometimes there can be over gatekeeping where people are too harsh on folks or even maybe cultural incompetence dressed up as gatekeeping." Participant P030 also reflected

on their background in gatekeeping research, their observed experiences, and sharing

acknowledgement for their colleagues' experiences, stating:

> in some of my research process, too, is that we don't talk a lot about multicultural
>
> competence in gatekeeping either. I know that a lot of my colleagues, particularly
>
> some of my friends who are women of color, feel really overlooked or dismissed
>
> when they bring up gatekeeping concerns that it's probably just as emotionally
>
> taxing as it was for me to deal with a student who is quite sexist towards me. It's
>
> probably even more emotionally taxing to women of color to deal with folks who
>
> are lacking in multicultural competence in terms of race, gender…

> Participant P050 reflected on their self-awareness process in multiculturalism in

gatekeeping with the following statements:

> Who I am as an educator, a counselor, as a person, as a professor, and to be more
>
> self-aware of how I interact with my students and the different identities that they
>
> bring into the classroom, the different cultures, the different attitudes, the different
>
> generation.

> There was a wide range of how multiculturalism impacts the gatekeeping process

from admitting students with diverse backgrounds, how classroom discussions impact

student's growth and gatekeeping, and how gatekeepers are reflecting on culture in their

gatekeeping process.

Subtheme D: Gatekeeping with Gatekeepers

Six of the 10 participants noted the importance of gatekeeping with other

gatekeepers. Counselor educators and supervisors mentioned the importance of exploring

how to select faculty that will fit with other faculty members and working with each other

to hold everyone accountable. Participant P010 shared "one of the things, because a part

of gatekeeping is, who are admitting to be a part of your faculty." Participant P040

included in their definition of gatekeeping:

> assess students and colleagues in ways that are healthy for the profession and to
>
> remove students that may be displaying problematic or concerning behaviors and
>
> talk to faculty that may be doing the same.

Additionally, participants reflected on the courage to confront other gatekeepers

or how their role as a gatekeeper impacts gatekeeping in the community. Participants

P050 and P030 noted the importance and tenacity of being able to hold other colleagues

accountable. Participant P050 stated "having the courage to call your colleagues out."

Participant P030 similarly shared "have the courage to put yourself out there, to better

yourself, to better the profession, to hold your colleagues accountable." Participant P040

reflected on conversations with colleagues as they shared they have had to "Talk to a

couple of colleagues about burnout, fatigue." Lastly, Participant P020 reflected on the

role of being gatekeeper in internship and holding community colleagues accountable as

a "community gatekeeper" as they said, "I hold that responsibility, just like my students

do." They also shared "My gatekeeping role ends up being more of a gatekeeper as a

practitioner in the community." These reflections indicate that gatekeepers may be

gatekeeping gatekeepers in addition to gatekeeping with CIT, adding meaning to their

gatekeeping experiences.

Emergent Main Theme 3: Supportive Relationships Impact Gatekeeping

All participants (n=10) identified that relationships are vital to the gatekeeping process. Participants noted that relationships with students and support faculty consensus, and consultation with colleagues are beneficial when executing gatekeeping responsibilities. Based on participants' responses, two subthemes in relationships emerged as building supportive relationships with students and supportive relationship from colleagues and administration.

Subtheme A: Building Supportive Relationships With Students

Nine out of the 10 participants indicated that they are navigating the gatekeeping process by building supportive relationships with students that support student growth and development. These results supported similar findings as Erbes et al.'s (2015), qualitative study exploring the lived experiences of gatekeeping. Erbes et al. (2015) identified the reality of the developmental process through a support and challenge dichotomy. These concepts were brought up with current participants and how balancing this dichotomy is beneficial during the gatekeeping process. Participant P020 detailed how building relationships is essential for the gatekeeping process, stating:

> Part of my role as an advisor, I have those conversation with students on a regular basis. We talk a lot about where they are growing really well, areas where they may be struggling, what that's been like for them or what they think is going on. I talk a lot about them being proactive with me. So, if they are having a hard time not being afraid of coming to talk to me as their advisor because they have heard me tell them a hundred times 'the earlier they come and talk to me, the more

option we have to work on the problem. But the later we find out about it, that

fewer options we have in finding ways to help them work through the problem.'

So, I think that the biggest thing that feels like it's been helpful in my role here is

just being really, really proactive in having a good relationship with the students.

So, getting to them as people, getting to know their context, to know where they

are coming from so when they are struggling, I know a little more about them that

I can kind of connect other pieces of their story and um just making sure I'm

having regular communication and contact. The last thing I would want is for

them to only hear from me when something is going wrong. I want to have

regular communication with them, about how they are doing well and how they

are growing and talking about the career goals and talking about how heir

internalizing the material and if we are having all of those conversations, then

they're going to be a lot more comfortable talking to me when they feel like they

are struggling and sometimes they come to me before I notice they are struggling,

which is great.

Additionally, two out of the 10 participants noted that this care and concern for

growth and development are helpful when exploring gatekeeping out of a program.

Participant P090 noted in a gatekeeping experience:

We use the tools and I didn't let her not grow in my presence. I think that's an

important part of gatekeeping is, okay, you're uncomfortable with this topic and

that's exactly what we are going to do.

Participant P050 also noted how being caring and compassion are better suited in discussing gatekeeping issues, which included:

Our responsibility to work with that person in a compassionate, caring way and help them out of the profession and point them in the direction of a profession that may be more suited to their skills and abilities and dispositions…. much more compassionate and developmental.

Participant P070 reflected on how supportive relationships impact gatekeeping when they shared:

It would be to have conversations early and often with students about what's going on and what we're what we're assessing for and how we're how this process supports and supports their development so that they're much more aware of kind of the boundaries around that, because I think counseling program faculty tend to build strong bonds with their students.

Participants also spoke about the support challenge dichotomy, with the empathy veil, noting the challenges in the importance of building relationships and still challenging CIT for growth and development (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016). Participant P030 stated:

recognizing that as people in the counseling field, we're probably a pretty social and empathetic and want to have positive relationships. And we're probably in this because we love to see people grow and develop, whether that be students or clients or supervises, but also knowing that, that empathy veil can be there at times. So, to also be really mindful of, you know, in my role as a counselor

educator, that much as it's great to be liked and to get along well with students, that that shouldn't stop me from providing a sufficient amount of challenge and being honest and open with them about what I'm seeing and what I need to be seeing instead.

Counselor education participants and site supervisors noted the importance of a supportive relationship with CIT. Two out of ten described a parallel process in using the supportive relationships. Participant P080 stated, "practice supervision and gatekeeping the way I practice counseling with my clients. And that way, I'm able to model a lot of those skills in those best practices for the interns or the students." While there may be differences within each participant of using the supportive relationship with students in gatekeeping, there was consistency between counselor educators and site supervisors in this subtheme.

Subtheme B: Relationships With Colleagues

Participants noted that relationships with colleagues are beneficial with gatekeeping for two reasons: faculty consensus or consultation. These findings align with Erbes et al. (2015) on the importance of consultation and support. Gatekeeping with other gatekeepers is vital to the best practices of many organizations.

Faculty Consensus. Counselor educators indicated that faculty consensus and cohesion is important in the gatekeeping process. Participant P010 noted the importance of faculty consensus stating, "I think it behooves faculty that everyone invests the time to buy into, that these are our standards for admission, for progression, for graduation, for endorsement." Participant P010 continued "if we identify students who we believe are

deficient to one or more areas, what are we prepared as a group to do about that and are

we prepared to say to a student at some point this is just not a good fit for you."

Additionally, the need for relationships with colleagues relates to best practices as many

participants note they meet as a group to identify and discuss remediation plans together.

Participant P060 shared:

> I usually pull in the advisor and the three of us will have a meeting with the
>
> student. And then if it happens again, we do have what we call a spec meeting,
>
> which is really… it's like student performance evaluation committee meeting. So,
>
> if we're concerned about the way that a student is performing, my associate dean
>
> and I meet with the student and usually the faculty member who brings a concern
>
> about if it's a serious concern.

Participant P060 noted best practices and reported that "A parallel level that takes

place is that the entire faculty, should, every semester, review every student…. as a

faculty, determine if you need to remediate those issues as a faculty, as a group."

Consultation. Overwhelmingly, gatekeepers appear to use consultation as the

main method to overcome gatekeeping challenges. Eight of out the 10 participants

reported that consultation with colleagues and supervision are ways to navigate

gatekeeping. Counselor educators and site supervisors utilized consultation to validate

concerns, check for consensus, or use for support during difficult gatekeeping

experiences.

Site supervisors lean more towards utilizing supervision for support. Participant

P070, who is a group supervisor stated "My first, go to, is always to talk to my supervisor

about it, because that's his role is to help me make these decisions." Participant P080 also reported they wanted to "make people aware of and all the ethical practices that you follow but have a trusted supervisor that you can say anything to because your supervisor can help you do what you need to do."

Counselor educators consult with other educators for support during gatekeeping challenges. Participant P060 stated, "my coping skill is to reach out to colleagues" and Participant P100 emphasized, "support definitely helps." Additionally, Participant P030 shared:

> I did have some really wonderful mentors, as well who were great gatekeepers and great gatekeeping role models, and still do have the wonderful colleagues who are great resources, who are like my go to consultant for "what do you think about this?

The use of formal or informal consultation repeatedly came through as a dominant theme of how gatekeepers gather support to make meaning of their experiences. Participant P040 shared "I definitely consult, staff these issues with my colleagues."

Emergent Main Theme 4: Gatekeeping Experiences Have an Impact on the Gatekeeper

All participants (n=10) identified that gatekeeping has an impact on their life. There was a varying degree between participants and how it manifests. However, counselor educators and site supervisors alike indicated gatekeeping impacts their role. The impact is felt in one or more of the following subthemes: professional and emotional.

Subtheme A: Professional

Gatekeeping experiences vary in the amount of time and energy for the gatekeeper. These experiences can be time expansive and take energy from other tasks as a counselor educator or site supervisor. Challenging gatekeeping experiences appear to take more time and energy for the gatekeeper. Participant P020 stated "it takes a lot of energy sometimes, take an enormous amount of time to deal with, and document, and inform everybody." Participant P040 reported "they were time expansive, you know, spanning a couple of years, appeals and lawsuits." Participant P080 noted "it took a long time to fire her because they kept making me jump through another hoop when I thought I'd jump through all the hoops to fire her. Then I'd have to jump through another hoop and they weren't horribly supportive." Participant P060 noted the emotion connected as they shared "I can get frustrated sometimes because it'll take up a lot of my time."

Five of the 10 participants noted that gatekeeping is a career-long expectation or has impacted their career choices. Participant P010 reported "that once you decide to become a faculty, it's a career long expectation." Participant P020 shared:

Honestly, it is has led to some leadership opportunities that I would never in a million years have imagined that I would have been involved with, including things like being invited to go to our state capitol and talk to legislators about best practices in our profession, to advocate for more funding for things; I would never have thought that they could have invited us to talk about those kinds of things or to be involved with those kinds of initiatives.

Lastly, participant P080 noted after a challenging gatekeeping experience "It completely changed the course of my life." Gatekeeping experiences have the ability to have a profound impact on one's career and current professional life.

Subtheme B: Emotional Impact

Nine of the 10 participants highlighted the duality of emotions connected to gatekeeping. Counselor educators and supervisors highlighted that there are inspiring emotions connected to the work accomplished with watching a CIT or supervisee grow and develop to move into the clinical field. More significantly, the emotional impact aligns with Kerl and Eichler (2005) findings with emotional impact as a "loss of innocence." The impact of the stress and emotional response from Participant P020 as they shared "So I think it's a huge part of counselor education, it's maybe not a part that we talk about as much because it can be unpleasant. But really, I mean, it's a piece of every single thing that I do in my job as an educator." The findings from the study explore more about the emotional impact each gatekeeper faces in this role. Participant P100 stated:

> I love it. I'm I it's just something that I'm passionate about because I'm passionate about the field of counseling, because I have experienced what it is to do to go to a counselor who is unhealthy and the damage that that can do. And it has created a huge passion for me as part of the reason why I love counselor education.

Participant P100 also mentioned during a challenging gatekeeping experience:

there was a lot of guilt, even though that was not within my control and there was

a lot of guilt because it was really affecting my other counselors and the whole the

dynamic of the work.

Participant P030 reported:

It was really scary because I think as a master's student, I didn't have remotely this

level of awareness. As a doc student, it's really scary to see some of the things that

faculty had let slide. It's still scary now to think of some of the thing's faculty may

have let slide. And so, it gives me pause or concern for the profession and the

level of slippage that could and probably is happening. Sometimes it also gave me

hope, though, at the same time, because I did have some really wonderful

mentors.

Participants varied in emotional impact from "humbling," "anger" all the way

through to "disheartening," and "hope." This wide range of emotions can leave a lasting

impact on the gatekeeper as highlighted by Participant P020, who stated it "impacts me a

lot and probably more than I'd like them to." This complements participant P050's

sentiments, who shared "the positive impact is when you have a successful remediation.

And you feel good about it, because at the end, you know, some good came of this."

Participant P090 noted the duality of the emotions noting a "real sense of pride" and also

"often get a little perplexed."

Some participants described the parallel process and relational impact during

gatekeeping. Participant P020 stated:

That supportive process looks very different because I have to sort of switch gears

between being as supportive of my student and being really supportive of my

students' future clients, because if it's a risk of safety to them. Then the

relationship becomes not as important between me and the student because I have

to handle the situation and make sure everybody is going to be safe. Mm hmm.

So, it's kind of like triaging any crisis situation with a client, like I worry about

the crisis first in the relationship later.

Additionally, Participant P070 also noted the parallel process on the emotional

toll from gatekeeping as she shared:

much like breaking confidentiality of a client, it's a reporter rift generally,

hopefully repairable; if students aren't in a place where they understand the

function of it or are able to appreciate the opportunity to grow, those can be really

challenging conversations so they can be quite draining.

Emergent Main Theme 5: Gatekeeping Experiences and Their Impact Lead to

Evolving Best Practices

Kerl and Eichler (2005) recommended that gatekeepers explore the emotional

interaction with gatekeeping practices. This study explored how the impact of

gatekeeping experiences relates to best practices. As Participant P040 reflected on the

gatekeeping experiences they encountered as a doctoral student while supervising

graduate level interns, they reported, "So by chance, I happened to get these really

challenging gatekeeping experiences while I was a student." They expressed watching

their mentoring faculty member "maintain tact and respect" during the gatekeeping

process. They continued to support in their doctoral intern role by "Supporting her…and documentation…consulting with her." The preliminary results showed that six of the 10 participants use the impact and results of gatekeeping experiences in their passion and best practices moving forward. Participant P050 noted a challenge and how they have explored it moving forward with "the problems I've encountered is going ahead and pulling the trigger earlier." Participant P020 noted that previous experiences about peer interactions impacted their future gatekeeping process as they reported "I think that probably the reason I pay so much attention to that now is because that happened." Participant P060 has also incorporated additional elements to support best practices in supervision as she shared:

> if I take on someone to supervise, I don't know. I ask them for two letters of recommendation and I ask them for their transcripts. And I'll tell you, I've had people walk and balk no one asks for this or no, no, no, this or this. And then I tell them why. And I say, look, at the end of the day, really is this I need a role model, good behavior for you if you're ever going to go out and to supervise people.

> Furthermore, Participant P080 also expanded best practices after a gatekeeping experiences as she noted:

> My gatekeeping has expanded, so I'm not like I said, I'm not just focusing on their clinical interactions and focusing on their academic knowledge and their clinical knowledge even more so than I had previously.

> Lastly, two participants noted how they utilized adding to the research community so they and others can benefit from their experiences. Participant P030 noted that her

previous experiences led to creating research and avowed passion for gatekeeping after a difficult experience as she shared "I wrote my dissertation on it, so I felt pretty strongly about it." Additionally, Participant P040 shared:

> How do I turn what I've gone through here and, I guess molded that are crafted into something that's just a way to help our profession. So, I actually did a research project on it.

Summary

This chapter highlighted the research process and results of the current study to answer the research question "How do gatekeepers make meaning of their experiences including resolving gatekeeping challenges as it relates to best practices?" I detailed the research process including data collection and data analysis. I provided the demographics of the participants. The emerging themes appeared as a process for the participants. First, protecting client welfare is an anchor. Gatekeepers are aligning their best practices including building supportive relationships with student and colleagues during gatekeeping experiences. Gatekeepers use their gatekeeping experiences to explore the impact on the gatekeeper. Lastly, gatekeeping experiences and the impact of those experiences lead to evolving best practices moving forward to better protect client welfare. These themes illuminate how gatekeepers are making meaning of their experiences. The next chapter will explore the interpretation of the emerging themes, limitations, implications, and recommendations for future research in gatekeeping.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Gatekeepers in counselor training programs are responsible for ensuring that CIT are competent entering the workforce (Bhat, 2005; Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brear et al., 2008; Foster & McAdams, 2007; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). These gatekeepers are the counselor educators, supervisors, and clinicians working in the training programs that provide continuous assessment throughout training to meet certain competency standards. It is imperative that counselor educators, supervisors, and clinicians working with counselor training programs provide ethical, comprehensive assessment continuously throughout training to support competency (Bhat, 2005; Brown, 2013; Tate et al., 2014). Many programs utilize CACREP standards goals as a measurement for competency. These gatekeepers are tasked with evaluating and monitoring CIT progress throughout the program to ensure standards are met to protect the public from those who may not be suitable for the profession to provide quality ethical and clinical care clients (ACA, 2014; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016).

The purpose of this hermeneutic study was to explore the meaning of gatekeepers' lived experiences in counselor training program. Furthermore, I examined how gatekeepers are resolving gatekeeping challenges. This study provides a deeper understanding of the essential role of gatekeeping experiences, including best practices to decrease gateslippage, the gatekeeping process for individuals executing this role, and how they resolve gatekeeping challenges (see Bhat, 2005; Brear & Dorrian, 2010; Brear

et al., 2008; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016). I explored the essence of gatekeepers in CACREP counselor education training programs.

In this chapter, I will provide concluding details of the study, including the interpretation of findings and how these results answer the research question, How do gatekeepers make meaning of their experiences, including how they overcome challenges as it relates to best practices? Results from this study indicate that gatekeepers make meaning of their experiences with the themes of (a) protecting client welfare as an anchor, (b) aligning their best practices, (c) supportive relationships have a significant impact on the gatekeeper, (d) gatekeeping experiences have an impact on the gatekeeper, and (e) gatekeeping experiences and the impact to continue to enhance their best practices. I will describe the study's limitations and recommendations. Last, I will highlight the importance of this study by addressing the implications for social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

Researchers have explored multiple areas within gatekeeping phenomenon, including best practices, PDPs, insight from lawsuits connected to individuals dismissed from a counselor training program, and the strategies for addressing problematic peers (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2014, 2015; Henderson & Dufrene, 2018; Kress & Protivak, 2009; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen (2010) proposed an emerging theory of the gatekeeping process, which was the conceptual framework for this study. This hermeneutic study provides insight on participants' gatekeeping process, meaning of their experiences, and gatekeeping challenges. In this section, I will discuss the findings of the study and how it builds upon current gatekeeping research.

Protecting Client Welfare as an Anchor

This current study included an examination of the meaning of gatekeeping experiences as the participants noted in their definition of gatekeeping that their main priority was to protect client welfare. Participants noted the ethical responsibility of protecting clients from CIT. Participants felt it was their responsibility to ensure that CIT are competent and not doing harm to clients. Participants appeared to use that ethical principle, and the ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) was their guide for gatekeeping choices. Each participant described protecting client welfare as the definition of gatekeeping and referenced the need to utilize a gatekeeping process to protect current and future clients that CIT will be working with moving forward. These results are consistent with Shuermann et al.'s (2018) results in the professional obligations domain. Shuermann et al. noted that the professional obligation subthemes include preventing harm and the ethical responsibility of counselor educators. These subthemes reinforced these results highlighting the importance of protecting client welfare to the meaning of gatekeeping.

Additionally, participants noted the ethical principles that are the foundation of the ACA (2014) *Code of Ethics*. These results are consistent with Shuermann et al.'s (2018) themes because enacting the ACA *Code of Ethics* principles for gatekeeping choices helps define the gatekeeping process for participants. Participants noted that they take the role seriously and use the ethical principles of beneficence, justice, and fidelity, and especially nonmaleficence when executing gatekeeping functions within their roles (ACA, 2014). Additionally, these results and findings are consistent with Homrich et al.'s (2014) findings that gatekeepers utilize ethical principles in best practices such as giving

feedback, providing support, and remediation as all participants discussed the importance of the ethical underpinning of engaging in best practices.

Aligning Best Practices

Participants overwhelmingly discussed their process in gatekeeping to ensure that they are aligning best practices for CIT and client welfare. This theme in these results examined on the thoughts and conceptualizations of gatekeeping and how it impacts their use of best practices. Participants described how their thoughts and "internal compass," as Participant P040 referenced, aligns with how they execute best practices. These results support Homrich et al.'s (2013) position that there is limited consistency beyond ethical standards for professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal standards for CIT, and gatekeepers align their practices to execute gatekeeping responsibilities.

Within this theme, participants reflected on the importance of transparent communication throughout the training program. Participants noted that communicating the openness of gatekeeping during the admissions process was essential for counselor educators' best practices. These results are consistent with the conceptual framework of Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen (2010), which indicates that gatekeeping commences during the admissions process. These results also aligned with Swank and Smith-Adcock's (2014) notion that programs use assessment tools during the admission process as a gatekeeping measure. Homrich's (2009) best practices model also noted gatekeeping being an open process during admissions. These results support the significance of this gate before a CIT admits to a counselor training program.

Participants reflected on the focus of growth and development. Participants, counselor educators and site supervisors noted the duality of thoughts around the role and the humanistic-centered approach. Granello (2002) noted that counselor educators should use a variety of techniques to support student development. Participants also reflected on the understanding that counselor training is a developmental process aligning with the findings from Erbes et al (2015). Granello (2002) continued to reflect on the developmental process in the growth of cognitive flexibility throughout the program, especially after their first fieldwork experience. Counselor educator and site supervisor participants recognized the need to explore developmental context during the gatekeeping process. These results are consistent with Handler et al. (2005), Eriksen and McAuliffe (2006), and Lambie and Sias (2009), who discussed developmental growth in cognitive flexibility, empathy, autonomy, and interpersonal integrity during the counselor training process. Participants clearly identified how important development context is to the gatekeeping process.

Some counselor education participants (n=4) noted that they reflected on multicultural considerations when executing gatekeeping best practices. Goodrich and Shin (2013) discussed how cultural differences in faculty-student relationships impacts the exploration of problematic behaviors. These results are consistent with research showing that gatekeepers consider cultural differences within faculty-student relationships (Goodrich & Shin, 2013). Also, Brown-Rice and Furr's (2016) survey reported that some gatekeepers struggle with reluctance to address problematic behaviors due to fear of being culturally insensitive. Brown-Rice and Furr's results appear

somewhat consistent as Participant P030 reflected on thoughts of over or under gatekeeping due to faculty-student cultural differences. All participant reflections are consistent with the conceptual framework in Ziomek-Daigle and Bailey's (2009) emerging theory, which noted that cultural responsiveness is interwoven throughout the gatekeeping process.

A subtheme surrounding gatekeeping with gatekeepers emerged from data gathered. Participants reflected on how gatekeeping with other gatekeepers is a part of their process when it comes to selecting faculty, achieving faculty consensus, and holding colleagues accountable. Participant experiences varied with other practitioners or other counselor educators. Although there is not extensive research on gatekeeping with other gatekeepers, there is research on counselor educator burnout. Sangganjanvanich and Balkin (2011) noted the relationship among counselor education burnout and job satisfaction. More recently, Harrichand et al. (2021) also noted multiple factors leading to CACREP counselor educator burnout. These results are consistent with participants' responses on addressing burnout with colleagues. However, neither study provided any evidence on how burnout impacts this role of gatekeeping providing evidence to continue research in this area. However, Erbes et al. (2015) described some counselor educators as reluctant to gatekeep or as not engaging in the gatekeeping role, and Brown-Rice and Furr (2016) noted challenges with gatekeeping consistency. Those studies begin to support the alignment of participant responses with efforts to hold their colleagues accountable and to explore faculty perception differences regarding gatekeeping.

Supportive Relationships Impact Gatekeeping

Participants reflected on the importance of relationships in gatekeeping in one or both ways: supportive relationships with students or the role of consultation with colleagues. Participants noted that they build supportive relationships with students to support their growth and cultivate openness with addressing areas of concern. These results are consistent with Erbes et al.'s (2015) study of the lived experiences of gatekeepers. Erbes et al. (2015) noted the support/challenge dichotomy where gatekeepers balance building supportive relationships and providing feedback to students when addressing problematic behaviors as an educational task.

Overwhelmingly, participants noted consultation as the approach to overcoming challenges in the process. Participant responses reflected the need to get support and alignment with their faculty as a group for remediation. Lumadue and Duffey (1999) also discussed the role of consultation and faculty remediation as a group. However, Brown-Rice and Furr (2016) noted roadblocks in gatekeeping consistency amongst colleagues, which may impact gatekeeping challenges. Consultation was pertinent to how gatekeepers resolve challenging gatekeeping experiences. This study's results are consistent with Erbes et al.'s (2015) study on the importance of consultation in gatekeeping and not making decisions in isolation. These results continue to assert that gatekeeping is not just the responsibility of one individual as many participants reported consulting for checks and balances.

Gatekeeping Experiences Have an Impact on the Gatekeeper

All participants noted that being a gatekeeper impacts them either in their role professionally or emotionally. These results are consistent with Gizara and Forrest (2004) and Brown-Rice and Furr's (2016) findings. Participants noted the time expansive nature of some of the gatekeeping experiences (see Brown-Rice and Furr, 2016). The results are consistent in the obligations for following through with best practices with PDPs, including time for increased supervision and advising (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Kress & Protivak, 2009; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010).

More notably, Gizara and Forrest (2004) discussed the personal impact of gatekeeping in American Psychological Association programs, which is consistent with participant responses. Participants discussed similar feelings with Gizara and Forrest, using words such as "sadness" and "disheartening" regarding executing gatekeeping functions. These results are consistent with the impact discussed by Kerl and Eichler (2005) and Gilbert et al. (2019). Kerl and Eichler noted the emotional stress as a "loss of innocence" (p. 83) for the gatekeepers. Additionally, Gilbert et al. noted the stress and anxiety gatekeepers experience during challenging gatekeeping experiences. Almost all participants noted the varying degrees of emotional impact of experiences from hopeful and pride to sadness and disappointment.

Gatekeeping Experiences and Their Impact Lead to Evolving Best Practices

Participants reflected on their gatekeeping experiences and how they impact them. With almost every participant identifying an emotional impact, the interview process allowed for reflection on how they worked through difficult emotions. Participants noted

that previous experiences lead them to evolve in executing best practices with CIT

moving forward. These results are consistent with recommendations made by Kerl and

Eichler (2005) to explore the interaction of emotional impact with gatekeeping practices.

Additionally, these results are consistent with Erbes et al.'s (2015) findings that

improvements in departments are being made to gatekeeping practices. This study's best

practices findings are consistent with Homrich's (2009) best practices models as the

participants shared their gatekeeping experiences. Many participants noted how they

enact best practices at similar checkpoints and assessed similar domains for clinical

practices (Henderson & Homrich, 2018; Homrich, 2009).

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation was the use of purposive snowball sampling. This type of

sampling method may have affected how information was disseminated to those

interested in being a part of a study on gatekeeping experiences. Information from current

participants may have been sent to prospective participants based on their experiences,

which may have reinforced similar experiences and not the breadth of all gatekeeping

experiences (see Etikan et al., 2015).

The second limitation includes the proportion of sample size. I strived to get an

equal proportion of counselor educators and site supervisors. The study had 10

participants reaching saturation with redundancy within this participant group (Patton,

2015). However, there were unequal proportions of site supervisors when compared to

counselor educators who participated in this study.

I identify as a gatekeeper, supervisor, and administrator at an agency and have served in the capacity of adjunct faculty for a counseling graduate program. Because of both of these identities, I have a connection to the gatekeeping phenomenon. Although I utilized a reflexive journal, member checks, and debriefings with a peer and committee member to explore and address how my role as the researcher may impact the data, my role as a gatekeeper may have had an impact on my interpretation of the data.

Recommendations

This study's findings highlight the continued need for qualitative research on the gatekeeping phenomenon as many participants noted how beneficial the research is to enacting best practices. Recommendations for future research include exploring additional sampling methods that may yield additional gatekeeping experiences that were not captured in this current study. The research community may benefit from hearing more about experiences with the individuals executing gatekeeping functions and those who are reluctant or do not engage in gatekeeping.

Moreover, increased sample size and proportion of site supervisors would strengthen the results of this study by capturing similarities and differences in lived gatekeeping experiences. I sought 5-6 counselor educators and 5-6 site supervisors as this study had 7 counselor educators and 3 site supervisors. Having an equal proportion of participants may help to ensure that themes captured within and between groups of participants encapsulate the experiences to enhance data saturation.

The current findings of this study are consistent with previous research in gatekeeping. The research community and gatekeepers would benefit from learning more

about gatekeeping with other gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are engaging in gatekeeping with community providers, counselor educators, and supervisors. One recommendation would be exploring rates of burnout and their impact on gatekeeping. An additional recommendation would be exploring how gatekeeping with gatekeepers relates to effective best practices.

Lastly, more research would be beneficial to explore how gatekeepers use their experiences to enhance their best practices. This study noted counselor educators and supervisors reflect and learn from previous experiences as they continue gatekeeping with future CIT, with a couple of participants also enhancing gatekeeping research. Future research would benefit from exploring further how meaningful experiences affect evolving best practices in the counselor training community to decrease gateslippage.

Implications

In this study, I explored the lived experiences of gatekeepers in counselor training programs, including resolving gatekeeping challenges. This study's results helped further understand and essence of gatekeepers' experiences related to best practices. The results can impact social change in the counselor training community and with client welfare.

Results also provide a deeper understanding of how gatekeepers in counselor training programs make meaning of their experiences. I explored both counselor educators and supervisors and how they execute gatekeeping functions. The study findings highlighted how gatekeeping is an essential process and supports that gatekeepers are learning from their experiences. These results can positively impact the counselor training community and enhance best practices to help decrease gateslippage.

As gatekeepers collaborate with other faculty, consult, and receive supervision on gatekeeping issues, establishing a peer consultation group would benefit the counselor education and site supervisor community. A gatekeeping peer consultation group could connect, receive support, and brainstorm additional best practices that are effective with CIT. This specific type of consultation group provides opportunities for gatekeepers to reflect on their experiences and discuss the professional and emotional impact on the gatekeeper to give support to one another. This collaborative group strengthens the relationship among gatekeepers providing opportunities to decrease gateslippage in their community.

More importantly, these results highlight that gatekeepers are thinking about impacting current and future clients when executing gatekeeping functions. These results indicate that gatekeepers take responsibility to protect the public from anyone who may harm seriously and intently. Gatekeeping is an essential function to protecting client welfare by strengthening competency for practice and preventing individuals who would do harm from entering the field. These results further suggest that gatekeepers learn from their experiences to increase gatekeeping effectiveness and increase competency for counselors entering the workforce and counseling in their communities. Increasing knowledge and use of best practices have a direct impact on effective gatekeeping and protecting the public.

The ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) and CACREP standards (2016) note the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for competency and ethical practice. However, the ACA *Code of Ethics* does not state how to effectively and ethically gatekeep for

competency. Research in the gatekeeping phenomenon and best practices has been evolving for these reasons. Community practitioners do not always have access to gatekeeping research if not subscribing to journals or accessing relevant databases. It is imperative that continued training is offered and required for those engaging in gatekeeping responsibilities.

Training programs can use transparency with the gatekeeping process with CIT to understand their role in the field as a clinician and future supervisor. Training programs can teach the importance of supporting and holding colleagues accountable and knowing what is needed if wanting a supervisory role will lead to increased awareness entering the field. After completing the training program, continuing education nits (CEU) would support a continued growth mindset for gatekeepers. Dedicated training in best practices led by other gatekeepers provides additional knowledge in evidence-based practices and awareness of the gatekeeping role in the community. Having gatekeeping training more accessible to practitioners and site supervisors will only strengthen effective gatekeeping practices and enhance services for the community.

What is profoundly evident through these results is that gatekeeping does not and cannot exist in isolation. There must be consensus, collaboration, and support when engaging in gatekeeping. The combined efforts of a gatekeeping peer consultation group and continued gatekeeping training adds layers of reinforcement for current and future gatekeepers. These strategies bring awareness through evidence-based gatekeeping practices to the larger gatekeeping community strengthening the gatekeeping process.

Conclusion

Gatekeepers have an essential role in counselor training. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of gatekeepers and how they make meaning of their experiences, including how they resolve challenges. The hermeneutic nature of the study captured participants' gatekeeping experiences and processes through the interview process. The results yielded five themes, including how gatekeepers protect client welfare as an anchor, how gatekeepers align their best practices, the role of supportive relationships in the gatekeeping process, gatekeeping has an impact on the gatekeeper, and experiences lead to evolving best practices.

The power of participants' responses indicates that they take the ethical responsibility of the gatekeeper role seriously and feel a sense of responsibility to protect the public from those who may be unsuitable for the profession. This responsibility leads to a wide breadth of impact for gatekeepers and is woven throughout counselor training programs. Participant P040 statement best captures the essence of this experience; "gatekeeping is a constant thread in this giant tapestry of what's comprised of our programs."

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Appendix: Interview Guide

Introductory Statement

Hello, thank you for taking time out of your day to speak with me. The purpose of this interview is to discuss your experience as a gatekeeper in the counseling profession. The specific research question is "How do gatekeepers in counseling training programs make meaning of their experiences including resolving gatekeeping challenges as it relates to best practices? This interview should take no longer than 90 minutes. After this interview, I will be transcribing our time for the data analysis phase. However, I will remove any identifying information from any documents so no one will be able to identify you with your answers. Your participation is completely voluntary and you can choose to stop this interview at any time. Do you have any questions or concerns before we get started?

Interview

1. Demographic Information:

    a. Type of Degree

    b. Role in counselor training

    c. Years of experience in counselor training

    d. Years at current university or practice

2. As we have discussed, I am looking to gather information about your experience as a gatekeeper. How do you define gatekeeping?

3. What are your best practices when engaging in gatekeeping in counselor training?

4. What is your experience executing gatekeeping responsibilities in your organization or university?

5. What does a typical gatekeeping experience look like for you?

6. Follow up: What has been a successful gatekeeping encounter you have experienced?

7. What factors impact your gatekeeping choices?

8. What ethical concerns have come up when executing gatekeeping responsibilities?

9. Follow up: How do these ethical concerns impact gatekeeping?

10. Describe some challenges you experience as a gatekeeper.

11. How have you resolved challenges that have come up when executing gatekeeping responsibilities?

12. Follow up: How have these challenges impacted you?

13. Tell me about how being a gatekeeper impacts you.

14. Tell me about how being a gatekeeper impacts the counselor education system.

15. What feedback would you have for current and future gatekeepers regarding gatekeeping in counselor training programs?

Closing Statement

Thank you again for taking valuable time out of your day for this interview. I appreciate hearing about your experience. Is there anything else that you feel is important to share about gatekeeping? After this interview, I may contact you for a shorter

interview to clarify or expand on additional gatekeeping experiences, approximately 15-20 minutes. I would be happy to share my transcripts and coding for accuracy and to be sure I am interpreting our time together. Are you interested in reviewing these documents? Thank you again for your time and sharing your experiences. Take care.