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Why Should We Care? Psychodynamic Theory and Practice in Counselor Preparation

Elyssa Smith

University of Wyoming, esmith61@uwyo.edu

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Abstract

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This constructivist grounded theory investigation explored the experiences and perceptions of seven counselors-in-training regarding psychodynamic theory and practice. Two categories, five themes including three subthemes, and a tentative theory which spoke to the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of students regarding contemporary psychodynamic psychotherapy emerged. Implications for counselor education and the training of counselors are discussed.

Keywords: counselor preparation, psychodynamic, reflective practice

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Author's Notes

I would like to thank Dr. Martin Agran for his extensive advice, support, and belief in my ability. A special thanks to Dr. Eric Teman who was a source of guidance and inspiration for this qualitative study.

I had no idea psychoanalysis had to do with emotions...

Oh—you know, Freud is all about sex, he was kind of a sick guy.

You look way too much into things, psychoanalytic therapy is outdated and doesn't make sense...

I don't believe we have to talk about the past...what's the point, your therapy seems so negative.

Psychodynamic/analytic therapists are so cold, they don't care about the client, they just want to tell their clients what they think.

The quotes as listed above are reactions and statements practicing counselors, counselors-in-training, and doctoral level professors expressed to me, after I told them that I align with psychodynamic theory and treatment in my practice. Although I had some awareness there are misperceptions surrounding psychoanalytic theory and treatment in the counseling field, I was surprised to learn, as Shedler (2006) observes, such “inaccurate, caricatured and pejorative preconceptions” of psychoanalytic psychotherapy (p. 3). I began wondering the extent to which the counselors lack accurate knowledge on contemporary psychodynamic practice. Further, I questioned how psychoanalytic theory was being communicated, portrayed, and taught to counselors-in-training to have warranted such a negative response. This curiosity motivated my investigation.

Misunderstandings about Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy

Psychoanalytic psychotherapy (for the purposes of this article, the terms *psychoanalytic* and *psychodynamic* are employed interchangeably) is one of the least understood theories and forms of treatment both within the mental health profession and larger society (Shedler, 2006).

If psychoanalysis is introduced in the clinical training of mental health professionals, this theory is often presented in a dismissive manner, described as scientifically invalid, or oversimplified

(Shedler, 2010). There are several reasons for such inaccurate portrayals and misunderstandings in the training of mental health professionals, including: discomfort with sexual, aggressive, and dependent aspects of human nature (Lowder, Hansell, & McWilliams, 2006); the fact that most undergraduate and graduate textbooks describe psychoanalytic theory as it was understood and speculated by Freud over a century ago (Hansell, 2005; Redman & Shulman, 2008); and cartoon-like depictions of analysis within the media (Shedler, 2010). Such portrayals have helped to shape the misinformed public perception of psychoanalysis.

Public Perception and the Media

Psychoanalysis has become a part of our culture (Lowder, Hansell, & McWilliams, 2006). According to Lowder et al., the influence of sexual and aggressive impulses as discussed in psychoanalysis is widespread within the media and society at large. In terms of public perception, many people derive their view of psychodynamic therapy from Woody Allen movies, and episodes of *The Sopranos*, which portray less than accurate views of what happens in actual contemporary practice (Barber & Sharpless, 2015). These widespread, inaccurate portrayals of psychoanalysis play a major role in the inaccurate and misinformed understandings of contemporary psychodynamic theory and practice. Overall, within the mental health field and society at large, contemporary psychoanalytic orientations are misunderstood as a theory of the mind, as an approach to understand psychopathology, as social and group phenomena, and as the basis of psychotherapeutic treatments (Lowder et al., 2006).

Another source of misunderstanding stems from the belief that psychodynamic treatment lacks scientific evidence and efficacy. Often, counselor educators, academicians, and researchers are quick to dismiss psychodynamic approaches, asserting psychoanalytic ideas are irrelevant ancient practices rather than an important contribution to the field of psychology and counseling

(Shedler, 2010). Yet, there is considerable research supporting the efficacy and effectiveness of psychodynamic therapy (McWilliams, 2013; Shedler 2010).

A meta-analysis of process and outcome research has proven the efficacy of psychodynamic psychotherapy for a range of conditions and populations with effect sizes as large as those treatments deemed *evidence based* or *empirically supported* (Leichsenring & Rabung, 2011; Shedler, 2010). Studies using randomized control trials support the efficacy of psychodynamic therapy for a wide variety of conditions and populations, including: depression, anxiety, panic, somatoform disorders, eating disorders, substance related disorders, and personality disorders (Clarkin, Levy, Lenzenweger, & Kernberg, 2007; Leichsenring, 2005; Milrod et al., 2007). Such evidence highlights the gap among perception and evidence in the field (McWilliams, 2013).

Further, several empirical investigations have determined a link between psychodynamic processes and successful outcomes in non-dynamic treatment approaches, suggesting non-psychodynamic approaches are effective, in part, because they use interventions and techniques central to psychodynamic theory (Diener, Hilsenroth, & Weinberger, 2007; Høglend et al., 2008). These techniques include focusing and facilitating the patient's affective experience in and through the therapeutic relationship. While many do not recognize or acknowledge, the concept of *common factors* comes directly from psychoanalysis and has been central to psychodynamic theory and practice for the past four decades (Horvath & Luborsky, 1993).

Relational Skills in Counselor Preparation

The development of relational skills is crucial in the training and preparation of beginning counselors. Novice counselors must be educated on ways to foster, attend to, and maintain a therapeutic relationship with their clients. Counselors are not able to provide effective

interventions with their clients if they do not have a solid therapeutic relationship with them. Hence, relationship skills are the foundational components and the basis of any effective intervention. With this in mind, it is clear that beginning counselors must receive training to further develop their relationship skills if they wish to become competent clinicians (Braga, 2015). A contemporary perspective on psychodynamic theory and practice with attention to the importance of the therapeutic relationship, can provide further development of relational skills and crucial insights for counselors-in-training.

Relevance of Psychoanalytic Theory for Counselors

Despite the misunderstandings in the field and society, recent literature has offered a contemporary perspective on psychoanalytic theory and its clinical relevance for counselors (Redekop 2015; Redekop, Luke & Malone, 2017). From their inception, psychoanalytic treatment methods have and continue to be relational acts (Redekop, Luke, & Malone, 2017). As Redekop (2015) argues, contemporary psychoanalytic theory, practice, and concepts remain clinically relevant for counselors and can be most usefully understood from a relational perspective, which emphasizes the importance of the client and the counseling relationship. Further, psychodynamic therapists and counselors equally view the therapeutic relationship as a vehicle for client development, a container for treatment interventions, and the most powerful therapeutic tool in and of itself (Redekop et al., 2017). Therefore, contemporary forms of psychoanalytic theory and practice offer crucial insights counselors-in-training, practicing counselors, and counselor educators through the use of the therapeutic relationship as a means for change.

Purpose

While the literature offers insights into the misrepresentations surrounding psychoanalytic treatment from the perspective of academia, the mental health field and society, there is a lack of research on counselors-in-trainings' perspectives regarding contemporary forms of psychoanalytic theory and therapeutic practice. The importance of exploring counselors-in-trainings' perceptions centers on the idea that psychoanalytic theory founded key therapeutic themes that continue to define the counseling profession, regardless of the counselor's theoretical orientation (Redekop, 2015). Therefore, the purpose of this pilot constructivist grounded theory study was to understand the meaning, feelings, and perceptions counselors-in-training have about contemporary psychodynamic theory and practice based on their knowledge and experiences. This investigation was guided by three primary questions:

- (1) How do counselors-in-training describe their experience of learning about contemporary psychodynamic theory and practice?
- (2) What are counselors-in-trainings' perceptions of contemporary psychodynamic theory and practice based on these experiences?
- (3) How do students' experiences and perceptions impact their understanding and attitudes regarding psychodynamic psychotherapy?

Method

Positionality and Philosophical Stance

As a current doctoral student in counselor education and supervision, a prior counselor-in-training, and a therapist who predominately draws upon psychodynamic theory and practice in my clinical work, I hold my own views, perceptions, and understandings regarding contemporary psychoanalytic theory and practice. It is my belief that these views and biases work to strengthen this study and provide a common ground between participants and me.

The epistemological stance of the researcher informs the entire research process from the creation of the study's design, to the data collection and analysis procedures (Crotty, 1998; Merriam, 2009). My epistemological stance is informed by the constructivist approach to social science. Constructivists (or interpretivists) view reality as existing in the form of multiple mental constructs that are dependent on the individual. That is, as human beings we construct knowledge in and through our lived experiences and interactions with other members of society (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Based on the constructivist approach to research, I viewed the interviewing process as a means for participants to tell their stories in their own terms. As participants told their stories, I listened with full attention and was open to discovering their subjective perceptions. It was vital for me to recognize how the relationship among the participants and me informed the co-constructed meanings and perceptions which lead to the theoretical discovery in this investigation.

Research Design

Grounded theory is a general methodological approach to data collection and analysis. It is a way of thinking about conceptualizing the data in an investigation. Grounded theory was pioneered by sociologists Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s. Their original method involved both

inductive and deductive thinking often with the researcher taking on the role of an observer and aimed to develop a theory that explains a process or interaction (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

A constructivist approach to grounded theory is a form of grounded theory based on the interpretative tradition of qualitative research (Charmaz, 2006). The constructivist approach to grounded theory tends to be less structured in comparison to the original method and involves the researcher's views, the co-creation of meaning by the researcher and participants, and seeks to uncover experiences within embedded networks, situations, and relationships (Creswell, 2013).

Additionally, a constructivist grounded theory approach provides guidance for deriving meaning from data and helps to facilitate the task of translating participants' experiences into understandable theoretical interpretations. I chose a constructivist grounded theory design for this study due to my experience dealing with the issues being discussed, my familiarity and prior relationships with some of the participants, and my perceptions regarding the theory's alliance with my epistemological stance.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to conducting the study, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at a university in the western region of the United States. Before each interview, participants were provided an informed consent to review. Once participants arrived at the interview, I discussed the informed consent with them. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. I maintained confidentiality by removing names and identifiable information from the audio recordings and transcripts. The interviews were then labeled in numerical order.

Participants

The participants in this study were recruited through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling places emphasis on the in-depth understanding of specific cases from which the investigator can learn, discover, understand, and gain insight (Patton, 2015). To begin purposeful sampling, the researcher must establish selection criteria. Once selection criteria are established, the researcher can use these criteria as a guide to find participants who will provide information-rich cases (Merriam, 2009).

In this investigation, nominees were selected based on the following criteria: (1) each was a currently enrolled student in a Master's in Counseling graduate program and (2) each had completed or were currently enrolled in a theory in counseling course. To recruit participants, I posted a call for participants on the Counselor Education and Supervision Network Listserv (CESNET-L). In addition to the posting, I reached out through email or in person to Master's level students enrolled at the university's Counselor Education and Supervision Program. Those who wished to volunteer for the study replied to the call through email. Once I received an email indicating interest, an informed consent was provided to disclose information regarding research purpose and procedures.

The final sample ($N=7$) consisted of four males and three females ranging in age from 23 to 45 years. At the time of the interview, all participants were enrolled in a Master's counseling program. Participants in the study attended programs in the following regions of the country: Rocky Mountain ($n=4$), North Central ($n=2$), and Southern ($n=1$). In terms of race and ethnicity, five of the participants were Caucasian, one was Hispanic/Latino, and one was Asian. The majority of the sample consisted of first-year students who were currently enrolled in either a pre-practicum or practicum clinical course.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide. While conducting the interviews, I drew upon my own prior knowledge and experiences as a way to focus on issues of importance to the research questions and clarify comments by the participants. This process provided structure and coherence to the interview data, without taking away from the originality and unique voices of the participants. Moreover, my shared background with participants allowed for additional insights into their experiences, disassembled differences in power, and fostered a dialogue during the interviews (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006).

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face ($N=4$) or via Skype ($N=3$), dependent on the participant's geographic location. The interviews lasted anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded using a digital recording device. After each interview, I listened to the audio recordings and transcribed them.

Trustworthiness

The quality of constructivist research is termed by trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness speaks to the quality of the research product, while authenticity attends to the quality of the research process (Rodwell, 1998). During the interview process in an effort to promote credibility, I sought to fairly represent participants' realities by asking for clarification and paraphrasing their responses. Additionally, I called upon peers to examine the data and comment on the emerging findings (Merriam, 2009). As the primary tool in this investigation, I acknowledged my previous experiences, beliefs and values that may have influenced my perspective, reflections, and interpretations of the data. This process enhanced the dependability and confirmability of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Data Analysis

The verbatim transcriptions of interviews formed the data base for analysis in this study. Due to the nature of unstructured and text based data, I sought a method which allowed for structure and coherence without taking away from the originality and voice of the participants. I determined that framework analysis (Richie & Spencer, 1994) was most applicable for this study due to its systematic, flexibility and dynamic nature, and alliance with a constructivist perspective (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009).

Framework analysis allows for all data to be collected prior to analysis and equally for data collection and analysis to occur simultaneously (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009). I used the constant comparative approach throughout the data collection process as some of the findings from earlier interviews led into questions and prompts for subsequent interviews. After all data were collected, I began the analysis stage. During analysis, I engaged in the following five-step process: familiarization, identification of a thematic framework, indexing, charting and mapping and interpretation (Richie & Spencer, 1994).

In the first stage, I familiarized myself with the data by listening to the audio recordings, transcribing the interviews verbatim, and reading the data thoroughly and repeatedly. While engaging in this process, key themes and issues naturally emerged. These key themes were highlighted and identified. The identified themes became the basis of a thematic framework that was later used to filter and sort the data (Richie & Spencer, 1994). During the next stage I engaged in the indexing process, a process which often mirrors coding in other types of qualitative data analysis. Data were indexed by applying codes to specific parts of data and grouping the themes together. In the fourth stage, the indexed or coded data were arranged in charts consisting of heading and subheadings drawn from the thematic framework. Finally, I made connections among patterns, associations, and concepts which led to the development of a theory grounded in the data

(Srivastava & Thomson, 2009). However, it is important to note that *theoretical saturation* must be reached for the theory to speak to the variation in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Due to the small sample size and lack of time and resources, I did not interview enough participants for *theoretical saturation* to occur. Despite the absence of *theoretical saturation*, the findings of this investigation can still contribute to knowledge and practice by acting as a pilot for a more robust study in the future (McMillen, 2008).

Findings

The analysis of interviews revealed two major categories which were based on the primary research questions of this investigation. These categories are presented under two headings: (1) experiences of psychodynamic theory and practice and (2) perceptions of contemporary psychodynamic theory and practice.

Category 1: Experiences

The following themes describe the experiences and perceptions of counselors-in-training surrounding contemporary psychodynamic theory and practice.

Foundational and Historical Theory

During the interviews, counselors-in-training spoke about their experience of contemporary psychodynamic theory and practice as historical and foundational. Most of the participants stated that psychodynamic theory was the first chapter in their respective text books. As the first theory introduced in their course, students experienced psychodynamic theory as foundational and a historical approach to counseling and psychotherapy:

Psychoanalysis was the first theory we talked about. I think our professor did that on purpose, I think it was intentional. To me it seems foundational and still relevant to understand where these concepts came from, but I think it is not so much up to date. Now there are all these other theories.
(P7)

In our theories class, we spoke about psychodynamic therapy as the first chapter in our text book. It seemed like students were more interested in the main stream topics. (P1)

Some participants spoke to their awareness that they lacked knowledge of contemporary practice and described their experience of psychodynamic theory from a more classical view:

I'm not really sure what modern practice is like. My understanding of it [psychodynamic theory and practice] is limited, so I think it is important to acknowledge that part of my experience. (P2)

For me, psychodynamic theory is kind of that classic type of psychology and how people looked at it in the beginning, but I think it has evolved over time. (P6)

Interestingly, one participant explained her experiences of psychodynamic theory and treatment in more integrative and contemporary terms. This participant stated her experiences of psychodynamic theory and treatment helped expand her view point and understand *that no two counselors are the same*:

At first, I was like "oh I'm only attachment theory and that's all I'll ever be" and then I went through the theories class. During the class, we started learning about different schools of psychodynamic therapy, as well as other theories and I thought, "Oh my gosh, I'm integrative." I began to recognize that all counselors have a different kind of approach and no two counselors can ever be the same. (P5)

Stigma and Negative Reactions

The majority of participants found their experiences of psychodynamic theory and practice involved a negative stigma and/or some type of negative reaction. These experiences were a result of interactions among peers in the classroom setting, based on representations from the media, or the widespread cultural messages in society. Participants further pointed to the interactions that impacted their experience of bias and negative reactions. These interactions are represented in the following three subthemes: (a) *personal or internal reactions* (b) *messages from the media and larger society* (c) *Institutional influences including: reactions from peers, faculty, their programs and the classroom dynamic.*

Subtheme A: Personal/internal reaction.

The experience of these participants seemed to be impacted by their negative internal and personal reactions when they were exposed to psychoanalytic theory. One participant had a personal reaction which impacted her view and experience by discounting the relevance of this theory: *I mean Freud has never been important to me. So, I didn't really think it was relevant.* (P3) Another participant acknowledged his bias which influenced his experiences during his theory course: *I think I am biased, I mean I see the approach as limiting, it doesn't seem beneficial. For me it seems like it is more about the counselor or therapist, so it is more counselor-centered than client-centered.* (P1) Further, one participant described the ways in which his negative bias impacted his experience of learning about psychodynamic theory. He reflected feeling uneasy and “blocking out” information because he did not see the relevance or use of these concepts: *When we learned about it in class I kept thinking, how is this going to help me? How can this be effective? So maybe that and some of my uneasy feelings made me block it out and say to myself, I don't need this.* (P7)

Subtheme B: Messages from society, and the media.

Most participants acknowledged that the messages from the media and larger society contributed to the misperceptions regarding contemporary psychodynamic theory and practice. One participant described the ways in which these topics appear in our culture and the media: *You know these concepts are intermeshed in our culture and language. When I think of psychoanalysis, I can't help but have popular references pop into my head, like the show Frasier.* (P3) Another participant commented on the stigma and pictures from the media that impacted his ideas about psychoanalysis despite being “intelligent enough to know that is not the way psychoanalysis is practiced today”: *I don't know how it is thought of today, I just have an idea in my mind of the*

couch and Freud. I think I am intelligent enough to know that it is not practiced today like it used to be- with that stigma attached. (P7)

Subtheme C: Institutional influences.

Several participants described their experiences of peers and the classroom dynamic when psychoanalysis was introduced in their courses. One participant observed mixed responses and reactions from their classmates: *In class, there was a mixed response, some people were like “oh yeah... Freud” and others were like “okay, let’s learn about it, let talk about this.” (P2)* While other participants described negative and uncomfortable reactions from their peers: *Everyone was like “AHH FREUD”, you know like old school, he said some crazy stuff, his ideas aren’t too popular now, especially the sex part. I feel like people were sort of uncomfortable when it was brought up. (P3)* Another participant described the impact of professors and the program on her experience: *You know, we haven’t really discussed it and maybe part of that is because psychodynamic theory doesn’t seem like it is viewed as legitimately as some other theories we are addressing. I tend to assume that means, the professors are minimizing and thinking they aren’t as legitimate. (P4)* Further participants acknowledged the impact of the program and cohort on their experiences: *In the program, people may think other theories are more relevant and psychodynamic isn’t so much. I think it is interesting because we haven’t gone in depth or explored it more. I don’t know if we will. (P7)*

Category 2: Perceptions

The themes in this category describe counselor-in-trainings’ perceptions of psychodynamic practice in general, the psychodynamic counseling process, and the psychodynamic therapist/counselor. Further each theme points to the ways in which students’ perceptions and

experiences, situated in the context of their respective programs, impacted their understanding and attitude regarding psychodynamic therapy.

Psychodynamic Practice: A Theory Not a Therapy

In general, most of the participants perceived psychodynamic psychotherapy as a theory rather than a therapeutic approach to working with clients due to their inability to link theoretical concepts to practice, their inability to grasp concepts, their lack of knowledge, and feelings of incompetence.

The majority of trainees in this study felt that they were unable to link the concepts they learned about psychodynamic theory to practice. Participants described the concepts they learned as basic, vague, and mysterious. They acknowledged feeling incompetent and needing to know more before they could consider the value and use of psychodynamic theory and practice. Below are excerpts of participants' direct statements expressing their inability to link theoretical concepts to practice: *It seems to me like there is a lot more that I don't know. I mean we learned about basic concepts but I couldn't tell you how to practice it.* (P7), and feelings of incompetence: *I think, again, since I know so little...I mean I feel super incompetent talking about it. I don't even know what it would be like to use it in sessions with clients.* (P2)

The Psychodynamic Counseling Process: A Way to Understand

All participants perceived the psychodynamic counseling process as way for the counselor to understand their clients. For example, one participant commented about the psychodynamic counseling process getting at *the stuff we don't notice.* (P7) While another participant perceived the psychodynamic counseling process as *a controlled and very understanding process, in which the therapist takes time to help the client understand their thoughts and feelings, where they are stemming from and finally understand themselves on a deeper level.* (P4) Further, participants

mentioned the process of focusing on both conscious and unconscious thoughts, drives for human behavior, while also ...*paying attention, to development across the lifespan, as it is attributable to not only the conscious thoughts but- the unconscious ones as well.* (P5)

Psychodynamic Counselors/Therapists: The Intellectual Expert

When participants were asked about their perceptions of psychodynamic therapists/counselors the majority viewed them as intelligent experts: *I see them as more intellectual, then other counselors, they might have more of a cognitive bend to them, in the sense that for them it would more important to be in their head, so they can figure out how all of the pieces of the client fitting together. I would imagine that they would have to be intelligent and cerebral.* (P2) One participant further described her perceptions of the “counselor as the expert”: *I see them as the expert, that’s what I think about. It’s like you know you’re the expert you’re going to basically tell your client what is going on- I think you have to be that way if you practice from psychodynamic theory- you’re going to be more blunt about it.* (P6) Similarly, another participant perceived the role of a psychodynamic theorist/counselor was to “fix a problem and not be concerned about the therapeutic relationship”:

I think my perception [of psychodynamic counselors/therapists]- even after theories class and learning more about it....is that it is more clinical more psychiatric, and less Rogerian type...more concerned with figuring out what the problem is and fixing that problem... less concerned with the therapeutic relationship. So maybe more what I would consider like medical model. (P3)

While, other participants held a different perception. These participants perceived psychodynamic counselors as wanting to understand their clients by remaining curious, empathic, and open to them:

I see them [psychodynamic counselors/therapists] as seems very intellectual and curious...also empathic. It a lot of curiosity and empathy to really delve fully into someone's past experiences and past emotions. So, I would describe a psychodynamic counselor as curious about their client... really aiming to understand that client deeply. (P4)

Psychodynamic therapists tend to be intuitive, empathic, open. They are curious, curious to explore more and really understand their patients. (P5)

Tentative Theory: Counselors-in-trainings' Experiences and Perceptions in Context

The themes that emerged from the data came together to form the tentative theory in this study. This theory describes how counselors-in-trainings' experiences and perceptions influence their understanding and attitude toward contemporary psychodynamic theory. It seemed that students who were more self-aware, reflective, and had engaged in their own personal therapy held a more in-depth understanding of the contemporary perspective on psychodynamic theory and its application in practice. For example, these trainees described *the importance of understanding clients' problems on a deeper level, the power of the relationship in feeling heard and experiencing catharsis, and helping the client understand themselves in context so they are able to prevent the same things from happening again*, descriptions which all speak to a deeper and more reflective understanding of psychodynamic theory and practice.

Discussion and Implications for Practice

This investigation explored the perceptions and experiences of counselors-in-training regarding contemporary psychodynamic theory and practice. Results revealed trainees' experiences and perceptions influenced their understanding and attitudes toward contemporary psychodynamic theory and practice. These experiences were mediated by personal reactions, the influence of the media and society at large, and the dynamic among peers, faculty, curriculum, and their program. Participants generally perceived psychodynamic practice as historical,

foundational, and a theory rather than a therapeutic and practical approach to working with clients. Additionally, many participants lacked a framework for understanding the purpose and value of contemporary psychodynamic theory. The majority of participants believed they needed additional training linking theory to practice. However, the participants who were open to exploring and understanding contemporary psychodynamic practice appeared more self-aware and reflective. These ideas formed a tentative conceptual framework regarding the influence of experiences and perception on counselors-in-trainings' understanding of psychodynamic theory and practice.

The categories, themes, and tentative theory identified in this study are consistent with literature regarding the misperceptions, lack of understanding and negative bias regarding psychodynamic theory in the academic setting (Hansell, 2005; Redmond & Shulman, 2008; Shedler, 2006; Yalof, 2015) and the value of self-awareness, reflective practice, and personal therapy in counselor training (Griffith & Frieden, 2000; Guiffrida, 2005; Norcross 2005; Pompeo & Levitt, 2014; Schmidt & Adkins, 2012). As such, these findings present important implications for counselor educators. First, counselor educators should be cognizant of the need to overcome students' negativity, bias, and misconceptions regarding psychodynamic theory. In an effort to combat bias and misperceptions counselor educators can foster connections among psychodynamic concepts and other theories, value critical reflection and open dialogue in the classroom setting, and encourage students to examine their preconceived frames of reference.

Additionally, counselor educators should consider re-evaluating how psychoanalytic theory is taught within their programs and further assess how their own bias, attitudes, and preferences toward particular theories impacts the curriculum and the training of students. Clearly, helping counselors-in-training appreciate and understand psychodynamic concepts is not an easy task. However, Yalof (2015) offers several creative teaching methods to address such issues. For

example, counselor educators can call upon their immediacy skills and point to the moments in the classroom as examples of interpersonally driven interactions. In like manner, the classroom in and of itself can offer rich, dynamic examples of psychoanalytic concepts. Based on a survey of British educators with analytic approaches to the classroom, Brown and Price (1999) offer suggestions for how to bring psychoanalysis into university settings. Several suggestions were offered for how to accomplish this task. These included, but were not limited, to the use of experiential learning; the promotion of a self-reflective attitude; recognizing the importance of not knowing; and having an appreciation for how the anxiety created by programs and educational settings in general evokes different emotions and thoughts for both students and faculty (Yalof, 2015).

In light of the tentative theory identified in this study, counselor educators can consider ways to incorporate deliberate reflective practices within their programs (Schmidt & Adkins, 2012). Reflective practice is significant in preparing future counselors. Such practice enhances critical thinking and self-discovery, fosters insight, develops meaning, and reinforces learning (Griffith & Frieden, 2000). Furthermore, the ability to engage in reflective practice is a desirable skill for counselors-in-training because it provides an opportunity to link theory to practice, a concept which seemed to be absent for the majority of counselors-in-training in this investigation. When counselor educators encourage their students to consider real life situations through a theoretical lens in critical and reflective ways, students develop an increased sense of empathy, cultural competence, and a decreased sense of anxiety in working with culturally different clients (Borders, 1989; Duys & Hedstrom, 2000; Granello, 2010).

According to Davidson and Schmidt (2014), reflective practice is not simply asking students to spend time regurgitating their day to day events at internship or encouraging them to write freely about their emotions. Instead, reflective practice involves the capability to understand

a presenting issue, place that issue into context, critically evaluate and reflect upon this issue, decide and plan how to tackle the issue, and then actually do something about it (Whittaker & Van Garderen, 2009). Such practices call upon the integration of both thinking and feeling in order to achieve a higher level of understanding, knowledge, and consciousness in our students.

Limitations and Future Research

The small sample size in this study provided a preliminary look at counselors-in-trainings' perceptions and experiences of contemporary psychodynamic theory and practice. Nevertheless, the range in participants from different institutions, backgrounds, and regions of the country produced varying perceptions in terms of context and perspectives. As mentioned earlier, I did not achieve theoretical saturation due to a lack of time and resources. Additionally, there was a lack of prolonged engagement in the study. Hence, this study can act as a pilot for future more in-depth investigations.

Future investigations, built upon this pilot investigation, may consider confirming the tentative theory, themes, and categories that emerged during initial stages. Furthermore, it may be helpful to seek out experts from the field to consult during the theory development and evaluation stages to enhance creditability and transferability of results.

Overall, the findings from this investigation present valuable insights into counselors-in-trainings' perspectives and the impact of both internal and external influences on their understanding and attitudes regarding contemporary psychodynamic practice. Such findings encourage counselor educators to consider the impact of reflective practice in counselor preparation. These practices are foundationally similar to psychodynamic theory and therapeutic practice as they promote inner capabilities, provide opportunities for self-understanding, and help both students and their clients lead richer, more meaningful lives.

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