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College of Social and Behavioral Health

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Kristin Dolph

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

The Impact of Counselor Educators' Unprofessional Behavior on Students

by

Kristin Dolph

MS, Wright State University, 2018

BS, Wright State University, 2013

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

Walden University

December 2024

Abstract

Current research into Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited counseling programs has provided data that counselor educators and supervisors (CESs) who conduct themselves in an unprofessional manner affect their colleagues, peers, and students. Although there is an existing problem of unprofessionalism impacting students, there is a dearth of information on this exploration through a qualitative lens. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of counseling students impacted by their CESs displaying unprofessional behaviors. Participants were master's-level counseling students in a brick and mortar CACREP-accredited program who were either currently enrolled or had recently graduated. Through purposive sampling seven participants met the inclusion criteria and completed the semi-structured interview. Using Giorgi's descriptive analysis process, four main themes emerged including multiple experiences of unprofessional behavior with CES, participants' experiences as academic distress, participants' growth post-academic distress, and participants' viewing CES as counselors. Additionally, there were 12 subthemes. This research provides positive social change implications including greater emphasis on CESs' dispositions as ethical mandates, a recommended addition in CACREP standards for CESs to be formally evaluated, and future gatekeeping procedures for CESs.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to all the counseling students who have ever felt unsupported, unheard, and alone in their experiences with unprofessionalism. I hope this study and the work being done brings you comfort and hope for the counseling profession.

I would also like to dedicate this study to Dr. Christine Ferens, Dr. Josh Francis, Dr. Corinne Bridges, and Paige Ballengee. These empathetic and incredible humans have stood by me with unwavering support and positive regard. Your strength and bravery in helping me navigate challenges speaks volumes to your character. Thank you.

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I am truly amazed that I made it. Saying that completing my dissertation was grueling, laborious, and often perplexing is an understatement. This journey was a deeply emotional challenge for me. As a first-generation higher-education student from a small rural town who had no plans of attending college post-high school graduation, this journey was not without fear and self-doubt. Therefore, I place great importance on recognizing those whom I accredit the most support in helping make this journey possible. I am not sure where I would be without them.

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Lastly, to my dogs. I know this may be unorthodox, and only us humans will read this, but I must extend my gratuitous energy into the universe for my dogs Tucker and Norman-Sue. I thank them for being my emotional and physical support from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. for the last three and ten months. They helped me to never feel truly alone.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Counselor educators and supervisors (CESs) have a responsibility to conduct themselves in an ethical manner, complying with the counseling profession's ethical codes and monitoring their own behavior as it relates to students. The American Counseling Association (ACA; ACA, 2014) *Code of Ethics* states that "counselor educators conduct counselor education and training programs in an ethical manner and serve as role models for professional behavior" (F.7.a). Self-monitoring is an ongoing self-reflective process to ensure that the responsibility of acting as a role model is upheld (Birden et al., 2013; Cruess et al., 2019). Self-monitoring is both an ethical aspiration and a requirement for counselors serving in the role of educators (ACA, 2014). Learning professionalism from a role model goes beyond instructional methods of teaching students' theories, techniques, and diagnostic criteria for mental health disorders (Birden et al., 2013; Brissette et al., 2017; Clement, 1988; Cruess et al., 2019). Role models educate students through experiential learning and influence their professional behaviors by demonstrating the profession's ethics and values. Role modeling is beneficial for teaching professionalism (ACA, 2014); however, this area has been overlooked in counselor education.

In this chapter, I present background information that summarizes the literature related to the scope of the study for descriptive phenomenological qualitative inquiry into the lived experiences of master's in counseling students who have experienced unprofessional behaviors from their counselor educators. As the available scholarly

literature is lacking in the area of professionalism in counselor education and how role modeling professionalism affects students as well as why this area of research is needed. I then provide the problem statement, purpose statement, research question, conceptual framework, and the nature of the study. I also define key terms, present assumptions related to the study, offer the scope of study and delimitations, and provide and discuss limitations. I close this chapter by discussing the significance of this study for the field of counselor education and supervision and providing a summary.

Background

Professionalism is found in all fields where professional identity and role modeling are important factors during the education process. Brissette et al. (2017) studied medical residents' attitudes and beliefs about resident educators' behaviors regarding professionalism and how professional behaviors are modeled and taught within pathology programs. Results indicated that residents were able to identify unprofessional behavior and report observing this behavior among their resident educators. Brissette et al. (2017) also found observational learning to be the most used instructional method when teaching professionalism. Similarly, Gaiser (2009) conducted a study on professionalism in medical residencies and found the importance of role-modeling professionalism. This role modeling appeared as situational learning where the students learn vicariously through their faculty's actions and on intangible teachings of important concepts such as self-reflection, honesty, integrity, and meta-cognition. In sum, educators need to model professional behaviors. However, there is a dearth of literature on monitoring and evaluating faculty professionalism to the extent that the term "hidden

curriculum" has been used to describe this important and current framework of teaching professionalism that is not overtly taught in the program curriculum (Gaiser, 2009). Educators are role models of ethics and professionalism; therefore, their behaviors can affect their students' perceptions of what is professional and what is unprofessional once they graduate. Further, the ACA requires gatekeeping so that no underprepared or under skilled professionals are working in the field.

Counseling students face strenuous dispositional and academic evaluation to ensure that they are meeting practice and state standards to enter the profession (ACA, 2014; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). These students rely on their CESs to effectively evaluate their progress and intervene with them and their peers when necessary to correct issues before they become problematic (Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). In addition to formal evaluation, CESs have an ethical responsibility to students to model the professionalism and ethical behaviors that they require (ACA, 2014; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Although there is an ethical responsibility for CESs to engage in and uphold professionalism for themselves and their students (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2024), there is a dearth of literature on counseling students who are gateslipping through their program, raising the question of how these students are either gateslipping or simply modeling the behaviors they observed (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002, 2006; Gilbert et al., 2019; Palmer et al., 2008; Rose & Persutte-Persutte-Manning, 2020; Salpietro et al., 2021). *Gateslipping* is defined as "graduating without appropriate gatekeeping" in counseling programs (Salpietro et al., 2021, p. 274). Students who gateslip are a potential risk to their clients and the counseling profession (ACA, 2014).

Additionally, students who display unprofessional behaviors while in a counseling program cause distress to their peers (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013; Rose & Persutte-Persutte-Manning, 2020). Brown-Rice and Furr (2013), who surveyed 389 counseling graduate students to measure the impact of students' knowledge of and interactions with classmates with problems of professional competence (PPC), concluded that most counseling students are aware of a classmate with PPC, report being affected by the classmate's PPC, and report having negative feelings toward faculty for not intervening. Results indicated that 74% of participants reported knowledge of a peer with PPC, 53% reported being affected by a peer with PPC, and 53% stated that this impacted their learning environment. This research into the effects of students exhibiting unprofessional behaviors is seen throughout the literature and has served as the impetus for gatekeeping practices and procedures within counseling and counselor education and supervision (CES).

In a meta-analysis of literature on counseling students with PPC and the impact they have on their program peers who were initially perceived as proficient, Rose and Persutte-Manning (2020) noted that the perceived unprofessional behaviors of peers had a negative impact on once proficient students and that students with PPC require increased attention from faculty. Additionally, Rose and Persutte-Manning noted that faculty require assistance in using program resources for their intervention. This literature provides current information on the need for remediation and gatekeeping practices. Both colleagues and peers of those exhibiting unprofessional behaviors appear to be impacted psychologically as well (Rose & Persutte-Manning, 2020). Additionally, since learning

does not occur in isolation, those exhibiting unprofessional behaviors impact the shared learning environment (Rose & Persutte-Manning, 2020). The importance of the shared learning environment and how the perceptions and behaviors of others impact this environment are important factors to consider when reviewing how CESs exhibiting unprofessional behaviors potentially affect their students.

Researchers have examined CESs' awareness of problematic students displaying unprofessionalism within graduate counseling programs (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2016, 2019) and students who may need remediation. Moreover, those students displaying unprofessionalism impact their peers and faculty (Palmer et al., 2008; Parker et al., 2014). In a study conducted by Brown-Rice and Furr (2016), 370 participants employed as CESs in CACREP counseling programs were surveyed to determine counselor educators' knowledge of counseling students' PPC and their perceived ability to handle students displaying PPC. The study concluded that CESs know students' PPC and the negative impacts on peers and faculty (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016). In fact, 91% of faculty have observed students with PPC in their programs (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016). This percentage highlights the abundance of unprofessionalism in counseling programs across the country and the potential factors that have not been studied that may be influencing the results. Moreover, counselor educators' potential barriers to intervening with students with PPC include CESs' emotions regarding the practice of gatekeeping and potentially appearing culturally insensitive (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016). Results highlight clear barriers that impact CESs' perceived ability to intervene and conduct gatekeeping procedures. Clearly, those behaving unprofessionally are impacting

peers as well as the academic environment and programmatic culture (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2016).

Current literature has illuminated potential issues related to negative effects PPC has on CESs, the counseling profession, and gateslipping (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019). Brown-Rice and Furr (2019) collected data from 345 doctoral students to measure if PPC exists in students in doctoral-level counselor education and counseling programs. The findings suggested that doctoral counseling students are aware of peers with PPC, are negatively affected by their peers with PPC, and believe that their educators should intervene more with these students. Therefore, without gatekeeping, it is likely that current CES students could graduate and perpetuate PPC among their students and within their institutions of higher education. In a similar study designed to determine whether CESs' are aware of their colleagues with PPC and their perceived beliefs of how their colleagues' PPC affect them and their students, Brown-Rice and Furr (2015) concluded that most participants were aware of colleagues with PPC, and that their PPC negatively affected them, their students, and the working environment. This study provided data that PPC exists in CES faculty of graduate counseling programs and that unprofessional behaviors exhibited by CESs are negatively affecting students and their environment.

Furthermore, there is existing literature on doctoral-level CES faculty exhibiting unprofessionalism towards their doctoral CES students (Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Furr and Brown-Rice (2016) surveyed 345 participants to measure the perceived knowledge that doctoral counseling and doctoral psychology students have of their faculty with PPC. The researchers conducted this study to bring attention to the lack of gatekeeping and

evaluative practices of CES and faculty and the need for these practices due to PPC existing in counseling programs. Additionally, unprofessional conduct by CESs brings negative consequences to those around them (Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). The researchers determined that doctoral students are aware of and have been negatively affected by their faculties' PPC inside and outside the classroom. The results indicated that 59.7% of CES doctoral students were aware of a faculty with PPC in their program. Of the 59.7%, 52.6% reported feeling stressed, 39.8% believed the unprofessional CES conduct disrupted the learning environment, 35.8% believed that their ability to complete work was disrupted, and 65.3% reported concern over the counseling profession. With the literature existing on CES faculty and students exhibiting behaviors of unprofessionalism, there is a great need for exploring these effects on their students to influence future necessary corrections.

Proficient doctoral CES students aware of unprofessionalism in their faculty and peers may be advantaged by being taught gatekeeping practices and procedures. These practices and procedures serve as important structures for these CES students as they enter their professional careers and take on the risk of encountering fellow CES engaging in unprofessionalism. In a study by Freeman et al. (2020), doctoral-level CES students were taught gatekeeping practices and attempted to develop a gatekeeping model for teaching this practice. By learning and creating a developmental experiential model (DEM), CESs may be able to increase doctoral student competence in gatekeeping practices (Freeman et al., 2020). The study revealed four common themes among doctoral students as their perceived importance of gatekeeping, which highlights that

there is not only a need for more exploration of CESs exhibiting unprofessionalism and how that may impact their peers and students but also that there is a demand among CES for more efficacious gatekeeping models to be utilized. In a similar study by Schuermann et al. (2018), the perception of current gatekeeping practices was explored among CESs. The researchers wanted to explore the similarities and differences in CESs' perceptions of the gatekeeping practice and how their role influenced their decision. The researchers concluded that CESs' perceived ability to enact gatekeeping practices was due to their faculty position, perceived faculty culture, relationships with other faculty, and years of experience. Results from this study brought attention to how impactful CESs' relationships and their environment are to engaging in gatekeeping practices to promote the welfare of the counseling profession. This was impactful for my study due to the perceived negative impact that a CES exhibiting unprofessional behaviors may have on their students and the learning environment.

The learning environment of a counseling program is an important factor when considering counseling student development (Hurt et al., 2020). An additional area to consider when reviewing the learning environment is the instructor's disposition. Hurt et al. (2020) studied different teaching dispositions of CESs, which were described as the attitudes, beliefs, and values demonstrated through verbal and nonverbal interactions. Hurt et al. used 48 master's and doctoral counseling students as their participants and determined that CESs' teaching dispositions do affect their students and the learning environment. There are clear characteristics of CESs' demonstrations of professionalism being role modeled to counseling students and the impact on their development.

However, there is still little known from the counseling student perspective as to how counseling students' experiences with their faculty impact them.

After concluding a comprehensive review of the literature, there appeared to be a lack of data on the effects of CESs' unprofessional behaviors on their students. There has been research into exploring the effects and demonstration of medical resident educator's professional and unprofessional behaviors and attitudes on their students (Birden et al., 2013; Brissette et al., 2017; Cruess, 2006; Cruess & Cruess, 2006; Gaiser, 2009) and that CESs' unprofessional behaviors exist in counseling programs and have an effect on students and their colleagues (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). However, there has been no further exploration into how master's level CES unprofessional behaviors are affecting their students through a qualitative exploration. Additionally, the inductive exploration into this problem through a descriptive phenomenological framework provided the initial data to extend this exploration further with future research.

My research study on this topic could help inform solutions to problems such as the ACA (2014) Code of Ethics excluding CESs' dispositions, CACREP (2024) standards excluding the requirement that counseling program administrators conduct their own evaluations of CESs, gatekeeping and remediation models existing for CESs, and above all, how CESs exhibiting unprofessional behaviors further affect their students entering the profession. The goal of this study was to explore the effects that CESs' unprofessional behaviors have on their students through semi-structured interviews. This is important so that the profession may finally have public and scholarly information on

how CESs' unprofessional behaviors are impacting their students, the sanctity of the learning environment, and the culture of the program. Additionally, this study provided data on why there needs to be more transparent information on the dispositional standards of CESs as role models for the profession.

Problem Statement

Counseling programs have many requirements and procedures to follow to remain current with professional standards for both students and faculty (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2024). Within these standards, there is little information regarding the policies and procedures that universities are creating for their own faculty evaluations. Current research into CACREP-accredited counseling programs has provided data that some CESs of master's and doctoral level counseling programs are conducting themselves in an unprofessional manner and affecting their colleagues, peers, and students (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016).

Gatekeeping is a core ethical responsibility of counselors (ACA, 2014). According to the ACA (2014), gatekeeping practices are defined as assessing, evaluating, and intervening when a counselor is suspected to be practicing in an incompetent or harmful manner. The counseling profession is familiar with the application of gatekeeping students due to the necessity of learning ethical codes of conduct and ongoing evaluative measures typically set by counseling program universities and CACREP (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2024). Counseling students and counselors in-training typically hold the most attention for this practice in academic settings and in research (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013; Freeman et al., 2016; Rose & Persutte, 2020; Schuermann et

al., 2018; Salpietro et al., 2021; Wilkerson, 2006). Gatekeeping, however, is an ethical responsibility to be upheld by any counseling professional (ACA, 2014; Homrich et al., 2014), wherein a professional has an ethical responsibility to intervene if they are aware of another professional engaging in unethical or unprofessional behaviors. The literature on gatekeeping within counseling appears to be lacking in one specific area, that of CESs.

Brown-Rice and Furr (2015) surveyed 335 CESs about their experiences with colleagues with PPC. Of those 335 participants, 75% of CESs reported being aware of colleagues exhibiting PPC, 76% of that 75% reported feeling affected by these colleagues, 66% reported being aware of unprofessional behaviors specifically, 61% reported concern over CESs acting in a hypocritical manner towards students, and 56% reported concern over these CESs' affecting students emotionally. In a similar study, Furr and Brown-Rice (2016) recruited 345 doctoral CES students, among other psychology-related doctoral students, who were surveyed regarding their CESs' PPC. Of the 345 participants, 59.7% reported observing PPC in their CESs behaviors, with most participants reporting being affected by this PPC. Of the identified 59.7%, 86.3% believed that their CESs were conducting themselves in a hypocritical manner. There is explicit knowledge that CESs' unprofessional behaviors affect their peers and students. Additionally, doctoral-level CES students are engaging in similar unprofessional behaviors. These students are at risk of not only gate slipping and entering the profession as less than competent but are also at risk of entering a CES faculty role and repeating their unprofessional behaviors resulting in casual harm (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). This problem appeared to be ongoing. Brown-

Rice and Furr (2019) conducted a study using the same PPC survey with doctoral CES students in a CACREP-accredited program who were asked questions regarding their peers. Of the 345 participants surveyed, 68.1% reported witnessing PPC in a peer. This data indicates that not only is PPC being exhibited by CESs in CACREP counseling programs, but there exists a risk of perpetuating this issue upon graduation of doctoral students with the intent of obtaining a CES position.

Research has demonstrated that students are affected by their educator's dispositions and professional conduct (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Hurt et al., 2020). Although less recognized in this regard, counselors are among other medical providers in the field wherein the knowledge of practice standards and behaviors is not only taught formally in the classroom but also through experiential learning (Brissette et al., 2017). This tacit knowledge of professionalism is additionally known as the hidden curriculum, wherein students' best learning practices are acquired outside of the classroom, such as interpersonal skills, self-awareness, moral integrity, and values (Gaiser, 2009). This process of role modeling, whereby an individual learns through observation and not through instruction, is essential to counseling programs as students are learning how to conduct themselves professionally through the observed behaviors of their faculty. Professionally conducting oneself and acting as a role model for the profession is an ethical responsibility of counselors (ACA, 2014); however, there are no specific codes in the *Code of Ethics* for counselors about how to model professionalism or how it is being evaluated. Gatekeeping is an ethical requirement wherein CESs are to conduct ongoing evaluations and utilize gatekeeping models and procedures to ensure and protect the

welfare of the public and the counseling profession (Daigle, 2005; Freeman et al., 2016, 2020; Henderson & Dufrene, 2017; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Salpietro et al., 2021). Although gatekeeping models exist in CES, such as the developmental experiential gatekeeping model (DEG), which proposes the use of gatekeeping practices to meet students developmentally (Freeman et al., 2020), there is little known about gatekeeping models being utilized among CESs or if any that exist are effective.

Furr and Brown-Rice (2016) stated that educators are "moral and ethical leaders of their programs" (p. 227). Acting as role models for the profession is an aspirational and ethical responsibility (ACA, 2014). Counseling professionals engaging in unprofessional conduct have a negative impact on others, causing significant issues personally and in the learning environment (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Although researchers have investigated the topics of problems of unprofessional competence and unethical issues being displayed by counseling students, trainees, supervisees, supervisors, and even counselor educators (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016), the topic has yet to be explored through a qualitative phenomenological perspective capturing the lived experiences of students affected by their CESs' unprofessional behaviors. Therefore, an exploration of the lived experiences of these students was imperative to understand.

Purpose

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of counseling students impacted by their CESs displaying unprofessional behaviors. To address the identified research problem of counseling

students being negatively affected by CESs acting unprofessionally, I limited my sample to counseling students of CACREP-accredited counseling programs in the United States who have had an experience with CESs' engaging in unprofessional behavior. The findings from this study could further inform future ethical codes for CESs on professionalism and inform future formative evaluation of CESs' professionalism by counseling program administrators as set by CACREP standards.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of master's-level counseling students that have experienced CESs' unprofessionalism during their graduate program?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was phenomenology. Phenomenology is a theory and philosophy of Edmund Husserl (Husserl, 2012; Peoples, 2021). Phenomenology is primarily interested in gathering information from an individual's lived experience to truly capture the phenomenon's essence (Husserl, 2012). The philosophical origins of phenomenology are rooted in the study of experiences by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and later advanced by Edmund Husserl (Pivcevic, 2015). Husserl's phenomenology sought to understand what had been experienced by observing how the individual perceives the event (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Peoples, 2021). Husserl argued that phenomenology works on the premise that all truth must be obtained through experience, and only through experience can knowledge and information be gained (Privcevic, 2015).

Descriptive phenomenology is based on the study and findings of Edmund Husserl and later continued and advanced by Amedeo Giorgi (Giorgi, 2009; Reiners, 2012). Phenomenology views all individuals' experiences with intentionality and with phenomenological reduction, which uses bracketing of judgments and biases to capture the pure essence of participants' experiences and explore the phenomenon under study (Burkholder et al., 2020). Phenomenology also considers the use of horizon, the present experience while engaging in noesis (Peoples, 2021). Noesis enables awareness and sets aside any biases or beliefs that may change how the individual perceives and reflects on their experiences (Burkholder et al., 2020; Peoples, 2021).

Nature of the Study

For this study, I used a descriptive phenomenological design to explore and describe information from participant interviews while bracketing my biases to gather the true essence of the phenomenon under study (Peoples, 2021; Shelton & Bridges, 2019;). Using a descriptive phenomenological design was necessary to fulfill the research purpose and answer the research question of exploring and describing counseling students' lived experiences without interpreting the information or applying meaning (Peoples, 2021; Giorgi et al., 2017). The intention of this research was to explore and describe a phenomenon that had yet to be studied so that the literature may flourish with better information on how to help counseling programs in applying CACREP (2024) standards and ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) requirements. Additionally, this research may help CESs in developing and implementing gatekeeping practices with colleagues.

Descriptive phenomenology was applied to this study to explore and describe the phenomenon of counseling students being affected by CESs' unprofessional behaviors. There was a benefit in exploring and describing the participants' lived experiences by using an inductive process, as this had yet to be explored (Reiners, 2012). The purpose of descriptive phenomenology was to describe the participants' lived experiences through careful and conscious practices without interpreting the data (Shelton & Bridges, 2019). Descriptive phenomenology aligned with the research question and the data collection process of semi-structured interviews, as the aim of this study was to have participants recount their lived experiences. Congruent with phenomenological designs, I bracketed my lived experiences to reduce bias. The process of bracketing continued throughout the data analysis. I listened once to take notes, and a second time to transcribe the data while identifying emerging themes (Shelton & Bridges, 2019). This research design was essential to the study of understanding the lived experiences of counseling students affected by a CESs' unprofessional behaviors. I will provide further information on this connection in chapter two.

Definitions

Counselor Educators and Supervisors (CESs): A counseling professional that is serving as an educator in a counseling program creating and implementing counseling ethics, theories, and practice to counseling students and evaluates and assesses a counselor or counselor-in-training's clinical and/or academic skills (ACA, 2014).

Counselor Education and Supervision (CES): A counseling profession that serves to educate on ethics, theories, and practice to counseling students and engages in

evaluation and assessment of a counselor or counselor-in-training's clinical and/or academic skills (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2024).

Professionalism: The attitude and behaviors exhibited by an individual belonging to a profession that enables an intrinsic motivation toward the collective quality of the profession (VanZandt, 1990).

Unprofessional: The violation or opposite of the definition that VanZandt (1990) provided.

Gatekeeping: "...the initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students' competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate" (ACA, 2014, p. 20).

Gateslipping: The progression into the profession or continuation of professional practice without intervention when there are clear signs of academic, clinical skill, or dispositional deficits (Homrich et al., 2014).

Assumptions

For this study, several assumptions guided my approach to data collection. First, I assumed that my background as a counseling student, counseling professional, and CES guided my interest in exploring this topic of study. I also assumed that the participants in this study could confidently and accurately engage in retrospective accounts of their counseling student experiences to satisfy the interview portion. Another assumption was that counseling students who had experienced a CESs' unprofessional behaviors would be willing to discuss this and appreciate the study's significance and implications. Finally, I assumed that the counseling students that I interviewed would be able to be

accessed through professional listservs and social media platforms. These assumptions were essential to the study as they were to be assumed true. The above-stated assumptions were met by providing informed consent to the participants and informing them of confidentiality, therefore offering a confidential space to provide an accurate recounting of information.

In choosing to use descriptive phenomenology, I assumed that I, as the researcher, would be able to explore current or recently graduated counseling students' lived experiences while not impacting the research data with my own as a past and current student. This assumption highlighted my ability to bracket my own experiences and beliefs to accurately explore the phenomenon under study. Another assumption I had was of suspending my own judgements (Peoples, 2021), as that is essential to the descriptive phenomenological approach that I used. Lastly, I assumed that I could analyze the data gathered from the participants' lived experiences and engage in descriptive analysis void of subjective beliefs, meaning, or ideas.

Scope and Delimitations

This study included participants from a brick and mortar CACREP-accredited master's-level counseling program who were either currently enrolled or had graduated within the last three months who had experienced CES unprofessionalism. These selection criteria were to ensure that the data analyzed matched with this study's problem and purpose under exploration. Master's level counseling students who have experienced a CESs' unprofessional behaviors had yet to be explored, which provided a gap in the literature. However, there was existing data on CESs engaging in unprofessional

behaviors and other CESs believing that those behaviors are affecting students (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015). Furthermore, research indicates that counseling student study participants at the doctoral level experienced and were negatively affected by their CESs and their peers' PPC (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Limiting the participants to those currently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited master's-level counseling program ensured that the data provided evidence of the problem's immediacy. Although counseling students who have graduated would have provided adequate data, the phenomenological approach of descriptive phenomenology does not require a delineation of time and space (Peoples, 2021). Therefore, exploring the experiences of counseling students who are currently enrolled highlighted the immediacy of this topic.

The participants in this study had experiences while attending a brick-and-mortar, CACREP-accredited counseling program in the United States. Counseling students may enter a counseling program that is either CACREP accredited or not CACREP accredited and may be engaging in classes through an in-person status like that of a brick-and-mortar program or through an online program (CACREP, 2024). I narrowed the participants to those of the brick-and-mortar type as they have more experiences to learn vicariously through ongoing observation of CESs' behaviors and actions (Coker & Schooley, 2012; Gilbert et al., 2019; Snow & Coker, 2020). Additionally, the need to ensure that participants are from a CACREP-accredited program further supports the purpose and significance of my study to highlight the need for CACREP standards to require counseling program chairs to engage in consistent formal evaluation of their CESs as CACREP standards only requirement of faculty evaluation is that of students

through an end of the term voluntary evaluation (CACREP, 2024). With the focus of this phenomenological study being descriptive and not interpretive, the findings may be transferable to other participants being explored in the future.

Limitations

The phenomenological design in which this study was conceptualized endorsed the idea of data being gathered through interviews of participants over their lived experiences (Peoples, 2021). Within this phenomenological design, there was an important delineation from transcendental to descriptive to simply describe the participants lived experiences without applying meaning to the data gathered or applying change from the analysis (Reiners, 2012). Through this knowledge, one limitation of this study was that of the participants' retrospective accounts of their lived experiences. Due to the phenomenological principle of exploring lived experience, this recounting of an experience of the participant could have resulted in an error in memory (Bradburn et al., 2004).

Another limitation of this study was the nature of the study's research question. The study explored the lived experiences of students who had unprofessional experiences with their faculty. Due to the recounting of these experiences possibly being emotionally provoking, this could have led to a biased response either unintentionally because of experiencing distress during the interview or intentionally so as to not tarnish the name of the university (Bradburn et al., 2004).

Finally, another limitation was the limited sample size. A descriptive phenomenological study requires a minimum of three participants to be interviewed

(Giorgi, 2009). The aim of this study was to interview six to 10 participants to ensure saturation. The final sample size of seven participants was adequate for a qualitative phenomenological design; however, it was small in relation to the population of counseling students in the United States.

Significance

Counseling students who are experiencing the effects of their faculty behaving unprofessionally feel stressed, overwhelmed, concerned for the profession, and even betrayed by their program (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). There is a clear understanding that CESs who are engaging in unprofessional behaviors are affecting their students and their perceptions of the field of counseling (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). This information has informed the field of counseling on the topic of gatekeeping. However, there is still little known about how this is affecting students. Current literature on this topic has encouraged future research into remediation and gatekeeping procedures for CESs exhibiting problems of professional competence (Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). The purpose of this study was to influence future gatekeeping procedures for CESs engaging in unprofessional behaviors, which, if caught early, could prevent students from being affected by informing new policies.

There are several social change implications for the field of counseling, such as a call for a change in the ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) to implement CESs' dispositions and provide a definition of professionalism, a change in the evaluation necessity of CESs' in CACREP standards, further evaluative measures in university programs, and remedial

procedures in university programs for faculty members as well as students (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016). Social change implications could include enhancing the knowledge of professionalism among faculty members for both students and faculty. This can help other faculty become aware of the possible unprofessional behaviors of their peers and can be a call for better self-awareness practices of faculty to better manage their stress and burnout. This study may help bring awareness to programs for both ongoing evaluation and assistance and education on managing their stress. This study was significant in that it will fill a gap in understanding the prevalence of CESs' unprofessionalism, the effects of CESs' unprofessionalism on their students, and the need for not only routine procedural evaluation of CESs' by their universities but also in CACREP standards and the ACA *Code of Ethics.*

Summary

I have provided the background information on the existing literature on the topic of dispositional, professional, and problematic issues existing in CESs' and with counseling students, provided the problem under exploration of my study, the purpose of this study, and the significance of the study to further conceptualize this study. In the following chapter two, I will further elaborate on the literature that exhausted the impetus of my study as well as further providing information on the significance of this study for the counseling profession.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The counseling program environment provides crucial significance to counseling students' healthy and stable development. Counseling students are affected by their CESs and the program environment in both a positive and negative way, which impacts their learning, perceptions of CESs, professionalism, and perceptions of the counseling profession (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). There is a clear problem indicating that CESs engaging in unprofessional behaviors exist and that they are negatively impacting their students, peers, the learning environment, and the counseling program culture (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016; Hurt et el., 2020). Counseling students who have had experiences with peers or CESs exhibiting unprofessional behaviors commonly experience emotional distress, increased stress, feelings of frustration and resentment towards their peers, CESs, and the counseling program, a disrupted learning environment, and negative thoughts about the counseling profession (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Recent literature has provided data that CESs and future CESs are exhibiting unprofessional and problematic behaviors such as emotional dysregulation, incompetent clinical skills, and excessive tardiness or class cancellation, which negatively impact those around them and the university program culture (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). There is recent literature that has highlighted the impact of the learning environment on counseling students including students' perceptions of their CESs displayed professionalism and teaching dispositions

(Hurt et al., 2020). Additionally, there is a dearth of literature on gatekeeping practices that primarily pertain to counseling students and trainees (Daigle, 2005; Daigle & Christensen, 2010; DeCino et al., 2020; Demyan et al., 2018; Freeman et al., 2016, 2020; Gilbert et al., 2019; Homrich et al., 2014; Rose & Persutte, 2020; Wilkerson, 2006) with a lack of research on gatekeeping practices or procedures specific for CESs. Although there is clear evidence that counseling students are being affected negatively by their CESs exhibiting unprofessional behaviors, there are practices and procedures that could be implemented to reduce the impact and harm. Recent literature has indicated that counseling professionals are requesting further information on gatekeeping practices and procedures to be used on CESs (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016), specific dispositional ethical codes for CESs (Johnson et al., 2012; Schwab & Neukrug, 1994), and improvement on CESs' taking responsibility for identifying and intervening when colleagues are exhibiting unprofessional behaviors (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Chang & Rubel, 2019; Daigle, 2005; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999; Parker et al., 2014; Schuermann et al., 2018).

CESs' involvement in the gatekeeping process' of their colleagues is important to consider when evaluating the effects of CESs' unprofessional behaviors on their students and the university environment. CESs have an ethical responsibility to create and maintain a safe learning environment for their students (ACA, 2014). However, it is counseling students that identify unprofessional behaviors in their peers before their CESs (Gaubatz & Vera, 2006; Parker et al., 2014). Additionally, there is evidence that counseling students believe that it is the program and the program chair's responsibility

to intervene with unprofessional or problematic behaviors (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). This displacement of responsibility may be further fostered by the current CACREP (2024), which consists of standards that espouse the only required iterative evaluation of CESs, which is conducted by the students. These standards foster the notion that it is the counseling student's responsibility to identify and intervene when there is a clear demonstration of unprofessional behaviors in the program. However, counseling students do not believe that it is their responsibility and, in turn, become frustrated with their program and CESs for not intervening (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). With a combined lack of both required CESs' evaluative procedures set in place by CACREP (2024) standards and a lack of dispositional and behavioral ethical codes for CESs' set by the ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) there are apparent foundational issues pertaining to the topic of CESs' unprofessional behaviors affecting their students and how they are being remediated. In my review of the literature, there was minimal research on CESs engaging in unprofessional behaviors and how these behaviors affect their students. The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of counseling students impacted by their CESs' displaying unprofessional behaviors. Exploring the experiences of counseling students who have been impacted by CESs' unprofessional behaviors could provide important information for future ethical codes related to CESs' dispositions and behaviors of professionalism and inform continual program evaluation of CESs' professionalism by administrators. Additionally, this research could inform specific CACREP standards for program evaluation of faculty and

clarify the necessity and information for creating gatekeeping procedures and practices specific to CESs.

In this chapter, I will first explain the literature search strategy to show a substantive review of the current literature on this topic. Next, I explain the theoretical foundation of descriptive phenomenology that forms the basis of methodology. Lastly, I provide a comprehensive review of the literature related to the effects of counseling students' being affected by CESs' exhibiting unprofessional behaviors in counseling programs, including the role of professionalism in CES, the impact of the learning environment on counseling students, gatekeeping practices and barriers in counseling and CES, the phenomenon of gateslipping, and the need for future change in the ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) and in the CACREP (2024) standards related to CESs' dispositions and professionalism.

Literature Search Strategy

To conduct a thorough and exhaustive review the literature, I utilized several search strategy methods. I used online databases such as PsychInfo, APA PsychInfo, Sage journals, and ProQuest to access CES journal articles and textbook chapters. I searched the above databases using the terms *gatekeeping, counselor education, counselor educator and supervisor, counseling, professionalism, problems of professional competence,* and *gateslipping*. I also extended my search to using the terms *ethical, legal, remediation, role model, mentor*, and *mentoring*. The literature used for this study is a combination of peer-reviewed articles, textbooks, and original works. The

range of dates of the articles used was to ensure that I covered both the history of the presented research problem and how this problem is affecting current areas.

Theoretical Foundation

The foundational theory of this study is Husserlian phenomenology, which is an inductive theoretical approach founded on the idea that no exact truth can be understood through observation, but a subjective truth can be through experience (Reiners, 2012). Phenomenology was a countermovement against positivist methodology, asserting that truth could be found through careful study, void of human interaction (Reiners, 2012). Phenomenology was created to bring researchers closer to those they are studying and assume that knowledge, not truth, is being gathered through this interaction (Reiners, 2012). Therefore, this approach emphasizes studying the individual's experience (Pivcevic, 2015).

Husserl's phenomenology is based on three principles of intentional experience: a distinction between differing ideas of an object, such as the empirical or general understanding, and that the theory of knowledge from the researcher needs to be free from empirical or relativist ideas (Pivcevic, 2015). This approach emphasizes an individual's present moment of experience without applying empirical logic or understanding to the ontological concepts being gathered. This method is applied through phenomenological reduction, which reduces an object or idea to its purest form, stripping away any empirical labels or understandings (Pivcevic, 2015). This reduction process is critical to Husserlian phenomenology where the researcher uses intentional consciousness while bracketing their own biases (Peoples, 2021). Husserl's phenomenology espouses

the importance of consciousness to emphasize the subjective experience of an individual and not place emphasis on the empirical evidence (Moustakas, 1994). This experiential knowledge is what sets phenomenology apart from other branches of epistemology, such as positivism and relativism, which both espouse that there is truth in what is being studied (Pivcevic, 2015).

Husserlian phenomenology was the best approach for the purpose of this study, because this descriptive phenomenology allows the researcher to simply explore and describe the phenomenon without attempting to interpret, explain, or make meaning (Giorigi, 2017). Descriptive phenomenology uses many of the critical concepts within Husserl's phenomenology, such as intentionality and bracketing. The researcher must be intentional with the purpose of the research question and in gathering data while suspending any preconceived notions or judgments that may be had about the topic (Giorgi, 2017).

Several key concepts of Husserl's phenomenology help to guide this study. Intentionality is of the first, which emphasizes the need to view the individual under study with complete awareness and intention (Peoples, 2021). This concept is critical to utilizing other concepts within the approach, such as bracketing or epoche, in which the researcher suspends their judgments or biases for the moment of study. Additionally, noesis, the concept of intentional thinking; noema, the subject of the intentional thought; and horizon, the present moment that the experience exists in, are all used synchronically (Peoples, 2021). The need to suspend one's judgments and preconceived notions in an experience is crucial to this study and aligns with the counseling profession's rigorous

ethical standards. Counselors and CESs are required to reject the notion of imposing their own attitudes or biases onto their clients or students to avoid harm (ACA, 2014). Additionally, counselors conducting research are also required to suspend their biases (ACA, 2014). The concept of bracketing within phenomenology was essential to this study in exploring the lived experiences of counseling students so that I, as the researcher, did not impose my own biases as a former student or current CES or researcher. In conclusion, descriptive phenomenology was an ideal approach for this study in exploring the lived experiences of students, as seen in several similar studies.

DeCino et al. (2020) utilized the theoretical orientation of phenomenology when studying the experiences of CESs' who have engaged in remediation or gatekeeping practices. In a qualitative study by DeCine et al., researchers used a transcendental phenomenological approach to explore CESs' lived experiences of engaging in gatekeeping practices. Phenomenology was essential in this study as the purpose was to explore the experiences of these CESs in the gatekeeping process. This study provided an understanding of the gatekeeping process as stressful and emotionally challenging, as well as highlighting concern for the future regarding student retaliation and litigation (DeCine et al., 2020). This study identified several themes that emerged through the exploration that may provide beneficial information to future CESs engaging in remediation or gatekeeping practices.

Freeman et al. (2020) used a phenomenological approach to answer the research question of what are the lived experiences of CES doctoral students being taught a gatekeeping model. Freeman et al. wanted to explore these experiences as there has been

more attention in past literature on the instruction of gatekeeping practices and little on the experience of these students through the learning process. Freeman et al.'s phenomenological approach was essential to this study to place an emphasis on experiential learning that takes place in CES and for students (Freeman et al., 2020). In a similar study by Harrichand et al. (2022), a transcendental phenomenological approach was used to explore the experiences of early career CESs in CACREP-accredited counseling programs learning to balance the responsibilities of protecting and fostering a growth culture for counselors-in-training and engage in gatekeeping practices. Harrichand et al. found several themes of psychological safety and gatekeeping as a challenging responsibility, and that these two concepts interact on a continuum. The researchers used the phenomenological approach to guide their research question and conduct interviews with participants.

The use of Husserl's descriptive phenomenology was necessary for my study of exploring the lived experiences of counseling students who have been affected by a CESs' unprofessional behaviors so that these experiences can be explored for the first time and provide information for ongoing research. This approach was necessary to capture the true essence of the participants experiences and to simply describe; through intentionality, the noema that has never been explored (Peoples, 2021).

Literature Review

In this section I provide a comprehensive literature review related to counseling students being affected by CESs exhibiting unprofessional behaviors in counseling programs. To begin, I discuss the role of professionalism in CES and related educational,

medical, and licensure programs. Next, I discuss the impact of the learning environment on counseling students. I then discuss gatekeeping practices and gatekeeping barriers in counseling and CES along with the phenomenon of gateslipping. I end the literature review with a discussion on a clear gap in the literature on why there was a need for this topic to be explored.

Professionalism

Current ethical standards of counselors and CESs require that counselors-in training are continuously evaluated and assessed for minimum standards of fitness to enter the profession (ACA, 2014). Through an ethical procedure referred to as gatekeeping, CESs have an ongoing professional responsibility to be evaluating counseling students so those that possess the potential for harm are not granted permission into profession (ACA, 2014; Lumadue & Duffey, 1999). CESs additionally have a responsibility of balancing this evaluative responsibility with another expectation of creating psychological safety (Harrichand et al., 2022). To fulfill this duty of creating psychological safety and gatekeeping the profession, CESs need to be practicing their own duties of professionalism at high standards. CESs hold the ethical responsibility to act as professional role models for the profession and promote professionalism (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2024), which cannot be recognized without the awareness that CESs are undergoing their own constant monitoring and evaluation by their peers and by counseling students. CESs are aware of colleagues exhibiting problematic behaviors (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Schwab & Neukrug, 1994). Additionally, CES doctoral students are aware of their professors' problematic behaviors and report to feel affected

(Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Furr and Brown-Rice (2015) reported that a majority of CES students (59.7%) reported to be aware of a CES exhibiting problematic behaviors and (55.6%) report to be affected by the experience. Additionally, the negative experiences have a greater lasting impact then positive ones (Gaiser, 2009). Although one's negative behaviors may be remediated, CESs may be inept at identifying their own weaknesses in role modeling these behaviors, leaving a negative impact on their students (Kottler, 1992).

Professionalism among CESs is an under-recognized and under-explored issue (Koh et al., 2023; Kottler, 1992). The ACA (2014) recognizes professionalism and role modeling as important ethical considerations for all CESs to consider when entering the profession and taking on the responsibility of guiding students. Furthermore, professionalism is an important construct to consider with any licensure-profession to ensure that educators are teaching and role modeling behaviors to their students on providing the best care (Birden et al., 2013; Brissette et al., 2017; VanZandt, 1990). In medical education, the teaching of professionalism is a standard benchmark in medical curricula (Huddle, 2005). Professionalism, "is an attitude that motivates individuals to be attentive to the image and ideals of their particular profession" (VanZandt, 1990, p. 243). Additionally, it is noted that professionalism entails how one deals with their own mistakes and makes appropriate corrections moving forward (Gaiser, 2009). Professionalism and the teachings of professionalism are an intricate and detailed process that CESs need to engage in to first explain the reasonings and then model (Cruess & Cruess, 2006). CESs are routinely setting expectations, teaching counseling students

ethical codes, counseling theories and techniques, and explaining and enforcing standards of conduct and dispositions. Through these processes, students are consistently evaluated on their application of the knowledge, rules, and facts, throughout their program. However, there is little acknowledgment on the importance of professionalism as a counseling standard. There is recognition in the medical literature for professionalism to be included in the curriculum as well as faculty needing to engage in consistent self-reflection and self-awareness to promote this important teaching (Cruess, 2006; Kenny et al., 2003). However, even though there are professional and academic standards to be taught in CACREP-accredited counseling programs, there is a gap between these teachings and application as gateslipping is continuing to occur (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013; Freeman et al., 2016; Rose & Persutte, 2020; Schuermann et al., 2018; Salpietro et al. 2021; Wilkerson, 2006).

Role Modeling

Professionalism is not best understood and applied by tangible teachings and lectures but requires reinforcement through experiential learning often completed through observational learning from students (Birden et al., 2013; Cruess & Cruess, 2006). There is a need for CESs to be aware of the delicate intangibles of professionalism that are being taught through action and behavior. Role modeling is especially important when teaching professionalism (Cruess, 2006). The gap between teaching and role modeling professionalism is important for CESs to understand due to the significant influence they have on students. Additionally, CESs are required to evaluate students by enforcing the ethical responsibility of gatekeeping. Which, without an engagement of self-monitoring

and self-awareness of how their own behaviors and dispositions of professionalism are being role modeled, this may lead to error when evaluating professional fitness. Cruess et al. (2019) discussed the impact of this observational learning on students in terms of professionalism regarding professional identity development. CESs have an immense amount of responsibility and are required to practice competently to tackle such a challenge of guiding and educating. Without this competence, they are at risk of causing harm to students.

CESs' competence can be measured in their ability to acquire knowledge, facts, rules, ethics, and understand their own attitudes, values, and beliefs and then adequately apply them when educating (Deemer et al., 2011; Fouad et al., 2009). Additionally, factors such as interpersonality and intellectuality are important in measuring competence in faculty members (Deemer et al., 2011). There is an abundance of experiential learning in counselor and psychology programs due to the nature of the profession and how professional knowledge is both acquired and applied. Students are learning through observation which places faculty competence of professionalism as a benchmark for the profession (Kenny et al., 2003). The role of observational learning in teaching professionalism is therefore an important professional standard to meet for students. Deemer et al., (2011) stated, "we contend that faculty members have the more direct and influential effect on student development through instruction and modeling of desired behaviors" (p. 39). There is a dearth of literature on how to evaluate students' competencies (Deemer et al., 201; Forrest et al., 2014; Fouad et al., 2009) with little research investigating the well-known factor of how CESs teach competence and

professionalism as the instructor. There remains no answer in the existing literature on the role that CESs play in the demonstration of these competencies both positively and negatively. Faculty members need to be placed at the highest of standards for professionalism so that the profession is safeguarded and entering counselors are being taught both instructionally and vicariously with rigor (Kenny et al., 2003). Fouad et al. (2009) highlighted many important factors of understanding the development and assessment of trainees' competence by promoting the use of a new model. Although this article is highlighting the evaluation of trainees' competence and not educator competence, there appears to be a common theme of continued evaluation as an important factor for assessing and intervening when necessary (Fouad et al., 2009).

Role Modeling & The Learning Environment

A crucial element of a learning environment is one that CESs have control over. This role of situational learning and its effects on students within the learning environment has been discussed in CES literature (Gaiser, 2009). Situational learning takes place when CESs and counseling students are able to engage in clinical demonstrations together placing the student as the learner and the CES as the instructor. In situational learning the goal is to present situations that the student may experience in the future and learn from their CES on how they would react (Gaiser, 2009). An element of observational learning takes place within situational learning that is both beneficial for counseling students and is the preferred teaching disposition (Hurt-Avila et al., 2020). CESs being responsible for awareness of their teaching dispositions and how they relate to the learning environment is standard in counseling programs (Rose & Persutte-

Manning, 2020). CESs are not only responsible for the tangible teachings of professionalism, but also in being self-aware as their behaviors and reactions influence students' perceptions of professional behavior. Gaiser (2009) discussed the concept of a hidden curriculum, which implies that beyond the instructional teachings that are governed by programs and accrediting bodies, students are learning just as much if not more in reference to application of material by simply observing their professors. The hidden curriculum has immense relevance in medical literature dating back to 1994, proving to be of importance for those that provide services (Gaiser, 2009). Additionally, this concept has a longer history in the education professions literature dating back to the 1930's (Gaiser, 2009). The hidden curriculum is referenced as a "by product" (Gaiser, 2009, p. 950) of situational learning implying that there is importance in what the students are understanding and analyzing from their educational culture. It is known that students are learning a multitude of professionalism factors simply by existing in their educational culture as well as observing their CESs (Gaiser, 2009). Another known factor of professionalism is in understanding and correcting actions (Gaiser, 2009; Kenny et al., 2003). What is known is that faculty are typically unaware of their role in the students vicarious learning which, until faculty are aware of their crucial part in this problem, makes correcting these behaviors difficult (Gaiser, 2009). The effects of CESs' professional and unprofessional behavior can be reviewed and improved if changes are made to make CESs aware of their role in students vicarious learning and own behaviors as well as creating a gatekeeping or evaluative model for CESs.

Gatekeeping

Among other healthcare professions, counseling engages in an action referred to as gatekeeping to ensure that those who are entering the field are well-trained, meet minimum standards, and will not cause public harm (ACA, 2014). The ACA (2014) defines gatekeeping as, "the initial and ongoing academic, skill, and dispositional assessment of students' competency for professional practice, including remediation and termination as appropriate" (p. 20). In addition to gatekeeping as an ethical responsibility for counselors (ACA, 2014) CACREP also requires that students are evaluated and assessed to meet minimum clinical standards throughout the entirety of their program by their CESs and the department chair (CACREP, 2024). Gatekeeping is an ethical duty enacted by all counseling professionals and is engaged in the most in counseling programs to safeguard the entrance of poorly trained and ill-suited individuals (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013; Foster & McAdams, 2009). However, there is little information on CESs gatekeeping each other and how CESs are being evaluated. The CES profession is lacking in evaluative standards and measure for CESs. Currently, the ACA (2014) and CACREP (2024) have no standard for CESs being formally evaluated or consisting of gatekeeping practices for other CESs. Additionally, neither the ACA (2014) nor CACREP (2024) state any dispositional standards for CESs. The lack of ethical and educational standards for CESs leaves a potential for CESs' unprofessional behaviors being mishandled and unevaluated which allows for unprofessionalism among CESs to continue unchecked and potentially causing harm.

Gatekeeping: Student Unprofessional Behaviors

Although there are ethical and educational standards in place to help leaders in the profession enact their gatekeeping responsibility, there remains an issue with problematic behavior existing in counseling programs (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013; Rose & Persutte-Manning, 2020). Counseling students exhibiting problematic behaviors, including issues with professionalism, are continuing to exist and then graduating and entering professional practice (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2016, 2019; Henderson & Dufrene, 2013; Jorgensen et al., 2017; Li, 2000; Mearns & Allen, 1991; Rose & Persutte-Manning, 2020). There is a dearth of literature on problematic students existing in counseling programs (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2016, 2019; Henderson & Dufrene, 2013; Jorgensen et al., 2017; Li, 2000; Mearns & Allen, 1991; Rose & Persutte-Manning, 2020). Research conducted by Brown-Rice & Furr (2013) found that 74% of counseling students, reported to have observed a classmate exhibiting problematic behaviors, with more than half of those participants reporting to be affected by this problematic behavior. Students with problematic behaviors are not only affecting their peers, but also the learning environment and their CESs (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016). Brown-Rice and Furr (2016) found that CESs are affected by problematic student behavior, and notice the negative affect this has on other students. Additionally, problematic behavior among students is not isolated to Master's-level counseling students. CES students are also exhibiting problematic behaviors resulting in a negatively affected learning environment, affected peers, and affecting CES students' perceptions of their CESs for not intervening (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019). There is clear data that a majority of CES students affected

by a peer with problematic behaviors are concerned and upset with their CESs for not intervening as students do not believe that addressing problematic behavior is their responsibility (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019). CESs are failing in the gatekeeping responsibility, leaving problematic students in counseling programs who will become licensed professionals and potentially future problematic CESs. In a study conducted by Demyan et al. (2018) the authors discussed that students are keener to problematic behaviors in their counseling programs than their CESs. Graduate students already endure an immense amount of stress in their programs and adding the negative impact of those exhibiting problematic behaviors may only cause further undue harm and negative attitudes toward the counseling profession (de Vries & Valadez, 2006; Thomas-Davis et al., 2020). Disruptive peers are even having a detrimental effect on the most proficient of students (Rose & Persutte, 2020). Proficient students that demonstrate exemplary academic and dispositional success, are negatively impacted by the problematic behavior of their peers (Rose & Persutte, 2020). The additional stress from counseling students' peers exhibiting unprofessional behaviors is compounded with another important aspect of their graduate experience that is impacting them in a negative way, their CESs.

CESs' Unprofessional Behaviors

CESs have an ethical and professional responsibility to safeguard the profession from harmful professionals, conduct their practice in a professional and ethical manner, possess competence in the skills and knowledge they are imparting, engage in consistent evaluation and assessment of students with the potential of enacting remediation and dismissal actions, and serve as role models for professionalism (ACA, 2014). Although

CESs have these ethical responsibilities, counseling students are still being affected by their CESs in an unprofessional and harmful manner (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016; Schawb & Neukrug, 1994). There are clearly missing pieces in not only CESs' ethical codes pertaining to their own dispositions, and in CACREP's recognition of CESs' evaluation, but also in the recognition that CESs are capable of unprofessionalism. Brown-Rice and Furr (2015) surveyed 335 CESs in CACREP-accredited counseling programs to investigate problematic behavior among CESs. The authors indicated that 75% of the participants had observed a colleague exhibiting problematic behaviors, and 76% of that 75% believed that they were being negatively impacted by these colleagues. Additionally, among the identified 75%, a majority of CESs reported to be concerned about the welfare of the counseling profession, believed CESs were acting in a hypocritical manner towards students in expecting students to behave counter to their own behavior, are concerned with the disrupted academic instruction for students, and believed CESs with PPC impacted students emotionally. Not only are CESs that observed unprofessional behavior in their colleagues concerned for their students, the program, and the profession but also reported to possess negative attitudes towards the institution for not intervening (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015). There is clear concern among CESs that there is little being done to safeguard and provide psychological safety for their colleagues and students when it comes to other CESs behaving unprofessionally. Additionally, research has indicated that some CESs are feeling frustrated with their profession and programs for having little awareness, knowledge, and procedures on addressing these behaviors, and are clearly motivated to

act on this issue (Brown-Rice-Rice & Furr, 2015). Of those 335 CESs surveyed, 56% reported to feel frustrated with the university's tenure process', frustrated with CESs exhibiting unprofessional behaviors being allowed to continue educating, and 47% reported feelings of frustration towards their program chair for failing to intervene and attempt to correct the faculty behavior (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015).

Master's-level CESs are not the only ones exhibiting unprofessional behaviors. In a study conducted by Furr and Brown-Rice (2016), a large sample of doctoral students in psychology and related fields were surveyed with 345 participants being CES students and discovered that a majority of the CES student participants had observed problematic behaviors in their CESs (59.7%) and been affected by these behaviors (55.6%). Among this sample, 86.3% of participants affected believed that their CESs were acting hypocritically towards their students with not upholding and role modeling the standards that students are being evaluated on (Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Concern over CESs role modeling responsibilities and potential for hypocritical behaviors has been mentioned in early literature in the field of counseling (Kottler, 1992). Although hypocrisy is certainly a concern as it contradicts a foundational ethical responsibility of CESs to be professional role models (ACA, 2014), there was important information from the above study on CES students observing PPC in their faculty that brings awareness to perceived responsibilities and discrepancies in the counseling profession regarding CESs' gatekeeping (Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). When CES students were asked if they believed that being aware of CESs' PPC was their responsibility, 61.6% reported "yes" (Furr & Brown-Rice-Rice, 2016). However, when the question was asked if these students believed that it was the

program chair's responsibility, 87.5% conceded (Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). This increase in positive report indicates that a majority of students surveyed do not believe that it is their responsibility to be aware of their CESs' unprofessional behaviors (Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016) however, CACREP (2024) does. The current literature on CESs acting unprofessionally has indicated that as a result of these behaviors students are being negatively affected and having their learning environment disrupted resulting in an increase to their academic stress, and concern over not being role modeled the appropriate behaviors and dispositions (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). With all of these negative and detrimental outcomes of being subjected to unprofessional behaviors of CESs, with additional normal stress that comes along with being a graduate student (de Vries & Valadez, 2006; Thomas-Davis et al., 2020) CACREP (2024) believes that it is the student's responsibility to evaluate their CESs. CACREP (2024) standards require that students have the opportunity to evaluate their CESs on a continuous basis to provide feedback to the program. CACREP (2024) states, "Students have regular, systematic opportunities to evaluate the counselor education program core and affiliate faculty" (p. 5). There are currently no CACREP (2024) standards on university programs or their chairs to engage in evaluation of their CESs. There is a clear discrepancy on who's responsibility it is to be evaluating CESs which causes confusion and may prohibit any intervention when necessary, resulting in potential harm to students and the profession (Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). From my review of the research literature, there is a lack of clarity in professional guidelines (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2024) about interventions in response to CESs' unprofessional conduct and

who is responsible for such interventions. CESs serve as role models for the profession and are the first professionals in the field that students are introduced to (ACA, 2014). CESs that can gateslip with no intervention are at risk of causing harm to the counseling profession as a whole.

Issues of Gateslipping CESs

CESs exhibiting unprofessional behaviors have been demonstrated to negatively affect their colleagues and students (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Understanding the important concept and role of observational learning in a counseling program lends importance to consider how the gateslipping of CESs are affecting the counseling profession. There are clear concerns for Master's-level counselors-in-training gateslipping such as a potential for causing harm to their clients, the public, and the profession (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002; Gaubatz & Vera, 2006, Olsen et al., 2016). However, there is less attention on the continued gateslipping of CESs at the Master's and Doctoral-level and the continued harm that they are causing their students both overtly and vicariously (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Counseling students report being negatively impacted by both their CESs exhibiting unprofessional behaviors and the program for not intervening (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). There is a lack of literature on specifically how these students are affected experientially and what perceptions or attitudes these experiences may create regarding their work as counselors. Furthermore, there is current literature on unprofessional behaviors existing in both CES students (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019) and CES faculty (Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016), which

raises concern as these are the guiding counseling professionals in the field. Therefore, there exist issues with doctoral students with unprofessional behaviors graduating such as concern for our future CESs, concern for the instructional methods of teaching professionalism that is occurring, and a lack of clinical and dispositional skills for CESs (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019).

In literature cited by Brown-Rice and Furr (2019) 78.3% of CES students surveyed on their observation of peers exhibiting problematic behaviors reported concern over those peers working as a counselor and as a CES. Additionally, 66.7% expressed concern over the quality of the profession (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019). With this information there is a clear issue of unprofessional behaviors existing in counseling programs. The current literature has provided evidence that counselors' unprofessional behaviors exist at all levels in the profession and that there is clear concern over these individuals continuing to practice (Olsen et al., 2016).

There is indication from the research literature into gateslipping students, that CESs are aware of a lack of intervention with ill-suited counselors-in-training and believe that they have allowed said students to graduate, becoming inadequate professionals (Gaubatz & Vera, 2002). Olsen et al. (2016) conducted research with current practicing counselors to explore the prevalence and kinds of problematic behaviors that colleagues exhibited. Olsen et al. (2016) surveyed 213 counselors and discovered that a majority of participants had observed problematic behaviors (69%) in colleagues, and a majority of those who reported to have observed these behaviors reported to be negatively affected (85%) and had concern for client welfare (54%). Additionally, 75% of the affirmative

participants reported concern for the counseling profession, 74% reported concern that these counselors were allowed to continue to work in the profession, and 59% reported frustration that no intervention with these professionals occurred (Olsen et al., 2016). Proficient counselors have clear concern of those exhibiting unprofessional behaviors in the profession (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2015, 2019; de Vries & Valadez, 2006; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016; Olsen et al., 2016). Although gatekeeping practices, procedures, and models exist for counselors-in-training (Freeman et al., 2016, 2020; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002; Henderson & Dufrene, 2017; Salpietro et al., 2021) there is a lack of literature on those that could apply to CESs. Furthermore, with this information, there are clear barriers to programs and program chairs enacting gatekeeping responsibilities with their faculty.

Barriers to Gatekeeping CESs

With the issue of unprofessionalism being exhibited by CESs, and the lack of literature into this issue, there is importance in understanding the barriers to intervention. One such barrier could be a program's fear of recrimination (Olsen et al., 2016). Information in the literature on this issue has shown that there is a fear of recrimination by means of litigation or negative reputation on the institution when students are remediated or gatekept (Olsen et al., 2016; Sheperis et al., 2020) which could point to this being a barrier for a program chair with intervening with an employed or tenured CES. Another perceived barrier could be a lack of understanding of the application of protocols or gatekeeping procedures when it comes to colleagues of CESs. Olsen et al. (2016) discussed survey results of counseling professionals questioned on their observation and

perceptions of the impact of these colleagues and discovered that there were perceived barriers to reporting these colleagues. The participants reported to know the protocol for reporting these colleagues, but believed they needed more guidance on the application (Olsen et al., 2016). Additionally, there could be emotional barriers as gatekeeping students and trainees can be emotionally taxing and upsetting for CESs (Chang & Rubel, 2019; DeCino et al., 2020; Palmer et al., 2008) let alone their colleagues. CESs also have many responsibilities to fulfill and may not have enough time or resources to engage in gatekeeping of a colleague (Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Additionally, with the surplus of responsibilities, CESs may not be monitoring themselves and their behaviors potentially lacking in self-reflection resulting in behaving unprofessionally (Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). With the accumulative of potential barriers as to why CESs are not engaging in gatekeeping with their colleagues that are behaving unprofessionally, this is leaving a gap in how the issue of unprofessionalism exhibited by CESs is being handled resulting in the continuation of this issue.

Summary

Unprofessionalism among CESs exist in CACREP-accredited counseling programs resulting in counseling students being harmed vicariously through the observation of unprofessional behaviors as well as being negatively affected by them (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Counseling students are being negatively affected by their CESs behaving unprofessionally and believe that their learning environment is disrupted which causes more stress to students without intervention (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). There is research

indicating that counseling students are negatively affected by their peers exhibiting unprofessionalism (Brown-Rice, 2013; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2016, 2019; Gaubatz & Vera, 2006; Li, 2000; Mearns & Allen, 1991). There was a need to explore the effects of CESs' behaving unprofessionally as researchers have indicated that these behaviors exist (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Additionally, there is literature on CES students with experiences with peers that are exhibiting unprofessionalism resulting in added stress, a disrupted learning environment, concern for the profession, and frustration towards the program for not intervening (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019). With the current literature there is knowledge that unprofessionalism is occurring at the master's and doctoral level in counseling programs with little understanding as to how these experiences are impacting students.

Master's-level counseling students are novice professionals and can be highly impressionable, which supports concern about how unprofessionalism is impacting the development of their professional identity (Cruess et al., 2019; de Vries & Valadez, 2006; Elman & Forrest, 2007). Counseling students are looking to their CESs for instructional teaching and guidance into the academic, clinical, and professional skills needed to become a professional counselor. A large component of teaching professionalism is experiential and observational which highlights the importance that CESs are behaving professionally and are aware of how they are impacting future counselors. When counseling students exhibit problematic behaviors and then gateslip into the profession they are at a higher risk of being a problematic and unprofessional counselor increasing the risk of harm to their clients (de Vries & Valadez, 2006). There was a clear need to

explore how CESs' unprofessional behaviors are impacting students that will become the next generation of counselors in the field.

In this chapter, I provided a significant amount of support that explained the need for this research. In Chapter 3, I will describe the plan to how I explored the lived experiences of counseling students affected by a CESs exhibiting unprofessionalism through a descriptive phenomenological approach to potentially influence changes in the counselor profession.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of counseling students impacted by their CES displaying unprofessional behaviors. The findings from this study could inform future ethical codes for CES on professionalism and dispositions as well as formative evaluation of educators' professionalism by counseling program administrators as set by CACREP standards.

In this chapter, I explain the research design and rationale as well as their role of the researcher and address researcher bias and ethics as it applies to the study. I discuss the relevance of the chosen methodology including information on participant criteria and selection, sampling strategy, sample size, and sample procedures. I then provide the plan for how instrumentation, data collection, and analysis was conducted and discuss any issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures. Finally, I provide a summary of the main points of the chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

RQ: What are the lived experiences of master's-level counseling students that have experienced CESs' unprofessionalism during their graduate program?

Central Concepts

Counseling students in a CACREP-accredited counseling programs are being impacted by CESs engaging in unprofessional and problematic behaviors (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Counseling students undergo continuous evaluation and assessment by their CESs on their academic and clinical skills, as well as

their dispositions (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2024; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2013, 2016; Schuerman et al., 2018). Although counseling students are being evaluated, there is little information on how CESs are being evaluated in the process. The ACA (2014) ethics and current CACREP (2024) standards are lacking in both providing specific dispositional ethical benchmarks for CESs' to meet and maintain as well as required ongoing evaluation of CESs. Deficient monitoring and evaluation of CESs combined with the knowledge that CESs are engaging in unprofessional behaviors that are affecting their students (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015), substantiates the need for more research into how this issue is affecting current counseling students.

CESs are role models of professionalism for the counseling profession and are responsible for being knowledgeable of and adhering to professional ethical codes (ACA, 2014). Research in several studies has found that CESs' unprofessional behaviors exist, negatively impacted students, and negatively impacted the student's learning environment (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Therefore, CESs engaging in unprofessional behaviors are not adhering to ACA (2014) ethical standards and are negatively influencing future counselors' attitudes, values, and behaviors, as well as influencing novice counselors' professional identity (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016).

Identifying the Research Tradition

This qualitative study was inductive in nature and explored subjective experiences (Reiners, 2012). Qualitative research has a long history of use in the social sciences. It has gained more attention within counseling and psychology fields to better understand

experiences that cannot be measured with quantitative research (Burkholder et al., 2020). Ravitch and Carl (2021) discussed qualitative research as "interpretive" and a way to explore and understand a phenomenon under study to "make meaning of and interpret their own experiences, themselves, each other, and the social world" (p. 2). Qualitative research, at its essence, is an iterative process between the researcher and participant that attempts to explore a phenomenon and gather information about the participant's experiences. How the phenomenon is explored depends more on the type of qualitative research design used. For this study, descriptive phenomenology was the chosen research design.

Phenomenology as a research tradition is credited to philosopher Edmund Husserl; the purpose is to explore the lived experiences of individuals to better understand a phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Husserl, also known as the founding father of phenomenology, began to establish his new findings in the early 20th century (Giorgi, 2009). A mathematician in his early career, Husserl later became interested in studying phenomenology as a method of inquiry, although different than the already established Hegelian concept of phenomenology, which Hegel stated was the essence of living through one's own spirit to gain full human consciousness (Pivcevic, 2015). Husserl began studying this philosophy with the influences of an earlier phenomenologist, Descartes, who espoused the need to set aside all assumptions to gain the full essence of an experience (Pivcevic, 2015). Husserl established this type of understanding to explore any experience that is lived through the senses (Giorgi, 2009). Due to Husserl's transcendental phenomenology being heavily rooted in philosophical

notions, applying a pure Husserlian phenomenological approach would result in a less than scientific study (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2011). Husserl's work then influenced later phenomenologists who further developed descriptive phenomenology into an established research approach that provides instruction for data collection and analysis in research (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2011). Giorgi's steps are gathering information, returning to the data, exploring the data, and finally describing the explored experience (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2011). Descriptive phenomenological research is the best-suited research tradition for this study to explore and describe the lived experiences of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of being affected by a CES and exhibiting unprofessional behavior. Additionally, descriptive phenomenology does not delineate the time and space of a phenomenon; therefore, this tradition suits well for participants who match the required participant inclusion criteria without the specifics of when this experience occurred (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Rationale for Research Tradition

Descriptive phenomenological inquiry best fits this study as it aligns all components. The purpose of choosing a descriptive phenomenological approach was so that I could explore and gather information from participants on their experiences with unprofessional CES to better understand this phenomenon (Reiners, 2012). This approach was best suited, as this phenomenon renders an understanding of students' lived experiences affected by a CES's unprofessional behavior. Furthermore, Husserl's descriptive phenomenology was better suited than a hermeneutical phenomenological approach because of the need to bracket my biases and assumptions and not create

meaning from the data but rather describe the findings (Reiners, 2012). Due to having a lived experience of being a graduate counseling student, the need to set aside my own biases was crucial to the rigor of this study and allowed me to fully immerse myself into the data collection and analysis portion. Additionally, there is little research into this phenomenon through a quantitative lens, providing a lack of data to interpret any meaning. Therefore, gathering data to create meaning through a hermeneutical approach would be premature, which is further justification for choosing descriptive phenomenology (Reiners, 2012).

Role of the Researcher

My role as the observer in this research study was to collect descriptions of participants' lived experiences to provide further data on this phenomenon (Giorgi et al., 2017). An additional role I had was that of a participant-observer, as descriptive phenomenological research emphasizes the need for the researcher to fully immerse themselves into the interviewing process to capture the true essence of the described participant's experience (Shelton & Bridges, 2019). This participant-observer role also aids in the iterative process that a qualitative researcher engages in, always reflecting on and modifying the research alignment (Giorgi et al., 2017).

Positionality

A descriptive phenomenological research study requires that the researcher takes on the role of participant-observer, which places the researcher in a complex and challenging position (Englander, 2012). Positionality is described as the researcher "role and identity" in relation to the research context (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 6). Although

complex, as the researcher now needs to be aware of their biases, this allows the researcher to fully immerse themselves into the experiences of the participants' narratives in a process known as reduction (Englander, 2012; Giorgi et al., 2017; Reiners, 2012). As an immersed researcher, I needed to be aware of my biases and positions that could have affected the participants during the interviewing process so that I was fully present in the experience and viewed the data as purely new to my consciousness (Giorgi et al., 2017). Being the researcher, I needed to be aware of the potential for a perceived position of power that may influence the participants and the data (Shelton & Bridges, 2019).

My personal experiences of being a graduate student in a CACREP-accredited brick-and-mortar counseling program influenced this study. From 2016-2018, I was a counseling student in a clinical mental health counseling program working towards my Master of Science degree and state licensure. It was during this time that I directly experienced and witnessed experiences of my peers being affected by a CES behaving unprofessionally and, at times, unethically. My peers and I were affected by this behavior, which enhanced our current challenges that needed to be overcome to complete our degree. My peers and I experienced distress and frustration with the program and the program chair for the lack of intervention with this CES's behaviors. Intervention could have helped us at that time and potentially corrected the CES's behavior, preventing future harm to students.

My professional experiences have also influenced my interest in this study. I am a licensed professional clinical counselor with supervision designation, working towards earning my doctorate in CES while serving as an adjunct CES in several graduate

programs. Moreover, I have supervised several counseling students who have reported being affected by the unprofessional behaviors of CESs in their program. My current counseling and educational positions allow me to engage in consistent consultation and feedback from my peers before making decisions that would impact clients, supervisees, and students with whom I work.

Researcher Biases

Due to personal experiences, I needed to be aware of any potential biases. Descriptive phenomenology acknowledges that the researcher has biases that may interfere with capturing the true essence of the participants' experiences and that these biases need to be set aside in bracketing (Giorgi, 2009). Giorgi (2009) discussed the importance of using our past experiences to interpret new experiences in our everyday lives and that due to this natural action, bracketing takes self-awareness and reflexivity in research. Reflexivity in qualitative research is described as the researcher's ability to consider their own identity, positionality, and subjective views when conducting research (Shelton & Bridges, 2019). Bracketing potential biases allowed me to gather data from the participants' experiences as they are new and not influenced by my own experiences (Giorgi, 2009). Giorgi (2009) calls for researchers not to create an assumption that bracketing means forgetting an experience that may contribute to bias but to be aware of and engage in reflection throughout the research process. According to Giorgi (2009), "It is not a matter of forgetting the past; bracketing means that we should not let our past knowledge be engaged while we are determining the mode and content of the present experience" (p. 92). Additionally, bracketing refers to living and experiencing the present

moment with pure consciousness, which is crucial in a descriptive phenomenological study (Giorgi, 2009). Bracketing my own biases allowed me to be present and engaged in a reflexive process throughout the data collection and analysis portions, which enhanced the quality and rigor of the study (Shelton & Bridges, 2019).

Ethical Considerations

Being aware of ethical issues that may arise in data collection and analysis is an ethical responsibility and shows rigor and criticality within the research. There are several ethical considerations that I needed to address including informed consent, storage of participant data, confidentiality and anonymity, and causing no harm. To address all of these, I provided the participants with an informed consent. Informed consent is necessary to inform the participant of the reason of the study, how their information will be used, and the voluntary nature (ACA, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I provided each participant with an informed consent (See Appendix A) once they stated interest in participating in the study and reviewed it prior to conducting the interviews.

Another ethical consideration I considered was how and where the participants' data will be stored. The ACA (2014) discussed participant confidentiality as an ethical responsibility; researchers will take all precautions within their power to prevent a breach. Due to the qualitative approach of this study, there was a need to record interviewing sessions with participants to reflect on during the data analysis process. I collected, stored, and analyzed data in accordance with IRB standards. Data collected was password protected and will be kept for five years in accordance with IRB standards. I presented participants with an informed consent form that invited their participation,

stated my name and university, the purpose and procedures of the study, risks and benefits of participation, and privacy practices. All interviews were conducted through means of a video-conferencing platform; Simple Practice, which is a HIPAA-secure web-based platform with HIPAA-secure videoconferencing. When recording participants' interviews, I safely and securely stored all data in an encrypted folder on my personal computer that engaged both fingerprint security and passwords. Additionally, I stored all typed data collection and analysis through the same means.

Another ethical consideration of this study was the need for confidentiality and anonymity. I discussed the difference of these two considerations with participants in my informed consent that confidentiality refers to how and when the participants' information will be kept private and distributed for the purposes of the study. Whereas anonymity refers to the process of disabling the participant from being identified in the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I interviewed both current counseling students and those who have graduated within the last three months, that had experiences with a CES behaving unprofessionally at a brick-and-mortar, CACREP-accredited university in the United States by gaining access to the ACA and other state counseling association listservs and through social media where I posted a flyer. Additionally, I attempted to recruit through LinkedIn and through the counseling honor society, Chi Sigma Iota. I needed to be aware that students may be concerned to discuss sensitive information related to their school if they believed that their name or the name of their school is revealed in fear of retribution or retaliation (Bradburn et al., 2004). Lastly, I discussed with the participants in the informed consent portion and throughout the study that there

are limits to confidentiality and anonymity as they cannot be guaranteed (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I discussed how these limits create deductive disclosure with the participants in discussing that their information may be deducted from others within the counseling community and limited to identifying information (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Lastly, the final ethical consideration is in causing no harm to the participants that may have recounted emotionally distressful experiences (Bradburn et al., 2004). As the researcher, I took appropriate measures to ensure ethics and rigor of the research to protect the welfare of the participants. The ACA (2014) discusses the ethical responsibilities of counselors and counselor researchers in protecting the welfare and rights of research participants. To ensure that I took appropriate measures to do so, I provided the participants with a crisis hotline number in the informed consent, and reviewed this information at the beginning of the interview. Additionally, I reminded each participant that the study is completely voluntary, and if at any time they wish to exit the study they may, or if they wished to take a moment to pause while recounting their story that could happen as well. I also engaged in member checking with each participant post-interview where I provided a summary of the transcript to ensure that I am accurately representing their experience.

Methodology

Population

The participants for this study were counseling students that were either currently enrolled at a brick-and-mortar CACREP-accredited counseling program or had graduated within three months who had an experience with a CES behaving unprofessionally. One

of my implications for conducting this study was to bring more awareness to the need for CACREP (2024) to add standards of evaluation of faculty members which provides justification for the counseling programs that I am sampling students from to be CACREP-accredited.

Sampling Strategy

I used purposive sampling, as I needed participants for a specific purpose (Shelton & Bridges, 2019). Additionally, I intended on using snowball sampling given that the participants needed for this study may have experienced the phenomenon in the context of others. I asked each participant to pass on the study and my contact information to anyone that they believe would also meet criteria, however, no participants recruited were through snowball sampling means.

Participant Criteria

I recruited participants that were either current counseling students or had just graduated within three months that had experiences in a CACREP-accredited, brick-and-mortar counseling program. The study initially was to only recruit participants who were currently enrolled to capture the essence of the issue happening in present day. However, extending my recruitment criteria to those that had graduated within the last three months broadened my participant pool and remained in line with the intended awareness of the issue being current. Although participant criteria in qualitative studies can include age, gender, year in the program, experience with the counseling profession, and ethnicity (Peoples, 2021) for the purposes of this study, there are no limitations on these demographics. However, while engaging in member checking, I provided participants

with a demographic questionnaire. Additionally, participants needed to be a current counseling student or one that had just graduated within the last three months, that had experiences in a CACREP-accredited counseling program. Additionally, participants needed to have had a minimum of one interaction with a CES that demonstrated unprofessionalism. A core tenant of phenomenological studies is that the participants share a common characteristic which is in experiencing a type of lived phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2020).

Sample Size

For this descriptive phenomenological study, the sample size was recommended to be between six and ten participants (Shelton & Bridges, 2019). Additionally, when considering the needed number of participants, there was importance in considering saturation (Shelton & Bridges, 2019). For the purposes of this study, I needed to gather data from participants until I was no longer gathering new data, and there was nothing new that was being presented about the phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2020). Although sources in qualitative and phenomenological research differ on the number of participants, I recruited a sample size of seven and ensured saturation (Shelton & Bridges, 2019).

Recruitment

I gained access to all seven participants through recruitment on social media Facebook groups where I posted a flyer and requested that interested participants that met the inclusion criteria email me. I also attempted to recruit through the ACA, state and local counseling associations, and the counseling honor society; Chi Sigma Iota, where I

sent them an email with my attached email invitation for the study, requesting that the listserv moderators approve and distribute the study to their members, however, no participants were from any of these sources.

Instrumentation

Interviews

The most used instrument for data collection in a phenomenological study is interviews (Peoples, 2021; Reiners, 2012; Shelton & Bridges, 2019). Interviews are typically the first instrument of choice because they aid in the process of capturing the true essence of how the participant is retelling their experience. For this study, I used individual semi-structured interviews (See Appendix B) to gather data. Given that data collection is more complex in qualitative research, there is importance in identifying these complexities during the interviewing process (Giorgi, 2009). One complexity identified, was in keeping the participant on topic during the interview. Due to the participants in this study recounting potentially emotional experiences, there were times where the participants needed redirecting back to the topic of the study (Giorgi, 2009). Giorgi (2009) further discussed interviews that are discussing potentially emotionally upsetting experiences may be hindered if there is not rapport established between interview and interviewee. It is for these reasons and for the reason of reflexivity in qualitative research that I used semi-structured interviews that allowed for rapport building both in the beginning of the interviews and throughout. I developed a set of seven interview questions that enabled me to direct, but not lead the interview (Giorgi, 2009). Another factor I considered when using interviews was the length of time of the

interview (Giorgi, 2009). I conducted 60-minute interviews with my participants which allowed for all interview questions to be completed. The interviews were conducted individually to protect interviewee's anonymity. I also engaged in member checking to ensure the credibility of the results. Member checking is a common validation technique in phenomenological research (Shelton & Bridges, 2019).

Data Collection

Once participants of the study expressed interest, I provided them with the informed consent and instructions of responding to the email containing the informed consent with "I consent" to proceed forward. All participants then responded via email with a typed "I consent" to join the study. The informed consent provided the participants with the study purpose and procedures, sample questions, the nature of the study, potential risks and benefits to being in the study, the consent to be recorded so that data can be transcribed and reviewed later, and privacy information. The participants were also informed that they may leave the study at any time. The discussion of the informed consent is also seen as a time of rapport building which can be helpful due to psychologically upsetting material being discussed (Giorgi, 2009).

For this study, I conducted 60-minute semi-structured interviews. I conducted all interviews though a HIPAA-secure video-call. The interview was audio recorded and then later transcribed which is typical in a phenomenological study (Giorgi, 2009). At the conclusion of the interview, I informed the participants that I will share a typed summary of the transcript to engage in member checking to ensure accurate depiction of their

experience. This process is common in phenomenological studies using interviews to enhance the reflexivity process (Giorgi et al., 2017).

Data Analysis

For data analysis, I followed Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method. I used Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method as he has devoted decades of research to creating and implementing a sound scientific method of inquiry from the philosophy of phenomenology (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2011). I used the following steps of method for my descriptive data analysis as discussed by (Giorgi et al., 2017).

1. Read and listen for sense of the whole.
2. Assume the attitude of the scientific phenomenological reduction.
3. Determination of meaning units.
4. Transformation of participants meaning units into phenomenologically, psychologically, sensitive expressions.
5. Describe the basic psychological structure of the participants experience.

After the interviews concluded and had been transcribed, I then coded the data in accordance with Giorgi (2009). These processes are completed so that I could begin to understand the data (Giorgi et al., 2017). To stay aligned with descriptive phenomenology, I did not attempt to make meaning of the data by interpreting it but by instead listening and reading for the sense of the whole of the participants experiences (Giorgi, 2009). With descriptive analysis, I attempted to simply describe the data that the participants provided through the interview process (Giorgi, 2009). Staying aligned with the descriptive, phenomenological approach, enhanced the trustworthiness of my study is

it eliminated the potential of any assumptions, biases, or theories being applied to the participants data (Giorgi, 2009).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research encompasses several concepts that need to be considered and practiced that create validity in the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). However, it is worth noting that validity is often a term used in quantitative research which aligns with the positivist view established during the 1970's when quantitative research was dominating even the social sciences (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). With the emergence of qualitative research, many scholars began creating new concepts to better align with the naturalistic and constructivist view that is qualitative research, creating a more fitting term; trustworthiness, for a study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Trustworthiness is a more fitting term for qualitative research, and this studies phenomenological approach because there is no one "truth" in the data collected from the participants, but a subjective experience. Trustworthiness is a practice that is essentially used to ensure credibility and rigor in a study regarding attention to ensuring dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research refers to how consistent and align the methods of data collection, data analysis, and reporting the findings are (Burkholder et al., 2020). To ensure dependability I used a methodological triangulation which is using multiple methods of data collection to ensure that the data is reviewed through multiple angles (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Triangulation is a common technique used in qualitative

research to ensure dependability (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To engage in this process I used semi-structured interviews, recordings, transcribing, and member-checking.

Credibility

To ensure credibility in my study, I used the structured steps of method detailed in descriptive phenomenological research (Giorgi, 2009; Giorgi et al., 2017). Additionally, I used other common strategies to ensure credibility such as peer debriefing where I engaged in conversation with my committee members about the data, negative case analysis where I documented any of the outlying data being presented to potentially make a stronger case against the consistent data that emerges, progressive subjectivity by checking in and monitoring my own biases, and reflexivity with documenting any of these biases or role influences that arose for me (Burkholder at al., 2020).

Transferability

Transferability is the next practice to ensure trustworthiness which refers to how applicable the results are to a larger population while still maintaining the importance of participants unique experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). With this study, transferability referred to how the data collected and analyzed could be used to inform other graduate students with their programs, other licensure programs where ethics are valued, and to university programs as a whole, of evaluating the faculty professionalism. I ensured this by using thick descriptions (Burkholder et al., 2020). Thick descriptions were used by gathering detailed information during the data collection process.

Confirmability

The final practice that I engaged in to ensure trustworthiness of the study was confirmability, which refers to how well the researcher can exclude themselves and their biases from the data (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This is a practice of trustworthiness to ensure that the data collected and analyzed is that of the participants and not the researchers own biases (Giorgi, 2009). Bracketing was used to ensure that this researchers biases did not influence the data (Giorgi, 2009; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2011). To engage in this practice, I was aware of and monitored my own biases. Additionally, I had a confirmability audit (Burkholder et al., 2020) in engaging in discussions with my committee members.

Ethical Procedures

As a counselor researcher, I have an ethical responsibility to follow ethical standards when engaging in research. The ACA (2014) states in reference to research, "Counselors who conduct research are encouraged to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession and promote a clearer understanding of the conditions that lead to a healthy and more just society. Counselors support the efforts of researchers by participating fully and willingly whenever possible. Counselors minimize bias and respect diversity in designing and implementing research" (p. 15). The first step to conducting ethical research is in gaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Before beginning the research portion, I needed to submit this proposal to the Walden University IRB to gain approval to move forward. The next ethical procedure I completed was the informed consent form

that includes all necessary information to adequately inform the participants of the purpose of the study, how their data will be used, and the risks and benefits of the study. Engaging in “minimal risk” as a researcher is essential to minimizing participant harm and practicing research ethically (Burkholder et al., 2020). Before having the ability to administer the informed consent to participants, I needed to engage in recruitment. Once recruited I provided the participants with the informed consent form, obtained an “I consent” emailed response, and engaged in a thorough discussion of the informed consent at the beginning of the interview where I highlighted aspects related to confidentiality and unanimity.

Storing participant data is another ethical consideration that was discussed with the participants (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To protect the data, I stored all data collection and analysis under a password protected file on this researcher’s computer that only this researcher has access to. Any additional electronic items of participant information such as notes, or audio recordings were stored through the same means.

Summary

In summary of this chapter, I have discussed elements of the research design and rationale including the research question, central concepts, the identified research tradition and rationale for use. I then identified the role of the researcher with inclusive elements of positionality, researcher bias, and ethical considerations. I then discussed elements of the chosen methodology including population, sampling strategy which included participant criteria and sample size, and recruitment. I then discussed elements

of instrumentation including interviews, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, I ended this section with discussing elements of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. In the proceeding chapters, I will discuss the results and findings of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of counseling students impacted by their CESs displaying unprofessional behaviors. The research question that guided this study was as follows: What are the lived experiences of masters-level counseling students that have experienced CESs' unprofessionalism during their graduate program? In this chapter, I will describe the participants and their demographics, the interviews including the setting in which they took place, the data collection and data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results of the study.

Setting

All interviews took place in a secure office using Simple Practice, a HIPAA-secure video-conferencing platform service. This space is also my therapy office. Therefore, there were adequate sound machines outside and around the office to add additional privacy. All participants opted to engage in the video-platform option for the interview as opposed to meeting in-person. Each participant reviewed and electronically signed the informed consent by emailing an "I consent" and was sent a link to their private portal for the agreed-upon scheduled interview. Each participant was also given a pseudonym in the system. Once the interview was over, all eight participants' profiles were deleted from the video platform. Although eight participants were interviewed, due to an audio recording error, one participant was eliminated from the study. Additionally, one participant did not have their camera on.

Demographics

Many participants expressed fear and anxiety due to the nature of the study relative to ensuring confidentiality and concern that participation in this study might impact their academic journey. Therefore, I limited demographic information to only include participants' sex. Limiting demographic information increased privacy and anonymity and helped alleviate emotional distress for participants. The following is the limited demographic information and assigned pseudonyms for all seven participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographic information

Participant	Sex
Elena	Female
Kelly	Female
Yvette	Female
Alex	Male
Bailey	Female
Theo	Male
Marcus	Male

Data Collection

I used semi-structured interviews to collect data. Initially, I proposed 90-minute interviews, however, all interviews reached saturation and were completed in 60 minutes. The sample range for this study was 6-10 and I reached saturation at seven. At the beginning of each interview, I informed participants of the interview process, reviewed the informed consent, including consent to begin audio-recording, and then began each interview. During the interviews, I completely immersed myself in the present moment to capture the phenomenological psychological experience of the participants' lived

experiences (Giorgi et al., 2017). Once the interviews concluded, I took memos to record observations of the experience. I returned to the memos, once I had time to process the interview.

All interviews were audio recorded with my personal computer, which requires my fingerprint to access. Once the interviews were concluded and audio recorded, they were transcribed by a transcription service. I conducted all the interviews without interruption. Throughout the process, I bracketed my experiences to reduce bias and to fully immerse myself in the participants' lived experiences. Bracketing my own lived experiences was an important and crucial piece to this study as phenomenology requires the researcher to engage in epoche and not allow their own preconceived attitudes from their life experiences to alter the data (see Giorgi et al., 2017). Bracketing was essential considering my position as a former student in a CACREP-accredited counseling program who experienced unprofessional behaviors of a CES and as a current adjunct CES entering the profession. To do this, before each interview, I engaged in a centering and mindfulness exercise and maintained awareness of any attitude that I needed to bracket throughout the process. As a counselor, this is a process that I am familiar with as the profession mandates ethical responsibility and reflection on personal attitudes and countertransference (see ACA, 2014).

Data Analysis

With phenomenological descriptive data analysis, I was careful to immerse myself in the methodological steps I described in chapter three. I used the same set of interview questions that I constructed out of the literature to guide the interview and used

additional probing questions as needed. When conducting data analysis, I used the following steps (see Giorgi et al., 2017):

1. Read and listen for sense of the whole.
2. Assume the attitude of the scientific phenomenological reduction.
3. Determination of meaning units.
4. Transformation of participants' meaning units into phenomenologically, psychologically, sensitive expressions.
5. Describe the basic psychological structure of the participants' experience.

To engage in the first step of data analysis, I simply listened to each participant's audio recording while reviewing the transcript. As I did this, I was listening for a sense of the whole experience being described by the participants (see Peoples, 2021). I then began immersing myself in the research question with a phenomenological psychological attitude. This was done while listening to the audio recordings and reviewing the transcripts. This helped me to experience what the participants were discussing without applying any meaning. With a descriptive phenomenological study, the data are only to be described, not interpreted (see Giorgi et al., 2017) and I was careful to stay aligned with this method. Once I was ready to engage in step three, creating meaning units, I began taking notes and writing down what each participant was saying throughout their interview that was aligned with the psychological reduction and where there was an experience of change in meaning (Giorgi et al., 2017). I used an excel spreadsheet for this and the following steps. I then engaged in step four as a two-step process by first creating themes of what the participants were reporting and then creating larger psychological

themes that helped organize the data. By engaging in this phenomenological reduction, I was able to take the meaning units and transform them into the current psychological themes (see Giorgi et al., 2017). In step five, I described the basic psychological structure of the participants' lived experience by reviewing the data and making sure to support the themes with statements from the participants. I also assessed and reassessed the organized data while writing this chapter. From the data, four main themes and 12 subthemes emerged. I will discuss these themes in detail in the results section.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

To ensure credibility I followed each of the proposed descriptive phenomenological structured steps created by and described by Giorgi et al. (2017). I also used additional strategies such as debriefing where I engaged in several conversations with my committee members about the data. These conversations were inclusive of the ongoing process of data collection both before and after the interviews of several participants, the excluded participant, and any of my initial data analysis steps including the themes. I also discussed with my dissertation chair the continuing monitoring of my biases and how I was bracketing these.

Transferability

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of counseling students. Transferability was continually present in my consciousness as I analyzed and described the data so the results could be applicable to a larger population. My intention for this study is to use the data collected and analyzed to inform other

current counseling students and university programs about evaluating CES professionalism. I engaged in this by constructing detailed and intentional interview questions and making sure to ask probing questions about their experiences throughout the interview.

Dependability

I ensured dependability in this study by member checking and triangulation. Triangulation is a common strategy to ensure the dependability of a study, although it can be time-consuming (Peoples, 2021). I used triangulation by combining the methods of data collection, such as semi-structured interviews, audio recordings, and transcriptions, to gather thick descriptions. I also used member checking. Member checking is another common strategy but controversial among qualitative researchers (Giorgi et al., 2017; Peoples, 2021). As Peoples (2021) discussed, some researchers opt out of sending the participants a summary of the transcript or identified themes to ensure accuracy as the participants may disagree. I opted to send the participants a summary of the transcript to ensure that I was correctly representing their story. Six of the seven participants responded with acknowledgment and agreeance with how their lived experiences were represented in the study.

Confirmability

I ensured confirmability by bracketing my preconceived ideas and experiences throughout the data collection and analysis process and staying aligned with the prescribed steps by Giorgi et al. (2017). I was aware of and monitored my own biases by engaging in a centering and mindfulness exercise before the interviews and the data

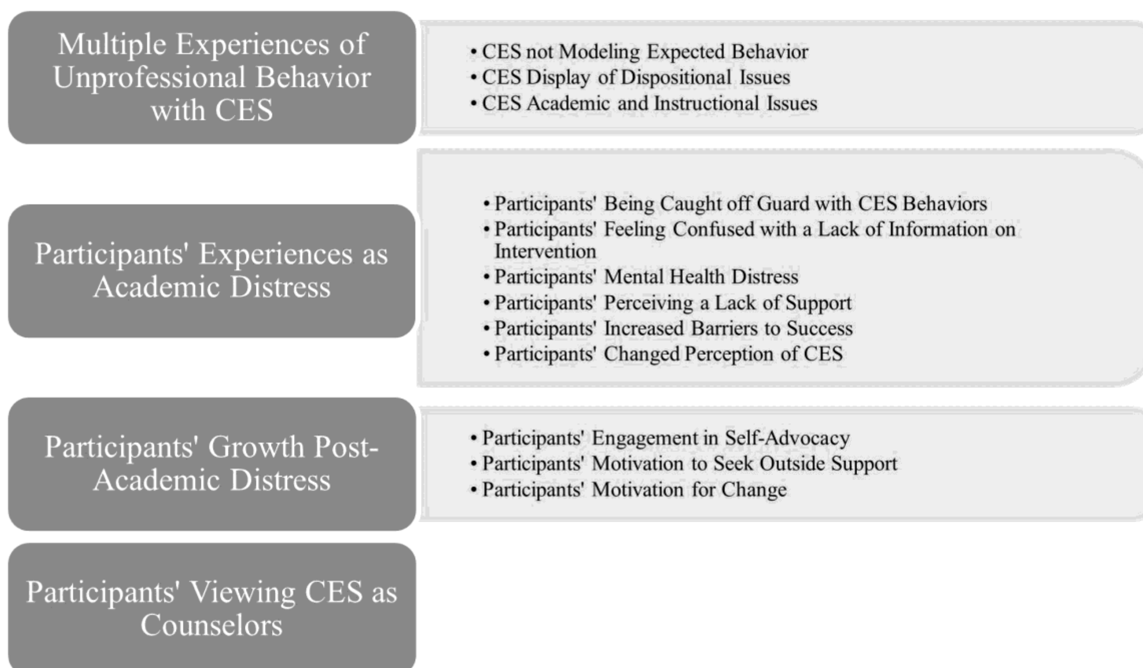
analysis steps, being aware when any biases would arise and taking a mental note, and engaging in a confirmability audit with my program chair.

Study Results

The research question for this study was: What are the lived experiences of master's-level counseling students who have experienced CESs' unprofessionalism during their graduate program? From the data, emerged four themes and 12 subthemes (see Table 1).

Figure 1

Themes Derived from Data



Theme 1: Multiple Experiences of Unprofessional Behavior with CES

All seven participants shared having multiple experiences of unprofessional behavior with an individual CES. Additionally, all seven participants shared that their

experiences of unprofessional behavior were not solely from a single faculty member, but from multiple CESs during their program (see Table 2).

Table 2

Number of Participant Experiences with CES Unprofessionalism

Participant	Total Number of Experiences of Unprofessional Behavior with an Individual CES	Total Number of Experiences of Unprofessional Behavior with Multiple CESs
Elena	12	9
Kelly	14	3
Yvette	11	4
Alex	9	2
Bailey	7	4
Theo	8	1
Marcus	10	3

All seven of the participants described having multiple experiences of unprofessionalism with at least one CES as well as multiple experiences with more than one CES. Additionally, all seven participants were aware of having multiple experiences of unprofessionalism, which was either overtly stated at the beginning of the interview or implied with the use of plural language, like Kelly, who used the word “experiences” before beginning to discuss them. The different domains of experiences are represented in the following subthemes.

Subtheme: CES Not Modeling Expected Behaviors

CESs have an expectation to act as professional role models for counseling students (ACA, 2014) and have an ethical responsibility to be aware of their actions. This ethical and instructional responsibility is important as there is much learning that occurs through observation (Birden et al., 2013; Brissette et al., 2017; Gaiser, 2009; Schwartz-

Mette, 2011). All seven of the participants discussed experiences with CESs where they perceived CESs' behaviors as not being in line with or modeling what was being taught or expected of graduate counseling students.

Kelly recounted an experience when her CES shared his own impairment due to excessively working, "He fell asleep during a client session. He woke up and the client was still talking." Several participants discussed experiences with CESs behaving dishonestly. According to Elena a CES stated her paper "was great" when she submitted it for feedback yet received a failing grade which resulted in her overall grade dropping and the need to retake the course. Moreover, Elena experienced dishonesty regarding a perceived issue in the classroom, withdrawal procedures, and a breach of confidentiality. Elena recounted an incident of dishonesty and removal from a course stating, "I get an email from them saying why I was removed. They were saying I don't participate in class, which is not accurate because all my participation grades have always been high." Further exacerbating the experience, her CES stated this would be reflected on her transcript. According to Elena,

> They kept trying to push me to remove myself from the class. No, I'm not doing that, because if I remove myself, I forfeit that refund. So, the next day, I go into my account and see I've been removed as a student removal saying I removed myself.

Kelly experienced displays of dishonesty with a CES wherein the CES would leave class due to another obligation and not return at the stated time. According to Kelly, "Last semester in the spring he left us twice. He was late coming back by an hour and a

half." Yvette experienced multiple instances of dishonesty from her CES, including unfair handling of assignment extensions, canceling a promised discussion about an assignment without rescheduling, misleading her about the purpose of a meeting, and altering information shared with the department head. Regarding her assignment submission, Yvette shared,

> I saw that grade… I need an extension. Can we talk about this? He said, don't worry about it, I'm giving the entire class an extension, we'll talk about it in class tonight. He canceled class that night. I emailed him on Wednesday. I didn't hear back from him until the following Tuesday.

Yvette's accounts illustrate a pattern of dishonesty, missed commitments, and misrepresentation which significantly affected her experience with her CES. In another instance, Yvette described a meeting that was intended to address an assignment issue but instead was used to criticize her character, "We ended up having a Zoom, and he started attacking my character... you've been unprofessional, disengaged, you are not valuing this class, and just a bunch of things that were not true." What was meant to be a discussion about her academic performance became a confrontation over her personal behavior, which Yvette felt was unwarranted.

Yvette also recounted how her CES altered information when communicating with the department head. She recalled, "What he told them was completely different. He never told them about the email that I had sent him asking for the extension... I said we didn't have class because he canceled it again." This misrepresentation of communication

between Yvette and her CES led to a misunderstanding with the department about her performance and the circumstances surrounding the assignment.

Further dishonesty was demonstrated when another CES gave false information in an official statement, as Yvette noted, "My advisor read from a statement that had so many blatant lies that she had written down." This experience added to her growing frustration with the lack of professionalism in her CES relationships. Yvette also described issues with missed classes and inattentiveness from her CES, while being unfairly criticized for similar behaviors. She explained, "He has called off three times..." and then stated the CES claimed, "you've been disengaged, you are not valuing this class."

Kelly discussed similar experiences with her CES who was late on multiple occasions, would leave class frequently to take personal phone calls, and left students in the class to engage in other activities. Kelly recounted these experiences:

> His wife would constantly call when we were in class. She would call several times while he was teaching. It interrupted his lecture, and he told us what they talked about. He didn't leave the room; he took the call.

Several participants recounted experiences of harassment and discrimination demonstrated by CESs despite mandates requiring inclusivity and equity by the ACA (2014) and CACREP (2024). Yvette, recounted an experience of a CES making an inappropriate comment about her physical appearance and Kelly shared multiple experiences with CESs demonstrating discrimination:

> I'm definitely treated differently. I think part of that is because I am a (minority) female, and I have experienced a lot of racism and prejudice on campus and from professors including this one unfortunately. So it has affected me greatly.

Further, Kelly described experiencing "micro aggressions and racism" stating, "Professors have used the "N" word in lecture...Professors have used slurs for white people in lecture." Moreover, Marcus discussed his experiences with discrimination towards himself and peers due to not aligning with his CES's expressed political views. Marcus recounted experiencing discrimination due to differing political beliefs, "she [CES] made a remark, "if you grow up in a conservative household, you are likely to come out less intelligent when you grow up."

Alex discussed his experiences with discrimination as a gay male in a religious-based counseling program. Alex voiced feeling "singled out" and "vulnerable" while in a religious specific course as a program requirement and voiced noticing a shift in the classroom culture when there were affiliate CESs teaching as opposed to the CES faculty due to the promoted values and bias within the program. Alex stated:

> I have to say that instructors could be really good if they're not there to push a personal agenda. The adjuncts basically run class with the outline from the main instructor. The full-time staff uphold everything this university stands for and put personal stuff in.

Elena experienced discrimination due to her mental health when she had an experience with a CES that "encouraged" her and her peers to share personal information during class, but later felt this information was "weaponized" and that the CES used her

"mental health against me". According to Elena, the CES stated she was going to remove her from the class because she was "clinically impaired". Theo discussed experiencing his CES "discriminating" against clients with specific diagnoses and issues, telling the students to "never believe them."

Lastly, four participants discussed witnessing their CES violate professional boundaries. According to the ACA (2014), counseling professionals need to maintain professional boundaries with their clients, supervisees, students, and research participants. Marcus discussed experiences in witnessing a CES consistently engage in detailed personal discussions with their students "…on an intimate level too, not a surface level." Elena discussed multiple experiences with a CES violating professional boundaries wherein they displayed tearfulness and blame on her and her peers for a misunderstanding between the CES and another CES. Elena recounted comforting the CES stating, "I felt bad for her so me and another girl, we were trying to comfort her and be like, it's okay as she's sobbing. It was awkward." Additionally, Elena discussed experiences with her CES engaging her peers in conversations regarding their personal lives. Elena stated, "My professors are always very good probing into our personal lives. . .which I never liked….I want professional boundaries."

Kelly also had multiple experiences with her CES displaying boundary violations. These included a CES encouraging students to share about their personal lives as a requirement of the course and taking personal calls both during class and in front of students. Kelly stated:

> We have been told about very intricate details of the professor's personal life and marriage including the status of their marriage what's going on in terms of how they're getting along in their marriage, down to the fact that the spouse is sleeping in a separate room. He told us what they talked about after he hung up, he didn't leave the room, he took the call. And during lecture.

Theo discussed his experience with a CES violating a professional boundary in recounting how he discovered that his personal therapist was also the chair of the counseling program he was accepted into. Theo stated that after this relationship was identified, the program chair did not terminate with him and continued having sessions where they would occasionally discuss Theo's academics. This chair also assisted in a situation that Theo was having with another CES in the program. These experiences highlighted how CESs role modeled unprofessionalism.

Subtheme 2: CES Displaying Dispositional Issues

CESs displaying dispositional issues was a common concern among participants, with six out of seven reporting such experiences. These issues included inappropriate displays of emotion and changes in CES attitudes toward students. For example, Theo described his CES as "very condescending and very much ego-based" recounting an incident where a student was reduced to tears after being reprimanded for having a dog in a virtual class. Alex also noted instances where the CES used emotionally threatening language of "A lot of you guys are going into internship, and if we see something we don't like, we can pull you from internship."

Although CESs are responsible for modeling professional behavior and maintaining students' dispositions throughout their graduate careers (ACA, 2014), neither ACA (2014) nor CACREP (2024) specifies dispositional expectations for CESs. This gap suggests that CESs are not held to the same standards they expect from students, contributing to the emotional distress reported by participants. These dispositional issues, which could be seen as a failure to model expected behavior, highlighted the impact on students and the need for increased awareness and change.

Additionally two participants discussed experiences of their CES avoiding them and not returning communication. The participants experienced these interactions as their CES being frustrated with them. Marcus recounted feeling avoided by his CES and advisor after he corrected him in class stating, "He stopped advising me after that. I was sending emails, and he would get back to me three or four weeks later."

Elena had multiple experiences with multiple CESs inappropriately displaying emotion both verbally and nonverbally. Elena recounted experiences of her CES becoming emotional with her and making statements such as, "I honestly don't even know what to do with you anymore" and "Why did you lie to me. I've seen five different versions of you, so I don't know if you are just lying to yourself or lying to me."

Elena discussed further experiences of a CES expressing emotions towards her and her peers, telling the students to leave the classroom while crying. Elena stated:

> She storms in [CES] "I heard you guys are mad at me". She accuses us of not wanting to come to class and saying we really hurt her feelings, she starts crying, [CES] "you know, just leave, get out. Class is over for the night."

Elena also discussed separate experiences of a CES displaying nonverbal displays of emotion and stating "They called me a liar. Just the tone, clapping her hands and throwing her arms in the air, making comments about my personality." Kelly also experienced multiple incidences with a CES inappropriately displaying emotion to her class about his excessive workload, personal life issues causing disruption to his teaching, and his personal emotions towards students. Kelly recounted, "He started out our first day of spring semester saying that he was burned out. He was visibly depressed and anxious. He was like, I really didn't want to be here tonight, but I'm here." Kelly further recounted how she experienced this CES inappropriately displaying emotion in class stating:

> This Tuesday instead of greeting us, he said, okay, let's start the presentation, he sat in the back of the room and kept squeezing his eyes shut, sighing, he had a stress ball, and he was squeezing the stress ball really hard. He seemed really irritable and impatient. He was very annoyed. You can tell he was annoyed and visibly irritated. That's the norm.

The experiences discussed above highlighted CESs' dispositional issues that affected students.

Subtheme 3: CES Academic and Instructional Issues

All participants discussed experiences involving academic instruction and course material incompetency. Additionally, all participants noted having experiences with biased grading and biased treatment from their CES. Biased grading and treatment are a noteworthy unprofessional behavior as it does not align with the counseling profession's ethics or values (see ACA, 2014). While these behaviors also fall within the subtheme of

CESs not modeling expected behaviors, due to the nature of academic instruction this is a separate subtheme.

Three participants discussed experiences of failing an assignment or a class; resulting in significant distress that will be discussed later, without just cause or an explanation. Kelly noted several experiences of biased grading that was perceived to be due to being a minority race and recounted how several CES's showed "favoritism". According to Kelly, "He'll give other students a pass. And me and a couple other students, we have to work harder. He definitely grades us differently than the other students." Kelly further recounted experiences with another CES engaging in biased grading stating, "I didn't think it was fair. He graded me lower than other people."

Marcus discussed his experiences with a CES that engaged in biased grading and treatment. Marcus recounted being graded "unfairly" due to not being "her pet" or if he "didn't align with her politically or with her own values." Marcus recounted experiencing the CES, "…poke jabs and make fun of me, and basically be a bully." According to Marcus:

> She has garnered popularity among the younger students. She would allow them to call her by first name basis. I assumed it was okay. She said, no, you haven't earned that yet.

Participants Elena and Alex both recounted experiences wherein a CES allowed their bias to interfere with grading. Elena heard her CES , "…laugh and brag about how he fails the most students and how no one will do anything because he has tenure. Those are his exact words." Alex experienced biased grading with a CES after several other

unprofessional experiences had occurred which created perceived tension between Alex and the CES. According to Alex points were deducted from his assignment without written justification but then earned a higher grade when another CES graded the assignment. Alex said:

> She regraded everything that was already graded and did all the grading for the rest of the term. She regraded that assignment, and it was 100%. I felt there was a retaliation going on.

A majority of participants described their CES as being less than knowledgeable on their academic instruction, knowledge and modeling of ethics, lack of clinical experience and skills, and on academic and professional decisions being made. These behaviors contradict ethical responsibility to be knowledgeable in professional decision making (see ACA, 2014). Additionally, the ACA (2014) *Code of Ethics* states, "Counselors who function as counselor educators or supervisors provide instruction within their areas of knowledge and competence and provide instruction based on current information and knowledge available in the profession" (p. 14).

Yvette discussed a CES using "TikTok" as part of their instruction and appearing less than competent on the course material. Alex shared similar experiences that resulted in he and his peers feeling unprepared in the course. Alex stated that due to the degree of the CES's incompetence she was "removed" from the class and replaced with another CES with "four weeks" remaining in the semester. Several participants noted their CES acknowledging their lack of knowledge and skills needed to adequately teach the course. Bailey discussed her experiences with a CES who was perceived as incompetent at

instructing a course and refused to adjust aid in the students' learning. Bailey recounted "questions were never answered" due to the CES refusing to provide clarity when students were confused. Bailey expressed her frustrations with these experiences and stated, "The PowerPoints were maybe two or three slides long" and "I still don't feel prepared." These experiences led Bailey to question the CES's ability to educate stating, "You might be a good counselor, but you have no clue what you're doing right now." Participants' experiences denote the multitude of ways CESs' unprofessionalism was demonstrated.

Theme 2: Participants' Experiences as Academic Distress

Participants discussed the effects of their experiences as distressing and creating long-lasting consequences. The consequences of a distressing experience can create a change in perception, prolonged emotional consequences, prolonged mental health consequences, and perceived barriers to support and growth (Hogg et al., 2023).

Participants in this second theme described how they were affected by their experiences including how they perceived them and how they made them feel. These affects are characteristic of distressing symptoms such as experiencing an emotionally distressing event that left them feeling threatened in some way resulting in feeling fear, anxiety, and helplessness. These subthemes begin with the element of helplessness, in being caught off guard.

Subtheme: Participant's Being Caught off Guard with CES Behaviors

Participants described experiences that left them feeling psychologically vulnerable and helpless. All seven participants discussed an element of surprise or shock

regarding their experiences. Six of the seven participants experienced a change in CES disposition which was experienced as surprising and distressing. Kelly discussed a CES having changes in disposition from being supportive and instructional to having emotional breakdowns and outbursts in class and expressing annoyance and aggravation. Kelly stated, "I thought we had good rapport and I always thought he was pretty supportive." Kelly stated that this CES's change in disposition was, "really shocking to me." Kelly also discussed her experiences with the entire program culture changing "very quickly" from originally being perceived as trustworthy, having an "open-door policy" and feeling, "really positive."

Alex discussed experiencing a change in his CES's disposition during one of his courses after himself and his peers' questioned statements by the CES they perceived as inequitable to clients. Alex described the CES going from being "activated" one week, to using supportive language the next week in class even guiding the students through a meditative exercise on creating a "safe space" to being "threatening" the following week. Alex stated this experience resulted in him and his peers being, "shut down and not really engaging in the class at all." Marcus described feeling ignored and avoided by his CES that was originally his advisor that he perceived as helpful stating, "He stopped advising me. I was sending emails, and he would get back to me three or four weeks later."

Yvette discussed feeling that her CES was originally supportive and was "on my side because I had talked to her quite a few times" due to previous interactions but experienced a change during a meeting regarding her dispositions. Yvette recounted her

perception of this change stating, “It felt like they were turning against me and making me to be the problem.”

Elena discussed experiences with multiple CESs whom had a change in disposition that caught her off guard. She described an experience where during a meeting, her CES initially vocalized feeling “concerned” but abruptly had a “demeanor change.” Elena stated, “She raises her hands in the air and starts saying, I honestly don’t even know what to do with you anymore. Can I call your advisor?”

Elena discussed a dispositional change with another CES during the same meeting leaving her feeling “confused” that her advisor was now “not advocating for me.” Elena voiced feeling “Shock” and stated:

> My professor always had this personality of being soft and understanding. Then she announced she got tenure. . .she was a completely new person. I’ve never seen her this aggressive.

Many participants also described experiences and the effect of their CESs’ requirement to be psychologically vulnerable in class and then having their information weaponized against them. Sharing personal information as a requirement in a counseling program violates the ACA (2014) ethical code F.8.c. Self-Growth Experiences that states, “Counselor educators and supervisors inform students that they have a right to decide what information will be shared or withheld in class” (p. 14). All but three participants discussed experiences of being encouraged to share personal information leaving them feeling psychologically vulnerable. Kelly discussed her experiences of being encouraged to discuss personal information. Alex discussed his experiences; described above, with a

CES guiding the students in creating a “safe space” one week and “threatening” them the next, leaving Alex feeling “shut down” the remainder of the course. Elena discussed her experience in a course that unethically, required students to “talk about stuff going on in our life” which resulted in the majority of students “crying” in class. Elena perceived her CES as “probing” and “saying things like, what else is going on in your life?” Elena perceived her personal information as being “weaponized against me” due to later experiences with this CES. Participants’ experiences highlighted the effects of students feeling caught off guard with CESs’ unprofessionalism.

Subtheme: Participants’ Feeling Confused with a Lack of Information on Intervention

This second subtheme of participants feeling confused with little information on the reason for their CESs’ reactions to them, highlights the continued feeling of helplessness. Participants in this subtheme, described experiences with their CES that were upsetting, but described their distress as compounded by the element of there being no prior intervention, which could have allowed them to understand and prepare for the consequences as well as cope and help themselves. It is worth noting, in this section, the word intervention is used to describe any type of intervening that the CES could have done prior to a terminal decision such as speaking with the student, giving a prior warning, having a meeting with the student, giving them information on why a meeting is happening, and correcting grades or behavior early.

Four of the seven participants discussed having limited information shared with them when they failed an assignment, were placed on a progress plan, or were removed from a course. Participants discussed feeling confused and misunderstood with these

experiences resulting in feelings of helplessness which created further consequences for them. The participants noted experiences of remediation or abrupt removal from their course without being provided sufficient information on the reason for removal. Yvette discussed her experience with multiple CESs that didn't provide sufficient information to her on why she was being placed on a remediation plan. Yvette experienced this lack of information in additional areas such as assignment requirements and a required remedial meeting. Although Yvette advocated for herself by requesting this information, Yvette stated, "He refused to answer any of my questions."

Several participants discussed earning grades lower than their peers and having failing grades in a course for the first time with no intervention. Theo discussed being accused of plagiarism as "pretty shocking" and "the most adverse thing" due to a lack of information and clarity on the accusation. Theo also discussed his experience of failing a course where he was not provided with prior intervention or information on why this occurred. Theo stated, "I failed my techniques class. I never failed a class in my life. The professor refused to answer my question. I blame her. I shouldn't have failed that class."

Yvette discussed not understanding or receiving clarity on why she was being placed on a progress plan regarding her dispositions after a peer group experience that she perceived as "an attack". Elena discussed feeling shocked with her CES's decision to remove her from a class when she had no prior dispositional issues in the program. Elena was "confused" by the lack of information on why she was being removed from the course and inquired as to why she hadn't received the feedback beforehand. According to Elena, her CES responded, "That's because that's not necessary, it's not relevant."

According to Elena, this abrupt removal from her course would have resulted in a delayed graduation date and cause financial hardship. Kelly was confused by a lack of information on receiving the lowest grade in the course after failing two assignments stating, “I didn’t think it was fair. [CES] would purposely not answer my emails when I emailed for help.” Participants’ experiences of having a lack of information on CES intervention created confusion and added distress to their situation.

Subtheme: Participants’ Mental Health Distress

Fear is described as, “…the emotional response to real or perceived imminent threat” whereas anxiety is the “anticipation” of “future threat” (American Psychiatric Association; APA, 2022, p. 215). Fear and anxiety typically occur together and are both characteristic of behavioral and cognitive reactions (APA, 2022). Five participants described threatening experiences of being removed from courses, being threatened with failing a course, being threatened with removal from the program, and/or having their graduation date delayed that created anxiety and fear. Alex experienced worry and hypervigilance around being removed from the program for questioning his CES behaviors and Elena noted experiences of anxious distress stating to be “constantly paranoid” that her CESs were going to further retaliate against her.

Three participants described and expressed anxiety and fear over participating in this study for fear of retaliation or perceived wrongdoing by their university and/or program. Theo shared his “fear of losing what I worked so hard to get” stating, “It’s irrational or unreasonable for me to think taking part in a study would ever jeopardize that.” Another participant expressed anxiety as apprehension in participating in the study.

Three participants appeared fearful during the interview with one appearing tearful and needing to collect her thoughts, two others exhibited rapid speech, and trouble articulating their experiences. Yvette shared to be “losing my words” during the interview stating, “That’s what happens when I get anxious.” Alex described having “rapid thoughts” in his class which made concentration and focus “challenging.” Kelly described feeling anxious in class and stated to be “always nervous” to give presentations. Kelly discussed how these experiences caused anxiety, worry, and hypervigilance around her academics stating:

> It’s taken a toll on my mental health. It has affected me greatly. It’s gotten to a point where I find it very hard to study or concentrate in classes. I’m very anxious … very stressed. I have a hard time motivating myself to do an assignment. . . if I do an assignment, I over prepare and I practice as much as I can.

Kelly also described experiences that resulted in her feeling “psychologically unsafe” such as reporting that, [CES] “bully” students to only write “positive reviews” of faculty or the feedback would be used against them. Kelly shared, “If we do criticize them, we definitely feel the heat for that.” Kelly also expressed feeling “very anxious” during a group exercise in class calling it a “hostile environment” where peers were “pitted against each other.” Kelly blamed her CES for not intervening and maintaining a psychologically safe environment. Yvette also discussed an experience with a CES that failed to maintain a psychologically safe environment in the classroom while she was encouraged to resolve issues with peers. Yvette stated that this was “very uncomfortable” and perceived this as an “attack” stating, “She [CES] let everybody tell me what they

didn't like about me. And none of it was constructive." These experiences resulted in anxious feelings which caused Yvette to limit contact with her peers and CES and question her self-awareness and efficacy.

Elena discussed feeling chronically anxious and "extremely uncomfortable" around her CES's stating, "I just don't feel safe going back." Elena stated she would "never" have an interaction with them again without "some sort of advocate by my side."

Participants also experienced anxiety in questioning themselves. All the participants discussed attempting to validate their experiences with another person. Bailey appeared questioning herself during the interview stating, "I don't know if that's a me thing, or if that's a her [CES] thing." Theo was also noted to be questioning himself as he described filling out a report to a university administrator but stated, "I decided not to send it because it felt too minuscule of an issue for me to report."

All participants noted prolonged mental health distress such as feelings of sadness, depression, and isolation. Elena described her mental health distress as having a "hard time doing simple tasks like cleaning my room." Two participants discussed entering therapy post their experiences due to their mental health distress. Kelly discussed how she and her peers were suffering:

> A lot of people aren't doing well in the program mentally. I know a lot of people, including myself, are having suicidal ideation. . .a lot of people are struggling. A lot of us are in therapy. I think it's a result of the program and if things were a lot better, it probably wouldn't be an issue.

Four participants discussed emotional and mental distress that affected their functioning in physical and vocational domains. Kelly and Elena discussed distress at work which impaired their focus and concentration. Elena stated, "I kept getting sent home. I was not able to function" and reported to have "lost ten pounds" due to loss of appetite. Theo discussed that he "gained weight" due to his "mental and physical health suffering." Feelings of isolation was another common mental and emotional consequence of these experiences. Four participants noted feeling isolated from other students stating that their peers were not relatable due to not having similar experiences. Four of the seven participants reported concern for their CES's wellbeing which caused further mental health distress. Elena noted to be concerned for her CES who was inappropriately displaying emotions in stating, "I felt bad for her, me and another girl were trying to comfort her as she's sobbing." Kelly noted feeling concerned for her CES's wellbeing after he stated to the class "[CES] I really didn't want to be here tonight" and stated to feel "burned out." Kelly stated, "We've done a lot of caring for him." All but one participant noted experiences of mental health distress as a result of experiences with CES unprofessionalism. All participants described their mental health distress as a result of their experiences.

Subtheme: Participants' Perceiving a Lack of Support

Participants who reported a perceived lack of support from a CES, discussed how this further created feelings of isolation from their academic community, a negative impact on their view of CES, and their motivation to continue in the program. Kelly recounted reaching out to her CES for "extra support" regarding her internship

experience and was told to “drop out of the program.” Kelly felt discouraged to continue after this conversation stating, “There’s just no motivation to encourage me to stay.”

A common theme among several participants was distancing self from peers due to issues with trusting others especially their peers in the counseling program. Four participants discussed distancing themselves from their peers in the program due to feeling isolated in their experiences. Kelly stated:

> I kept telling [friend] about my experiences and she believed me, but you know, she didn’t really understand what I was going through because she had never experienced it.

Elena experienced a change in her interpersonal relationships describing herself as a “more distrusting person” now. Elena stated:

> I would try to see the best in people, I would try to form connections when I could. Now, I try to be more cautious in my interactions. I try not to tell people things. I have this default setting of thinking people are out to get me or hurt me.

Four participants reported feeling unsupported by their CES. These participants discussed how this changed their perception of seeking support when they had concerns which negatively impacted them in the counseling program. Theo stated, “When we needed their help, they didn’t give us help.” Kelly reported, “I don’t have support. When I reach out for help from my supervisors at school there’s little to no support. I don’t get a lot of feedback.” Kelly reported using her CES’s for help as “A last resort” stating, “I’m not as motivated to ask for help if I need it.” Participants noted how this lack of support created barriers for them to continue towards graduation.

Subtheme: Participants' Increased Barriers to Success

Participants discussed experiencing increased barriers to their success as a result of their CES's unprofessionalism. Six out of seven participants discussed academic hardship due to a perceived or literal increase in coursework. Six participants discussed a perceived increase in coursework due to over-preparation for assignments and tests. Kelly reported feeling "anxious" and "stressed" regarding her perceived increased coursework stating, "If I do an assignment, case presentation, I over prepare and I practice as much as I can."

Four participants discussed an increase in coursework as they educated themselves on course material due to a lack of instruction in class. Alex described how his CES was "removed" from the course due to a lack of competency in instruction which left him and his peers to learn a semester worth of material in "four weeks" with a new CES. Additionally, Yvette discussed having additional coursework to complete as part of her progress plan in the program.

Two participants discussed transferring to another counseling program as a result of their experiences with CESs which created financial loss and extended their graduation date. Four participants experienced financial hardship and a delay in graduation due to failing or being removed from a course. Elena discussed her financial distress due to a requirement to pay for equipment for a class that she was then removed from stating, "I withdrew and got only 50% of my money back. I spent money on the camera for the class, tuition, insurance, and other technology."

Participants also reported a perceived barrier of feeling ill-prepared for the profession which left them feeling incompetent in clinical areas. Alex described his delay in entering the counseling profession as a result of his CES's incompetent instruction due to having "zero knowledge" on a core area needed to pass the NCE. Bailey expressed distress and concern for herself and her future clients with feeling incompetent in her knowledge of clinical skills, "I don't want to treat anyone as a guinea pig. I want to give them quality." This is problematic in the field due to the ethical requirement that faculty be clinically competent and knowledgeable in instruction (see ACA, 2014). Participants expressed frustration towards CESs and the counseling program when they were taught courses by a CES that reported to have minimal experience in the topic they were teaching. Several participants discussed being taught clinical and ethical skills incorrectly such as Bailey who reported a CES provided the class with incorrect ethical information on mandated reporting laws which she validated with her site supervisor. Theo discussed witnessing a CES provide false information related to treating specific diagnoses. Barriers to success were multifaceted and long lasting which created further effects for the participants discussed next.

Subtheme: Participant's Changed Perception of CES

Six participants discussed having a changed perception of CESs or counselors because of their experiences. Five participants discussed feeling distrustful of the CESs that they had experiences with which created an unwillingness to engage with CESs to ask questions or seek support. Elena reported that she "wasn't distrustful" prior to her

experiences but the result "made me distrustful of counselors." Four participants felt distrusting of their program culture.

Six participants reported a changed perception of counseling professionals such as Kelly, who witnessed her CES express feeling "burnt-out" on multiple occasions and described her perception of CESs as, "They're [CESs'] just using their advanced doctoral degree to perpetuate and abuse the power differential. They take advantage of people." Theo described his perception being "soured" and blamed CESs' unprofessionalism on their "power being abused" which resulted in him having "A negative view of academia now which I didn't have before."

All seven participants perceived their CESs' minimal effort and support as a lack of motivation to be in the professional role. Yvette stated, "The bar is very low for a counseling professor. . . they don't put a lot of thought or preparation into it." Four participants blamed the head of the department for not intervening or making better decisions such as Bailey who described having a "decreased view" of CESs and feeling frustrated and questioning the department head stating, "What's going on here? Is it desperation? Is it money?" Marcus discussed similarly having a changed perception of the CES profession, "The quality of the education solely depends on the quality of professors." All participants reported a changed view of either CESs, counselors, or the counseling profession as a result of their experiences. Participants also demonstrated resiliency that promoted growth and helped them in their academic achievements.

Theme 3: Participants' Growth Post-Academic Distress

Along with the distressing and lost-lasting effects of the perceived experiences, participants shared how they evolved since their experiences. Although all participants experienced distress in some way by their CESs' unprofessionalism, they also discussed growth as an outcome. The subthemes that emerged were participants advocating for themselves, gaining motivation for support through their experiences, and experiencing a motivation to change.

Subtheme: Participants' Engagement in Self-Advocacy

All participants engaged in self-advocacy by attempting to utilize their strengths to work through their challenges such as Kelly who stated, "I've had to do a lot of things on my own and figure things out for myself. I try to figure it out on my own first. I'll either consult with other people or I'll google some things." All participants attempted to remediate their issues directly with their CES. Alex discussed his multiple attempts at talking directly with his CES about his concerns and voiced being met with resistance. Alex said, "We were writing emails and advocating for ourselves." Even when these attempts failed, participants still persevered with self-advocacy such as Kelly, who stated, "I told him, I didn't think it was fair that he graded me lower than other people." Four participants attempted to remediate their issues directly with their CES through confrontation such as Theo, stating, "He had a lot of issues with substance use clients, and that was my main work experience, so every time he said that I would try and challenge him a little bit."

All the participants reported to have reached out for help to either their advisor, peers, the program chair, or another CES they had rapport with to assist them in remediating their issues. Theo described talking with one of his "program directors" and reported feeling that they supported him "emotionally" and were " validating." According to Bailey:

> We were all very frustrated. None of us felt we were learning what we were supposed to. We talked to our advisors. Eventually the class came together and wrote an open letter to her.

Common among participants that engaged in self-advocacy was fear of recrimination or being removed from the program. This highlights the participants' growth in being able to overcome these feelings while advocating for themselves. Alex experienced continued concerns of recrimination when engaging in self-advocacy stating, "I didn't think that anything was going to come of it. I honestly really did think I was going to be tossed out of the program at one point." Similarly, Kelly wrote an end of semester review even though the CES in the program discouraged anything other than "positive" feedback. All participants engaged in acts of self-advocacy that helped them pursue their goals and overcome their challenges. Participants also engaged in outside support seeking which was an additional type of growth.

Subtheme: Participants' Motivation to Seek Outside Support

All participants demonstrated a motivation to seek outside support during and post their experiences despite experiencing strains in their relationships and distrust of others. Six of the seven participants engaged in seeking support through friends both

inside and outside of the counseling program. Kelly felt “relieved” and reported, “I didn’t feel as lonely anymore because now someone else can say yes, he does this. It’s not just me. There are other people.” Bailey and Alex both described engaging with classmates. Alex felt “support” from his peers resulting in strengthened friendships and encouragement to “reach out to other people in the program” as needed. Yvette connected with friends stating, “I spoke with a lot of people about these situations and a lot of people said put your head down, do the work, let your work speak for itself.”

Four participants reached out to their work supervisor or clinical site supervisors which was described as validating due to receiving support from another professional. Bailey felt “lucky and privileged” in having a supervisor she could reach out to. Three participants that had issues with failing or being removed from a class, or being placed on a remediation plan felt support and validation from their site supervisors while Yvette and Theo, were supported by their partners or family members. All participants discussed experiences of support. Additionally, all participants experienced a motivation for change.

Subtheme: Participants’ Motivation for Change

All seven participants described a motivation to change their current situation or the counseling profession. Three participants described their considerations of leaving their counseling program, but ultimately decided to stay. Two participants did leave their program. According to Elena, “I decided, I’ve had other terrible incidents at the school but this time, I’m done. I’m a year into the program, I’m going to transfer.” Elena felt motivated to continue in her new counseling program and eventually graduate.

All seven participants described a determination to work harder and push through their challenges and perceived barriers for the reward of becoming a counselor . Theo discussed feeling motivated to reframe his experience as “facilitative to my learning” and reflected on his “struggle” stating , “I really persevered. I didn’t ever once think of quitting.” Yvette was motivated to work harder, “I’m just committed to finishing and doing this and being done so I can leave it in the past and do what I wanted.”

Five participants reported feeling determined not to engage in unprofessional behaviors that were modeled to them by their CESs. Elena described how this reverse-role modeling motivated her and encouraged her to engage in “self-monitoring” and stated, “It really showed me what kind of counselor I do not want to be. It really showed me how I do not want to be as an educator, counselor, or as a person.” Alex experienced reverse role modeling as affecting him “positively professionally” due to his gained awareness of what a healthy environment is. Alex discussed seeking an environment that is “affirming in everything they do” and a supervisor that doesn’t have an “ego” or “sense of superiority.” Marcus shared his determination to “do better and be better” as a result of his experiences. This was a common theme among all seven of the participants of having a motivation to become better for the counseling profession. Marcus specifically reported feeling a greater motivation to help others when they seek support:

> When someone’s asking me a question, if I don’t know it, I’m going to say, give me a few days and let me get back to you. I don’t say I don’t know. If I don’t know something, I find the resources, and I send it to people. It motivates me to be more mindful of how I’m teaching myself, how I’m learning.

All participants reported a motivation in change for themselves as future counselors and the counseling profession.

Theme 4: Participants' Viewing CES as Counselors

The last theme that emerged from the data was participants viewing their CES as a counselor and is consistent with the literature on professionals as role models (see Birden et al., 2013; Cruess & Cruess, 2006). The participants were not always seeing their CESs as educators rather role modeling what it is to be a counselor. When the participants shared these experiences they had with their CESs, they discussed concern for the counseling profession and five of the seven participants expressed concern for their CESs' clients.

As a result of these experiences Kelly shared a new distrust for counselors. Yvette was "flabbergasted" with her CES's behaviors, "This is a *counseling* program. I feel like people should be more warm or understanding or willing to help." The experiences highlighted how participants view CESs as counselors first and educators second.

Summary

The themes that emerged from the data provide detailed and thick descriptions of counseling students' lived experiences with CESs' unprofessional behavior helps inform the counseling profession and provide insight into this under-researched area of CESs. The data collected provides thick and rich descriptions of four emergent themes illuminating multiple experiences with CES, academic distress, growth as a result of the academic distress, and CES as a counselor first and then educator. Within all but the last of these themes, there were subthemes that emerged. In the final chapter, I provide a

discussion of the findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of counseling students impacted by the unprofessional behaviors exhibited by CESs. The results from this study both confirm previous research findings that CESs displaying unprofessional behaviors negatively affect students (see Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016) and extend knowledge. According to Brown-Rice and Furr (2015), 75% of the master's-level CESs surveyed believed they had witnessed unprofessional behavior in their colleagues. These behaviors affected other CESs and the emotional state of students and created concern that the CESs were acting in a hypocritical manner toward their students (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015). Unprofessional behavior by CESs is a documented issue that can significantly impact program culture and students (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015). This research into the lived experiences of students affected by CESs' behaviors gave participants a platform to share their lived experiences and emergent themes and provided valuable insights into how these behaviors impact master's-level students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs.

The results of this study revealed that CESs exhibit various types of unprofessional behavior that profoundly affect their students. Participant interviews highlighted the nature of these behaviors, their influence on program culture, how they were managed, and their dual impact—both harmful and resilience-building—on students. Additionally, the findings illustrate how these behaviors shape and affect

students' perceptions of their CESs and counseling professionals. This chapter will cover the findings, limitations, recommendations for future research, and the implications of these findings.

Discussion of the Findings

Descriptive phenomenology provides a framework to describe a participant's lived experience that is transferable to the larger population and remains true to the essence of their whole story (Giorgi et al., 2017; Peoples, 2021). This research offers an inductive view into this phenomenon which will inform future research. The data from this study support existing literature (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016; Kottler, 1992; Schwabb & Neukrug, 1994) and provide new insights into the phenomenon. Earlier research indicated that CESs observed unprofessional behavior among their colleagues, which they believed negatively impacted students (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016; Kottler, 1992; Schwabb & Neukrug, 1994). In related studies, CES students reported witnessing and being affected by unprofessional behaviors from their CESs' (Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016) and from their peers (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2019). This is salient as these doctoral students are the future CESs. While prior studies have taken a quantitative approach, this research provides qualitative data, revealing the presence of unprofessional behavior in master's-level CACREP-accredited counseling programs and the subsequent impact on students. The four main themes and subthemes that emerged from the data were as follows:

1. multiple experiences of unprofessional behavior with CES
    a. CES not modeling expected behavior

b. CES display of dispositional issues

c. CES academic and instructional issues

2. participants' experiences as academic distress

a. participants' being caught off guard with CES behaviors

b. participants' feeling confused with a lack of information on intervention

c. participants' mental health distress

d. participants' perceiving a lack of support

e. participants' increased barriers to success

f. participants' changed perception of CES

3. participants' growth post-academic distress

a. participants' engagement in self-advocacy

b. participants' motivation to seek outside support

c. participants' motivation for change.

4. participants' viewing CES as counselors

These themes provide a comprehensive understanding of the varied impacts of CES behaviors on students, from distress to growth and resilience.

Theme: Multiple Experiences of Unprofessional Behavior with CES

All participants reported having multiple experiences with a singular CES as well as multiple experiences with multiple CESs that were exhibiting unprofessional behavior. Previous quantitative research did not expand on types of unprofessional behavior nor inquire as to how many experiences the participants had (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015,

2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Additionally, previous research (see Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016) only described unprofessional behaviors as excessive tardiness, dishonesty, and excessive class absences. Although these behaviors were congruent with my study, previous research excluded all other unprofessional behaviors, such as emotional dysregulation, mental health concerns, inadequate clinical or academic skills, and unethical behaviors. The current study illuminates a broader category of unprofessionalism as any behavior that does not promote the welfare of the profession (see VanZandt, 1990) and provides greater insight into these kinds of behaviors.

All subthemes within the theme of multiple experiences of unprofessional behavior with CES were supported by the literature. For example, all participants witnessed their CES engaging in behaviors prohibited by students or the profession such as engaging in unethical behaviors (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Participants witnessed their CES displaying dishonesty and secrecy, excessive absences or tardiness to class, discriminatory behaviors towards students, and crossing professional boundaries. All of these behaviors fall within the category of unethical as "Counselors do not condone or engage in discrimination against prospective or current clients, students, employees, supervisees, or research participants based on age, culture, disability, ethnicity, race, religion/spirituality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital/ partnership status, language preference, socioeconomic status, immigration status, or any basis proscribed by law" (ACA, 2014, p. 9). CACREP (2024) also requires CESs and counseling programs to maintain an inclusive and equitable environment for

counseling students. Behaviors of discrimination and harassment fall under the category of CES not modeling expected behaviors and the ACA (2014) ethical codes mandate CES value and support those they serve without imposing personal values. Moreover, the ACA (2014) requires that a CES act as professional role model to those whom they are teaching and supervising. Previous research highlighted the importance of role modeling professionalism in the helping professions as students learn tacit knowledge most effectively through experience and modeling (Brissette et al., 2017; Gaiser, 2009; Kenny et al., 2003).

This study confirms the necessity of role modeling professional and ethical behaviors as students began questioning, feeling distrustful, and incompetent when observing inappropriate behaviors. Additionally, previous research highlighted the importance of the academic environment and culture for counseling students for successful situational learning (Hurt-Avila et al., 2020; Rose & Persutte-Manning, 2020), which this study confirms and expands on when detailing the negative effects that a culture of unprofessionalism can have on students and their views of other counselors.

The additional subthemes of CESs displaying dispositional issues such as inappropriate displays of emotion, academic and instructional issues such as biased grading, reduced knowledge of course content, and not aiding in the student’s learning are both supported by the literature and by the *Code of Ethics* (ACA, 2014; Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). The existing literature provided data on CESs and CES students displaying issues regulating their emotions (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Existing literature emphasizes the importance of

educators' role modeling professionalism and ethical behaviors (Birden et al., 2013; Brissette et al., 2017; Clement, 1988; Cruess et al., 2019). However, previous literature did not explore the lived experiences of master's-level counseling students and all participants highlighted biased grading. For example, Elena reported: "The professor who failed me with the paper, he ended up getting investigated. They made him grade anonymously, because apparently the professors they don't grade honestly, let their biases come into play." Participants from the study shared their multiple experiences with CES unprofessionalism, which highlights the multitude of behaviors that exist. Additionally, participants shared about the impact of these experiences.

Theme: Participants' Experiences as Academic Distress

Participants in this study experienced their interactions with CESs behaving unprofessionally as academic distress, which highlighted the impact on them personally. Current research indicates that students who witness or experience unprofessional behavior from CESs are affected emotionally, academically, professionally, and interpersonally (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). These behaviors also negatively impact students' perceptions of their counseling programs, faculty, and the profession, leading to frustration over the lack of intervention (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). This study extends prior findings, revealing that students were often surprised by sudden changes in their CES's demeanor, felt vulnerable when personal disclosures were used against them, and were shocked by the severity of interventions imposed without prior warnings. For example, Elena reported:

> I never thought that we were required to share our personal information. I just thought it would add value. The moment I didn't, upset them because now they're saying, you're required to do this…she [participant] is failing to share and engage in class discussions. I shared and they removed me, on what I said. It doesn't make sense.

Additionally, participants felt confused by a lack of information when an intervention was used, experienced prolonged mental health distress, a perceived lack of support, increased barriers to success, and a changed perception of CESs. Previous literature on this topic confirms emotional distress, increased academic workload and stress, and concern from the counseling profession (see Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016; Thomas-Davis et al., 2020). Moreover, Thomas-Davis et al. (2020) discussed the negative effects and abundance of stress that first-year graduate students experience. This study highlighted additional stressors as a result of CES unprofessionalism which furthered the participants already stressful responsibilities. Participants felt confused and stressed when attempting to understand and cope with their experiences with CESs. Further, participants reported ongoing anxiety and fear both inside and outside of the classroom and university. One participant described her anxiety in the classroom as "I want to do well and need to do well to stay in the program. The class was discouraging. I didn't want to be there."

Participants reported significant psychological distress, perceiving the program culture as unsafe, leading to chronic self-blame and questioning. They also described ongoing mental health issues, including isolation and excessive worry for their CES, who

displayed signs of stress and burn-out, emotional outbursts, and unprofessional boundaries. These behaviors, coupled with CESs' ethical responsibilities as counselors, raise ethical concerns (see ACA, 2014). Additional subthemes include a lack of support, increased barriers to success, and altered perceptions of CESs and the counseling profession. Many participants felt unsupported, which led to distancing themselves from their peers, experiencing life disruptions, and hesitating to seek help when needed. According to Elena, "I distanced myself from a lot of people...I don't trust them because I felt like they might not believe me if I share."

Others reported increased anxiety about coursework, perceiving it as more challenging due to the CES's behavior. Kelly expressed her apprehension, stating, "I have to present again next month…I'm absolutely dreading it…I don't want to be interrogated again." Some participants experienced financial setbacks from failing or being removed from courses, which delayed graduation or professional progress. For example, Elena's removal from a class would have "delayed" her graduation.

Participants' perceptions of CESs and the counseling profession shifted, with many viewing them as distrustful, power-abusive, and burned out aligning with previous research on frustration toward CESs (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; de Vries & Valadez, 2006) convergent with the participants rich descriptions in this study. de Vries and Valadez (2006) discussed the negative effects of stress on counseling students and how that impacts their view of the counseling profession. Data from this study supports previous literature as the participants all noted negative and stressful experiences with their CES and all but one participant noted a changed perception of CESs and the

counseling profession. However, only two participants expressed concern for the future of the profession, a point also raised in prior studies (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019). Overall, these findings extend the current literature that highlights the profound personal and academic impact of educators' unprofessional behaviors (see Birden et al., 2013; Brissette et al., 2017; Clement, 1988; Cruess et al., 2019) and the impact of CESs' unprofessional behavior which had been previously underexplored (see Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019).

Theme: Participants' Growth Post-Academic Distress

Data that emerged from this third theme and proceeding subthemes goes beyond the extent of the current literature Although previous literature discussed how participants responded which included communication with others (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019) the data from this study expounds on this communication and advocacy in providing rich detail and description of the participants helping themselves, not just responding to the situation. All participants engaged in some kind of self-advocacy such as support for themselves, attempt at remediating the issue with the CES, and confiding in another individual. The participants' discussed areas of self-advocacy such as reaching out directly to the CES that was behaving unprofessionally and discussing their concerns and impact with them as well as attempting to have a meeting or contacting the department chair. However, when this kind of self-advocacy was used, most reported little to no change. A majority of participants reported to have never received emails back from their CES when they attempted to communicate directly with them.

All participants engaged in motivation to seek support through means of a trusted individual such as peers, family, partners, or their work or clinical supervisor who helped validate their emotional and mental distress and concern. Seeking support by means of a site-supervisor is supported in the literature as a type of self-advocacy behavior used by counseling students (Doshi et al., 2022). Participants also engaged in behaviors of motivation towards change such as taking note of what not to do as a result of their experiences, having awareness of their ability to leave the program, leaving the program, and determination to be a more competent and professional counselor.

All participants voiced feeling determined to continue towards becoming a counselor and feeling determined to behave more ethically and professionally than what they experienced. Previous quantitative literature on the effects of CESs' unprofessionalism on counseling students surveyed participants on how they perceived to be affected which limited the data (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019). Due to the qualitative nature of this study, the data provides a more expanded insight into how the participants were affected and how they responded. Additionally, in staying in the descriptive phenomenological lens, the data that emerged is descriptive from the participants' experiences leaving rich data that embodies the whole of their experiences (Giorgi et al., 2017). This third theme highlighted the resilience and perseverance that the participants' possessed in becoming a professional counselor. Participants from this study had high regard for counselors in the field which highlighted another emergent theme, the participants seeing their CES as counselors first.

Theme: Participants Viewing CES as Counselors

The last emergent theme was that of participants' viewing their CESs as counselors first and educators second which brought data that extends beyond the current literature. A majority of participants made statements regarding the expectation of professionalism and understanding due to their CES being seen as a counselor. The participants' language when discussing their CES often times moved from their "professor" or "faculty" to "counselor". Additionally, as participants voiced their concern, their language focused more on the CES as a counselor over an educator. Elena highlighted how experiences with her CES changed her view of "counselors" and the distress of this changed view, "It's made me distrustful of counselors, now. And that sounds bad because, I'm wanting to be a counselor."

The counseling profession upholds standards of empathy, unconditional positive regard, autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, fidelity, and veracity (ACA, 2014). These ethical values and moral principles are foundational to the counseling profession and were identified by the participants as both violated, and the opposite modeled to them leaving feelings of shock, confusion, and disappointment with their CES. Several participants spoke of having their CES make choices for them regarding their work in the program and encouraged specific options for intervention. This behavior violates the ethical and moral standard of autonomy which is the act of fostering the right for an individual to take control of their own life (ACA, 2014). All participants noted mental, emotional, interpersonal, or academic harm which violates the ethical and moral standards of nonmaleficence wherein counselors are required to cause no harm and

beneficence which is the promotion of well-being and mental health in individuals (ACA, 2014). A majority of participants' discussed experiencing discrimination and/or bias either through grading or interactions with their CES which violates the principle of justice wherein there is an equal and fair treatment of individuals (ACA, 2014). Lastly, as a result of their experiences, a majority of participants' discussed feeling distrustful of their CES which violates fidelity, which is honoring commitments, being honest, and fulfilling the duty of trust in a relationship and veracity, and being truthful in interactions with others (ACA, 2014). A majority of participants' discussed perceiving their CES acting in a manner that caused distrust of them and others. Specifically, several participants spoke of experiences that involved dishonesty.

CESs are trained and tasked with the responsibility of evaluating students and upholding the professions ethics and standards which requires knowledge and modeling on what these ethical and moral principles are. The participants' experiences highlighted a current issue of ethical and professional violations existing in counseling programs.

Limitations of the Study

For this descriptive phenomenological study, I analyzed data from seven participants which met data saturation according to research standards (see Bradburn et al., 2004; Peoples, 2021; Reiners, 2012). The participants were recruited through an online social media platform and shared their experiences that they had with CESs engaging in unprofessional behavior. The participants all discussed experiences that they believed were unprofessional and explored aspects of how they were affected including how they responded and how their now current view of other counseling professionals,

CESs, and the counseling profession changed. All participants were willing to participate and consented to voluntarily commit their time to the study which provides information on several potential limitations such as retrospective errors and limited understanding of the inclusion criteria.

The participants described their retrospective accounts of their lived experiences which is essential to stay aligned with the phenomenological methodology. However, due to this recounting of an experience(s) there is potential for memory error (see Bradburn et al., 2004). Additionally, given that all participants were current students or had graduated within three months, there is a potential of a misunderstanding of the inclusion criteria of the study. For example, the inclusion criteria required participants to be current counseling students or one that had graduated within the last three months, enrolled in a brick-and-mortar, CACREP-accredited counseling program. One participant had their experiences at a brick-and-mortar counseling program but had since transferred out to an online program because of the effects of their experiences. Therefore, they were not currently enrolled at a brick-and-mortar institute. Another participant discussed being enrolled in a brick-and-mortar counseling program, but eventually opted to complete the program online through Zoom with synchronous experiences outside the brick-and-mortar classroom. Additionally, given the nature of the study, some participants opted not to disclose the name of their university therefore I couldn't verify that the university was CACREP-accredited.

One limitation of this study lies in the nature of the research question, which sought to explore the lived experiences of students impacted by CESs' unprofessional

behaviors. This inquiry prompted emotionally sensitive responses, as evident through participants' verbal and non-verbal cues during interviews. Many expressed anxiety, one participant became tearful, and another chose to leave their camera off. The emotional intensity of these experiences may have influenced responses, potentially leading to bias, either through withholding information due to fear of identification or concern for the CES or institution (see Bradburn et al., 2004). Some participants specifically noted not wanting the CES to "lose their job" or face termination. This concern was heightened for participants in smaller programs or geographic areas, where they feared being identified and facing further distress as they worked toward licensure.

Another limitation was the broad definition of "unprofessional behavior" used in the study. Without a specific definition, participants provided their own interpretations of unprofessionalism, which contributed to a wide range of perspectives. Although this lack of specificity allowed for a rich exploration of students' perceptions, it introduces variability in how unprofessional behavior was understood and reported. The study referenced "professionalism" as defined by VanZandt (1990) but did not concretely define unprofessional behavior, allowing for subjective responses that can complicate interpretation.

Lastly, the study's small sample size and the restriction to participants from brick-and-mortar universities are limitations. The sample of seven participants met the minimum for a descriptive phenomenological study (see Giorgi, 2009) and achieved saturation. However, given the vast number of students enrolled in the 976 CACREP-accredited counseling programs in the U.S. (CACREP, 2024), the sample is relatively

small. Furthermore, the exclusion of online students may have limited the study's scope, as their experiences could differ from those of brick-and-mortar students. While the findings are transferable, results from online students might offer additional insights.

Recommendations

This descriptive phenomenological study helps inform future research. Researchers Brown-Rice and Furr discussed the need for future research on master's-level counseling students and that of a qualitative nature (2015, 2019). Given that this population has never been studied before on this topic, this research study provides the inductive groundwork for further studies. Previous research has provided data on the issue of CESs behaving unprofessionally and affecting individuals within counseling programs (see Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). This study provided further insightful data about the kinds of unprofessional behaviors that are occurring the most, which are the most impactful, and the variety of ways in which students are impacted. My recommendations for future research are for further descriptive phenomenological and quantitative studies.

Recommendations for future research on phenomenological studies could render more data if researched on those attending online universities. Although online universities may have similar instruction, the majority of ways in which a student is to interact with their CES will differ with an online university. For example, a majority of the participants detailed experiences of their CES that they witnessed such as nonverbal and verbal displays of emotion, discrimination, change in disposition, and boundary crossing. Although these could be experienced in an online university setting, some of the

other mentioned behaviors may be more prevalent than online universities or be more noticeable such as dishonesty, lack of teaching instruction and competency with material, biased grading, excessive cancellations or missing class, discrimination, and students feeling caught off guard with no prior interventions or a lack of information provided on their intervention. Additionally, there could be differences with how participants respond to these kinds of experiences in an online program. Given that most participants reported reaching out to other CESs, the department chair, or a student support person, students in an online program may have less direct contact with their CESs, changing how they respond.

Given that this is the first time this area has been explored, there could be a benefit to have further phenomenological research on the specific areas of unprofessionalism mentioned by the participants such as specific boundary crossing, ethical issues, or having a less than competent instructor as the effects may be different on the participants and specific to the kind of experience they had. Such as, several participants' reported feeling discriminated against due to their race and sexual orientation. In such, those experiences produced a different affect than a participant whose experiences were with a less than competent and knowledgeable CES.

Additionally, there is a recommendation for further exploration into the effects of CES unprofessionalism as academic trauma. The effects of trauma include cognitive, emotional, and/or physical responses that can cause both short-term and long-term consequences (APA, 2022). Some participants' experiences may be consistent with psychological trauma reactions such as long-lasting distress and impairment in relational

and social domains of life, avoidance of people and stimuli, negative cognitions of self and others, and a changed view of one's interpersonal and intrapersonal world (Hood & Copeland, 2024). Hogg et al. (2023) described psychological trauma as, "a person experiencing events or circumstances which are physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening, and which have lasting adverse effects on their functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" (p. 397).

Participants described social withdrawal and feeling detached from others which are common consequences of psychological trauma exposure and often furthers feelings of isolation and distress (Hood & Copeland, 2024; Jones & Cureton, 2014). Additionally, several participants described their experiences as traumatic such as seen here by Theo who stated, "It's like a minor lower T trauma in a way. It's an adverse interpersonal experience" and Kelly who described multiple experiences with CESs' as "traumatic." Given this information, there is importance in further exploring the lasting effects of experiences as academic adversity or trauma.

Lastly, future research could be beneficial explored through a quantitative lens once future qualitative work is completed. This future research through a quantitative lens could provide data on a larger population that may enhance the transferability of the results

Implications for Positive Social Change

The findings from this study provide insight into this current phenomenon of how counseling students are being impacted by CESs' unprofessional behaviors. This data is not only important for the population of counseling students studied, but also to CES, and

counseling programs. The purpose of this study was to explore how counseling students are affected by their CES's unprofessionalism. This study also provides future social change implications to influence gatekeeping procedures for CESs' engaging in unprofessional behaviors which could prevent students from being affected by informing new policies. However, there are several other implications to be noted.

The data from this study could provide insight and information for CES on the importance of evaluating and engaging in ongoing self-reflection. This information could influence CES and counseling programs to enhance their evaluation models or practices and encourage department chairs to be evaluating and checking in on the wellbeing of both the students and the CES. The data from this study provided information not only on how students are being negatively impacted by their CES behaving unprofessionally, but also on the awareness that there are current CES's that are emotionally struggling themselves and hence impacting their students by not taking care of and addressing their own mental health issues.

Additional social change implications for the field of counseling such as a call for a change in the ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) to implement a section on CESs' dispositions. As discussed in the data, one type of experience that participants mentioned as impacting them was a sudden change in CES disposition and the CES disposition being modeled as the opposite of what is expected by the students. The ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) specifically discussed that CESs are to be evaluating student's dispositions, but make no mention of what dispositions CESs should be upholding themselves. This places an imbalance of how CESs should be role modeling behaviors of

professionalism and is left up to interpretation. Additionally, as mentioned the ACA *Code of Ethics* (2014) specifically states that CESs are role models of professional behavior but does not provide a definition of professionalism. Another implication for positive social change, and a purpose of the study, is in the need for evaluation of CESs in CACREP standards. CACREP (2024), although with a recent update, still makes no mention of the need for continued CES evaluation. The only mention of evaluation by CACREP, is in the students, at the end of the semester which is noted in current literature as students believing that gatekeeping their CES is not their responsibility (see Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016, Furr & Brown-Rice, 2019). Additionally, CACREP makes note in their standards under Section 1: The Learning Environment, Counselor Education Program, "The counselor education program intentionally creates and effectively maintains an inclusive and equitable learning community that respects individual differences" (p. 4). Although CACREP standards do not explicitly state that CESs in the program must align with this, the meaning is embedded in the mention of "The counselor education program". This standard is clearly being violated in all of the institutions attended by the participants.

A change to CACREP standards in noting the need for professionalism among CESs is necessary and the data provides further information on why this is, as several participants' discussed multiple experiences with their counseling program and several participants' noted these experiences with the program chair and the end of semester feedback. Participants did note on advocating for themselves in the end of semester feedback, but one discussed that the CESs in their program discouraged students from leaving negative feedback and reported to monitor who the author of the feedback is,

leaving the participant feeling uncomfortable to be honest. If CACREP provided their own evaluative procedures that universities were required to follow in-order to keep accreditation, this could eliminate bias in evaluating CESs and help correct behavior before it negatively impacts students.

Conclusion

Counseling students are currently being harmed and misguided by their CESs (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015, 2019; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). CESs have a heavy responsibility of acting as professional role-models for the counseling profession and upholding ethical and moral standards if they are to be evaluating those seeking to enter the profession (ACA, 2014; Furr & Brown-Rice, 2016). Being a CES goes beyond earning a doctoral degree and teaching graduate-level counseling courses. It also goes beyond acting as a gatekeeper to the profession. This study provides significant and impactful data for all CESs on the importance that their behaviors have on their students. Students are not just learning from what their CESs are saying, they are observing and modeling their behaviors. Participants in this study detailed their lived experiences with CESs that caused significant and ongoing harm resulting in current struggle to date. Additionally, as discussed by the participants, these experiences were significant due to being exhibited by counselors who are regarded as possessing strong ethical and interpersonal skills.

Participants detailed experiences with CESs' using power assertion and overtly modeling unprofessional behaviors highlight the negative impact of this phenomenon. Counseling students are often experiencing immense stress due to the academic workload

and newly added responsibilities of graduate school (Thomas et al., 2020). This study brings awareness to this current issue of counseling students being negatively impacted by CESs' unprofessionalism leaving them feeling stressed, overwhelmed, and underprepared to enter the profession. The awareness and understanding of this current and ongoing problem with CESs' behaving unprofessionally raises alarms within the counseling profession. CESs are at the top of the counseling profession hierarchy with each counseling student passing through the strenuous, stressful, and often arduous academic, clinical, and dispositional evaluations in order to become licensed professional counselors. When CESs, who are entrusted with modeling professionalism and setting ethical standards, engage in unprofessional behaviors that harm their students without facing evaluation or consequences, it jeopardizes the future integrity of the counseling profession.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study about the effects that counselor educators' unprofessional behaviors have on their students. This form is part of a process' called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

Only participants meeting the below criteria are invited to participate in this study. This study seeks 6-10 volunteers who are:

- Counseling students currently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited, brick-and-mortar, graduate counseling program in the United States OR have just graduated within the last 3 months.
- Have had at least one experience with a counselor educator displaying unprofessional behavior.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Kristin Dolph, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know this researcher as an educator, but this study is separate from that role.

Study Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand the effects that counselor educators displaying unprofessional behavior(s) have on their students.

Procedures: This study will involve you completing the following steps:

- Take part in an individual, audio-recorded, 60-minute interview in an either face-to-face or videocall platform. (60 minutes)
- Review a typed summary of the transcript of the interview (10 minutes)

Here are some sample questions:

1. Tell me about an experience that you have had with one of your counseling faculty that you perceived as behaving unprofessionally?
2. While having this experience, what did you do with this? How did you respond?

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer. Everyone involved will respect your decision to join or not. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. Please note that not all volunteers will be contacted to take part.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study: Being in this study could involve some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life such as sharing sensitive information. With the protections in place, this study would pose minimal risk to your wellbeing. Please see the resource listed below if needed:

- The National Suicide Hotline: Phone or Text "988"

This study offers no direct benefits to individual volunteers. The aim of this study is to benefit society by improving the future ethical codes related to counselor educators, future CACREP standards related to counselor educators' formal evaluations, and future protocols for students to follow if they feel that they are being negatively impacted by an

educator. Once the analysis is complete, the researcher will share a summary of the overall results by email.

Payment: None.

Privacy: The researcher is required to protect your privacy. Your identity will be kept confidential, within the limits of the law. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. If the researcher were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, the dataset would contain no identifiers so this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Data will be kept secure by a password protected file that also requires fingerprint access. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Limits to Privacy: The researcher for this study is a mandated reported, as such there are limits to confidentiality including any incidents of abuse or neglect of minors, elderly individuals, or disabled individuals to the appropriate authorities.

Contacts and Questions: You can ask questions of the researcher by email at Kristin.dolph@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant or any negative parts of the study, you can call Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study 04-17-24-1094125. It expires on April 16, 2025.

You might wish to retain this consent form for your records. You may ask the researcher or Walden University for a copy at any time using the contact info above.

Obtaining Your Consent: If you feel you understand the study and wish to volunteer, please indicate your consent by emailing this researcher at Kristin.dolph@waldenu.edu with the typed words “I Consent”.

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about an experience that you have had with one of your counseling faculty that you perceived as behaving unprofessionally?
2. While having this experience, what did you do with this? How did you respond?
3. Did this experience affect you academically? If so, how?
4. Did this experience affect you personally or interpersonally? If yes, can you describe how?
5. Did this experience affect you professionally? If so, can you describe how and to what extent?
6. Since having this experience, how has this affected your perception of the counseling profession?
7. Since having this experience, how has this affected your perception of counseling faculty?