2019

Professional Identity Development in Blended Clinical Psychology Doctoral Students

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The Office of the Provost

Walden University
2019

Abstract

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MS, Radford University, 2012

BS, Radford University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Walden University

Novenber 2019

Abstract

As online graduate programs gain popularity, it has become more important to understand how students enrolled in these programs develop their professional identities. Researchers have demonstrated that there are both benefits and drawbacks to participation in blended learning programs (which incorporate in person and online instruction). It is not known how students enrolled in blended clinical psychology PhD programs experience the in-person portion of these programs and what their experiences mean for their professional identity development. This study examined the perceived impact of one part of an online clinical psychology doctoral program, the in-person classroom experiences, on the professional identity of clinical psychology trainees. Drawing from theories such as actor network theory and transactional distance theory, the current study explored how interactions between students and professors shaped professional identity. The study was qualitative phenomenological, using NVivo software to organize interview data from participants enrolled in blended doctoral programs. There were 6 participants total. A total of 8 themes were found in the data. These themes included fear, expertise, improved understanding, adjusting, growth, change, dissatisfaction, and finding support. Students valued the time spent with professors and perceived themselves to have grown after participating in in-person intensives. The themes found gleaned insight into the professional identity development of students enrolled in blended clinical psychology doctoral programs. This study has implications for how training programs for those in blended programs can be improved, thus improving the quality of patient care.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother. You will always be my biggest source of inspiration and the person I admire most. I miss you and I live every day to make you proud.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank my sister and my dad for their ongoing support throughout this process. Thank you to my committee members Dr. Susan Rarick and Dr. Lisa Scharff. They were always available to me and provided me with guidance, feedback, and reassurance. My internship supervisor, Dr. Bory, for helping me to instill confidence in my writing abilities. Thank you to Dr. Megan Gramm, my second coder, for all her help in this process. Dr. Gramm, you have been an incredible support to me and I cannot thank you enough. Thank you to my Division 12 mentor, Dr. Visser for his help in conceptualizing this idea and encouragement throughout this process. Finally, thank you to my wonderful boyfriend and best friend, Joey. I would not have made it this far without your unconditional support and ability to make me laugh.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In this study, I sought to examine professional identity development in doctoral level clinical psychology trainees who are enrolled in blended programs. The concept of identity in itself is complex. Burke (2004) stated that "identities are the meanings that individuals hold for themselves" (p. 5). Professional identity can be described as an intersection between one's personal characteristics and the vocational instruction he or she receives (Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss, 2010). One's professional identity is observed and evaluated by others in the workplace who react to the individual based upon his or her identity (Gibson et al., 2010).

There are multiple aspects of professional identity and development in psychology trainees. Cultural issues and sociological aspects of identity are invaluable to the development of professional identity (Watts, 1987). Additionally, the availability of the Internet across previously unreachable, rural areas has also changed the way society learns.

There has been an increase in the number of students pursing higher education online. According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2018) 29.8% of all students are enrolled in online courses at colleges and universities. With an increase in the use of technology in education, it is important to know how online course delivery might impact the professional psychology training process. In this study, I explored how doctoral psychology students who are enrolled in

programs with a combination of in-person and online education perceived the development of their professional identity.

Technology has changed the manner in which individuals learn and has the potential to improve success in the classroom (United States Department of Education, n.d.). Blended learning uses technology in such a way that individuals are able to access coursework on their own time, as opposed to adhering to a classroom schedule (United States Department of Education, n.d.). With this type of educational environment, it is possible to decrease classroom expenses and increase the pace at which students acquire information (United States Department of Education, n.d.). Blended coursework is presented using a combination of online and in-person instruction (Smith & Brame, 2018). One requirement of a blended program is a face-to-face intensive, also called Academic Year-in-Residence. Walden University (2018c) defined this as a period where students receive face-to-face instruction in areas such as assessment, ethics, multicultural awareness, and interventions. During this time, students use exercises such as role-play, and they are able to receive feedback from faculty members, which allows them to gain the skills necessary to succeed in the field of clinical psychology (Walden University, 2018c).

The blended program experience allows students to meet in-person with instructors and members of their cohort in order to learn about fundamentals in the field of psychology such as ethics and multicultural competence (Walden University, 2018c). Many professionals now have degrees from blended programs. However, it is unknown how this type of education is impacting their professional identity development. Clinical

psychologists who were educated in traditional brick-and-mortar programs likely had a different experience than blended online students because of the constant face-to-face access to faculty and their cohort. The question of how blended students online incorporate experiences such as isolation, self-motivation, and perceived competence from other professionals was explored in this study.

This study was intended to better understand how the professional identity of a clinical psychologist is developed in online blended programs. Although other fields have addressed the development of professional identity, there appears to be a lack of research in the field of clinical psychology or counseling fields in general. There is a specific gap of research concerning those educated in blended programs. For example, Brott and Myers (1999) observed a lack of research dedicated to professional identity development in school counselors. In addition, Mellin, Hunt, and Nichols (2011) noted a lack of research on professional identity in the field of professional counseling. To date, there does not appear to be any research addressing the development of professional identity in clinical psychology students being educated in a blended program.

Background

Blended programs offer a flexible means of providing education to students who want to work in their respective fields while adding to their knowledge base and professional skills. A review of the literature has indicated that some online learning formats can be as competent in conveying information to students as traditional in-person learning environments (Tsugihashi et al., 2013). However, some literature addressing some blended programs have revealed weaknesses. Goldberg, Clement, and Cotter

(2011) found that students in a blended program had less knowledge of statistics, and resources in these courses needed improvement Additionally, students wanted an increase in faculty availability as well as an increase in the availability and variety of classroom resources, such as prerecorded lectures (Goldberg et al., 2011). There is a need for examination of all aspects of blended learning programs in order to improve the understanding of such programs and enhance their availability and effectiveness. Specifically, blended programs incorporate an in-person component into the overall education and competencies. This process can occur at various stages in a doctoral program (Fielding Graduate University, 2019). Though residencies occur at various times throughout graduate training, students are not necessarily continuously working with their cohorts for extended periods of time (Fielding Graduate University, 2019; Saybrook University, 2016). This differs from students in traditional brick and mortar programs. Traditional students begin courses with their cohort and faculty and remain together throughout the entire process. In this study, I examined how the in-person components of blended programs impact overall professional identity.

A review of the literature has shown that there are aspects of blended learning programs that can be improved, which in turn could likely positively contribute to students' professional identity development (Dollarhide, Gibson, & Moss. 2013; Ellis, Pardo, & Han 2016; Sells, Tan, Brogan, Dahlen, & Stupart, 2012). For example, the use of online discussion boards allows students to explore various topics, and get input from other students. Additionally, they observe how other students interact with one another, and learn how others interact with the professor. Adverse topics are explored within the

safety and boundaries of an online learning environment. For example, a topic of discussion might be sexual harassment in the workplace, and students can explore this without fear of negative consequences at their workplace or internship. Furthermore, students have the guidance and feedback of the professor who may talk about his or her experiences. For the purposes of this study, I wanted to capture how students perceived in-person discussions and feedback from professors. I aimed to discover what meaning these held for the students and how they contributed to professional identity development. Interactions with others are important in professional identity development.

In the current study, I examined how those in blended programs conceptualized their roles as developing psychologists in training, and how this role changed across the training experience. It is important to know how students change throughout training because it is the training itself that allows for the acquisition of more skills and an increase in confidence to practice (McElhinney, 2008). Professional identity provides the base by which students perfect their craft and are able to offer insight to other trainees as well as provide quality care to their patients.

There is a gap in the literature regarding how clinical psychology doctoral students develop professionally in online training and what will help to improve the training process. McElhinney (2008) interviewed 17 clinical psychology trainees at the University of Edinburgh in a grounded theory study and reported that they tended to experience feelings of defeat as training progressed, leading to poor judgment regarding how much responsibility to undertake, and resulting in an inability to appropriately prepare for therapy sessions. Factors that helped to mitigate stress in this study included

regular individual and group supervision (McElhinney, 2008). Clinical psychology doctoral students have an opportunity during their training to learn about the ethics, skills, and guidelines that are an integral part of professional psychology. As they progress through their programs, students are shaped by a variety of factors, including interactions with both other students and teachers. If psychologists themselves are to have skills in supervision, assessment, and therapy, it is important to understand how training contributes to the building of these skills and its impact on the students themselves (McElhinney, 2008).

Problem Statement

Although it is not certain how professional identity is formed during training, it begins as students move through their graduate programs (McElhinney, 2008; Perry, 2012; Watts, 1987). In blended clinical psychology programs, there is less known about how professional identity is shaped, as opposed to what is known regarding professional identity of those enrolled in traditional brick and mortar programs. There is a lack of research that addresses how trainees can grow into more competent professionals and how training can shape this growth (McKenzie, Cossar, Fawns, & Murray, 2013). The aim of this study was to investigate how clinical psychology trainees experience the blended portion of their doctoral studies. The purpose was to determine how those in blended clinical psychology doctoral programs use the in-person component of training to grow into developing psychologists.

Literature from the medical field, specifically with faculty from teaching hospitals, has revealed that although professional identity stems from a combination of

one's personal ideas and experiences as well as events that have occurred in one's professional life, the stepwise process that occurs as one develops a professional identity is not known (Branch & Frankel, 2016). One model of professional development refers to the level of training an individual has, such as being a third-year graduate student, but does not specifically address what one's professional identity is (Woodward, 2014). This model is called professional identity formation and states that professional identity is comprised of attitudes that are acquired through engagement in professional practice (Woodward, 2014). The theory assumes that one's identity changes as he or she progresses through training (Woodward, 2014).

Theories of identity development in mental health often fail to address problematic behaviors that trainees engage in (Woodward, 2014). Some trainees continue to engage in behaviors that professional psychologists see as negative (McKenzie et al., 2013). These behaviors included not showing up to class, talking during class, as well as not engaging in work that must be completed outside of class (McKenzie et al., 2013). If it is understood how trainees view their roles as psychologists, as well as what experiences may negatively influence their conceptualization of how a psychologist behaves, then it is possible to improve upon the influences students are exposed to in the learning process (McKenzie et al., 2013).

A literature review addressing mental health professions such as clinical psychology and family therapy has revealed that there are varying notions regarding identity development. One such notion is reflective practice, which emphasizes how one should be cognizant of the attitudes and behaviors he or she exhibits in the context of

therapy (Lavender, 2003; Schon, 1987). Another notion from family therapy emphasizes how to be mindful of one's behavior in therapy and this, in turn, can help individuals to experience interpersonal growth (Aponte, 1992, 1994). The concept of identity appears to be difficult to define and measure given the complexity of different human characteristics and professions. It is not necessarily a stage process but rather a continuous building and meshing of layers.

It is imperative to understand how clinical psychology trainees function and benefit from training. It is also important to understand how training may be detrimental to students' well-being, and how this might be changed. The aim of this study was to provide a greater understanding of the identity development process for clinical psychology graduate students in blended programs. The problem is that it is not known how the process and distance-oriented nature of blended programs impacts the professional identity of clinical psychology doctoral students. More specifically, it is not known how the temporary face-to-face instruction in blended programs helps shape professional identity.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative cross-sectional phenomenological research was to explore if and how students enrolled in blended clinical psychology doctoral programs perceive intensive, in-person learning experiences as shaping their professional identity at different times in an academic year (see Bollinger & Halupa, 2012). In the programs that were the focus of this study, students attend a portion of their classes in person, where they are able to interact with peers and professors at various points in the completion of

their graduate coursework. The focus of this in-person training is to establish skills in psychological evaluation, ethical and clinical decision making, as well as to learn how to individualize the therapeutic approach based upon aspects of a client's background, while incorporating scientifically supported techniques into therapy.

Students were interviewed at various points in their progression through face-to-face intensives as a means of assessing how their professional identity changes as they progress in their programs (see McElhinney, 2008; Perry, 2012). By using qualitative interview data to assess how students develop their professional identity, I explored how students believe the classroom environment impacts the development of their identification as psychologists. By gathering qualitative information from students about their recollective experiences about face-to-face learning intensives, I wanted to capture how students perceive their growth as professionals (see Bollinger & Halupa, 2012; Dollarhide et al., 2013; McElhinney, 2008; Perry, 2012).

Research Questions

Research Question (RQ)1: Are there differences in the description of individuals who completed their first intensive and individuals who have completed multiple intensives?

As a subquestion, how do students describe the impact of an intensive, in-person learning experience on professional identity development in the context of a blended clinical psychology doctoral program?

RQ2: What thematic differences exist in the descriptions of individuals who completed their second-to-last intensive as compared to those who have completed their final intensive?

RQ3: At the conclusion of the last intensive, how do students describe the experience of being able to interact with cohort members and professors in person, as opposed to interacting solely online?

RQ4: At the conclusion of the last intensive, how do students attending a blended clinical psychology doctoral program view the professional duties and the mission of a psychologist?

Theoretical Framework

Transactional distance theory was used as a guide for this study (see So & Brush, 2008). This theory proposes that a student, instructor, and a means to convey information between the two parties comprises what is called transactional distance (So & Brush, 2008). Transactional distance theory states that students conceptualize lapses in correspondence and dialogue with professors as a function of the distance between the two parties (So & Brush, 2008). Transactional distance theory emphasizes both the interactions that take place between students and professors and how students manage their own learning experiences, both of which shape how individuals develop within their profession (Dollarhide et al., 2013; Kang & Gyorke, 2008; So & Brush, 2008). In terms of this study, transactional distance theory can describe how students must cultivate part of their professional identity despite a lack of daily face-to-face interactions with professors. Although they only have a finite amount of time face-to-face with students

and teachers, they must use this time to seek out information about the field of clinical psychology. It is during this time that they have the opportunity to seek out contacts that can help further their growth and deepen their understanding of what it means to be a developing clinical psychologist.

Additionally, actor network theory (Simpson & Sommer, 2016) can help describe how those in nontraditional learning environments navigate the demands of the classroom while working with others. This theory supports the notion that nontraditional programs and how students manage social and scholarly settings can each be examined from a scientific perspective (Simpson & Sommer, 2016). To this end, both social and scholarly environments can be viewed as separate networks that can intersect with one another. Actor network theory also describes the nature of how those in specific fields of employment develop relationships with others in order to gain authority (Vicsek, Kiraly, & Konya, 2016). More specifically, in the context of blended graduate programs, a clinical psychology student might develop a working relationship with a professor in the hopes of finding a mentor or a dissertation chair. For students who only meet with professors a finite amount of times during face-to-face intensives, it is important to develop substantive relationships and for the student to present with potential for growth in the field of clinical psychology. These relationships can be composed not only of other individuals but also of aspects of professional life, for example, the dynamics between a student and the demands of the virtual classroom (Simpson & Sommer, 2016; Vicsek et al., 2016). For the purposes of this study, this theory helped me to formulate some of my

interview questions, such as “How did you perceive your interactions with other students and professors at your face-to-face residencies?”

Actor network theory and transactional distance theory help to explain the importance of various interactions with others. They also help to explain how one navigates multiple spheres of a given issue, such as online classroom discussions and feedback from professors as well as the impact of both student and teacher interaction in regards to how one learns and grows within a profession (Simpson & Sommer, 2016; Vicsek et al., 2016). Additionally, the importance of change in an individual’s development over time that is reflected in the research questions is emphasized in the nature of how transactional distance can change as time passes as well as how one gains autonomy throughout the course of various relationships in actor network theory (Simpson & Sommer, 2016; Vicsek et al., 2016). These theories help to explain how one grows over time and how various aspects of one’s life contribute to this growth. Online learners manage coursework and how students grow by completing online education requirements as well by interacting with other cohort members (Kang & Gyorke, 2008; Simpson & Sommer, 2016; So & Brush, 2008).

Social learning theory is related to the idea that individuals learn behavior in part from others, as opposed to behaving solely based on unobservable emotional factors (Bandura, 1969; Leonard & Blane, 1999). This theory was not used as a framework for this study, as I focused on an individual’s own growth experience as opposed to what he or she learns from observing others. However, it should be noted that this does not discount the notion that students do indeed learn from others, which practitioners and

instructors would do well to be mindful of, in order to promote appropriate professional behaviors in an educational setting (McKenzie et al., 2013).

Nature of the Study

In this study, I used a qualitative, phenomenological approach (see Woodward, Keville, & Conlan, 2015). A purposive sampling technique was employed with students from two different blended clinical psychology doctoral programs who had completed at least one in-person session as part of the requirement of a blended learning program (see Woodward et al., 2015). Qualitative interview data were collected from participants to determine how professional identity develops across. The information obtained from the interviews helped to generate an understanding of how these individuals develop a sense of professional identity during this phase of training (see Goodyear et al., 2016; Prosek & Hurt, 2014). I interviewed students, and themes in their interviews were identified by me. Differences in these themes were also examined by me.

Definitions

Blended learning environment: A type of learning environment that incorporates online learning modalities, such as live seminars, coursework that students complete at their own pace, as well as in-person classroom activities (Cheung & Hew, 2011; Singh, 2003).

Professional identity: This describes how one integrates philosophies of a vocation into his or her personality (Wilson, Liddell, Hirschy, & Pasquesi, 2016). In psychology, this concept is viewed as a person's awareness of what duties are expected in the profession, as well as an understanding that he or she will act with integrity and

uphold the tenants of the profession that promote client welfare (American Psychological Association, 2017; Bruss & Kopala, 1993).

Assumptions

The major assumption of this study was that the participants were enrolled in clinical psychology doctoral programs that took place in a blended format. I assumed that they had participated in at least one in-person learning intensive. Another assumption was that participants were willing and able to participate in the interview. Finally, I assumed that participants were truthful in the interview and provided authentic answers to questions.

Scope and Delimitations

The data gathered in this study addressed how doctoral psychology students perceived themselves as changing as they progressed through in-person residencies. There are aspects of blended programs that could be improved upon, which was the rationale for examining these types of programs in this study, as opposed to online or brick and mortar universities (see Ellis et al., 2016; Sells et al., 2012). Masters level clinical psychology students were not used in this study, as many states do not allow these students to become licensed at the master's level. Therefore, developing a professional identity as a practitioner of psychology would not have been applicable. The information gathered from participant interviews was restricted to the participants themselves and the programs those participants were enrolled in. Although the sample was limited, the findings from this research can be expanded upon in other projects.

Other participants from different schools who may participate in future research projects may offer additional information and perspectives.

Limitations

The biggest limitation of this study was that only a small number of individuals enrolled in certain blended clinical psychology programs was used in the sample. Additionally, only two schools allowed for data collection, thus eliminating possible data sources. Given that the research was qualitative, there was also a decreased likelihood that the interview questions could be used in interviews with students from other graduate student populations, including those obtaining degrees in other fields of mental healthcare (see Atieno, 2009). The research was completed by a Walden University student, which presents an issue of bias, because I am also a student who is enrolled in a blended clinical psychology doctoral program. However, it was determined that Walden University students would not be used as a part of the sample, as a means of decreasing the bias from me.

Another assumption was that there may be interpretations regarding the interview data and the nuances that occur in verbal communication (see Atieno, 2009). If I misconstrued the interview data through my own interpretation, results could be conveyed that are not actually representative of the development process or of the personal experiences of the trainees. One way of addressing this bias was to craft interview questions based upon previous research with clinical psychology trainees (see Chenail, 2011). Although limitations do exist, a qualitative approach was one that was most well-suited for this study. This approach allowed for an examination of the

experience of clinical psychology doctoral trainees during graduate training face-to-face intensives.

Significance

The study provided information about the lived experiences of students enrolled in clinical psychology doctoral programs that use a blended framework to deliver course material. This has the potential to increase our knowledge of how blended graduate programs may be improved. The study provided insight into how trainees develop their own professional identities as developing psychologists. The results from this study have importance with regard to how individuals will function as they transition from students to professional psychologists (Dollarhide et al., 2013; Klonoff, 2016; So & Brush, 2008). Ultimately, students should be able to develop an understanding of how to behave professionally in order to provide quality care to clients, and they should have instructors and mentors who behave in appropriately professional ways to look to for guidance (McKenzie et al., 2013).

In 2016, there were over 44 million people in the United States with a diagnosable mental illness (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2017). Thus, it is vital to understand how various educational formats impact learning and professional identity, and in what ways these formats can be improved upon, in order to increase the availability and quality of care provided to clients (Goldberg et al., 2011; National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.). Service delivery to clients could be improved by practitioners who are conscientious about their professional behavior and who students look to as resources (Goldberg et al.,

2011; McKenzie et al., 2013; National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.). This study helped further the understanding of what students need from their professors in residency in order to feel more confident in the care they provide to clients.

The results from this study provided information that could be used for program development, which in turn may aid in the development of student professional identity. Those enrolled in blended programs enjoy the in-person experiences that allow for interactions with other students of varying cultural backgrounds (Sells et al., 2012). However, researchers have suggested that there are components of blended learning programs that can be improved upon in order to increase positive student experience and enhance student interaction, which contribute to professional development (Dollarhide et al., 2013; Ellis et al., 2016).

Results from this study may help students understand the importance of the intensives in the development of their identity as a clinical psychology trainee. The results demonstrate additional needs from professors and school administrators to maximize the effectiveness of in-person meetings for the students. By helping students understand more about what their roles are as psychologists and how they grow into this role, it is my hope that these individuals will feel more capable as they move through practicum and internship, as well as when they become licensed. If there are psychologists who feel confident and capable, they can be more effective in their work with patients. By developing an understanding of what a psychologist does and how training helps inform this, university officials can help tailor blended programs that meet the needs of the field of mental health.

By examining the process of course delivery in blended doctoral programs and how students are influenced by their interactions with professors and with one another, there is hope for improved mental health care as these students grow into professionals. Discovering more about how students perceive the learning process as well as what their role is as a psychologist, it is possible to influence professional behavior and client care.

Summary

Professional identity development in the context of blended clinical psychology programs is an important area of study. It allows for the training process to be examined through a critical and evaluative lens. The research allowed for a better understanding of the course of the identity development process and the importance this has on mentorship, professional and ethical duties and considerations, as well as client care. By improving upon the understanding of how psychology trainees develop into professionals, the training process used in blended doctoral clinical psychology programs can also be improved. The findings from this research may also help agencies that provide credentialing to universities, such as the American Psychological Association, better understand blended programs. This improved understanding could lead to changes in licensing requirements for blended programs. In Chapter 2, I focus on the literature surrounding the topics only briefly reviewed here, including professional identity, blended learning programs, transactional distance theory, and actor network theory. This chapter addresses what is already known and what is yet to be learned regarding professional identity development.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

There is a substantial number of individuals who are currently employed in the field of healthcare who wish to obtain doctoral degrees in psychology in order to expand their capabilities in their chosen profession (Goldberg et al., 2011). Online education provides a good option for such professionals, as it is a means of furthering one's education while continuing current employment (Goldberg et al., 2011). As delivery of online coursework continues to expand, so too does the importance of knowing how students perceive their learning environment and what improvements can be made to the curriculum (Dollarhide et al., 2013; Ellis et al., 2016; National Center for Statistics, 2015; Sells et al., 2012). This, in turn, provides the opportunity to learn more about how students interact with teachers and other students and how these interactions help trainees develop a professional identity (Ellis et al., 2016; Goldberg et al., 2011; Hartman, Fergus, & Reid, 2016; McElhinney, 2008; Rudestam, 2004; So & Brush, 2008; Woodward et al., 2015).

There is still a great deal to understand regarding how doctoral-level blended learning programs in various fields of psychology should be structured and how these programs impact students (Henriksen, Mishra, Greenhow, Cain, & Roseth, 2014; McElhinney, 2008). Researchers have indicated that because of the ambiguity surrounding how psychologists identify themselves and their role, service delivery to clients and the ability to deliver appropriate care is impacted (Hartman et al., 2016). However, it is not known how those in blended doctoral clinical psychology programs

conceptualize their professional identity and what this may mean for client care. I aimed to explore professional identity development in students enrolled in clinical psychology doctoral students. Specifically, I interviewed those who are enrolled in clinical psychology doctoral programs that deliver coursework in a blended format. For the purposes of this study, the in-person experiences that are a part of the blended format are referred to as face-to-face intensives.

Although there are numerous pieces to the blended programs, the focus of the current study was on how students develop their professional identity. The current study addressed how those in blended clinical psychology doctoral programs perceive their experience in face-to-face intensive, in person learning experiences. In this chapter, I define the differences between blended programs, brick and mortar programs, and online graduate programs. Additionally, the role of clinical psychology trainees is reviewed, as well as the concept of intensive learning experiences and professional identity of psychologists. This research was important because it allows an understanding of how a lack of face-to-face time with instructors, as compared to those who are enrolled in brick and mortar programs, contributes to how one develops as a clinical psychologist. This study provided data on how students used these intensives to get what they needed to enhance their identity development.

A review of the current literature suggested that clinical psychology trainees and licensed clinical psychologists differ in what they deem appropriate behavior in clinical work (McKenzie et al., 2013). In this study, I explored the experiences of clinical psychology students enrolled in blended programs. Through the interview process, I

explored how trainees perceive their professional identity changing as a result of the face-to-face intensives they participate in. These face-to-face intensives offer a more diversified experience than online and brick-and-mortar programs alone. The meaning that students give to the elements of blended clinical psychology doctoral programs needs to be explored in order to determine how these elements can combat the feelings of isolation and uncertainty that clinical psychology students may have throughout their doctoral studies. I also explored how those feelings contribute to professional identity. In this chapter, I discuss how information was gathered using the Walden library as well as the theoretical foundations used in the study. Additionally, literature associated with professional identity, blended learning programs, and learning experiences is discussed.

Content and Search Strategy

The literature review for this study was conducted using Walden University's online library and by accessing articles from databases including PsychINFO and PsychARTICLES. Search entries included phrases such as *professional identity, clinical psychology, blended learning, online learning, professional development,* and *psychology trainees*. Additionally, terms such as *actor network theory,* and *transactional distance theory* were also used as search terms. In reviewing the literature, the focus was on how trainees are able to develop in blended clinical psychology doctoral programs.

The search focused on differences in blended, online, and brick and mortar clinical psychology doctoral programs and how students from these programs are similar and different from one another in terms of their experiences in school and their understanding of the role of what a clinical psychologist does. Qualitative, quantitative,

and mixed methods studies were reviewed to gather comprehensive information about the nature of blended clinical psychology doctoral programs and the experiences of students enrolled in such programs. In order to appropriately assess the gap in the understanding of how blended clinical psychology doctoral programs can contribute to professional identity development as a clinical psychologist, an overview of these programs and theories pertaining to the intersection between technology and socialization is provided.

Theoretical Foundations

Actor Network Theory

Actor network theory states that the potential that all beings, both living and nonliving, are governed by the connections they have to other entities, again both living and nonliving, such as the relationship between humans and the stock market (Callon, 1999; Skagius & Munger, 2016). In the case of the current study, these entities included professors and blended learning environment itself. The connections are known as networks (Skagius & Mungar, 2016, p. 275). The greater the number of connections, the more likely an entity is to have a substantial amount of power (Skagius & Mungar, 2016). This theory encourages consideration of the interaction among human and nonhuman articles, one of these entities being technology (Carter & Dyson, 2015). The theory has vast applicability in numerous fields of study, especially when considering how much technology plays a role in numerous aspects of life.

The aforementioned theory can be monumental in the understanding of how to navigate the blended learning environment. By understanding how both other individuals and learning environments help clinical trainees develop their professional identity, what

specific factors contribute to this and in what ways they do so can be understood. In the case of the current study, using theories such as actor network theory (Latour, 2010), numerous nuances and interactions among students, teachers, professional expectations, in-person learning environments, and the technology that is the means by which those in the blended learning programs obtain a substantial part of their education can be considered. Subsequently, this theory was used in the current study to help unveil the various elements that contribute to professional development both online and during interaction with peers and professors. For example, students' interactions with teachers influence them differently than do those with other students. The content and nature of the interactions may be different, depending on who the student is talking to, but both can contribute to professional identity. Subsequently, this theory helped me to categorize data from interview questions into the appropriate codes. Having a conversation with a fellow student about theoretical orientation preference may be equally valuable to professional development as a conversation with a professor about the importance of ethics in psychological treatment. This, in turn, may impact professional identity differently, depending on the nature of the interaction. Additionally, students' understanding of their role as psychologists may be influenced by engaging in classroom activities in person. Thus, various actors in this particular situation can create a network whereby students are able to refine their understanding of professional psychology (Carter & Dyson, 2015).

Transactional Distance Theory

Moore published research on the notions behind transactional distance theory as early as 1972 (Huang, Chandra, DePaolo, & Simmons, 2016; Moore, 1972). The theory

was developed as the presence of technology increased throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Huang et al., 2016; Kang & Gyorke, 2008). Transactional distance theory was generated by examining deficits in exchanges that occurred among teachers and students (Huang et al., 2016). This theory has increasing importance as online education evolves (Huang et al., 2016). Transactional distance can be conceptualized as the gaps or deficits that can result between instructors and pupils when the two are not located adjacent to one another, and, thus, the ability to converse becomes compromised and must be addressed by both parties (Huang et al., 2016). The aforementioned deficits can include lapses in exchanges or conversations between professors and students (Huang et al., 2016). These lapses can occur from sequential as well as logistical differences among those involved (Huang et al., 2016). These exchange deficits can compromise the learning process (Huang et al., 2016). It is imperative that both students and teachers recognize this so that both parties can work to rectify any confusion in communication (Huang et al., 2016). The development of this theory underscores the importance of how education is influenced when students and teachers are not in proximity to one another (Kang & Gyorke, 2008).

This theory not only examines the nature of distance education but also the communication between students and instructors, as well as how students take ownership of their learning environment (Kang & Gyorke, 2008). The degree of transactional distance is comprised of the communication that occurs between students and teachers, the adaptability of the classes and their ability to provide what students require from their coursework, the degree to which students have influence over how they learn, as well as

the students and teachers themselves (Kang & Gyorke, 2008). The more influence students have over the learning environment, the less likely they are to need a controlled learning space (Huang et al., 2016). Additionally, the more interaction that takes place among the involved parties in a classroom, the less the assumed transactional distance (Huang et al., 2016). There remains some question regarding the relationship between how a particular course may be structured and the amount of transactional distance present (Huang et al., 2016). However, transactional distance theory has been able to elucidate researchers on the effects of communication, or lack thereof, on students' perceptions of their educational environment (Huang et al., 2016). With regards to the current study, this theory was able to help me assess how students view the educational environment as well as provide direction as to how this environment may be enhanced in order to maximize student learning (see Huang et al., 2016; Kang & Gyorke, 2008). This theory also helped me to formulate the research questions regarding how distance plays a part in the development of one's professional identity.

Clinical Psychology

Clinical psychology combines the clinical application of therapy with scientific literature in order to guide those who are suffering from mental illness and help them to heal and discover their own potential (Berkoski, 2015). Clinical psychologists not only engage in psychotherapy with clients, they also impart knowledge to students of clinical psychology in the process of supervision, perform assessments, and consult with those from other professions in related fields (American Psychological Association, 2018). They provide education to the public regarding the management and treatment of mental

illness and conduct research, all while using information from scientific literature to guide their approach (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Clinical psychology is one of three specializations that prepare individuals to provide psychotherapy, the others being counseling and school psychology (Berkoski, 2015). The difference between counseling and clinical psychology is inherent in the origins of each respective profession (Society of Counseling Psychology American Psychological Association, Division 17, 2018). Historically, clinical psychology has focused on those who have more severe psychopathology, whereas counseling psychology has focused on providing work-related guidance (Society of Counseling Psychology American Psychological Association, Division 17. 2018). Clinical psychologists then began providing therapy, which was only previously provided by psychiatrists (Society of Counseling Psychology American Psychological Association, Division 17. 2018). After World War II, both clinical and counseling psychologists worked with veterans who were experiencing psychological turmoil after returning home from war (Society of Counseling Psychology American Psychological Association, Division 17. 2018). In 1951, counseling psychology officially differentiated itself from clinical psychology through the generation of the Division of Counseling psychology (Society of Counseling Psychology American Psychological Association, Division 17. 2018).

School psychologists, as opposed to clinical and counseling psychologists work within the school systems themselves. They work with students and teachers, as well as the parents of students, in order to address issues that impact mental health and school

performance (National Association of School Psychologists, 2017). School psychologists also work with students who have disabilities, as well as work to implement programs designed to promote the health and welfare of students (National Association of School Psychologists, 2017). There are distinct roles for each of these three specializations. The commonality among them appears to lie in the commitment to help promote change in those whom they serve. Additionally, each of these professions have extensive training programs that allow individuals to become experts of their particular craft. Presumably this allows for a more refined sense of professional identity, in each of the aforementioned fields. The current study examined the identity of clinical psychology trainees and how training in a blended environment contributes to this identity.

Professional Psychologists and Psychology Trainees

Professional psychologists and trainees in psychology present differently in terms of their mannerisms, choice of attire, and approach to therapeutic work (McKenzie et al., 2013). Whereas trainees may be more likely to seek out counsel from a supervisor, professional psychologists themselves may operate more independently, confident about the standards they are required to uphold (McKenzie et al., 2013). The literature indicates that psychological trainees experience a substantial amount of anxiety, which can negatively impact the manner in which they conduct themselves in clinical work (Pakenham & Stafford-Brown, 2012). Part of the anxiety that students experience has to do with recognizing difficult scenarios in practice, time management skills, as well as what course of action to take when one encounters a potentially dangerous situation in clinical work (Pakenham & Stafford-Brown, 2012). Given that trainees in psychology

can experience a substantial amount of anxiety, and that provision of care to clients can be impacted due to a lack of understanding about the role of a psychologist, it is important to investigate trainees' understanding of the workings of the profession, how they conceptualize their role as a psychologist, and how they plan to provide clinically sound care (Hartman et al., 2016; McElhinney, 2008; Pakenham & Stafford-Brown, 2012). The current study allowed us to understand how those enrolled in blended clinical psychology programs navigate the innate challenges that are present in developing an identity as a psychologist.

Professional Identity

Related to professional identity development is the concept of continuing to engage in learning throughout one's career as a psychologist (Taylor & Neimeyer, 2015). Clinical psychology doctoral students interface with supervisors and other experienced individuals in the field throughout their internship and practicum (Taylor & Neimeyer, 2015). However, their responsibility to continue to engage in educational seminars and to interface with other professionals by becoming involved in professional organizations increases for trainees after obtaining licensure (Taylor & Neimeyer, 2015). Literature shows that psychologists who are in the beginning stages of their careers benefit from having mentors and are more likely to engage in behaviors such as participating in teaching conferences and producing research related to teaching (Troisi, Leder, Stiegler-Balfour, Fleck, & Good, 2015). In a similar sense, individuals that continue to engage in professional development activities report that these activities improve clinical practice (Taylor & Neimeyer, 2015; Troisi et al., 2015).

It is evident that individuals who work to improve their professional identity and who continue to work with a mentor experience gains in clinical practice and instructional abilities (Taylor & Neimeyer, 2015; Troisi et al., 2015). In one study, feedback from alumni of a blended Ph.D. program in Health Related Sciences was used to enhance the number of resources available to current students, including the use of novel technological tools as well as providing instructors with teaching assistants for courses deemed difficult by alumni, such as statistics (Goldberg et al., 2011). Soliciting feedback from students allows for the provision of constructive criticism of the program, the addition of new classroom resources, and an increased tailoring to individual needs, all of which impact student success and satisfaction with the program (Goldberg et al., 2011). It is unclear what clinical psychology students who are enrolled in blended programs might need in order to be successful and to develop a professional identity that allows them to feel competent to enter professional practice. The current study helped to address that.

Professional Identity of Clinical Psychologists

There are differences in the manner in which students and psychologists conceptualize client prognosis and treatment, and this has implications for how students behave in professional settings (Waltman, Williams, & Christiansen, 2013). For example, one study showed that those who worked with professionals as opposed to students exhibited more progress in therapy (Reese, Norsworthy, & Rowlands, 2009). If we can understand what trainees gain as well as what they are lacking from their educational experiences, perhaps we can improve upon their ability to deliver adequate client care.

One way in which professional identity can be fostered is through "experiential learning" (Falgares, Venza, & Guarnaccia, 2017, p. 233). This allows students to participate in activities designed to promote professional development (Falgares et al., 2017). After participation, the students can offer insight into these experiences (Falgares et al., 2017). When students have an opportunity to discuss how they incorporate concepts from psychology into how they view themselves as people, we can observe the origin of professional identity (Castro-Tejerina, 2014). The literature also shows that experiential learning allows for one to develop a more realistic and less idealistic view of the duties of his or her chosen profession (Falgares et al., 2017). This might include gaining more concrete knowledge about psychological theory and professional practice and recognizing the utility in standardized approaches to therapy. This is not to discount one's own interpersonal skills as a part of professional identity, but rather to add scientifically-based knowledge to one's repertoire. This is to say, a new appreciation for the scientific rigor of the field is developed throughout the course of training. Thus, students gain a clear understanding of the expectations in the profession of psychology as well as the abilities one must acquire in training.

Several factors were found to influence the professional identification of being a psychologist in counseling psychology students. Some of these factors include becoming members of a professional organization, working with others in the counseling psychology field, and collaborating with other mental health professionals (Gazzola, De Stefano, Audet, & Theriault, 2011). We might infer that given the similarities between the two professions, similar opportunities might also promote growth for students of

clinical psychology. However, there could be differences in how clinical psychology trainees view their role and what will help them be successful in professional practice. This study helped to close that gap. Being exposed to others in the field of psychology and members of professional organizations is part of what occurs in a doctoral intensive. These intensives are a part of blended learning programs and allow for students to have experience interacting with teachers and other trainees, and thus they have the opportunity to learn about myriad facets of professional psychology.

Clinical Psychology Training

Before 1950, clinical psychology training was not standardized (Stricker, 2016). However, because psychologists were being requested to provide care within the VA system, it was determined that schools of psychology would now have to earn accreditation by the American Psychological Association (APA; Stricker, 2006). This led to the development of a new training process (Stricker, 2006). As a part of this new formalization in 1946 the National Alliance on Mental Health was created (Petersen, 2007). Additionally, new stipends were given to fund graduate programs in psychology, as a result of the National Mental Health Act (Petersen, 2007). There was speculation regarding how training should be structured and what types of practical knowledge and traits one should have in order to become a clinical psychologist (Petersen, 2007). The Boulder conference provided some solutions to these issues (Petersen, 2007).

The Boulder Conference served as a means of generating guidelines for psychological training (Petersen, 2007). Issues such as ethics, financial aid, obtaining licensure, providing accreditation to programs, and myriad other topics related to

professional psychology were discussed (Petersen, 2007). From the conference came the idea that trainees should be taught with a model that incorporates both "science and practice" (Stricker, 2006, p. 50). This model, appropriately called the scientist-practitioner model, is one that is derived from the notion that mental illnesses had biological causes, otherwise known as the "medical model" (Petersen, 2007, p.763). The premise of the scientist practitioner model is that practitioners needed to be able to weave together both scientific research and the art of providing therapy, in order to effectively treat mental illness (Petersen, 2007). The conference paved the way for how psychological training was to be structured (Petersen, 2007; Stricker, 2006). It was from this conference that we see an attempt to regulate how training is conducted in the field and to determine what standards we must hold trainees to, before deeming them ready for professional practice.

Training in clinical psychology encompasses learning about various psychological theories and methods of providing psychotherapy (American Psychological Association, 2018). A graduate degree is required, as well as an internship whereby one is given the opportunity to provide therapy to those seeking mental health services (American Psychological Association, 2018). The American Psychological Association has an accreditation process for graduate programs which allows for an assessment of how well students have mastered specific areas of "competency" (Rodriguez-Menendez, Dempsey, Albizu, Power, & Campbell Wilkerson, 2017). This term encompasses the idea that trainees have gained new information through education, as well as a newfound sense of purpose in the profession (Fouad et al., 2009). Governing bodies that issue licenses to

practice psychology often request evidence that such competencies have been met through the course of doctoral training (Fouad et al., 2009).

Some of the competencies that one is required to possess in order to become a professional psychologist include being able to perform psychological assessments, having multicultural awareness, and being knowledgeable of the ethical guidelines that govern professional practice (Fouad et al., 2009). Part of the structure of competencies is that there are various phases one must pass through in graduate training that allow for growth. These phases include being prepared for an initial practicum experience, being prepared to move into an internship experience, and finally, being prepared to enter professional practice (Fouad et al., 2009).

Having guidelines that govern professional practice and psychological training promotes the notion that we must protect those whom we serve (American Psychological Association, 2017). We are trusted by our clients to behave in an honest, kind, and knowledgeable manner, and to provide care that is scientifically sound. We must also remain empathetic and take into account individual differences amongst patients (American Psychological Association, 2017). Psychologists must be able to apply scientific knowledge regarding mental illness into professional practice (Petersen, 2007). It is important to acquire such knowledge in training in order to preserve the credibility of the profession and to provide the best care possible to patients (American Psychological Association, 2017). By examining how students develop in blended clinical psychology programs, we can gain an understanding of how the nature of the program might hinder

or enhance one's appreciation for the ethics of the profession and how these are to be put into place in the practice of clinical psychology.

Blended Learning Programs

Blended learning programs combine traditional classroom learning with online learning environments (Cheung & Hew, 2011). This has allowed for students with other work and family commitments to engage in the learning process even when they may not be able to be present in a classroom at a specified time (Cheung & Hew, 2011). Additionally, this type of learning program provides other resources for students that may not be available in a traditional classroom environment, such as being able to view information pertaining to the course while online (Cheung & Hew, 2011). Blended learning programs not only incorporate technology into traditional classroom settings, but the courses themselves are structured such that there are numerous tools that can be used for students to interact with professors and with one another (Lakhal, Bateman, & Bedard, 2017). However, there have been difficulties with the absence of face-to face interaction that impede progress in universities' willingness to develop more blended learning programs (Schumann & Skopek, 2009). Given that the APA does not give accreditation to online doctoral programs, this research will help to provide valuable information to the APA as online education continues to increase.

There are aspects of blended learning that have been predictive of student contentedness such as "flexibility" and interactions with professors (Zeppos, 2014). However, there are areas of these programs that students have endorsed less favorably, such as the types of online education delivery systems, resources available for assigned

coursework, and the ability of professors to work with other school-based resources, such as the school's library (Zeppos, 2014). The authors of a study in which 61 students from a Master of Public Administration program in Wyoming were interviewed reported that although students were satisfied with their interactions with professors, 79.1% of those surveyed stated that they had "little or no interaction with other students" (Schumann & Skopek, 2009, p. 226). The authors of this study noted that students who take classes online as well as those who take classes in person perceive those who participate in classes that take place in person as receiving preferential treatment (Schumann & Skopek, 2009). Blended classes can help to mitigate some of these concerns (Schumann & Skopek, 2009).

Students enjoy prompt, timely interactions with professors as opposed to having delays in responses to online postings (Collopy & Arnold, 2009). Another consideration with blended learning programs is the personalities of the students themselves and the opportunity for those who are less extroverted to participate in an online classroom setting in a different manner than they might have if the class were taking place in a face to face environment (Collopy & Arnold, 2009). Blended learning environments can support the needs of students with different learning styles (Collopy & Arnold, 2009). These programs can be developed to suit a variety of subject areas (Collopy & Arnold, 2009). There is support from the research that those who are enrolled in blended classes express feelings while participating in the classroom, such as laughing at part of a discussion post (Meyer & Jones, 2012). These students are able to present their true selves in the online classroom environments, as opposed to developing a sort of character

of themselves (Meyer & Jones, 2012). Additionally, it has been theorized that if students have interacted in person with one another, they may be better able to understand how a particular individual presents himself or herself in the online classroom (Meyer & Jones, 2012). In this sense, the blended learning environment allows students to express their own personalities while drawing on relationships they have built in-person (Collopy & Arnold, 2009; Meyer & Jones, 2012). There remains a question of whether online environments, such as classrooms, can offer a potential means of developing our interpersonal skills (Meyer & Jones, 2012). How we relate to others impacts our professional life. It is important to understand how we develop as psychologists. Blended programs offer a glimpse into how students grow as professionals (Ellis et al., 2016; Sells et al., 2012). There are improvements to be made to these programs (Ellis et al., 2016; Sells et al., 2012). Improving these programs could improve the care we provide to our patients and our understanding of individuals from all walks of life. The current study allowed for students to express what they enjoyed and what they did not enjoy about their blended programs. The interview questions for this study examined how particular aspects of these programs may have contributed to their growth and how they managed to gain an understanding of what psychologists do and the standards they are held to, without a substantial amount of in-person contact with psychologists during their training.

Blended Doctoral Programs

Instructors for blended and online doctoral programs in fields such as English and Nursing, among other programs of study, question how professional identity and

relationships with others in the professional world are impacted and perhaps negatively so, by a lack of face-to-face interaction (Roumell & Bolliger, 2017). Additionally, negative sentiments about supervision in online education were also expressed, given that students are not often able to have in-person access to the university (Roumell & Bolliger, 2017). Faculty in the Roumell and Bolliger (2017) study endorsed that "the primary role of doctoral supervision is building trust and a relationship with the student" (Roumell & Bolliger, 2017, p. 89). This can be compromised when online and blended educational environments are involved, and additional supports are needed for both students and faculty working to develop relationships in these environments (Roumell & Bolliger, 2017). This too is a testament to the improvements needed in blended learning environments. To improve these programs allows us to improve interactions between students and professors, and to give both parties what they need to be successful in their respective roles. The participants in this study were interviewed about what elements in blended learning programs were most hopeful to them, and what resources helped them to develop as professionals. Additionally, the interview questions for this study examined how students can build relationships with professors and other students, even with limited face-to-face contact.

Students who were enrolled in a blended doctoral program in Australia were assessed after seven months of participation in the program, to determine how they had changed in their notions about learning and growing as scholars (Beutel et al., 2010). An important note regarding doctoral programs is the amount of investment that students must be willing to put into their coursework (Beutel et al., 2010). Additionally, students

must determine how to structure their time such that they can meet the demands of the program without feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work involved (Beutel et al., 2010). One purpose of doctoral programs is to build students into competent researchers who can explore important issues within their field of study (Beutel et al., 2010). The process of obtaining a doctoral education involves changes in how students interact with one another and in how they conduct scholarly work (Beutel et al., 2010). The results of this particular study were such that students were able to grow in their scholarly abilities, including their ability to engage in the research process within the seven-month time frame (Beutel et al., 2010). Although the results of this study found changes in students' abilities and mindset regarding doctoral education after only seven months, it is the case that substantial alterations in ideology and how one conducts himself or herself as a graduate student likely occur over a longer period of time (Beutel et al., 2010). In the current study, participants included students who have completed numerous doctoral intensives, which may take several years in the case of some schools. This will allow an observation of how professional identity can change over a significant period of time.

Blended learning programs can take many different forms. They can offset the difficulties that present with courses that are only online and offer creative and valuable resources and tools for students that were not present prior to the incorporation of technology. Students must be able to develop healthy and productive relationships with supervisors in a blended environment and must be afforded the same opportunities for growth as those who are enrolled at brick and mortar institutions (Roumell & Bolliger, 2017). The graduate school environment helps shape one's identity as a professional

psychologist and it is important to understand how we can positively influence this environment.

Summary

Literature surrounding blended learning programs has shown that students appreciate the flexibility offered by such programs (Zeppos, 2014). These programs have a variety of structures and incorporate the use of in-person intensives in numerous ways. Additionally, we know that students enjoy having interactions with their professors (Collopy & Arnold, 2009). Supervisory relationships are important in blended doctoral programs (Roumell & Bolliger, 2017). Students should feel as though they can trust their supervisors, despite not meeting with them in person (Roumell & Bolliger, 2017). Clinical psychology training involves an extensive process that prepares individuals to engage in therapeutic practice (Fouad et al., 2009). Psychologists are trusted by the public to provide quality care to those who are seeking help for emotional distress. Research in training in blended graduate programs has shown that there are issues in professional training that need to be addressed, such as the availability of professors, the use of technology, and how these programs might help us to develop interpersonally (Goldberg et al., 2011; Meyer & Jones, 2012). The use of technology in education is growing rapidly. Itis imperative that we understand how this impacts individuals who are training to become clinical psychologists. If we can understand more about blended learning programs and how they shape budding psychologists, we may be able to improve the care provided to those seeking help.

Although blended educational programs have increased in popularity, there are still factors that are not often addressed in the literature (Erichsen et al., 2013). For example, we must improve our understanding of what kinds of technologies and program structures work to best meet the needs of students in blended programs (Erichsen et al., 2013). Additionally, there is a need to understand how students might change over time in blended programs, and how their interactions with others might shape their course performance (Beutel et al., 2010; Ellis et al., 2016). By using a qualitative approach to talk with individuals who are at various stages in blended clinical psychology programs, we can address some of the gaps in the literature surrounding how students are impacted over time by participation in a blended doctoral program (Beutel et al., 2010).

This study allowed for students to reflect on their own identity development in the context of their doctoral program. It allowed them to explore what elements of their programs were most helpful to them, as well as those that were not helpful. Understanding how one develops can help us to improve the learning process (McKenzie et al., 2013). Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, we can gain insight into how students perceive their training, how they view their professional roles, and what they believe will help them in becoming psychologists. This study helped address the gap that exists in the literature with how blended programs can influence us interpersonally, as well as how students change throughout various phases of their programs. Chapter 3 reviewed the role of the researcher, how to address ethical issues that arose given that the researcher is also a graduate student in a blended psychology program, how students were recruited for participation, what types of questions were asked and the literature these

questions will be derived from. This chapter also addressed data analysis and ethical issues.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how students develop their professional identities as psychologists in the context of blended clinical psychology doctoral programs. This study provided information about what is needed to further the growth of such programs and the success of the students. The sections in Chapter 3 include a discussion on the rationale for a qualitative phenomenological study design. The rationale for selecting the sample is also addressed. Moreover, I review the role of the researcher and manner in which the data were analyzed. Issues with validity and potential ethical concerns are also addressed. Chapter 3 provides a through overview of the methodology of this study.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions in this study were designed to explore the impact of in-person learning intensives on professional identity in clinical psychology trainees. The questions assessed how students experience the in-person intensives that are a requirement of blended doctoral programs. These questions also addressed student experiences interacting with cohort members and professors. Ultimately the questions addressed how students initially view of the role of a psychologist and whether this view changes as one completes in-person learning intensives.

The questions are as follows:

RQ1: Are there differences in the description of individuals who completed their first intensive and individuals who have completed multiple intensives?

RQ2: What thematic differences exist in the descriptions of individuals who completed their second-to-last intensive as compared to those who have completed their final intensive?

RQ3: At the conclusion of the last intensive, how do students describe the experience of being able to interact with cohort members and professors in person, as opposed to interacting solely online?

RQ4: At the conclusion of the last intensive, how do students attending a blended clinical psychology doctoral program view the professional duties and the mission of a psychologist?

One concept central to this study is that of blended learning programs. These programs present coursework in a combination of platforms, including in-person and online (Singh, 2003). Classroom activities are offered in real time as well as in a manner where students can complete work on their own schedules (Singh, 2003). More research is needed to understand what can be done to improve these programs as well as the learning experiences of the students who are enrolled in these programs (Ellis et al., 2016; Sells et al., 2012). Professional identity is also an important concept in this study. Professional identity is the notion that one forms a persona based both on personal experiences as well as on the philosophy and tenants of one's chosen vocation (Wilson et al., 2016). These factors encompass what it means to be a member of a certain profession (Wilson et al., 2016). Professional identity also influences how individuals make decisions in a work environment (Wilson et al., 2016). Professional identity in psychology refers to knowing how to manage the various activities that psychologists

engage in while adhering to professional ethics (American Psychological Association, 2017; Bruss & Kopala, 1993).

The nature of this research was qualitative To gain a comprehensive understanding of how individuals perceive their professional identity development, first-hand accounts through interviews were necessary. By completing qualitative interviews, as opposed to surveys, I learned about how students perceive their identity development to have occurred on an individual level. Interview data allowed me the opportunity to gather information about the nuances of each individual's experience as opposed to predetermined interview questions presented in a forced-choice format.

The methodology of the study was phenomenological. In the current study, students provided their impressions of in-person learning intensives and how they believed these intensives have shaped their professional identities through one-on-one interviews. This type of research allowed for an introspective look into how students perceive their learning experiences. This methodology was chosen because although I am exploring individual experiences through narratives, I wanted to examine a particular phenomenon, professional identity. I assumed that this construct, although experienced differently by each individual, would have some common factors amongst all participants. It is a process, with unique elements occurring for each individual; however, there is a common goal to be reached. This research may illuminate how course delivery and student satisfaction can be improved. By examining the process of professional identity in psychology more resources can be provided to blended programs to ensure the quality of education provided to the students.

Role of the Researcher

Literature on the role of a researcher states that this individual is to conduct interviews, gather participants, and analyze data (Postholm & Skrøvset, 2013; Reid, 2016). In addition to this, I generated the interview questions for this study. I asked the participants a series of questions through qualitative interviews and recorded the answers through Skype. I analyzed the data using codes I created. The interview data were sorted into codes using NVIVO software.

All participants were doctoral students enrolled in blended clinical psychology PhD programs. I did not interact with the students prior to their participation in the study. These students came from schools other than the school I attend. There was a potential for a power differential such that student participants were not as far along in their programs as I am. One means of addressing this concern was to include a statement in the informed consent that student participation was not mandatory and that students could withdraw at any time from the study. Another means of reducing bias was to let participants know about my position as a doctoral student enrolled in a blended doctoral program. I am aware that my position as a graduate student impacts my research interests. I also recognize that each individual's experience in graduate school is unique. I addressed my own biases through bracketing and member-checking. I was able to personally reflect on my own experiences and give participants an opportunity to check my transcriptions of their interviews in order to correct my interpretations or add information to their interview answers.

I recognize that being enrolled in a blended doctoral program myself does present some concerns regarding bias. These concerns were mitigated by obtaining feedback from the chair and methods expert for the study as well as disclosing my position as a graduate student to participants. I selected participants from schools other than that which I attend. Additionally, the research questions were approved by my chair and methods expert. Through the process of bracketing, I examined my own biases as they arose (see Tufford & Newman, 2012). I did so by manually recording what pertained to my experiences with blended program intensives that may not necessarily pertain to those of others (see Tufford & Newman, 2012). For example, I did not meet my cohort until the third year of my program. However, we had all known each other virtually for so long that I felt a certain ease when meeting them for the first time. This is perhaps not the case with individuals who must immediately participate in an intensive prior to the program. It may be the case that unfamiliarity would increase anxiety for these individuals. However, all this rests on my assumptions and experiences, which differed individually and collectively from each participant. I engaged in bracketing both prior to and during data collection to ensure that I was continuously examining my own biases (see Tufford & Newman, 2012). This offered a means of correcting for biases that may present when only one researcher is involved in the research design process.

I also went through the process of member checking, whereby after transcribing interviews, I emailed these transcriptions back to participants (see Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). This allowed participants to read through the interviews and to clarify their words to ensure that the transcription was correct (see Birt et al., 2016).

They were given the opportunity to have a follow-up Skype interview to address issues that arose in my transcription or to expand upon points made in the original interview. This allowed me to ensure that my interpretations were accurate. No incentives were offered for participation in the study.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Participants included students who were enrolled in blended clinical psychology doctoral programs in schools other than the one I attend. These students completed at least one in-person doctoral intensive as a part of the requirements for their programs. I used a purposeful homogeneous sampling technique in which all participants were part of a specific population. This type of sampling technique is used to examine a particular occurrence within the context of certain settings (Ko, Smith, Liao, & Chiang, 2014).

I gathered contact information for faculty and administrators of blended clinical psychology doctoral programs by looking at program websites. The programs offered blended Ph.D. or a Psy.D. programs in clinical psychology. Enrollment in one of these programs with at least one in-person intensive completed qualified participants for the study. Programs had different time frames during which intensives take place. Although intensives are spaced differently based on each individual program, I recruited participants who had completed more than one intensive.

One school did not require submission of materials to their IRB office, but the other did. The same materials were provided in either case. I also provided the administrators with the most current copy of my proposal for their review. After I

obtained approval to recruit participants from two universities, I asked the administrators to forward the flyer for my study to doctoral students. This flyer included contact information for me so that students could contact me if they wished to become participants. Snowball recruiting was used in cases where a participant wanted to refer a fellow cohort member to me.

Creswell as cited in Mason (2010) suggested a sample size of five to 25 for phenomenological research. Based upon previous qualitative research with professional psychology graduate students, my aim was to have 10 to 15 participants total in the study (see Creswell, 1998; Gazzola et al., 2011; Knoetze & McCulloch, 2017). I reached saturation with six participants.

Instrumentation

A structured interview was used to gather data from participants during interviews (see Appendices C and D). The interviews were conducted using Skype. The Skype Mp3 recorder was used to record data from participants. Recorded interview data were then transcribed by me and sorted into codes. I also used a second coder. She was a postdoctoral resident in clinical psychology. Her role was to duplicate my efforts to ensure consistency and reliability in the data. She reviewed my codes as well as the interview data I transcribed and offered feedback to help me establish saturation and validity. NVIVO software was used to help categorize data into appropriate codes. The interview questions were researcher produced and based upon previous literature that has addressed professional identity in psychology. The NVIVO and the Skype Mp3 recorder

allowed for an examination of how students at various phases in their doctoral programs perceive the process of developing their identities as psychologists.

Researcher-Developed Instrument

The interview questions were based upon literature in professional identity development and blended learning programs (see Appendix A). Appendix A details questions that were asked of those that have completed more than one intensive. The questions generated for those who had only completed one intensive were not used, as everyone completed more than one intensive. I drew upon theories such as Actor Network Theory as well as existing literature that used graduate students, including those enrolled in blended programs. This served as a means of establishing content validity in generating interview questions (Leidy & Vernon, 2008). In order to address research question 1, the following was asked of participants (based off of Erichsen et al., 2013; McKenzie et al., 2012): What is your understanding of the principles that psychologists must abide by? How would you say that your understanding of the role of a psychologist has changed? Did interacting with peers and professors influence this understanding? If so, how? What are some misconceptions you had about the roles and duties of psychologists prior to attending your first intensive? What are your perceptions about the online portion of the blended program? In order to address professional identity development, I asked questions such as What did you learn about yourself during your participation in the intensives? Did you see your values and beliefs change after participation in the intensives? What does being a psychologist mean to you? What is your understanding of ethics and multiculturalism as it relates to clinical psychology?

To address RQ2 and RQ4 as they relate to those that have completed more than one intensive, the following questions were asked: How would you compare the experience of your first doctoral intensive to your last one? Do you feel as though your values and beliefs about the practice of psychology have changed as a result of participating in the face-to-face intensives? Now that you have completed several intensives, what would you say being a psychologist means to you? How would you say being a psychologist relates to who you are as a person? What is your understanding of what a clinical psychologist does? Were there any differences between what you believed a clinical psychologist did prior to attending a learning intensive versus what you believe after completing all your intensives?

To address RQ3 (Pombo & Loureiro, 2013), the following interview questions were asked: Would you say that your peers influenced your conceptualization of what a psychologist does? If so, how? What kinds of feedback were you able to receive from peers online? What was your experience of getting to interact with faculty in-person versus online? Was this different than the kind of feedback and suggestions you received in person? If so, how?

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participants were recruited by contacting administrators and faculty at schools that offered blended clinical psychology doctoral programs. When an administrator agreed to allow me to recruit participants from their school, I applied to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at my school in order to complete necessary requirements to start data collection. After I was given approval to recruit participants from two schools, the

administrators I had previously contacted at each school virtually posed my flyer so that it was visible to their students. Students contacted me via email if they were interested in participating in my study. The data was collected over the course of a three-month time period. Interview data was recorded with a Skype Mp3 recorder. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. The data was organized using NVIVO.

I recruited participants by emailing graduate school research faculty and asking the faculty to email my contact information and a description of the study to students. When the students contacted me via email I included a copy of the informed consent for the study in my email to them. This explained that the study is designed to examine professional identity in clinical psychology trainees in blended programs. I stated in my email that individuals who are at different stages in their programs will be interviewed about their experience with in-person intensives. The potential participants were told that interviews would last approximately 30 minutes and were conducted through Skype. I offered to answer any questions the students had at the time they emailed me to request to be a participant in the study. I then sent a consent form to the students and they were asked to respond back to me with the words "I consent" if they agreed to participate in the study. If the student was interested in participating in the study a time was coordinated to conduct a Skype interview. I then explained that the conversation was recorded using a Skype Mp3 recorder. The students were invited to email me with any questions prior to the interview. They were notified that they could withdraw from the study at any time. They were told this at the beginning of the interview as well.

Participants were thanked at the close of the interview for their participation. They were invited to ask any questions or address concerns at that time. They were reminded that the purpose of this study will serve to further our knowledge of the professional identity development process in clinical psychology doctoral students. There were no requirements for a follow up interview. However, students were sent a copy of their transcribed interview three to four weeks after the interview took place and were invited to address any changes they wished to make in a follow-up Skype interview. This served as a means of member checking in order to establish validity in the study.

Data Analysis Plan

I sought to examine how those enrolled in blended clinical psychology doctoral programs develop as professionals. My study used interview data to determine how students experience in-person intensives that are a part of the curriculum in blended doctoral programs. More specifically, I looked at how students perceive interactions with peers and professors. Additionally, my research questions looked at whether individual perceptions about professional roles change based upon how many intensives a student has completed. The interview questions were designed to address these questions by asking students about their experiences with doctoral intensives as well as experiences with peers and professors. The questions asked how students understand the roles and responsibilities of psychologists. They inquired about how students perceive in-person versus online interactions with other students and professors. Finally, the interview questions assessed the nature of the feedback students received from professors and other students during the intensives.

The interviews allowed for an introspective look into blended doctoral programs from the students' perspective. My research sought to understand how we can use student perceptions to better understand and improve on blended clinical psychology doctoral programs. The interview data helped to develop this understanding.

The data was coded using NVivo software (QSR International Pty Ltd., n.d.). This type of software is designed to aid researchers in categorizing qualitative data (QSR International Pty Ltd., n.d.). It allows researchers to evaluate their data and break it down into small sections according to commonalities in interview content (QSR International Pty Ltd., n.d.). I typed the interview data while listening to the interview recording. Once my interview data was in written form, I sent the interview data back to participants for their review. I did not get any requests for corrections or follow-up interviews. A month after these emails were sent, began the coding process.

After my data was entered into NVivo, I began sorting the interview content. I did this in a process called thematic coding (Gibbs, 2007). I also engaged in bracketing during this process so that I could be aware of how I was sorting the data and correct my own biases regarding what categorization the data might fit best. This type of coding allowed for me to separate particular notions or subjects that participants discuss into categories (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This method of coding is possible with NVivo as the software allows for the breakdown of interview data into sections called "nodes" (NVivo by QSR, 2015). This allowed me to categorize my data and see the similarities as well as the differences in how doctoral students experience in-person intensives.

After initial coding took place each node was placed into a file within NVivo. Sorting the data this way allowed me to see commonalities across all participants. This method of data analysis allowed me to uncover emerging themes that pertained to professional identity development as told by clinical psychology trainees. I coded all the interviews and looked at which themes have emerged. This gave me an understanding of what types of concerns, developmental processes, and learning experiences take place in the context of doctoral intensives and help to answer the research questions. The results will be reviewed in Chapter 4, along with the rest of the interview data. They are valuable in generating a thorough understanding of how students grow and learn. It was my hope that by interviewing students at different stages of their respective programs that I would begin to see consistent themes and shared experiences in the training process.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Saturation in qualitative research is reached when there are no new themes that come from coding data (Bryman, 2013; van Rijnsoever, 2017). I was able to determine the point at which saturation was reached when no new themes emerged. I also had a second coder to help me determine when saturation is reached and to help establish internal validity. She reviewed my codes as well as the interview data in order to help me detect biases in my own coding and to help establish validity.

Reflexivity occurs when a researcher acknowledges his or her biases and roles within the context of conducting research (Reid, Brown, Smith, Cope, & Jamieson, 2018). Having a second coder addressed this issue. I have also been transparent about my role as a researcher and a student. Acknowledging this role along with other personal

impressions as I collected my data was important in addressing reflexivity. I was mindful of my own biases and impressions as I coded and interpreted the interviews. I engaged in this process through bracketing both before and while interviews are taking place. I underwent the process of member checking, in order to ensure that participants have a chance to review my data and that it was accurate based upon their reviews. I also made note of these biases in my dissertation. This served to make my own perceptions known to those reading my study. This process allowed me to gain new insight into my data as I examined my own perceptions and how they influenced the themes I saw within the interview data. Thus, I was able to see how my study is shaped by my own experiences and adjust my analytic approach I was able to reflect on my own interpretations and biases with the help of a second coder. This person offered a different perspective on the data and the themes that emerged.

A concept called "analyst triangulation" was also used here (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999). By applying this concept to my study, I had a second coder (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). This person was someone who could examine my biases and point out aspects I may have overlooked in my coding of the interview data. This person can also offer alternative perspectives on how statements should be coded. The second coder served as someone who could ensure that the data is viewed from another perspective in order to increase the depth of the researcher (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Transferability pertains to being able to extrapolate findings to various populations (Shenton, 2004). In order to address transferability, I have explained the

parameters of the study in Chapter 3 of this proposal. I have provided a thorough description of how I chose participants. I have also described what was required of participants. I have made the parameters of my study clear so that others can replicate it with different populations. I sought out students who are at various phases in their programs, so as to increase the applicability of the results to a variety of settings.

Dependability in qualitative studies pertains to reliability. In order to address dependability, I have provided a description of how the study was conducted (Shenton, 2004). This included describing how the sample was be chosen, what interview questions were asked, how interviews were conducted, as well as how interviews were coded for themes (Shenton, 2004). Triangulation will also be used in addressing dependability as there will be a second coder. This allows for two different perspectives in the coding process. Individuals who are enrolled in different schools and who are in different places in their respective programs were interviewed. This allowed for an examination of data from several different individuals, at different points in their educational career, who attended two different schools. Providing detailed descriptions of how the study was conducted, gathering data from individuals enrolled in different programs, as well as using a second coder were all means of addressing dependability in this study (Shenton, 2004).

In order to establish confirmability in Chapter 4, I plan to explain why I coded statements in the manner I did (Shenton, 2004). More specifically, I will acknowledge my own biases and discuss why I placed a statement in one category as opposed to placing it in another category (Shenton, 2004). I also considered how I coded each statement and

whether my own perception and experience might have influenced how I coded. I considered changing how I code each statement based upon my assumptions. Essentially, I considered alternative ways of interpreting each coded statement and consulted with my second coder in order to help address my own biases. I also provided a thorough overview of my methodology. I examined interview data with the awareness that there were instances where the content from one interview was not be consistent with what I had observed in other interviews. Additionally, I asked my second coder to help me identify occasions where my own biases may have been present and how this might have impacted the coding procedure. These strategies helped me to maintain confirmability in my research.

Having a second coder was critical in addressing the trustworthiness of this study. In order to address intercoder reliability, I met with the coder in person to review the specific process for coding. We discussed specific themes that were present in the interviews such as professional growth, anxiety about performing clinical work, and a sense of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in the field (Beutel et al., 2010; McKenzie et al., 2013; Pakenham & Stafford-Brown, 2012). I gave the coder background information on my study (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013). The two of us formalized the coding procedure together (Campbell et al., 2013).

The literature states that there is no gold standard to test intercoder reliability (Campbell et al., 2013). Given this, I had my second coder review my codes. The second coder then reviewed the interview data I coded, and we compared themes. Although there are many ways to assess reliability in qualitative research, I wanted to ensure that there is

quality to my work (Campbell et al., 2013). I wanted to engage in measures that would allow my work to be expanded upon in the future (Campbell et al., 2013). Taking steps to ensure trustworthiness allowed me to do this.

Ethical Considerations

IRB approval was obtained in order to conduct this study by submitting required documentation to the board for review. The IRB approval number for this study was 02-04-19-0541902. I contacted various clinical psychology blended programs and asked administrators and professors to email my contact information to students in their programs. Participants then contacted me if they wish to participate in the study. Participants were given the information that the purpose of the study is to find out more about the process of professional identity development in clinical psychology trainees. All of the following procedures are in accordance with Walden IRB policies (Walden University, 2018a; Walden University 2018b). They signed an informed consent which indicated that they were participating in the study on their own accord. The fact that they could withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequence was stated in the informed consent. I also repeated this at the onset of the interview.

Additionally, the form will note that participants will not be compensated. However, their participation will allow for a greater understanding of the development process in clinical psychology trainees. It was not anticipated that students will experience distress as a result of participation in this study. Participants were told that they were able to ask the researcher any questions they have at the close of the interview. They were also informed that their interview data will be kept confidential.

There was minimal risk of physical harm or psychological stress to participants. There may have been some psychological distress in discussing events that occurred during residency, or feelings of being uncomfortable in a new situation. However, this was not likely to cause significant discomfort. I offered the number of a 24-hour national help phone line in case students experience any distress. I also offered contact information for the Walden IRB so that students can file a complaint if desired.

The interview data were not anonymous. I emailed the students from an email account created just for this study. I removed the names from my data and use a numerical code to refer to participants. Only I had access to this code and the data will be stored in a file on a computer that is password-protected. Only the second coder and I had access to the data. The computer that the data is stored on is located in a locked office. The data will be stored for five years. I made a Skype account specific for the purposes of this study and removed all participant data from this account at the conclusion of the study (Iacono, Symonds, & Brown, 2016). I also removed participant data from my email and phone contacts at the conclusion of the study.

Given that I am a graduate student in a program similar to those that the participants will be enrolled in, I have elected not to collect data from students in my program. Instead, I recruited participants from other blended doctoral programs. This allowed for a more objective examination of the experiences of other students. It allowed me to gain insight into other doctoral programs without having developed previous notions about what these programs are like.

Summary

This chapter served as an explanation of the methodology for this dissertation. The method for recruiting participants was discussed. The interview questions as they relate to the research questions for this study were reviewed. This chapter provided an overview of how the data will be coded using NVIVO software. The concept of using a second coder in order to increase reliability was introduced. Procedures to maintain integrity and ethical guidelines were discussed. This included the discussion of IRB approval and obtaining informed consent. More specifically, the lack of anonymity of the data and the storage procedures for this data given this concern were reviewed.

The aim of this phenomenological research was to gain insight into how students perceive their own development in blended clinical psychology doctoral programs. Chapter 4 will discuss the results from this study. The chapter will review themes found from the interviews with students and how these themes encompass the identity development process in clinical psychology trainees. Issues of trustworthiness and any adaptations in data collection that occurred will also be discussed in this section.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how students who are enrolled in blended clinical psychology doctoral programs perceive in-person intensives as contributing to the development of their professional identity. The research questions for this study included the following: Are there differences in the description of individuals who completed their first intensive and individuals who have completed multiple intensives? What thematic differences exist in the descriptions of individuals who completed their second-to-last intensive as compared to those who have completed their final intensive? At the conclusion of the last intensive, how do students describe the experience of being able to interact with cohort members and professors in person, as opposed to interacting solely online? At the conclusion of the last intensive, how do students attending a blended clinical psychology doctoral program view the professional duties and the mission of a psychologist?

The information I obtained is a representation of the lived experiences of the clinical psychology doctoral students I interviewed as well as their perceptions about the in-person portion of their doctoral program. The results may be used to enhance the understanding of how in-person intensives contribute to the professional development process in clinical psychology trainees and how these intensives might be improved. Students who were at various points in their programs were interviewed about their experiences in these in-person intensives. The interviews were coded for common themes, some of which included adjustment, change, fear, and frustration. In this chapter,

I review the data collection process as well as the themes that emerged from the data. Each research question is addressed. I review the setting in which the data were collected, demographic information regarding the participants, the data collection procedures, how the data were analyzed, and evidence of trustworthiness of the data, including issues of dependability and transferability. Finally, I review the results of the data analysis and provide a summary of my findings.

Setting

Interviews were conducted with six individuals who attended one of two different blended clinical psychology doctoral programs. Given that participants were providing feedback about their experiences with these programs, it is possible that there was some anxiety regarding anonymity. Specifically, participants may have been concerned that they were identifiable based upon feedback they gave. One participant expressed that the ideas expressed in the interview were quite unique as compared to others in the graduate program. Consequently, this person believed that there was a potential to be identified. As the researcher, I reassured this individual that interview responses and the school the individual attended would be kept confidential and that it was up to my discretion what quotes to include and not include in the reported data. I also assured this individual that my work was being reviewed by my committee, who would provide feedback on what to include and what not to include in my dissertation. No other participants expressed similar concerns.

Demographics

Participants were six individuals who attended one of two different blended clinical psychology doctoral programs. Both of these programs were based and conducted intensives in the United States. These intensives covered topics such as clinical interviewing, projective assessment, research skills, clinical interventions, child abuse assessment and reporting, ethics, and multiculturalism. All participants had completed at least two in-person sessions (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant number	School attended (coded as 1 or 2)	Number of intensives attended
1	1	More than one-unspecified
2	1	2
3	1	More than one-unspecified
4	1	More than one-unspecified
5	2	4
6	2	More than one-unspecified

My goal was to interview participants who were at various places in their programs. I was not able to determine exactly how many intensives each participant had attended. Instead, the data reflect student perceptions that as they continued to participate in the intensives, they had more to contribute during the intensives as time went on. Additionally, despite differences in the placement of their respective programs, there were many similarities and common themes throughout the interviews, which are reviewed in this chapter.

Data Collection

All six of the participants received a flyer describing requirements for the study and contacted me via email to request information regarding participation. I then coordinated a time with participants to conduct a Skype interview. I informed them that the interview would be recorded with a Skype Mp3 recorder. Each participant received an informed consent form and was requested to send me an email stating "I consent" after reviewing the document. Interviews were conducted from 02-10 -2019 until 03-28-2019. Apart from two lost connections in the Skype interviews, there were no unusual circumstances in collecting the data. On the two occasions when a connection was lost, I was able to call the participant back immediately using Skype. In addition, my computer broke after the interviews were conducted and was repaired by a local computer repair shop in Fredericksburg, Virginia. The Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was notified of this issue. No further action was deemed necessary. I was also granted permission by the IRB through submission of a change in procedures form to engage in snowball sampling. I was also granted permission to change the wording on my flyer to state "residential conference" as opposed to "intensives." This change was made to reflect one school's preferred terminology when referring to the intensives. No additional changes in the data collection procedures were made.

I transcribed the videos into a Word document. Participants were sent a transcript of their interview and were offered the opportunity to make corrections or set up a follow-up interview. Two participants responded that they were satisfied with their initial interviews. The other four participants did not respond to the email I sent with their

transcribed interview attached. There were minor issues with regards to scheduling interviews that had the potential to influence participation, such as one participant who had just returned from a trip, as well as another participant who had difficulty activating Skype. These were considered minor issues. Participants did not appear to be bothered by these issues while engaging with the interviewer.

Data Analysis

I used thematic analysis to code my data. I began data analysis by moving the transcribed interview data into NVIVO from a Microsoft Word document. As I was acquainting myself with the features of NVIVO, I discovered that I could create a word cloud with the data that would show commonly discussed words or phrases from participants. This was a deviation from the original analysis plan that helped me to determine commonalities in the participant interviews. Although I used the word cloud as a starting point, the themes found in the data were determined as a result of thematic coding, and not by the word cloud itself. Through thematic coding, I noticed that participants frequently spoke about topics such as interacting with others, learning more about various roles in the field, as well as negative experiences that took place during residency. I then began to sort these topics into various themes.

My aim in this study was to identify how clinical psychology graduate students perceived the development of their professional identity. I asked participants how their beliefs about the practice of psychology changed as a result of participating in intensives. I also wanted to determine if there were common lived experiences among the participants as related to their participation in intensives.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

I used several strategies to maintain credibility in my study. I engaged in member checking by sending copies of the interview transcriptions to participants for review. I also used bracketing by making note of my own biases and themes I might expect to see, given my own experiences in residencies. For example, I was aware of my own anxiety going into residencies, so I made note of that. I was mindful when coding particular statements in the category of fear as opposed to the category of growth.

Transferability

Qualitative research by its nature has limited transferability. To address transferability, I collected data using the procedures I described in Chapter 3, including interviewing participants from two different programs who had also completed different numbers of intensives. By describing how participants were recruited and following this procedure and by providing thick descriptions of the settings and responses, I was able to optimize transferability in this study. This study can be replicated using different populations, such as students from other schools.

Dependability

To address dependability, I engaged in a process called triangulation. My second coder audited my codes. We came to a consensus on eight themes. This also helped me to determine when saturation was reached. She was able to see what interview statements I placed into a particular category. I was able to provide a rationale for coding the way I did. Initially, she and I discussed themes we thought may be present in the data, such as

growth. We also discussed how coding would be conducted, for example by initially using a word cloud to determine what themes might emerge from the data. Using a second coder also helped me to justify the themes I identified in the data. Additionally, I was able to interview participants who were in the first year of their program as well as those who had completed numerous intensives. This also increased dependability in this study.

Confirmability

I was able to address confirmability by consulting with my second coder and by using bracketing to acknowledge my potential biases. This helped me to finalize the themes I found within the data. Having a second coder input on the coding procedure helped me to ensure I was following a specific protocol. The second coder also provided me with feedback on the themes I identified. This served as a means of examining where my own interpretations may have been faulty, or biased. With feedback from her, I was able to tell when I achieved saturation with the data. She and I were able to agree on eight final themes.

Results

I was able to find eight themes within my interview data. As I considered each research question, I found themes that came from the data that helped to answer each question. Below I state each research question and the themes that are associated with that question. Table 2 illustrates each theme and the research question associated with the themes.

Table 2

Themes and Associated Research Questions

Theme	Research questions
Growth, fear	RQ1: Are there differences in this description in individuals who completed their first intensive and individuals who have completed multiple intensives?
Expertise, improved understanding	Subquestion to RQ 1: How do students describe the impact of an intensive, in-person learning experience on professional identity development in the context of a blended clinical psychology doctoral program?
Fear, adjusting	RQ2: What thematic differences exist in the descriptions of individuals who completed their second-to-last intensive as compared to those who have completed their final intensive?
Finding support, dissatisfaction	RQ3: At the conclusion of the last intensive, how do students describe the experience of being able to interact with cohort members and professors in person, as opposed to interacting solely online?
Expertise, change	RQ4: At the conclusion of the last intensive, how do students attending a blended clinical psychology doctoral program view the professional duties and the mission of a psychologist?

Research Question 1

The first research question in this study was: Are there differences in this description in individuals who completed their first intensive and individuals who have completed multiple intensives? The themes associated with the first question were growth and fear.

Theme 1: Growth. The participants in this study had each completed more than one intensive. One of the commonalities in the responses to interview questions was the idea that participation in the intensives promoted individual growth. Participants discussed feeling more at ease during intensives as time went on. Their multicultural

awareness and understanding of ethical issues in the field expanded after participating in the intensives. Additionally, they described an increased awareness of traits a psychologist possesses, such as being "intelligent but not condescending." There appeared to be an endorsement of an expansion of knowledge in participant responses. This was consistent with the theme of growth.

As an example of growth, participants frequently addressed the differences between what they experienced during the first intensive as compared to follow-up intensives. One participant stated "I would say that it's gotten easier over time. I was very overwhelmed, um at the first one. This past one I kinda felt like… I had more to contribute. I could say more, as opposed to the beginning where I felt like I don't have anything to say, I'm just here to listen."

Theme 2: Fear. Participants discussed feeling "overwhelmed" when beginning their first in-person intensives. They discussed notions of comparing themselves to peers and questioning their own abilities. Ideas regarding how to handle ethical dilemmas or whether to behave in a certain way in a given clinical situation were also discussed. Participants expressed feelings of unease with regard to diagnosis as well as providing appropriate resources to clients. The hesitancy and anxiety expressed with regard to these issues was consistent with the theme of fear.

With regard to the first research question, several participants referenced the idea of fear when discussing their experiences progressing through the intensives. One participant stated, "I would say at the first one um, I was intimidated um, by just the idea of it." This participant also stated, "I would say imposter syndrome is starting to fade."

In reference to fear, another participant noted, “It was also very intimidating because we were being watched or it felt like we were constantly being watched.” Another participant talked about being “overwhelmed” and assuming that all subsequent in-person meetings would be as “intense” as the initial one.

Subquestion to Research Question 1

The subquestion to research question 1 is: How do students describe the impact of an intensive, in-person learning experience on professional identity development in the context of a blended clinical psychology doctoral program? The themes associated with the subquestion were expertise and improved understanding.

Theme 3: Expertise. The theme expertise emerged as students described learning about what is involved in psychological training. This theme pertained to students’ comprehension of what is involved in becoming a psychologist. More specifically, the realization that being a psychologist involves being able to conduct and use research to inform one’s clinical practice. Additionally, this theme describes notions regarding what is required of psychologists and how they should present themselves professionally. Students discussed the idea that being a psychologist is not simply about providing therapy. Psychologists must complete years of training, become well-versed in various therapeutic techniques, and must present themselves in a way that is not only objective but also accepting of others. Psychologists can work in various settings and this theme reflected realizations that the work of a psychologist is different than the work of those in other mental health professions.

Two participants discussed the nature of obtaining a master's degree compared to a doctoral degree, and what it means to have the title "psychologist." Participants also mentioned the differences in roles among psychologists and those in other mental health professions. The appreciation for the level of training, as well as the professional duties and personal characteristics of psychologists were topics that were encapsulated by the theme of expertise.

The subquestion to the first research question was used to examine how students believed the intensives contributed to their professional identity development. With regard to expertise, students described the impact of the intensives as increasing the existing knowledge they had of the field. They also discussed obtaining a new understanding of how psychology differs from other mental health fields. One participant stated, "I think I was very confused about what a psychologist did, and how it was different, um, compared to other mental health professions… I have become way more aware of, um, the, the elevated level of knowledge, about the mental health field. Um, and, I did not understand the importance of the research aspect when it comes to psychologists." Another individual noted "Well to me…I wanted to do assessments... And you have to be a psychologist to do the, the kind of assessments that I wanted to do. ..it takes my clinical skills deeper. And it makes me more specialized..." Statements such as these illustrated the theme of "expertise" that students discussed in reference to how students described the impact of the intensives on their professional identity development.

Theme 4: Improved understanding. This theme was discovered as participants discussed developing an increased awareness of nuances in the field. Some participants mentioned becoming more knowledgeable of different theorists and theoretical orientations as they progressed through training. Participants also provided specific examples of how their knowledge base had expanded beyond wanting to talk with others, into how to use their training to provide clinically effective tools to clients. As these ideas as well as ideas about what participants wanted to accomplish professionally outside the scope of providing therapy emerged, the theme of improved understanding was generated.

In reference to the subquestion and how intensives influence professional identity, one participant stated that "I have learned things that you can do as a psychologist outside the traditional or stereotypical realm of what a psychologist does." This description is one of several that provided support for the theme improved understanding, which helped in addressing how students describe the impact that the in-person intensives have on professional identity. The intensives provided students with an understanding of the level of expertise required to become a psychologist. The intensives also improved participants' understanding of various aspects of the field, including where they would be able to work as clinical psychologists.

Research Question 2

The second research question regarded thematic differences in the descriptions of individuals who completed their second-to-last intensive as compared to those who have completed their final intensive. It is worth noting that participants did not specifically

differentiate their "second-to-last" versus their "final intensive" in their interview responses. However, numerous participants made references to previous intensives they had attended, as well as the most recent intensives they had attended. This question was addressed using that framework. The themes of "fear" and "adjusting" were found to help answer this research question.

Theme 1: Fear. In response to the second research question, participants primarily referenced fear when discussing issues with scheduling surrounding the intensives. This theme was also present when addressing the first research question and was often cited by the participants. Participants discussed how long and intense the in-person meetings were, and what this may have meant for future intensives. One participant made a remark about missing out on some important seminars during the intensives. This participant stated, "I feel like…as time went by and I went to like more of these, that I realized that I had to fit in enough stuff so that I didn't miss anything because one workshop that you can take this time won't show up again for another year." This participant also discussed fear in relation to understanding ethical issues. The student noted, "The ethics piece is really um, complicated. I think it's difficult and it's nowhere near as cut and dry as I thought it was at first." Statements such as these illustrate fears not only regarding what took place in residency but how one might feel after learning more about what the psychological profession entails.

Theme 2: Adjusting. This theme arose from participant discussion of several factors. Participants discussed feeling more acquainted with the structure of their programs after attending the first session. They were able to determine how to adjust their

schedules. They also wanted to determine how to participate in seminars on topics they enjoyed, while simultaneously meeting requirements for their respective programs. Participants were aware that they needed to modify their own expectations of residency in order to be successful in future residencies. These emergent ideas helped me to discover the theme of adjusting within my data.

In one example of thematic differences that exist between those comparing previous experiences to the most recent intensives they completed, one participant addressed the theme of "adjusting" by discussing how to manage future intensives, given the experience with the second intensive. This participant stated, "Coming out of my second intensive, will plan probably to do it at a different point in the semester…as long as it happened later in the semester, let you get your footing with your new classes before you go off for a residential and doing that doesn't give you the chance to sink into everything and to sort of align your priorities before you go."

Research Question 3

The third research question was: At the conclusion of the last intensive, how do students describe the experience of being able to interact with cohort members and professors in person, as opposed to interacting solely online? The themes found in relation to addressing this research question were "dissatisfaction" and "finding support." It is important to note that I was not aware of how many participants had completed their last intensive, and therefore could not address this research question as specifically as originally planned.

Theme 1: Dissatisfaction. This theme emerged from participant discussion of two issues. One of these issues was the overall experience participants had during residency. Specifically, dissatisfaction was expressed in relation to professors and the way they structured classes, as well as the quality of material they presented and how engaging they were. This was important in understanding how students experienced being able to interact with faculty. Additionally, some participants also expressed dissatisfaction with the manner in which multicultural awareness was presented in their coursework. This idea is discussed further in Chapter 5 as it is an important area for future research.

In terms of addressing the theme of dissatisfaction, one participant spoke of being dissatisfied with how professors had structured the in-person portion of the classes. This participant stated,

> I would be disappointed. I would feel like faculty…they weren't being very interactive… you know they would bring a couple of handouts and PowerPoints and they would read us the PowerPoints. I don't wanna see you in person, so you can read me slides.

Some participants also spoke of their dissatisfaction with regard to the education faculty provided surrounding multicultural awareness. When asked about multicultural awareness one individual stated, "My thought from the beginning is that um, it's not fully addressed in these uh. graduate clinical training programs and I still maintain that it's not fully addressed." With regard to multicultural awareness specifically, another participant

mentioned “So multicultural awareness is part of why I chose the program that I’m in. And if anything, I would say it’s not as strong among the faculty overall as I’d hoped.”

It is worth noting that some participants expressed a satisfaction with how they were taught about multicultural awareness. Nevertheless, these references to perceptions regarding the lack of appropriate attention to multicultural awareness are vital in the results of this study. This has implications for how we can improve the in-person component of blended programs. Additionally, we must consider how online coursework aligns with the delivery of in-person course material. It is evident that students place a great deal of importance on their interactions with professors and other students. They vocalized both positive and negative aspects of these interactions. These findings indicate that we have valuable feedback to consider when designing the in-person portions of blended coursework.

Theme 2: Finding support. This theme was developed through an examination of students’ descriptions of interactions with cohort members and professors. Students described completing activities such as “role playing” as well as learning from peers who had different professional experiences. Students also discussed feeling more at ease around professors as time went on. They valued being able to spend time with professors and learning about the professional experiences of the faculty. One participant referenced the idea of consulting in a professional setting, in relation to getting to talk with cohort members and faculty in residency. This theme is important in understanding how we can help to combat feelings of isolation that students may experience while enrolled in blended doctoral programs.

With regard to how interactions with faculty promoted the idea of finding support one participant stated, "You know my expectations were really high as far as what I would get out of those interactions, and in some cases my expectations were met and I really enjoyed the class…And I would feel like I got a lot from them and their expertise." Another participant made reference to finding support from faculty as a means of addressing practical concerns in the field. This participant stated, "I guess, just, mentoring, modeling, being-you know, showing up at these courses and having the professors, um, or the faculty just be there to talk with you." Another participant spoke of the value in talking with cohort members, as opposed to strictly faculty. This participant noted, "Interacting with other people, who are in the same program, um going through the same thing with me, I think really was important."

Research Question 4

The fourth research question was: At the conclusion of the last intensive, how do students attending a blended clinical psychology doctoral program view the professional duties and the mission of a psychologist? I was not aware of which participants had completed the final intensive required by their program, which limited the interpretation of the findings. Instead of limiting the question to those that had completed the last intensive, all of the participants addressed this question without consideration of how far they had progressed in the program. The themes of expertise and change were found here.

Theme 1: Expertise. This theme described the notion that psychologists are seen as experts in the field of clinical psychology as a whole. Their duties go beyond providing therapy to clients and expand to presenting themselves to the public and to

others in the field as compassionate and knowledgeable. This presentation is a testament to the training they have received and to the duty they have to provide ethically-sound clinical care to patients. When asked what being a psychologist meant to each individual one participant stated, "Being a gatekeeper. You know it's not just a matter of helping people with, uh, you know whatever psychopathology or any disturbances that they have. You know at the very essence we're giving life or death services." Statements such as this one illustrate how students' perceived the expertise one gains in order to become a psychologist, as well as the complexities of the role of a psychologist.

Theme 2: Change. This theme arose from ideas that participants expressed regarding what they wished to change in the field after participating in the intensives. One participant discussed changing the notion of stigma surrounding mental illness being perpetuated by mental health practitioners. Another participant talked about wanting to promote social change through individual therapy. Another individual discussed helping patients change not by making a diagnosis but by using prominent literature in the field of psychology to help guide them. This theme was important in understanding how students perceived the mission of clinical psychologists and how they could carry out this mission.

In reference to understanding what it means to be a psychologist, one participant stated, "I think we're poised to do something that won't happen in another way um, that, that there is a way to make social change on the interpersonal level, um, and I think it's unique to psychology." Participants also discussed "change" in terms of changes they wished to see occur in the field in response to these ethical issues. One participant stated,

"It's very interesting how even with this pro-profession there's this perceived stigma that a lot of practitioners have about treating mental illness and I think that needs to be addressed."

Summary

In this chapter I discussed the findings of the study. Students experience less fear, and a greater degree of comfort. Participants were able to describe what traits they thought a psychologist should possess. These traits included being an expert in their field, as well as someone who understands the difference between talking to someone and truly engaging in therapy. They also discussed the experience of getting to meet faculty and other students in person. They placed great importance on this, as it served to build their confidence as clinicians. Participants discussed interactions with which they were dissatisfied. These interviews contain a wealth of information regarding how future psychologists view their training. The information found in these interviews is valuable in assessing how we can improve upon the training process. Participants viewed these intensives as incredibly important to their development. They wanted to capitalize on the time they had during residency. This helped them cultivate their understanding of the field and to determine their own interests in clinical psychology.

In Chapter 5 I will discuss how my findings relate to transactional distance theory. I will discuss how my findings are similar and different from the literature discussed in Chapter 2. I will also discuss limitations that occurred during my data collection, such as obtaining a limited number of participants. I will also discuss how I believe my study can promote positive social change. Specifically, I will address how the findings from my

research can help to improve training programs. The improvement of training programs will ultimately help improve the quality of care that individuals seeking therapy receive.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This study was conducted to learn more about the lived experiences of those who are enrolled in blended clinical psychology doctoral programs. The purpose was to gain insight into the identity development process that occurs in the context of in-person learning intensives. The idea for this study came from my own experiences as a clinical psychology graduate student who attended in-person learning intensives. Throughout the course of my experiences in residency, I made connections with faculty and staff. I also gained a lot of social support from my peers. I learned a great deal about ethics and multicultural awareness. I also believe that I grew as a professional. I improved my ability to integrate the literature into my clinical decision making. I was able to collaborate with peers during residency. We discussed our individual experiences, which greatly enriched the training process for me. In generating ideas for a dissertation, I thought back on these experiences and how valuable they were to me. I wanted to know whether other students felt this way. I was curious how those from other schools perceived their intensives. I wanted to know how these intensives improved their understanding of psychology. I also wanted to know how the intensives might be improved upon, based on feedback from students. This study is deeply personal to me, not only as my dissertation, but as a means of giving a voice to trainees. In my experience as a trainee, I have taken in a great deal of information. I believe that this study gives trainees an opportunity to gain insight into their own development. They are able to take

the information they have been given and generate new insights for themselves and for the field of clinical psychology.

The results of this study indicated that as students progress through their intensives, they experience greater confidence and less fear. They were able to evaluate what they needed from the intensives, as opposed to accepting the experience of the intensives at face value. They also discussed how important it was to them to be able to interact in person with both faculty and other students. Students referenced the value in learning from other students who had had various career experiences. Students also discussed issues they wanted to see addressed in residency and in the field of clinical psychology. They talked about their dissatisfaction with how multicultural awareness was discussed in their residency. One student mentioned learning about all the different roles that clinical psychologists can have, which can go beyond providing therapy.

Additionally, another student discussed the desire to incorporate societal change in the therapy room. These insights were incredibly valuable in addressing the purpose of this study. They allowed me to see how a sample of students understood their role as psychologists going beyond that of therapist. The findings provided insight into the training process regarding how students discover their own personal goals for their role as a professional psychologist.

Interpretation of the Findings

To present a complete picture of the results of my study, I compare my findings here with the literature discussed in Chapter 2. Pakenham and Stafford-Brown (2012) noted that trainees in psychology often experience anxiety that can impact their clinical

work. Several of the participants discussed the anxiety that they experienced during training, particularly beginning the in-person intensives. Participants made note of the resources available to them in residency, such as professors and other students with varied experiences. Being able to talk with their professors allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of the field of psychology. Trainees also noted that as time passed, they felt more at ease in residency. According to Falgares et al. (2017), being able to participate in professional development activities allows students to gain a more realistic and less idealistic view of their profession after engaging in experiential learning. Feedback from participants in this study supported the research of Falgares et al. as students discussed their improved understanding of the field of clinical psychology after participation in the intensives.

Participants also discussed the level of expertise required to become a psychologist. They made note of the fact that the role of psychologist extends beyond simply talking to individuals. One participant stated, “I’ve even started to be curious about ways to raise these questions in the literature.” Statements such as this are consistent with the results of one study conducted in an Australian blended doctoral program (see Beutel et al., 2010). Beutel et al. (2010) reported that students gained a greater understanding of the research process after participation in in-person intensives.

Authors have made note of the importance of collaboration with other mental health professionals in the development of one’s professional identity (Gazzola et al., 2011). One major theme participants discussed in this study was finding support. Participants talked about working with faculty who had clinical experience, as well as

other students who had various professional experiences, as reflected by the theme finding support. When asked about comparing the first experience at a doctoral intensive to the last one, one participant stated, "Just more interested in learning from other students about their experiences as a, as a way to um, kind of increase my own um knowledge about different parts of the field." It is evident that students value their time in residency. They enjoy being able to interact with others as it allows them to develop their own appreciation for the field of psychology.

One clear conclusion that can be made from the literature review, as discussed in Chapter 2, is that there are improvements to be made in blended learning programs (see Erichsen et al., 2013). This conclusion was also supported by the themes revealed in the data analysis for the current study. For example, several students discussed feeling hesitant when beginning their intensives (as evident in the theme fear). Given that fear is a common experience in students attending intensives, this could be addressed early on in the intensive process and normalized by professors to help students feel more comfortable contributing to their in-person sessions. In addition, the theme of dissatisfaction, which included some participants mentioning their lack of satisfaction regarding how multicultural awareness was addressed in residency, is an issue that may be important to examine in future studies. These themes are vital to understanding the training process and may be important in developing measures of program satisfaction. Future research with students enrolled in blended doctoral programs might involve asking students what elements of their intensives they found most helpful, as well as those they found least beneficial and why this was the case. The findings of this study may also be

integrated into research that aims to develop quantitative measures of student experiences that will allow for larger sample sizes and generalizable data.

In the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, I discussed transactional distance theory as one of the theoretical frameworks used in this study. According to this theory, when students and teachers are not next to one another, their ability to communicate is impacted (Huang et al., 2016). The amount of transactional distance in a given situation can be described as the communication that occurs between students and teachers (Kang & Gyorke, 2008). The relationship is such that the degree of transactional distance is smaller when there is more interaction occurring between individuals in a given classroom (Huang et al., 2016). The themes of finding support, growth, dissatisfaction, and change supported this theory. These themes reflect the idea that students want to have an impact on their learning environment. They also want to contribute to their learning environment by interacting with others and vocalizing what they need from their respective programs. They found support in meeting with faculty and other students. When they had positive experiences in person with faculty and other students, they experienced growth and change within themselves. When their needs were not met when meeting face-to-face with professors and other students, they expressed dissatisfaction. There were not exceptions to this theory, rather varying responses from participants regarding what interacting with other students and professors meant to them and how it influenced their experiences in-residency.

Results from this study illustrate that being able to interact with faculty in-person allowed students to relate to them. One participant stated, “I have had a really, um,

wonderful experience, working with faculty from different fields. And being able to ask them questions and talk with them." Statements such as this one support the idea in transactional distance theory that students who perceive that they have an impact on their learning environment are less likely to need a controlled classroom setting.

It is apparent that students enjoyed being able to talk candidly with their professors. This allowed them to learn about other aspects of the field aside from therapy. Whether students were asking questions about research or attending seminars in environmental psychology or substance abuse, when they had a greater degree of control over what they were learning about, they endorsed enjoyment regarding participation in the intensives. Conversely, one participant expressed dissatisfaction with professors who simply referred to PowerPoints during a lecture. Two other participants described dissatisfaction with how multicultural awareness was addressed during these intensives. These findings are important in addressing the transactional distance that occurs in blended programs. Students in these programs presumably see their professors much less than those enrolled in traditional programs. They place a great deal of value on the time spent during the intensives. Thus, when instructors structure their time with students in such a way that there is a sense of disengagement, transactional distance between the two parties may be impacted. Students may easily become frustrated with the lack of communication. These results illustrate that allowing students to discuss issues that are important to them is vital in maximizing the benefit of the intensives and delivering coursework to students.

Actor network theory was also discussed in Chapter 2. This theory notes that the all entities, both living and nonliving, are driven by the connections they have to other entities (Callon, 1999; Skagius & Munger, 2016). Results from this study indicated that professional identity development occurs as a result of a myriad of factors. Seminars, conversations with other students, talking with professors, role-playing, and recognizing what one is and is not satisfied with in residency are all factors that contribute to how students developed across the intensives.

The themes found in this study that were consistent with actor network theory were improved understanding, expertise, fear, and adjusting. By participating in the intensives, students observed that there were numerous entities that influenced their understanding of the field of clinical psychology. One of these entities is ethics, and students discussed developing an improved understanding to ethics that govern the field of psychology as well as the idea that psychologists have developed a level of expertise that is unique to their profession. This expertise is another entity that governs the field of clinical psychology and perceptions that trainees have about psychologists. The fear that trainees experienced was another entity that influenced their learning environment. The decrease in fear that they experienced also had a positive impact on their willingness to participate and contribute to in-person sessions as time went on. Students discussed several factors that influenced their ability to adjust within their programs. These included being able to meet program requirements while taking seminars they enjoyed, as well as modifying their schedules to meet program requirements. These themes illustrate the connections that take place between students and other entities in blended learning

programs. These connections can become networks where students influence their learning environment and the learning environment influences the students.

In one example illustrating the connection between students and other non-living entities, two participants mentioned the financial aspects involved in planning for a residency. Being aware of financial constraints resulted in adapting their time and adjusting their accommodations in order to maximize their success in-residency. Another participant stated, "How do we…find a way to shift the practice of therapy to sort of a… community- minded practice, even as it takes place between two individuals?" Statements such as this one illustrate that students are influenced by numerous entities in their clinical training. These entities might present on a micro level, such as a conversation with another student regarding experience in the field, or on a much larger scale, such as how financial constraints might influence one's training. Another example of these entities would be how as a therapist we can provide a means for positive social change in the context of the therapy room. Thus, the themes were consistent with both transactional distance theory and actor network theory. There were themes such as dissatisfaction and finding support that impacted the transactional distance that occurred between students and professors. Additionally, there were connections between students and non-living entities, such as fear and the concept of adjusting, that provided support for the networks that students develop not only with their professors and one another, but with other factors that may not be readily apparent until information about their lived experience in-residency was gathered.

It is clear that there is a wealth of information we have yet to discover about what influences students in their graduate training. However, we do know that students are influenced by the interactions that occur between themselves and professors, as well as other students in residency. These interactions allow them to feel more comfortable as they continue in their programs. They are able to recognize facets of the residencies that they enjoy. They are also able to formulate ideas about what they would change in-residency. They are able to develop a sense of what they want to accomplish professionally and what they wish to bring to the field of clinical psychology.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations of the design were discussed in Chapter 1. There was concern with the fact that only a certain number of individuals from each program would participate in the study. Flyers were distributed by faculty and administrators to students in two blended clinical psychology programs. Presumably all students who were eligible for participation had an opportunity to respond to the flyer to be considered for participation. Two sets of questions were created in anticipation of recruiting participants who had only completed one intensive and those who had completed more than one. All of my participants had completed more than one intensive. Thus, only one set of questions was used. I was only able to recruit six participants. Due to the limited sample size, I cannot generalize the findings of specific issues, such as the perception of a lack of focus multicultural awareness, to other populations. This issue in particular may be considered a program issue and cannot be extrapolated to all blended programs. I was also not able to clearly demonstrate the change in professional identity development that

might occur as students progress through the intensives, as there was no clear identification of how many intensives each student had experienced.

There was also a limitation in regard to the number of schools I recruited participants from. If I had recruited a larger sample, I may have gained additional insight into how the training process differs from program to program. This was not the aim of this study. However, the degree of transferability may have been increased by interviewing students from more clinical psychology programs.

I am a graduate student researcher enrolled in a blended clinical psychology doctoral program at Walden University. Given my own life experiences as a graduate student, I had personal biases that may have been reflected in my findings. As a means of correcting for this bias, I had a second coder. Additionally, Walden University students were not used in this study. The input of Walden University students would have been valuable in examining differences in the lived experiences of students who are enrolled in different programs; however, it was important to limit the possibility of my bias interfering with the findings by not recruiting Walden students. In the future, it is important that students from a larger number of schools are interviewed in order to determine how to improve blended programs across disciplines.

Recommendations

I have several recommendations for future research given the current findings. First, I recommend that participants from other schools as well as those from other disciplines are interviewed in follow-up studies. This will provide insight into the differences that exist among blended programs. This will also provide information

regarding the identity development process that occurs in students who are training to work in fields other than clinical psychology. Additionally, a longitudinal study would be helpful in determining how students from the same program develop professionally as they progress through their programs. There is still much to learn about how we can improve blended programs and the experiences of students who are enrolled in these programs.

Additional research is recommended to address the professional identity development process that occurs in-residency. Some students expressed dissatisfaction with certain elements of their programs, however there is still more to uncover with regard to how students perceive their preparedness to enter into the field. More research is needed in order to determine how trainees experience their own professional identity to occur. Questions such as, "How did the intensives influence your readiness to enter practicum?" would be important in future research in order to address developmental changes that occur within students as a result of participation in the intensives. It is important that we consider how blended programs can be improved based on student feedback.

Students enrolled in blended programs must determine how they can meet the demands of their program without feeling overwhelmed (Beutel et al., 2010). Some participants in the current study discussed the nature of the intensives and how they needed to meet the requirements of the program while choosing electives or seminars based on their own interests. One participant described having to adjust a schedule in order to meet the demands of the program and attend specific seminars that fit individual

interests. It is evident that more research is needed to determine how we can allow students time to pursue their personal interests within the field while still completing necessary program requirements. Additionally, several participants spoke about being overwhelmed and not knowing how to contribute during initial residencies. More research is needed in order to help alleviate some of this stress and to help students feel more confident even in the beginning of their program. A qualitative, longitudinal study could be beneficial in determining how student perceptions of a specific program improved over time. Additionally, this type of study could provide information about how students perceived their professional identity development to have occurred, even after they earned their Ph.D.

Researchers have reported that students change over time as a result of participation in blended learning programs (Beutel et al., 2010). Additional research into how students change over time as a result of participation in graduate programs will be important in developing this field. This may help us to discover how program structures can be adapted to suit the needs of students at various stages. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 coupled with the results of this study support the need for more research into how we can improve the structure and delivery of material in blended learning programs (Erichsen et al., 2013). When we improve the training programs for those who wish to become mental health professionals, the quality of care that patients receive has the potential for vast improvement.

Implications

Change on Individual and Organizational Levels

Before I began collecting data, I was curious about what students would have to say about their experiences in their doctoral programs. I wanted to know how they conceptualized the intensives because I learned so much from them. I gained support from professors and other students. I wanted to know how these intensives could be improved upon in order to improve the lives of students and those receiving mental health services. As I developed my proposal, I considered how the results of my study could contribute to the field of psychology. I discovered that there is a dearth of research focused on how trainees can become more competent professionals and how training itself can contribute to this development (McKenzie et al., 2013). It is important to understand the nature of professional development in the context of the need for mental health professionals; in 2016, there were over 44 million people in the United States who had a diagnosable mental illness (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2017).

The results of this study may provide a means for developing individual training programs. For example, students expressed fear regarding how to manage issues that will likely occur in clinical work. These issues include those related to ethics, diagnosis, and multicultural awareness. By developing blended programs that specifically address fears students may have we can help them to learn how to make sound clinical judgments. This modification might include adding role-playing exercises, as well group exercises to the

in-person intensives. These exercises would allow students to explore and find solutions to issues they will encounter as they enter the professional world and minimize the risk for patients. If we can help to mitigate the fears of students through the training process, we can likely increase their confidence as they become psychologists. By improving clinical psychology programs, we may also improve the care that those in need of mental health services receive. By improving the delivery of healthcare, we can contribute to positive social change.

On an individual level, the results of this study provided information about how students view their time in-residency. Students expressed growth in their confidence as they progressed through residencies. Some also expressed a dissatisfaction with the way that residencies were structured, as well as how topics such as multicultural awareness were addressed. This is important for those involved in designing curriculums. An examination of how professors are utilizing resources and structuring classroom time in-residency is warranted in future studies. Students are aware that residencies are emotionally taxing and financially burdensome. We have a responsibility to ensure that they feel confident and satisfied with the training they have received. If we can help improve their confidence from the beginning of residency, the more willing they will be to learn about the field. Subsequently, they are able to feel more assured in their ability to contribute positively to their clients and to the field of clinical psychology.

On an organizational level, I believe that the results from my study can be used to help communities of graduate students and professors capitalize on their time interacting with one another in-residency. Students who participated in this study emphasized that

they enjoyed the social support they gained in-residency. They learned from other students. They were able to talk candidly with professors about issues beyond the curriculum. They learned about various career paths in clinical psychology. They were able to build a network of individuals that helped them to feel supported. Literature shows us that psychologists who engage in professional development activities, such as working with a mentor, experience gains in clinical practice and instructional abilities (Taylor & Neimeyer, 2015; Troisi et al., 2015). Students have the opportunity in-residency to find a mentor. They also have the opportunity to explore how engaging with others can help them grow as professionals. This study can contribute to positive social change by showing professors how important they are in shaping the understanding students have of the field of psychology. By building a network of support in-residency, students have a platform to build their confidence. Having more confidence allows trainees to contribute to the field in a positive manner. They also have support to reach out to when feeling isolated. This has the potential to improve their psychological well-being, thus creating a more positive, well-adjusted professional.

Change on a Societal Level

On a societal level, I believe that the results of this study can help emphasize the importance of blended educational programs. The American Psychological Association does not currently provide accreditation to online doctoral programs. The literature illustrates difficulties with a lack of face-to face interaction that impact universities' willingness to develop additional blended learning programs (Schumann & Skopek, 2009). The students interviewed in this study demonstrated a passion for the field. They

discussed their struggles, their personal ambitions, and their desire to help others. Anecdotally speaking, there have been instances where others have questioned the legitimacy of my education simply because I attend a blended doctoral program. If those funding higher education understood the amount of work and diligence that students who are enrolled in blended programs put into their training, perhaps more funding for these programs could be provided. This in turn could help lift some of the financial burden from students so that they could focus on maximizing their time in residency. With additional funding, perhaps administrators could structure courses differently, in order to better meet the needs of students.

Above all else, by improving the funding for blended doctoral programs, we can increase the quality of training students receive. This may allow them to feel confident in the services they provide to clients. With improved training they are better able to understand ethical issues as they arise. Being able to manage these issues ensures that they have done their due diligence in promoting health and well-being in their clients. With millions of individuals suffering from mental illness we must be able to provide quality care. This starts with ensuring that those who want to help are equipped to do so. And most importantly, that their training fosters their passion for aiding others.

Conclusion

I was and still am learning about myself and who I want to become as a psychologist. There have been many times I have called on the support from others I met in residency. My second coder on this study was a graduate teaching assistant I met in residency. She has been a driving force in helping me to improve my confidence as a

clinician and as a researcher. Engaging in this experience has given new meaning to developing my own professional identity. I once heard a professor in residency emphasize the importance of the dissertation process in truly knowing what it is to become a doctor. This process has shown me that I am more capable of helping others and contributing positively to the field of psychology than I ever thought possible.

Being able to interview participants and learn about how they perceived residency was an enlightening experience. I found that their struggles were both similar and different from the ones I had experienced. I shared in their nervousness and apprehension at the beginning of residency. I recognized too that the dissatisfaction that some of them expressed with education surrounding multicultural awareness in-residency was not something I had experienced. Although this was an upsetting finding, I believe it is imperative that I use the results of my study to help improve others' understanding of blended doctoral programs. Additionally, I hope to help improve the quality of these programs so that mental health care may be improved. I was afforded an opportunity to examine how students view their own experiences in-residency. I believe I have captured that in the results of this study. I have done my best to present my results with clarity and integrity. It is my hope that others see the value in these results and are able to help advocate for improvements in the field of clinical psychology.

Students need support in order to meet their goals. They want to be able to learn from professors as well as their peers. They recognize the level of expertise it takes to become a psychologist. Their time in-residency is valuable to them. They want to be able to learn about different subjects within the field of clinical psychology. Through the

process of completing residencies they are able to establish professional goals for themselves. They recognize the need for improvements in the training process. This too, helps to inform their professional goals. Ultimately, they are given a short period of time to learn as much as possible about how to provide clinically-sound care to others. One participant stated, “At the very essence we are giving life or death services.” This illustrates the importance that clinical psychology students give their work. They recognize the potential impact they can have on a person’s life.

It is my hope that the results of this study will be useful in developing blended clinical psychology doctoral programs, as well as other blended education programs. I hope that as blended education programs become more popular, policy makers recognize the importance of giving funding to these programs as well as considering giving them accreditation. I recognize my own role as a healthcare provider will always be evolving.

Completing this dissertation opened my eyes to the world of research and how it can influence society as a whole. I am deeply humbled to have been afforded the opportunity to study psychology at the doctoral level. Having completed the dissertation, I recognize that it is my professional duty not only to serve my clients, but to advocate for my fellow trainees and other mental health professionals. There is so much we have yet to learn about how we can improve the training process. I believe that this study has contributed to our understanding of what clinical psychology trainees in blended programs experience. I hope that we can use this information to improve these experiences. In turn, this can help them to fulfill their goal of helping those in need of mental health services.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions for Those Who Have Completed More Than One or All Intensives

- If you have completed more than one in-person intensive, how would you say that your understanding of the role of a psychologist has changed?
- How would you compare the experience of your first doctoral intensive to your last one?
- What expectations did you have after your first intensive for the other intensives? Were these expectations met? Why or why not?
- Did your understanding of professional ethics in psychology change from your first intensive to subsequent intensives?
- Did your understanding of multicultural awareness change from your first intensive to subsequent intensives?
- What aspects of the intensives helped improve your understanding of what a psychologist does?
- Do you feel as though your values and beliefs about the practice of psychology have changed as a result of participating in the face-to-face intensives?
- Now that you have completed several intensives, what would you say being a psychologist means to you?
- How would you say being a psychologist relates to who you are as a person?